

## On Theatre-Mirror, Theatre-Hammer, Theatre-Veil in the Romanian Theatre

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**Abstract:** Starting from the Shakespearian observation that the theatre seems to be a mirroring of its age, we notice how in the *The Theatre* magazine – published from 1956 to 1989 – this allegory is treated. At the same time, we turn our attention to the way in which this allegory is appreciated by the Romanian theatre people nowadays. At the same time, we investigate the way in which the socialist-realism was aesthetically and ideologically evaluated in the current Romanian theatre and in the second half of the twentieth century. Analyzing the moments when the social reality of the present is the source of inspiration for the theatrical performance, we notice that not the reality of the present is reflected scenically, but a reality projected into an immediate future. In a first stage, we conclude that what leads to this perspective is how reality is understood. In the next stage, we identify a few points of view that challenge the allegory of the theatre as a mirror that tries to replace the mirror with hammer, veil, and we thus notice that the most important perspective from which theatre must be approached as a reflection of a reality of the present time is that of identifying and recognizing the characteristics of this present.

**Keywords:** director, theatre, mirror, realism, actuality

If theatre can be considered exclusively as a reflection of the social reality of its time, we should ask ourselves: *Why would we want to duplicate reality?* It is obvious that this process of duplicating the reality cannot be one without dangers, and the first danger might be that of falling into the phantasm. What if the double of reality is not quite *real*, but *pure phantasm*? From a psychological point of view, we know that “He [the artist] finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality”<sup>1</sup>. However, *these precious reflections of reality* come from *phantasies moulded into truths of a new kind*. So does reality have its origins in a phantasy? At the same time, what is the *special gift of the artist*? Peter Brook tells us that *the only difference between a man passing on the street*

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<sup>1</sup> Freud S. *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Case History of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, vol. XII, translated from German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: Vintage Books, 2001, pp. 213-226, p. 218

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*and an actor is the time dedicated to rehearsals.* Can we treat reality in the plural or in the singular according to an unclear criterion? How do we prove which is reality and which is not? "It would still seem, however, that the term 'reality-testing' covers, and so confuses, two rather different functions: on the one hand, the basic function of discrimination between the merely represented and the actually perceived – and hence too between the internal and external world; and on the other hand, the function which consists in comparing what is perceived objectively with mental representations so as to *rectify* possible distortions in the latter"<sup>2</sup>. But the term *reality-testing* has been used both to denote *motor action* and to designate "... the fact that the subject faced with the loss of a loved object learns to modify his personal world, his projects and his wishes in accordance with this real loss"<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, "Nowhere [...] did Freud make this distinction clear, and the confusion intrinsic to the notion of reality-testing seems to have been preserved if not aggravated by present-day usage"<sup>4</sup>. Thus not being capable of having a *reality-testing* we cannot, in art, and, consequently, in theatre, reduce everything to the preoccupation for expressing the personal world according to a somewhat archetypal loss of the *loved object*. Theatre, as an art, cannot be reduced to an educational function that is very much like the saying *the show must go on*. Or, perhaps, it can and, in this case, might this be the primary function of the theatre? Is that what theatre does help us with? What if theatre as reflection of a reality helps us to continue, to go on, to enjoy life? Is that why in Greek antiquity the amphitheatres were built near what can be called hospitals?

The transition from the reflection of a reality to the reflection of a more specific reality, the reflection of the present times implies, however, different problematics from those expressed at the psychological level. In another sense, of course, if we do not treat the problem of duplicating reality only as a rhetorical question, we could observe that, on the one hand, the desire to duplicate reality could be a consequence of a relative failure to adapt to a given reality, and, on the other hand, the attempt to put a self in antagonistic positions to reality or even to facilitate its escape from that reality would have as a consequence the adaptation of the duplicated reality to the self which gives rise to a new string of questions. They could be as follows: What is the relationship between the two realities? What is the true reality? What is the possible reality useful for? What does it help us with? What is the difference between truth and the possible? What to do with two parallel worlds, one we live in and one we look at? Can this dedublation be more than the instant of perceiving an illusion? Can illusion become reality? If what we call stage action were reflected in a mirror, what would we see? Can we see the action itself? Or just the surface of bodies arranged in a sequence that represents the action itself? Is this succession of surfaces related to the

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<sup>2</sup> Laplanche J. and J.-B. Pontalis *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Introduction by Daniel Lagache, London: Karnac Books, 1988, p. 385

<sup>3</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>4</sup> *ibidem*

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scenographic aspect of the scenic reality? Mirroring as a synchronous copy of the performing of an action is more than appearance? Can it desynchronize, accelerate or delay and thereby become autonomous from the mirrored reality? Can we say that fiction comes to life because, in a Pirandellian manner, it revolted, or, better say, it protested, put itself in opposition to the auctorial tyranny? Can we say that theatre not only mirrors, in Shakespearian terms, its times, those where it comes from, that is, the past and those that present themselves, that is, the present, but also the new times, that is, those of the future? And if at the theatre we look at the real moment through/from the mirror, can we glimpse the new in this moment?

Is theatre a reflection of a single reality, or is it a reflection of various realities imposed by a social system that is ultimately always totalitarian and that forces the mirroring on stage of an ideational fiction nicknamed *reality*? Of a constructed reality, in the sense of the mismatch between reality and its apparent reflection, and not of the reality itself, be it objective or ideational, natural or artificial. Isn't that what Hamlet is referring to? Is, in this case, stage mirroring still a reflection of a genuine social reality or the reflection of prefabricated ideas, of falsehoods, of temporary models that make nest in the minds of the spectators? Obviously, we are dealing with a second reality, a reflective-mediated reality. But it is a reflection in a mirror that is no longer whole, a broken, fragmented mirror, in which only parts of a whole too big to be mirrored are reflected.

Is all this a consequence of the very fact that "... the mirror of consciousness reflects the outside world in an arbitrary way and not in a faithful way. That what we see in the mirror of consciousness is far from being a faithful copy of the outside world"<sup>5</sup>? If the very way we become aware of things suffers from a certain inadequacy to the truth, then can the mirroring be that of a truthful reality? Is there a distance between reality and truth? But if the awareness of the *outside world* is an approximation, does not the perception of scenic reality become a double approximation of the outside world? Does the claim that the reflection of the world on stage can correct its flaws and, consequently, its reality, actually refers to the correction of perceptions? If you can't put right an inconvenience, an impasse, an objective impediment, isn't it enough to perceive it inside out, as a quality? Why? So that it doesn't affect one anymore. Is that what theatre should use for? If, however, this is what it is useful for, then let us not be surprised that, in the course of history, the theatre has always have a tendency to disappear, to be even forbidden or to be forgotten as something useless covered by a thick layer of dust.

These could be some of the puzzles that we would have to solve if we tried to investigate in what way this *theory of the theatrical act as a reflection of the times* can be found in the articles published in Romania, in *The Theatre* magazine between 1956-

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<sup>5</sup> Rădulescu-Motru C. *Elemente de metafizică pe baza filosofiei kantiane*, București: Editura Casei Școalelor, 1928, p. 45

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1989. The way in which this *theory of mirroring* is found in the texts published during this time often seems surprising. Basically we can argue that, throughout the period of existence of this magazine, at the basis of the theatrical thinking of those who collaborate on it can be identified this theory. "In theatre, the theory of reflection of reality should gain maximum fullness. Mirror of the world, focus in which the great coordinates and meanings of existence and actuality are symbolically concentrated, here is what theatre must be..."<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, we notice that reality is considered to be only a social reality, if we identify as synonymous the term *world* with that of *social*. Thus stage mirroring consists in the reproduction of social relationships. But curiously, the term focus is also used in the context of the scenic mirroring of reality. Should the scenic space work in a more special way than the simple reflection in which the left becomes the right and the right becomes the left? To endure the mirroring also an increase or decrease of the dimensions of relationships in social reality? Or to consider the unfolding of existence in the scenic space as a re-writing or sub-writing of reality following the model of Platonic philosophy. What appears to be truly real loses its possible right to be real. We are thus dealing with both a mirroring and a focus: "... the actor who personifies an idea moves only apparently in a determined space, his real space is the world, as his appearance, no matter how individualized, is a mask"<sup>7</sup>. It reminds us of: "What do you think he would say, if someone told him that what he had formerly seen was meaningless illusion, but now, being somewhat nearer to reality and turned towards more real objects, he was getting a truer view?"<sup>8</sup>. It is in this context that this way of reflecting the social reality of time in the scenic universe seems somewhat dangerous. Why? Because if we abandon truth as a conceptual tool for appreciating reality in favour of probability, distinguishing between the real and the unreal becomes impossible. At the same time, often, what seems less likely we find as real. Thus the probability as a conceptual tool for appreciating reality seems inoperative in the work on stage. We would immerse ourselves in a game of endless illusions.

We are dealing, at this level of interpretation, with a strange uncertainty of what is reflected in the mirror. On the one hand, the subject of mirroring can be identified as real or not in the mirroring, but, on the other hand, can we say with certainty what was reflected in the reflective surface of the scenic universe? It seems to be possible to consider a slight difference between the appearance of the projected image and the source that generates the image: "Paraphrasing a famous author, I believe that theatre must be the living mirror of our time and implicitly the author cannot be a spectator; at least, those authors who are likely to create plays in which

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<sup>6</sup> Lovinescu H. *Răspunderea dramaturgului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 1, București, anul X, 1965, p. 7

<sup>7</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>8</sup> Plato *The Republic*, translated with introduction and notes by Francis Macdonald Cornford, London / New York, Oxford University Press, 1945, p. 229

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their time – contemporaneity – is mirrored"<sup>9</sup>. We note that the theatre is not considered as being able to be appreciated only through the prism of the theory of reception, and the author cannot be the spectator himself. Therefore, something outside of the subjectivity of the spectator, and not just his simple meditation, provokes the sensation of participation in the theatrical unfolding.

Thus the one who mirrors himself should not look at himself as he is in the mirror, but look at himself as he should be or as he would like to be. Therefore, society is reflected scenically by the individuals who compose it and not in itself, as a whole. Then can we still argue that social reality is mirrored on stage? Or, in fact, we speak about mirroring that is not total, but partial, selective. Why so? Because it was noticed that if: "The style of the age was pursued with assiduity and meticulously reproduced. The reality of the age, however, in its meanings, was not seen..."<sup>10</sup>. By whom? "... by the scenographers"<sup>11</sup>. In the case of scenography it can be most easily seen that the *reality* of the times is not identical to the *style* of the times. The style of the present age, whatever it may be, does not necessarily represent the reality of this so-called current era. The style of an era and especially the style of actuality is susceptible to inaccuracies to its reality. Reality thus becomes something deeper, and not superficial, different from the appearance of style. We can thus imitate style without imitating reality. Imitating the style, updating the universe of a play written in the past brings as an unwelcome consequence the over-evaluation of the role of scenography in the performance and the transformation of the scenographer into a so-called *dictator* of a so-called apparent reality. In the same way it seems that "... proletkult – to which the Cubist, constructivist and expressionist schools would be added – considered the scenery the most important element in a performance, subordinating the actors, the director and the author to it"<sup>12</sup>. This predisposition of the scenographer to impose himself in the work on the stage by imposing the framework of visual unfolding of the stage action supported by the acting is also signaled by another author: "... the director's desperation in search of personal means to make him seen took advantage of the scenographer who embezzled, through his emancipation, the other arts in the theatre complex from their forms of expression and, approaching them, in a horrible way kitsch, made them his own ways [...] instead of the pathetic, the grandiose, the heroic, the sublime, the graceful, etc., to be the prerogatives of the actors' play, these specific theatrical values appeared as appanages of the décor; the actors, instead, remained some colourful dolls, simple images of the décor, theatrically inexpressive, but very expressive from a pictorial point of view"<sup>13</sup>. The same tendency towards the

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<sup>9</sup> Dinu Cernescu in Lovinescu H. Al. Mirodan, Dinu Cernescu, Dan Nemțeanu, Sică Alexandrescu, *Rolul teatrului în lumea contemporană*, ancheta I.T.I, in „Teatrul”, nr. 4, anul X, 1965, p. 30

<sup>10</sup> Ciulei L. *Teatralizarea picturii în teatru* in „Teatrul”, nr. 2, anul I, 1956, p. 54

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 53

<sup>13</sup> Stanca R. „*Reteatralizarea*” teatrului, in „Teatrul”, nr. 4, anul I, 1956, p. 55

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scenographer's subordination of the scenic creation activity can be discerned today, after sixty-seven years of theatrical life: "In recent years I have begun to think of the décor as an installation-costume and I treat it the same. I look at space as an extension of a character's traits and try to imagine my life and the world through his/her eyes"<sup>14</sup> or "I think the actor is the sound produced by the string, and the scenography is the resonance box of that sound. A violin without strings is a wooden box, it means absolutely nothing. The rope that has to vibrate is indispensable. The mastery of the one who plays the instrument, that's already another discussion, much more complicated. Who does actually play the instrument...?"<sup>15</sup> And in one case and in the other, in the case of the *costume-installation* as well as in the case of the *resonance box*, in fact, we are dealing with an *over-writing* of the acting, incorporating it into an superstructure, a theatrical mechanism that practically alters the very reality of the acting. The actor is deprived of his ability to perform his dramatic function of playing. This leads to the treatment of the dramatic actor as having the same function as the actor in the animation theatre, handling puppets, or, in other words, handling props.

The director as a dictator or even abuser seems to be an accusation that describes the current state of stage creation development at least in the Romanian theatre. Unfortunately, these imaginary accusations, upon closer investigation, could, in fact, unveil the desire disguised in good intentions of some theatre critics who still sigh after the outdated ideological dimension of Eastern European theatre practiced with aplomb in the last century. Thus, the product, the performance, the artistic technique of a "director who has committed psychological and physical abuses during his rehearsals, endangering the physical and mental health of the actors with whom he worked"<sup>16</sup> cannot be appreciated artistically. The lack of artistic freedom of the actor, which derives from the director's radically abusive attitude, is claimed and this is attributed to his aging. The older, the more abusive. But this position seems contradicted by the following observation: "When I was young, I was more like a dictator. I wanted everyone to do everything I said and to fit directly into my style. But over time, I realized that actors are also artists. They have their own intelligence

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<sup>14</sup> Cristina Milea in Modreanu C. *Scenografia Cristina Milea: „În zece ani teatrul nu va mai arăta ca azi, schimbarea a devenit o necesitate*, Scena.ro, at <https://revistascena.ro/interviu/scenografa-cristina-milea-in-zece-ani-teatrul-nu-va-mai-arata-ca-azi-schimbarea-a-devenit-o-necesitate/>, published: 08.03.2021, accessed: 25.03.2023

<sup>15</sup> Adrian Damian in Bogzaru O. *Adrian Damian: Rolul tehnologiei în teatru e că poate să creeze magie pe scenă*, Yorick.ro, at <https://yorick.ro/adrian-damian-rolul-tehnologiei-in-teatru-e-ca-poate-sa-creeze-magie-pe-scena/>, published: 31.10.2017, accessed: 22.03.2023

<sup>16</sup> Carmen Lidia Vidu in Neagu A. *Peste 1.400 de oameni au semnat o petiție pentru retragerea nominalizării la Premiile UNITER a regizorului Andriy Zholdak, acuzat că a pălmuit o actriță în pauza unui spectacol*, at: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-cultura-26151173-aproape-1-400-oameni-semnat-petiție-pentru-retragerea-nominalizării-premiile-uniter-regizorului-andriy-zholdak-acuzat-palmuit-actrita-pauza-unui-spectacol.htm>, published: 20.03.2023, accessed: 27.03.2023

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and their personal ideas. So I'm much more open now"<sup>17</sup>. Youth seems more willing to abuse than its opposite. Of course, the problem that arises from this apparent dispute imported into theatre from literature, well observed and ironically documented since 1704, to make only one reference, in *The Battle of the Books*, seems to be different from the one that appears to a first glance thrown at it. The problem does not seem, in fact, to be the terror and abuse that older people commit on the less old, but the fact that there is nothing left between young and old. There is no longer the dimension of maturity, of artistic maturity. Thus, one can no longer discuss only the abuse of the director, but we can consider, in addition to the abuse of the scenographer, the abuse or dictatorship of the actor. That actor who considers himself to be a star imposes his taste, even doubtfully, on the author, the director, the scenographer and, above all, the costume designer. No one debates the many abuses, which lead to artistic failures, of those who already have a name, be they actors, directors, playwrights, etc..

Szombati Gille Óttó in a November 2011 interview with Elisabeta Pop in the *Teatrul Azi* magazine states: *I do not believe in the dictatorship of the director*. This reminds us of another statement: "Demonstrating that today's theatre is created in the efforts of the theatrical collective and pleading for the importance of the director's function – the one whose program and method of creation are accepted by the overwhelming majority of the collective – Akimov fights against the director's dictatorship, which transforms the creative body into a mechanism capable of embodying only the ideas of the director, supremacy that has brought brilliant results to art, but never an art theatre"<sup>18</sup>. So is it about depriving the director of exercising the function for which he was invented? Directing, from the Soviet perspective of the 1960s, was supposed to be collective. In 2023 the same call resounds with aplomb in the Romanian theatre. The director is a dictator for he directs. Because when directing he can become a danger to the public. And: "... this is his flaw – he's a donkey! and violent! And he has no manner!"<sup>19</sup>. The director must be put in his place in the work team because he has a directorial vision and for it he is capable of collaring the actors who, even if they do not have a directorial vision, undoubtedly have non-negotiable opinions... And then if the director can abuse, even though we note here that the director is not prone to it by simply practicing his job, if the actor can, if the scenographer can, who else could be suspected of totalitarian, abusive, dictatorial tendencies? Have we forgotten anyone? We think we're dealing with that theatre

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<sup>17</sup> Andrei Șerban in Văsii A. *Andrei Șerban: „Când eram tânăr, eram mai mult ca un dictator”*, at <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/andrei-serban-cand-eram-tanar-eram-mai-mult-ca-un-dictator/>, published: 17.05.2013, accessed: 26.03.2023

<sup>18</sup> Akimov N. N. *Akimov: „Regizorul să nu aștepte nașterea unei dramaturgii noi, cu totul și cu totul contemporane, iar dramaturgul să nu-și amîne căutările creatoare, pînă la creșterea deplină a regiei sovietice. Indiferent de unde vine impulsul, fecare pas să contribuie la progres, la înflorirea unui teatru sovietic, nou, al secolului XX.”*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 7, anul V, 1960, p. 91

<sup>19</sup> Caragiale I. L. *Momente*, ediție și studiu introductiv Ion Vartic, notă asupra ediției Mariana Vartic, București: Humanitas, 2013, p. 422

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critic, sometimes also professor of theatre, who might be the direct beneficiary (or indirectly when the ultimate beneficiary would be another elderly director who is silent and enjoys the theatrical quarrel caused by the critic between the young and the old because he, the old director takes side of the young and loved for this by them) of a quarrel between the members of a theatre collective. To introduce the idea of abuse, when belonging to one collective or another is an individual option, is almost ridiculous. Of course, there may be all sorts of abuses, but they must be ascertained by those in charge of them. In the case of the seemingly ethical debates in the Romanian theatrical environment at the beginning of 2023, we should notice the conflict that some were trying to arouse six years ago on the same subject and which seemed to be trying to broaden the subject to a generational conflict that would prevent even the transmission of knowledge between those who aspire to practice the profession and those who have already practiced and know it. To claim that "An entire culture of silent submission is nourished by all of us, even at the level of drama schools, where the actor is educated, most of the time, to endure stoically, without any reaction, the whims of the director (and sometimes even those of the class teacher)"<sup>20</sup> seems to be the ideological tool through which the chain of transmission of knowledge accumulated in the past to the present is broken. The invocation of this weird *culture of submission*, which is unnoticed in reality, and the pseudo-insurrectionary call to punish those who seem to practice it through social ostracization, reminds us of how theatre should have mirrored reality in the socialist society of the last century East Europe. So how much the call to adapt to the style of the present times resembles the old call to adapt to the style of the socialist age: "... the features of contemporary theatre must be: the mirroring of the essence of our age and of the new man who makes it, the communion with today's spectator, the search for the new in the healthiest, dialectical meaning, the revolutionary restlessness, the ardour, the frenetic and heroic rhythm of our days; we owe it to ourselves to fight hard for an efficient and active theatre, which aims, through its concrete contribution, to the construction of socialism in our country, towards the new humanism, communist humanism"<sup>21</sup>. Is it reality other than that reflected in the world of theatre on stage or in the backstage?

Of course, the idea that art mirrors the world, or rather, mirrors the age in which the world finds itself, exposes it to the public eye, caused, causes and will cause many headaches. The idea has been challenged, in various aspects, first of all, by challenging the model that is reflected in the mirror. For example, Oscar Wilde, trying to narrow down the definition of what is reflected in art says: "It is the spectator and

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<sup>20</sup>Runcan. M. *Note plecînd de la un scandal teatral* in Observator cultural nr. 868 at <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/note-plecind-de-la-un-scandal-teatral/>, published 14.04.2017, accessed: 25.03.2023

<sup>21</sup> Niculescu M. *Miron Niculescu: „În ieşirea teatrului dintre ziduri şi canoane, în căutarea unor forme noi de manifestare teatrală, în apropierea teatrului de cei mulţi, tocmai în această nouă concepţie de teatrul popular stă germenul contemporaneităţii.*”, in „Teatrul”, nr. 7, anul V, 1960, p. 75



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not life that art really mirrors"<sup>22</sup>. In this statement we can observe, for a start, that we are dealing with the idea that in art as a mirror, life itself is not reflected, but a dead nature is portrayed. In Wilde's expression, even if perhaps the intention was to convey, on the one hand, the idea that life cannot be separated from that which is alive, on the other hand, the idea that life is a multitude that contains more than man, and the object of art is presumed to be concern for mankind, or in other words, art deals with the study of the human in existence, however it seems that there is a difference between life and the spectator. As a result, on the one hand, the spectator does not necessarily have to be alive in order to be portrayed through art, and on the other hand, if art is limited to reflecting only the hypostasis of man as spectator, we can ask ourselves the following questions: Is man by definition a spectator? If man is not by definition a spectator, but more than that then does not remain outside the preoccupations of art for much of human existence? Thus art, and in our particular case, theatre, reflects only a part of existence. Is this part just the appearance?

Elsewhere, Oscar Wilde argues, "She [Art] is a veil rather than a mirror"<sup>23</sup>. Thus we could conclude that art, namely theatre, has nothing to do with the world or the age in which we live, in the sense of exposing it, but in the sense of hiding it. After all, thus defined, the comparison of art with a mirror is treated as a non-functional analogy. But - the two phrases are mutually exclusive - if one is true, the other cannot be true at the same time. However, it doesn't seem to matter which of them might be true as long as any of these expressions could replace the idea that art, theatre in our case, could be a reflection of the world.

Moreover – we can identify challenges to the analogy between art and the mirror: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it"<sup>24</sup>, Paulo Freire, the master of director Augusto Boal, tells us that Bertolt Brecht would have said. But, of course, this erroneous interpretation of the Shakespearian metaphor was attributed, by other authors, not only to Brecht, but also to Vladimir Mayakovsky. A similar formulation we find in Trotsky: "Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes"<sup>25</sup>. Thus, without being sure to whom the paternity of this expression really belongs, we find that, in certain ideological circles, the *art-mirror* analogy is strongly challenged by trying to offer an opposite analogy: *art-hammer*.

After all, we can consider that this polemic could be based on the assumption that we could treat *reality* and *environment* as being identical. Thus, the relationship between the individual in his capacity as an *observer* and the *environment* cannot be

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<sup>22</sup> Wilde O. *Miscellaneous Aphorisms; The Soul of Man*, at Free eBooks | Project Gutenberg, published: 22.09.2010, accessed: 24.03.2023

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem

<sup>24</sup> Freire P. *A Critical Encounter*, edited by Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, London & New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 79

<sup>25</sup> Trotsky L. *Literature and Revolution*, Edited by William Keach, translated by Rose Strunsky, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005, p. 120

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that of mere mirroring. The tension between the two poles of the relationship involves either an adaptation, a modification of the individual to fit the environment or an adaptation, a modification of the environment that fits the individual. Can we conclude, then, that reality is identifiable with the environment? No, we cannot. The existence of reality cannot be conditioned solely by its mere knowledge, and it cannot be restricted to what can be known, to what is known, or to what is recognized. Reality does not define itself according to the observer of reality. In this aspect, reality appears to be related to nature. Of course, reality also has contradictory, surprising and paradoxical aspects, but we will not develop this perspective in the following. Regarding the aspect of naturalness of reality we find ourselves, somehow, caught up in defining art as mirroring. Mirroring only of what is natural could exclude what is artificial. Therefore, the reality could be somehow deprived of a good area of manifestation, that of the artificial. Artificial that can be subsumed to the bringing of novelty into existence. Of course, of a certain type of novelty and not of novelty as a whole. Or, the reality, if it could be suspected to be identified with the natural, would be reduced only to manifestation. Reality that does not manifest itself could be excluded from existence. This perspective can be discerned in the following statement: "... there is a need to write a theatre freed from the nightmare of naturalism – the bourgeois theatre par excellence; we need a theatre in which the most concrete dramatic events are poetically enhanced, in which the daily events are transfigured acquiring the high poetic significance that the contemporary spectator demands. Freed, with the help of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, from the prison of his loneliness and passivity, the contemporary man discovers, in his most concrete activities, new poetic and philosophical horizons. He discovers the meanings of the concrete, the emotion of the dialectical correlation"<sup>26</sup>. In this paragraph we can consider that the allegory of *art - mirror* is attributed to naturalistic aesthetics. At the same time, by invoking the *everyday event* in this way, realism, as an aesthetic movement, is somehow counterposed to naturalism. Reality becomes an aspect of contemporaneity. Everything that is contemporary is real. But, in this case, what is not contemporary becomes less real. Moreover, the real thing is only what can manifest itself noisily in the collective. Therefore, what is individual is no longer real, it becomes pure illusion. The theatre that corresponds to the present is real, and the theatre of the past is a bourgeois, outdated theatre. Only theatre that corresponds to the man of today (defined exclusively as being Marxist-Leninist) is a theatre that corresponds to reality. Why? Because it's the kind of performance that doesn't exclude the future from the real. Can the future that does not yet exist be now and here in this real present? Apparently this reproach is based on a shift of meaning from the *presentation* to the *present*. The art of theatre defined as the art of the present actually involves a presentation. This

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<sup>26</sup> Pintilie L. Lucian Pintilie: „Sînt suficiente forțe reale în teatrul românesc pentru a-l ridica la nivelul impus de frumusețea și complexitatea epocii noastre.”, in „Teatrul”, nr. 7, anul V, 1960, p. 77

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concept of *here and now* of theatrical experience actually refers not to a concrete present, but to the *presence of a presentation*. The theatrical act presents itself *here and now* which is the present in which it exists. Therefore, if we always move forward by expanding the present, the future will never be achieved. Suppose the future will never be inhabited by the real? Can the world of the future, the times to come be reflected in the present? Thus we can have another form of misinterpretation, the cancellation of the allegory world – mirror. It is not what is that is mirrored, but what is not yet. Theatre thus seems to be an apparatus for scrutinizing the future. Pushing this perspective to the limit seems to be dealing with a Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist mysticism applied to the theatre in which the present is born from the future. So here is a paradigm that undermines the very structure of perceiving the real.

The real is no longer considered to be a unitary notion but is compartmentalized, fragmented into various slices of the real from which we choose a form of it, the social reality. And this real is confronted with the other forms of the real, the organic one, the physical one, etc., dialectically, aiming at a much-hoped-for synthesis that would enthrone a terrestrial paradise in a theatrical spectacle that should be as real as life itself. A social, daily, political, young, current, eternal, touching spectacle. Thus "... the problem of anchoring theatre in social reality, as a source of permanent revival, is always actual. But the social, economic, political basis, of protest, of contestation, is essentially another. This is about a social system structured according to the course of history, the interest of the masses. Criticism cannot address the system, but to the phenomena and manifestations that prevent the full efflorescence of the system. This, of course, can be achieved by knowing and deep understanding of the meaning of the development of society, its structure and rules. We have a clear ideal that we consciously strive for, the ideal of communist society. In its name is the struggle against all the maladies, flaws, moral and social excrescences. Dramaturgy and theatre cannot remain outside this fight that is part of the substance of our daily lives"<sup>27</sup>. This should be a theatre that cannot be reproached for. A combative theatre to which it would be dangerous to express doubts about its value. A theatre that can be assumed to be even more real than life itself.

After all, in an ironic expression, it could be said that if we live a life full of hardships and sufferings, surely we can find sincerity and a carefree life in the theatre. "Our age, I have the impression, is the era of the great syntheses, in which universally human aspirations are discovered, above all, full of realism and sincerity"<sup>28</sup> was claimed in 1965; in addition to that, it was stated: "... the art of performance is bound to realism, its main element of communication being man with his physiological and psychological reality, hence individual, and with his historical, economic, social, and

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<sup>27</sup> Bărbuță M. *Teatrul și integrarea în social*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 1, anul XVI, 1971, p. 3

<sup>28</sup> Banu George, *La arlechin*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 1, anul X, 1965, p. 84

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political cravings, hence his group reality"<sup>29</sup>.

This craving for the real in the art of performance, clearly expressed since 1965, resonates in 2021 to such an extent that the theatricality itself is abandoned in the name of reality: "I would say that the performance [*the title of the performance*] actually contains much more real things than theatre and that is why we chose to call it performance, because [*the title of the performance*] has a dramaturgy – and here comes the theatre – but the things that happen *live* with the actors' bodies are real elements. I've worked a lot with balance and imbalance, with a fragile balance, and then the real emotion is a moment when you watch the body in imbalance... but not of a character, but of the actor himself"<sup>30</sup>. But this claim, which yearns for legitimacy or justification, perhaps out of an atavistic fear of criticism, may mark the fact that we are dealing with a new discrimination between old realism and the new realism, as stated in 1965 "... the presence of realism in the art of performance seems, at first glance, one of the remains, one of the remnants of the old culture"<sup>31</sup>. Discrimination becomes evident as a result of changes in society. What is socially real in the middle of the last century is not identical to what is real at the beginning of this century. The statement seems to express something already known. But if we consider that social relations are established according to constants and variables, we cannot claim that the modification of variables leads to social change. It is possible, as it seems to be pointed out in this analysis of the Romanian theatrical discourse, that the social reality, keeping its constants and modifying its variables, has not changed. The tendency to build realistic performances seems to be a constant of the Romanian social reality. Nothing has changed in this respect. But what kind of realistic performances are they, we will analyze, if we are allowed, after noticing a strange effect of this constant pursuit of the social reality of the Romanian performance. The exaggerated attention to be in tune with the social reality leads to the exaggerated sensitivity to social novelty, to fashion. Living under the fear of getting out of fashion, of remaining behind, the creators of theatre: "In the rush for an alleged modernity and overestimating the simple and the natural, these directors were glad to solve the content problems of the performance by making them hyperbolically. Frightened by the theatrical, they preferred, instead of a modern acceptance of the theatre, an intimate simplicity, foreign to the theatre, which is the life seen through the magical magnifying glass of the stage, life magnified – according to the director's potencies – tens, hundreds and thousands of times"<sup>32</sup>. Noticing another perspective that denies the

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<sup>29</sup> Liviu Ciulei in Fianu A. *Teatrul contemporan și contemporaneitatea teatrului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 5, anul X, p. 106

<sup>30</sup> Leta Popescu in Big I. *Clin d'oeil | Leta Popescu: „Folosesc teatrul ca să înțeleg lumea mea”*, at <https://zilesinopti.ro/2021/12/18/clin-doeil-leta-popescu-folosesc-teatrul-ca-sa-inteleg-lumea-mea/>, published 18.12.2021, accessed: 26.03. 2023

<sup>31</sup> Liviu Ciulei in Fianu A., op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Stanca R., op. cit., pp. 55-56

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allegory art/theatre – mirror by substituting the mirror, and proposing the allegory art/theatre – magnifying glass/microscope/telescope, we can say that novelty has become the equivalent or substitute of reality. Even more than that, the good – bad paradigm has been replaced by that of the new – old. There is nothing wrong anymore, there can be no mistake in any way. The good is the new. The evil is the old. "What's going on in the theatre, in our country? Wherever we throw a strong ray of light, on any area of life, we discover the confrontation between the new and the old unfolding obviously"<sup>33</sup>. This substitution reverberates in the present – past and especially in the young – old pair. Evil is old – good is young. This politically validated opinion at the middle of the last century reappears at the beginning of the twenty-first century: "... this generation, which I feel wants to totally distance itself from the past. All the harm that is perpetuated in society is caused by the fact that many generations so far have given up, made massive compromises and I believe that, at some point, things must change"<sup>34</sup>. So, social evil comes from older generations. The new generation is the possessor of the good. And then what makes a theatrical performance valuable? What is the instrument for measuring success? The youngest age of those who put on stage a text. But this theatrical-political-cultural realism is not just any kind of realism. It is a particular form of realism that in the past had at least the sincerity to recognize itself as it is, but which, today, camouflages itself in what we can call the *naivety of existing*. Therefore, it is not enough to put on stage that that is actual, contemporaneous. Even today, the theatre actor is asked what was asked, in 1958, from the film actor: "... in order to make an art consistent with his era, the actor [...] must be a man practiced in thinking in a contemporaneous way, in giving contemporaneous interpretations to the meanings. It is the same as regards the conception and the style. But his behaviour – not on stage, his own, the man's – can be any. His force of depersonalization and re-personalization frees him from an obligation which is mandatory for the film actor, that of being a contemporary man. I do not think that a man who still has manners inherited from the past, can express himself adequately in an art that, undeniably, couldn't be born but in this day and age that it represents"<sup>35</sup>. But what exactly should be understood by contemporary? It seems that what was claimed in 1960 does not differ much from what we claim in 2023: "I plead for the understanding of contemporaneity in art as an active, lucid, passionate, exhaustive attitude of the artist, *in relation to the ideal of our time*, to everything that can be perceived, thought, expressed. I emphasize, in relation to the ideal of our time, because this ideal is both

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<sup>33</sup> Pintilie L. „*Punctul de vedere al scriitorului asupra vieții – de neconfruntat*”, in „Teatrul”, nr. 10, anul IX, 1964, p. 18

<sup>34</sup> Radu-Alexandru Nica in Dumitrache S. *Nu sînt mercenar prin naștere, deși asta am ajuns*, at <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/nu-sint-mercenar-prin-nastere-desi-asta-ajuns/>, published: 19.08.2016, accessed: 28.03.2023

<sup>35</sup> Ciulei L. *Nu se poate da un verdict*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 4, anul III, 1958, p. 28

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a political ideal and an aesthetic one"<sup>36</sup>. And, of course, in 1960, it was added with relative, from today's perspective, ingenuity: "and, in my opinion, contemporaneity, in the broadest and also the most comprehensive sense, means communism"<sup>37</sup>. But to clarify the kind of art to which this understanding belongs we must remember: "The theatrical culture created and developed by soviet theatre is based on the aesthetic experience of realist theatre of the past and on the rich experience of applying the method of socialist realism"<sup>38</sup>. *The socialist realist theatre* could be that theatre which, beyond right and wrong, in terms of the new and the old refuses the *theatre – mirror of its time* as a functional allegory. The distance required to be able to reflect oneself in the mirror seems to break the connection with the real. Perhaps theatre cannot be, from the perspective of socialist realism, extracted from social reality even by mirroring. Today it is said: "I can't make art, theatre, film, anything, disregarding the context in which it happens. Because at that moment I'm no longer connected to reality"<sup>39</sup>.

If by context one means the socio-political context, since it is stated: "... I think the theatre is political"<sup>40</sup>, then this implicitly leads to the observation: "... young directors tend towards such a deeply engaged theatre, a theatre which, through its political ideas and its moral commands, puts into question with the utmost vehemence the entire social existence"<sup>41</sup>. But this observation was made about Andrei Serban, Aureliu Manea. Anca Ovanez, Ivan Helmer in 1969. In fact we can speak about a theatre where "The conception of each of us about theatre directing is born on the basis of the principles of the art of socialist realism..."<sup>42</sup>. But, paradoxically, this distancing from the acceptance of the illusory and the fixation in the exaggerated and exclusive perception of the real leads to the idea that "... what is primarily of interest to directing is not so much its exegetical, real and indisputable meaning, but its sociological meaning"<sup>43</sup>. Thus the theatre is continuously engaged in the disputes of the day. It no longer mirrors the real, but gets involved, fights. "This polemical character, our realist-socialist theatre justifies it (or better: rightly claims it), from the moment of its founding, as a way of enlightening and revolutionizing the consciousnesses: yesterday, the political unmasking of the past of exploitation and

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<sup>36</sup> Silvestru V. „Oglinda visătoare a timpului”, in „Teatrul”, nr. 8, anul V, 1960, p. 91

<sup>37</sup> ibidem

<sup>38</sup> Redacția *Consfătuirea oamenilor de teatru sovietici*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 7, anul VI, 1961, p. 88

<sup>39</sup> Eugen Jebeleanu in Vișulan A. *Eugen Jebeleanu, regizor: „Cred într-un teatru manifest, angajat, politic, dar nu în acea artă care se face cu pumnu-n gură*”, at <https://culturaladuba.ro/eugen-jebeleanu-regizor-cred-intr-un-teatru-manifest-angajat-politic-dar-nu-acea-arta-care-se-face-cu-pumnu-n-gura/>, published 13.05.2022, accessed: 25.03.2023

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem

<sup>41</sup> Băleanu A. *Profilul unei generații*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 6, anul XIV, 1969, p. 5

<sup>42</sup> Neleanu D. D. *Concepția regizorală înseamnă analiza conținutului de idei, detectarea ideii principale și determinarea suprasarcinii spectacolului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 1, anul VI, 1961, p. 46

<sup>43</sup> Teodorescu L. *Obsesia autoportretului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 10, anul XIV, 1969, p. 48

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obedience of man; today, the revealing and blaming of the ideological and ethical remnants of this past, of its influences on man's consciousness and habits"<sup>44</sup>. This theatre becomes a theatre in which its *raison d'être* lies in the fact that it generates, maintains and organizes a collectivity. It is no longer interested in the aesthetic dimension except to the extent that it serves the strange solipsism inculcated in the structure of socialist realism. A group solipsism as a result of an individual consciousness of the group. The place of the individual is taken over by the individuality of the group. Because, in fact, if "... the common goal is the measure of man's actions (the active in the sense by which Marx defines the subjective), that is, the human. Because the surpassing that Sartre speaks of can only be achieved in and through the collectivity"<sup>45</sup>, then the enemy is defined as being the individual reality.

Both today and in the past, it seems that those playwrights who were forcibly put together and labeled as the *theatre of the absurd*, because they were probably perceived as too individualistic, are identified as enemies of the socialist-realism. They are reproached that: "Tormented by the thought of the self-destruction of the human race and by the sense of the absurdity and unreality of the immediate world, some contemporary dramatic authors have protested and are protesting, in their own way (Adamov, as the European intellectual elite of the 30's, and Beckett, as a great old-fashioned playwright, in the 60's)..."<sup>46</sup>, and therefore, to prevent social dissolution: "... the defense of the world has been assumed today by the *political theatre*, and everything that is foreign has become obsolete"<sup>47</sup>. In fact, the socialist-realism claims no more and no less than the re-mythologization of the world through theatre according to a mythology of the immediate conceived as a perpetual state of novelty. Under the pretext of an interpretation of the work of Ion Sava we find out that he intended "... the *re-magicking of the theatre* and the creation of the *modern social mystery*. We must restore to the theatre the essential functions that magic had for the primitive man. In doing so, Sava in no way envisages a return to traditionalist forms of mysticism or primitivism. He was a materialist, who believed in technical and social progress"<sup>48</sup>. A mythology of progress, of social actuality, of socialist-realism is attributed to theatre as art. Mythology that is presented as the effort of lucidity. If the theatrical convention had, in one way or another, self-awareness and the ability to express itself, then it can be said that it always had the ludic to pretend to be reality. But can social reality as a conventional reality replace reality, let's call it, natural reality, even in the theatre? To what extent? It is an impossibility for conventional reality to replace fundamental reality entirely for an indefinite period of

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<sup>44</sup> Tornea F. *Lenin și patosul promovării noului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 4, anul VIII, 1963, pp. 2-3

<sup>45</sup> Chitic P. C. „*Suplex Thalie*”, in „Teatrul”, nr. 2, anul XIII, 1968, p. 80

<sup>46</sup> Gheorghiu M. *Ipoteze*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 3, anul XV, 1970, p. 10

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem

<sup>48</sup> Teodorescu C. *Direcții estetice în teatrul românesc modern (I) – Ion Sava și remagicizarea teatrului*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 4, anul XIV, 1969, p. 78

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time. This procedure can be partially performed over a short period of time.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the socialist-realism presents itself as an artistic practice with profound political accents that tends to become a fundamental reality. In Romanian theatre, the socialist-realism can be identified as a constant refusal of the theatre-mirror allegory. This refusal occurs constantly in the Romanian theatrical culture, in various forms. We can also notice, in the actuality of the last years, marks of socialist-realism both at the level of artistic production and at the conceptual level. The particularity lies in the fact that, at the conceptual level, the socialist-realism is not assumed as such and is presented as a recent invention.

At one point, Liviu Ciulei says: "I think that today the most important theatre creations in the world tend towards an increasingly comprehensive and diverse realism. It is a natural reaction [...] after the rediscovery of the convention, of the theatrical, after a new exploration and understanding of the scenic effect, contemporary theatre returns, consciously and enriched by the experiments carried out, to its obligation always, that which Shakespeare called, through Hamlet's mouth: *to hold the mirror up to nature*"<sup>49</sup>. This reveals to us the fact that the socialist-realism could be undermined as an artistic procedure by revisiting, redefining the concept of realism. Precisely by treating the theatre performance as a mirror of its time. We notice that the same procedure, the redefinition of the meaning of reality, probably makes the socialist-realism to return to the Romanian culture. The question that remains is this: has the socialist-realism ever been banished from the Romanian culture? Perhaps not. Perhaps the socialist-realism has masked itself into the cutting-edge artistic novelty, assumed it, excluding any other possibilities. Thus the theatrical artistic novelty seems to be reduced to socialist-realism. Unfortunately, the socialist-realism, at least, in the Romanian theatrical culture seems a bit unreal and does not reflect an existing social reality, but an imagined one. If we mirrored on stage the reality of the theatrical society and not the social reality we would have a surprise. The social reality of theatre in general and of Romanian theatre in particular seems unchanged at least in the last two hundred years.

An actress' testimony goes like this: "... in my youth, even if you had an innate talent for theatre, in order to succeed, you had to [...] have no scruples. To have no dignity. You had to have no idea what was moral or immoral. You had to not know what was called comradely honour. You had to hit right and left to get ahead. And above all, very importantly, you had to be in good relations with the press, with journalists, any kind of relationships, any kind... and the same relationships with the people in the theatre who were then running the theatre... or to be protected by an influential politician or a rich man. Not all of them were reaching the pinnacle. Some, discouraged, were getting out of the way. Others were pushed aside by intrigue, by

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<sup>49</sup> Ciulei L., *Pasionantul drum spre realism*, in „Teatrul”, nr. 1, anul X, 1965, p. 19



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cowardly blows, by a whole entanglement of interests and arrangements"<sup>50</sup>. The social reality of the theatre seems different from the one that presents itself to the ticket-paying spectator. Can the theatre man/woman still be believed when he/she claims that his political and social commitment, the socialist-realism of his/her performances, still serve the development of society? The question that arises nowadays is the following: what if this practical intelligence of the theatre man/woman has come to replace the talent? Or, if talent is defined strictly on social coordinates, then talent is reduced to a certain slyness of the theatre man/woman? Does the talent to play theatre on stage matter, or is it enough to prevent others from expressing themselves through theatre? Theatre can be a mirror of its time to the extent that the theatre man/woman recognizes the reality, be it fundamental or just social, and acts to reflect it not to occult it.

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<sup>50</sup> Leanța Galaction in Găină R. *Mit și istorie: Actrițe de odinioară – Leanța Galaction (@Arhiva TVR)* la <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVMJW8yXmF0>, published: 21.05.2019, accessed: 13.03.2023, min. 2:58 – 5:07

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