

### 3. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN ARTS EDUCATION THE CHALLENGES OF *HERE AND NOW*

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**Abstract:** *In our time, the theater has greatly expanded in scope to include education, personal development, and sometimes therapy. With its novel stage installations, it has penetrated into the realm of the visual arts and, since the covid-19 pandemic, into the virtual environment. As such, the Actor's Art has inherently been subject to change. Drama schools no longer seek to train masters but to guide and to facilitate the discovery or the definition of each artist's unique individuality, creativity, and personality.*

**Key words:** *vocation, artist's ego, adaptation*

#### 1. Introduction

Romanian theater and, with it, theatrical (higher) education and training are grappling with their share of confusion, for who can listen to, discover, and cultivate that inner whisper of *vocation* amidst the deafening uproar of the fundamental need for *survival*? To even begin to consider an answer, I reached for the dictionary in search of the exact meaning of the term. According to the Romanian Pocket Academic Dictionary<sup>117</sup>, *vocation* is a special aptitude or talent for a particular form of art or science, as well as a *calling* or sense of purpose shaping one's destiny. In Romania, after the '90s, the number of independent theaters, groups, companies, and associations using theater as a social engagement tool increased, and so did that of specialized training schools.

#### 2. Discussions

The theatrical domain has broadened to accommodate education, personal development, and sometimes therapeutic approaches. Installations have become more visual and, since 2019, the stage has gone online, resulting in a wider spectrum of *destinies* seeking fulfillment through theater. Acting is no longer as we knew it and acting schools are now less interested in mastery and more invested in facilitating individual self-discovery. The pursuit of virtuosity has been replaced by a demand for artists with very personal styles who can be themselves on the stage and put on display for all to see the most intimate experiences from their past, their deepest desires, and their fears. This *artistic* DNA embedded in an individual is what dictates the theatrical direction uniquely *destined* to each of us.

Now is not the first time that Romanian theater, in particular, but also theater in a universal sense, has had to go through challenging, confusing periods, and this restores our hope for the future. For instance, until the '90s, the theater held an important strategic position in the political and social life, as well as in the lives of ordinary people. On one hand, the Party used theater to reinforce its agenda and further educate the population accordingly; on the other, people used theater as a

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<sup>117</sup> The 2010 edition by the “Univers Enciclopedic” Publishing House

safe outlet for their frustrations with the dictatorial political regime. Then, at the end of 1989, everything changed. Referring to the play *Lost Morning*<sup>118</sup>, the actor Ion Besoiu noted the effect that the Revolution had upon spectators: “I can say that the play had a tremendous impact on the public, but after the Revolution, when we replayed it, and when everyone had already released their frustrations out in the street, the impact was gone. This also happened to me when we scheduled a replay of *The Misanthrope*<sup>119</sup> after the Revolution. Before, the roar of applause would fill the theater hall and give spectators the impression of an explosion or an earthquake taking place. People would seek release at the theater, but, once they found it in the street and we played it again after the Revolution, the show was a flop...”

Before December '89, the creators of a theatrical performance would go to great lengths to deceive and avoid censorship, while afterward the challenge became dealing with the mass media and the street show. It took nearly 10 years for a new generation of playwrights and directors to emerge and for the contemporary Romanian dramaturgy to be theorized, such as by Alina Nelega, who was among the first to define the underlying principles of this new direction. She found inspiration for her creative work in the plays of Heiner Müller and Rodrigo García, in which the “deconstruction of a play leads to dispensable, single-use texts trademark of a consumer society, but also to great experimental texts showcasing the poetic power of language.”<sup>120</sup>

The ten layers of *de-theatricalization* identified by Alina Nelega signal a direct form of theater that allows for the voice of the author to be heard with poignancy. In the century of speed, the reality is insufficient and a sort of “hyper-reality” is called for: “The new plays no longer speak in the noble code of the heroic character, but in the hasty and unpolished jargon of elliptical verbal communication. [...] Behavioral change brings about a new stage code.”<sup>121</sup> The Romanian theater followed the pattern indicated by Alina Nelega for almost twenty years, during which the number of theaters, theater companies, and associations rose concurrently with that of performing artists engaged in ever wider and more diverse spheres of interest, from social intervention to experimental expression. According to the theater critic Iulia Popovici, the *surplus of people* was in direct proportion to the *surplus of ideas*.<sup>122</sup>

### 3. Results

Today, the Romanian theater world must cope with new and unexpected challenges – after having had to face censorship and then the mass media, now it has to fight the virus. Today, the political warfare between vaccine supporters and

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<sup>118</sup> *Lost Morning*, dramatization by Cătălina Buzoianu after the novel of the same title by Gabriela Adameșteanu, direction: Cătălina Buzoianu, Theater “Bulandra” Bucharest, season 1986/1987

<sup>119</sup> The play *The Misanthrope* by Molière (direction –Valeriu Moisescu) premiered in May 1989 at Theater “Bulandra”.

<sup>120</sup> Alina Nelega, *Structures and Composition Formulae of the Dramatic Text*, Eikon Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, p.102

<sup>121</sup> Alina Nelega, *The Return of the Playwright: Resuscitation of the Tragic and De-theatricalization of the Theater*, in “The Cultural Observer”, Nov 2005, source: [www.agenda.liternet.ro](http://www.agenda.liternet.ro)

<sup>122</sup> Dialogue with Iulia Popovici, *User Guide for Independent Theater in Romania and elsewhere*, “The Cultural Observer”, no. 282/August 2005, source: [www.agenda.liternet.ro](http://www.agenda.liternet.ro)

anti-vaxxers, between minority and majority communities fueled by all sorts of social restrictions and individual fears, has made both conventional and unconventional theater spaces inaccessible. The performing artists of our time must demonstrate yet again a remarkable capacity for adaptation and relevance. Firstly, when quarantine was enforced, different state and independent theaters started to broadcast online existing recordings of past performances, and then they set up live online shows, performed outdoors, or adapted their plays for TV. Secondly, the actors, when they found themselves isolated and alone, turned to their inner *egos*, exploring and sharing their artistic individuality via social media networks and online platforms in a variety of online appearances. This has contributed to a noticeable shift of focus in today's theater from the *interaction* with its public to the *individuality* of its artists.

The theater has been through wars, famine, and pandemics before, and performing artists with something to say have always found a way to express themselves. Theater art functions like a mirror for society and will continue to exist as long as society endures. I find Antonin Artaud's remarks very of the moment even if he made them in 1938; to him, back then, the theater was "an impressive summoning of forces which bring the spirit, by means of example, back to the source of its conflicts" and "from a humanistic point of view, theatrical performance is beneficial, for it compels people to see themselves as they are; it tears of their masks, uncovers their lies, complacency, nothingness, hypocrisy."<sup>123</sup>

According to the French theoretician, "any true insignia is accompanied by its own shadow." In his *Love and Non-love in Theater*, George Banu also comments how "the theater hall is the shadow of the stage": "I most certainly cannot dissociate from it, but at the same time I am not its perfect double; I am something *other* than it! We are both different and... inseparable."<sup>124</sup> At present, the theater hall, the so-called *shadow* of the artist on the stage, is gone and has been replaced with the artist's own intimate self. Therefore, whereas previously theater was one instrument with which the spirit of an entire people could be acted upon, today's social distance can only be bridged by the spiritual metamorphosis of the artists as they seek within to rediscover their sense of *purpose*. As Antonin Artaud predicted, "it is only fair that cataclysmic events can occur and incite us to go back to nature to find life again, so to speak."<sup>125</sup> These days, the *life* that we are revisiting is that within, which our inner self lives out in solitude.

#### 4. Conclusions

Actors must rediscover themselves. Whether they interpret roles to the conception of which they contributed, in a *site-specific* type of show, or they recite from Shakespeare, or they enact a virtual *performance*, stage artists express and communicate their visions to the world. Personally, I consider it a great privilege that any actor should appreciate during these trying times and see the glass half

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<sup>123</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, in Romanian by Voichița Sasu and Diana Tihu-Suciu, afterword and text selection by Ion Vartic, ECHINOX Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, pp. 26, 28

<sup>124</sup> George Banu, *Love and Non-love of Theater*, translation by Ileana Littera, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p. 13

<sup>125</sup> Antonin Artaud, op. cit., p. 13

full. I concur with the British director Declan Donnellan, who said that “even the most stylized art is still about life and the more life is distilled into a work of art, the greater its value.”<sup>126</sup> History teaches us that the connection between life and theater is an indissoluble one, therefore our time calls for artists who dare *talk* boldly about their *life*.

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### Web resources

1. [www.liternet.ro](http://www.liternet.ro)

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<sup>126</sup> Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target*, in Romanian by Saviana Stănescu and Ioana Ieronim, UNITEXT Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 16