

**CULTURE AND CREATIVE PRACTICE.
DOCTORAL RESEARCH AS A CULTURAL ACT**

*Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Doctoral Schools
"George Enescu" National University of the Arts Iași, Romania
(December 5-6, 2024)*

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CULTURE AND CREATIVE PRACTICE.

DOCTORAL RESEARCH AS A CULTURAL ACT

– Foreword –

For some time, there has been more and more persistent talk about a (new) crisis of culture, one generated in particular either by a manifest disinterest of the younger generations for something they associate with definitively outdated paradigms, or by redefinitions of “culture” that make this is a matter related to entertainment rather than the seriousness of a deep personal training process.

In the artistic area, a series of questions thus come back into focus, bearing new nuances: how much (more) does creation depend on the previous culture of the creator? To what extent are we able to identify a solid cultural background behind contemporary works of art, be they from the sphere of the visual, musical or performing arts? Does the requirement of culture remain valid in the case of the artist, or do we have to accept the relaxation to the point of dissolution of a once essential criterion? How much and how do the new “technological cultures” affect the old “humanistic cultures” that were the basis of what is today Europe and the European spirituality?

Transferred to the plane of doctoral research, such questions retain their unsettling character: is a doctoral research in the artistic field (and) an act of culture? How intense should the cultural air blow between the pages of a finished thesis? What cultural experiences should a doctoral student ideally have during research? What cultural attitudes and activities should PhD supervisors promote in such a way that the outcome of their collaboration with PhD students is culturally decisive as well? Are there tensions, at the level of a community, between academic and cultural environments, and if so, how might these tensions be described/quantified/mitigated? Is the researcher a “man of culture” or, without realizing it, has he already turned into a technician, into a craftsman who follows certain patterns, predetermined rituals that turn his actions into predictable actions lacking the spectacularity of an act of creation?

Music section

The Cultural Aspirations of Contemporary Musicology - an Exigency or a Utopia?

The interconnection of musical research with the current cultural directions guided by the humanist sciences and technology trends is a requirement of the present. Never has musicology been opened so directly towards the sciences and sister arts, nor has it ever been so rooted in the interdisciplinary area, the interest towards related fields (history, politics, psychology, cultural industry, technology, literature, arts) enhancing the cultural accessibility of the already consecrated musical themes. In the same time, cultural studies have pointed the importance of the context, determining the reappraisal of: the multiple factors, social, political, biographical, and artistic, which either stimulated or discouraged musical expression, the environment of ideas from/in which a creation was made, interpreted, and received. We ask ourselves if young musicians are prepared for the cultural challenges of contemporary musicology, with the aim of integrating it in the environment of intellectual perception, or it would be better fit the area of a well limited professionalism to be understood only by those pertaining to the same guild of arts. Furthermore, we ask ourselves if the centrifugal movement of musical research, involving major reclamations of vision, content, and vocabulary, is not excessively diluting the substance of musicology as a means of achieving a utopic cultural resonance.

Theatre and Performing Arts Section

Culture and Creation. Doctoral Research as a Cultural Act

In the field of theater, research avoids emitting the ambition that they represent acts of culture. Perhaps also because most of them take place in academic contexts burdened by various rigors and condemned from the start to a specific niche. The event doctorate, for example, is an exception, not a rule. The event book, resulting from solid research, is also a rarity. Most of the artists outside the University don't know much about what is going on or what is being researched inside the University, and the reverse is often true. If the theater performance is (still) regarded as a cultural product, a doctoral thesis is quite far from such a definition.

Is cultural reflection on a subject in the theatrical field a necessary condition for research? Are our assignments—of leading professors and doctoral students—really culturally relevant? How else do we decide what is culturally relevant and what is not? Is the lead professor-doctoral student relationship also a cultural type relationship, involving spiritual communion, electives that exceed the limits and limitations of an institutional type of communication, compatibilities resulting from shared principles, convictions, inclinations?

Therefore, we propose to fellow professors and PhD students an honest (self) look, with a cultural filter, on the topics we research/coordinate and, at the same time, a meditation on what we still mean by "culture" within a Doctoral School in the field Art.

Visual Arts Section

Cultural Practices in Techno-Scientific and Eco-Creative Contexts

In the field of visual arts, research culture presupposes a (co)generative, responsible, and communicative effort that takes into account both the management of tensions between the relevance of art history and the imperative to create novel artworks, as well as the (auto)reflectivity on the mechanisms and ways of producing artworks within incongruent communitarian, professional, and institutional contexts.

Research-based contemporary art has been permeable to the accelerated influence of social and techno-scientific advancements, the contradictions of taste revolutions, the new attention economies, and the inherent ecologies of creativity. The diversification over time of cultural studies, which has been reflected both at the level of the paradox of the superficiality's complexity of visual culture and in relation to the rebellious reaction of cultural criticism, is now reset at the level of the ideological conflicts between the rhetorical support of creative industries and the obliteration of the social culture's vocation.

Nevertheless, the artist-as-researcher informs and inspires themselves from the contortions of cultural crises and exercises their freedom to seek new opportunities to make something matter.

The Editors

MUSIC SECTION

**The Cultural Aspirations of Contemporary Musicology - an
Exigency or a Utopia?**

Romanian symphonic poems from the first half of the 20th century: *Marsyas* and *Acteon*

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Abstract: The history of Romanian music at the beginning of the 20th century was marked by the efforts of composers to offer valuable local creations in terms of content that were fully in line with European ones. The analysis of the two symphonic poems aims to highlight their formal principles and the way in which the subject dictates the sound architecture or vice versa. At the same time, by researching these works, it will be highlighted that in the Romanian musical space of the first half of the 20th century, the language used is as complex as that of contemporary works in Western Europe.

Keywords: *Marsyas*, *Acteon*, symphonic poem, Alfred Alessandrescu, Alfonso Castaldi.

1. Introduction

The association of an image, a painting or a text helped the art of sound to be better received by the listener. Thus, musical programatism gained ground over absolute music, being a much more accessible method of conveying the poetic and narrative message to the listener.

The term symphonic poem is closely linked to the name of Franz Liszt and was first used in 1854. Musicologist Richard Taruskin argues that Franz Liszt opted for this term in order to be closely linked to the ideal promoted by Hegel's philosophy, which advocated unity between written text and music¹.

It is known that the symphonic poem is an orchestral work in a single movement of variable length, whose score contains the programme presented in the preface, various titles and textual observations written throughout. Symphonic poems offered great compositional freedom from the outset, a liberation from the forms imposed by the symphony genre. However, in early works, such as the symphonic poems *Preludes* and *Orpheus* composed by Franz Liszt or *Macbeth* and *Don Juan* by Richard Strauss, we can observe the use of the sonata. Composer and professor Vasile Herman offers a much clearer picture of the formal evolution of the genre in question. The stages he describes highlight the transition from framing the subject within a fixed pattern to choosing forms according to the

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¹ Richard Taruskin (2005). *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 3, “The Nineteenth Century, Midcentury”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 419.

literary programme, the latter being the generating factor of the musical architecture. The author concludes that “the symphonic poem is a genre rather than a form of music per se”².

However, the fact that this musical genre involves a single movement gives composers the opportunity to show their skill in the variational technique to which musical themes and motifs are subjected. This manner of processing, although not new, began to be increasingly developed through this type of work and reached its peak with those offered by R. Wagner.

The creations of Liszt and R. Strauss stimulated the imagination of composers, especially those who represented the national schools of the 19th century. Artists such as Bedřich Smetana managed to achieve their aesthetic ideals through this genre, offering remarkable musical achievements, such as the work *Má Vlast*³ (1874-1879), consisting of six symphonic poems describing the beauty of the composer's native country.

Representative works can also be found in Russian musical culture, such as the symphonic poem *Tamara* (1882) composed by Mily Balakirev, inspired by the ballad of the same name written by the poet Mikhail Lermontov, or *The Poem of Ecstasy* (1908) and *Prometheus: Poem of Fire* (1910), composed by Alexander Scriabin, are true musical landmarks of the genre.

Similarly, in Romanian music in the first half of the 20th century, we have as reference models the poems *Marsyas* (1907) composed by Alfonso Castaldi, *Le Temple de Gnide* (1908) and *Narcisse* (1912) by Ion Nonna Otescu, *Didona* (1911) and *Acteon* (1915) by Alfred Alessandrescu, *Poveste indică* (1920) by Mihail Jora, *Isis* (1923) by George Enescu, *Fatma* (1924) by Constantin Bobescu, *Tîndală și Păcală* (1925) and *Pe șesul Moldovei* (1931) by Alexandru Zirra.⁴

2. Alfonso Castaldi (1874-1942)

Alfonso Castaldi went down in Romanian music history as one of the most important professors at the Bucharest Conservatory and as the founder of the composition class at the same institution.

Dedicated to his calling, he took over the composition department, where, in partnership with D.G. Kiriak, he was responsible for teaching composition and counterpoint. Alfonso Castaldi's teaching methods reveal a true exactingness in terms of the themes offered by his students, but also an unprecedented dedication to those who are truly gifted. In the first months of his course, he offered examples from universal musical culture, starting with Bach and Beethoven and moving on to contemporary composers and his own work, with the aim of attracting and

² Vasile Herman (1982). *Originile și dezvoltarea formelor muzicale* [The Origins and Development of Musical Forms], Editura Muzicală, București, p. 76.

³ *My Homeland*, translated from Czech.

⁴ Mihai Popescu (1979). *Repertoriul general al creației muzicale românești* [General Repertory of Romanian Musical Creation], vol. 1, Editura Muzicală, București.

extracting the essence of creativity from his students. In his notes for the composition curriculum, which unfortunately only lasted for two years of study, there is a special focus on understanding and deepening the sonata form, along with the analysis of periods, ideas, and musical expression, all of which contribute to the formation of an analytical and creative spirit.

A complex personality, attracted by art and culture in general, Alfonso Castaldi contributed to and elevated Romanian music education, training notable musicians such as Alfred Alessandrescu, Ion Nonna Otescu, and Dimitrie Cuclin, who were able to carry on the mission of enriching Romanian national culture.

As a composer, Alfonso Castaldi made his mark most strongly in the genre of symphonic music. Although many of his works have been lost over time, the most important ones remain to be appreciated and cherished by future generations.

The context of development in a country that was only beginning to assert itself culturally at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was favourable for Professor Castaldi. Musicologist Vasile Tomescu draws attention to the two main aspects of his symphonism: the program music idea and the complex orchestral writing⁵. These aspects are found in many of his works in this genre, such as the symphonic fairy tale *Fagul roșu* [The Red Beech], *Uvertura Pavana*, the *Symphonic March*, the symphonic triptych *Il giorno*, the poem *Orelor* [The Hours] and the symphonic poem *Thalassa*. Unfortunately, many of these scores were lost in the turmoil of the last century.

2.1. The symphonic poem *Marsyas*

Alongside his teaching activities, Alfonso Castaldi produced several notable works that would change the public's perception of this composer. Among these, the symphonic poem *Marsyas* (1907) revealed a new musical language, in which the creator demonstrated mastery and inspiration. This is evidenced by the reviews dedicated to this symphonic creation, which place it alongside the great contemporary symphonic creations of Western Europe and consider it an important milestone in local creation.

We learn from Vasile Tomescu's research that this symphonic poem was conceived as the first in a cycle of three. The others, *Acteon* and *Misenus*, were assigned to Alfred Alessandrescu, who was encouraged to choose the subject of *Acteon*, and to Ion Nonna Otescu, for *Misenus*, to be composed.⁶

After its premiere in 1908 at the Romanian Athenaeum, conducted by the composer, *Marsyas* was performed again in 1909, 1912 and 1913 under the same conductor and with the same orchestra. After the musician's retirement from artistic life, it was performed by George Georgescu in 1923, Ionel Perlea in 1942 with the Radio Orchestra, and Alfred Alessandrescu in 1942 and 1947 in the Radio

⁵ Vasile Tomescu (1962). *Alfred Alessandrescu*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, p. 113.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

studio and in 1948 at the Athenaeum, with the Radio Broadcasting Orchestra. The success of this work was not only national. In 1909, it was performed in Rostock, Germany with the city's symphony orchestra conducted by Schultz, then in 1925 in the United States by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock.

One of the first things that catches the eye is the subject matter. Alfonso Castaldi drew upon a legend and chose a text by the ancient poet Ovid as his programmatic motto. In the history of the genre, choosing subjects from mythology is relatively rare, with subjects from literature, history, whether national or international, and the world of fantasy usually being preferred.

The work consists of six parts, closely related to the structure of the text. The legend of Marsyas, which served as a source of inspiration, is found on the frontispiece of the score. I believe that the chosen structure is due to the division into paragraphs made by the composer himself. The footnotes accompanying the written presentation of the programme are also interesting, as they provide some additional information.

The entire work is built around the themes of the main characters, Marsyas and Apollo, and the two leitmotifs that precede them. The choice of instruments representing the two protagonists is also ingenious, as is the harmony used for each of their themes. In mythology as well as in the poem, Marsyas is represented by the flute, while Apollo plays the lyre, replaced in the orchestra by the harp. The harmony used for the former's theme is predominantly modal, while for Apollo it is tonal-functional.



Fig. 1 Alfonso Castaldi, *Marsyas*, Marsyas' theme, ms. 30-48



Fig. 2 Alfonso Castaldi, *Marsyas*, melody derived from Marsyas' theme, ms.1-4⁷

⁷ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

Noteworthy is the archaic flavour of the themes, especially the flute theme, which at times resembles a *doina*, as well as the rubato rhythm, which creates an improvisational character.

Apollo's theme, which begins in the second part of the poem, *Allegro moderato assai*, is also preceded by thematic material initially presented on the clarinet. Given the choice of instrument for the first presentation of this thematic material, we can consider it to be Marsyas' distant cries to Apollo.



Fig. 3 Alfonso Castaldi, *Marsyas*, reference point 6, ms. 2-3⁸



Fig. 4 Alfonso Castaldi, *Marsyas*, Apollo's theme, reference 7, ms. 6-9⁹

Here is a diagram created by musicologist Vasile Tomescu regarding the architecture of the entire poem.

1. Exposition of the flute theme and accompanying replies (A major); brief development;
 2. Exposition of the harp theme and the calls and responses (D flat - G flat); brief development;
 3. Development of the flute theme (apotheosis) (C hypolidian);
 4. Development of the harp theme (apotheosis) (A flat);
 5. Development of the flute theme (mocking of Marsyas) (A hypolidian);
- Ode in memory of Marsyas; coda (C and finale in D)¹⁰.

We also made a diagram of the first two parts of the poem, parts where all the thematic material is presented.

Alfonso Castaldi, <i>Marsyas</i> (1907), Structura părții I (<i>Lentamente</i>)			
Articulație	A	A1 (Tema lui Marsyas)	A2
Măsurile	1-29	30-52	53-82
Cadrul tonal	<i>La major</i> cu inserții modale	<i>Re dorian - Mib dorian - Mib major - Mib dorian - Mi dorian - Mi major</i>	<i>Solb major</i> (V)
Rol dramaturgic	Introdutiv	Expozitiv-dezvoltator	Culminativ - Concluziv

Alfonso Castaldi, <i>Marsyas</i> (1907), Structura părții a II-a (<i>Allegro moderato assai</i>)			
Articulație	B (Chemarea lui Apollo)	B1 (Tema lui Apollo)	B2 (Lupta)
măsurile	83-102	103-122	123-156
Cadrul tonal	<i>Solb major</i> (V)	<i>Solb major</i> (I)	<i>Sib major - Solb major</i>
Rol dramaturgic	Introdutiv	Expozitiv-Dezvoltător	Culminativ - Concluziv

Table 1 Musical architecture of the first two parts of the poem *Marsyas*

⁸ Alfonso Castaldi, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

Through this symphonic poem, Alfonso Castaldi set an example for his students in the composition class. Alfred Alessandrescu, one of them, pointed out the novelty and extraordinary originality that listening to the *Marsyasi* poem offered him and his colleagues¹¹.

With such examples, Castaldi's students created the first important works in the genre of symphonic poem, overture and symphony, and, as Vasile Tomescu points out in writing, "the transition from a period of outdated eclecticism, specific to the creation of this genre by the forefathers of the past century, to a period of superior development, corresponding to the beginning of the century"¹².

3. Alfred Alessandrescu (1893-1959)

We know Alfred Alessandrescu as one of the most important Romanian conductors of the 20th century, as well as a composer, chronicler and teacher. He was one of Alfonso Castaldi's brilliant students and gave Romanian musical culture one of the most important works in the symphonic poem genre. Despite his Western-sounding name, the composer is Romanian, his first name being spelled according to the rules of the time, with two "s" letters.

His name, as well as those of his two brothers, Marc Antoniu and Romeo, was given by an acquaintance of the Alessandrescu family, drawing an analogy with the famous historical characters. The monograph by Vasile Tomescu describes the atmosphere in the artist's family. In a few pages, we learn about their occupations and passions, as well as some information about the father's youth. Vasile Tomescu's monograph describes the atmosphere in the artist's family. In a few pages, we learn about their occupations and passions, as well as some information about the composer's father's youth, an amateur actor, a great admirer and lover of art in general, all of which complete the picture in which the artist developed¹³.

Born in 1893 in Bucharest, he learned his first musical and piano lessons from his mother. Encouraged by his family to pursue his passion for the world of sound, Alfred Alessandrescu made his piano debut on the stage of the Romanian Athenaeum in 1903, performing his own works *Gîndiri glorióse - fantezie* (*Glorious Thoughts - Fantasy*) and *Ideal - reverie* (*Ideal - Reverie*). He then studied at the Conservatory under Emilia Saegiu for piano, D.G. Kiriac for theory and solfeggio, and Alfonso Castaldi for composition.

The artist's life was also marked by the time he spent in the cultural capital of the time, Paris. A. Alessandrescu studied counterpoint and fugue with Paul Vidal at the Conservatory, and at the Schola Cantorum, he studied composition with Auguste Sérieyx and later with Vincent d'Indy. At the same time, he studied

¹¹ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

at the Faculty of Law in Paris and kept in touch with George Enescu, who lent him scores to study and gave him tickets to various symphonic performances¹⁴.

In addition to his rich conducting and performing activity, A. Alessandrescu was involved in the revival of Romanian cultural life. He participated in discussions on the reform of the Conservatory and the Opera and, out of modesty, refused to take over the leadership of the former institution. Starting in 1920, he participated as a representative of the Ministry in the examination committees at the Conservatory, getting involved in drafting the analytical programme and in discussions about the Opera and Philharmonic seasons. He was involved in the establishment of the Romanian Composers' Society and was a member of the Association of Drama and Music Critics. He became a répétiteur at the opera and continued his performing and conducting activities through concerts with great personalities of the time, both at home and abroad¹⁵.

Thanks to his work, the French awarded him the title of “Knight of the Legion of Honour”, the highest French civil and military distinction.

During this period, the composer became increasingly involved in musical activities on the radio. He also continued his work at the Opera, where in 1934 he was given the task of bringing to life the ballet *La piață* composed by Mihail Jora, and was appointed substitute teacher of theory and solfeggio at the Bucharest Conservatory of Music after the death of composer and teacher Gheorghe Cucu¹⁶.

3.1. The symphonic poem *Acteon*

Through his work, which was appreciated both on nationally and international level, Alfred Alessandrescu paved the way for the generation that would lay the foundations and develop the main national musical genres.

His first creation in the symphonic poem genre was entitled *Didona* (1911), but Alfred Alessandrescu's most representative symphonic work is the symphonic poem *Acteon*. The work premiered on 20 December 1915 in Bucharest under the baton of the author. Despite the difficulties associated with the technical parts, it was well received by the public and aroused the interest and praise of contemporary musicians and composers, George Enescu among them.

It is worth mentioning that, in 1916, A. Alessandrescu won first prize for this work at the *George Enescu* composition competition, with a jury composed of A. Castaldi, G. Enescu, Paul Ciuntu, D. G. Kiriac, Dimitrie Dinicu, Ion Nonna Otescu, C. Dimitrescu, Theodor Fuchs and Mihail Mărgăritescu.

Equally important are the composer's statements about how he wrote this poem, recorded by the newspaper “Rampa” on 23 May 1928 in the column *How the most notable Romanian compositions were written*:

¹⁴ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-48.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-90.

“How did I work? Usually in front of the piano, which can never deceive you about the sound of harmonic combinations and the chain of tonalities. /.../ Once the thematic elements have been found, the general harmonies and modulations established, and the music sketched out in its essential lines, the composer's real work of construction begins at the desk, where his technique and craft as a sound architect play the leading role.”¹⁷

Internationally, it was conducted by Gabriel Pierné in 1920 in Paris, in concerts at the Colonne, in 1924 by the well-known German conductor Hermann Scherchen, whose repertoire is notable for including new works from all over the world, conducting *Acteon* and other Romanian and George Enescu works in Strasbourg in 1926, New York in 1938 and with the Boston orchestra in 1939.

The most insightful analysis is that of Professor Nadia Boulanger, published in the specialist newspaper “Le Monde Musical” no. 5 on 6 March 1920. The conclusions of this review present a young composer, only 24 years old, who managed to offer musical literature an original symphonic poem in content, but where certain influences from the style of C. Debussy, Paul Dukas and Richard Strauss can still be observed. The author emphasises that the creator's youth is the only reservation when it comes to recognising his talent.

Relevant are the writings in “Le courrier musical”, which specify the influences of Schola Cantorum and Russian music found in the themes of the poem, but also less admired aspects such as its somewhat excessive and dense length¹⁸. Also important are the reviews in “Le Figaro” on 31 March 1924, those in “The New York Times Monday” on 15 March 1929, and those in “Le Temps” on 15 April of the same year.

After a first hearing of this poem, the rich sonorities stand out, with the composer using the entire orchestra in numerous passages, the insertion of the celesta punctuating key moments of the action illustrated, and the numerous changes of metre.

This poem can be compared to *Marsyas* due to the use of the variation technique of the main leitmotifs. In this regard, the composer's own words are relevant:

“To transpose this legend, whose action unfolds over time, into music means to create a symphonic poem constructed according to the typical model of the genre, that is, following the programme as it unfolds, illustrating the main moments of the story. For such an illustration in music, I used the system of leitmotifs, which are particularly suited to an action involving various episodes and which constitute very necessary guides for the listener.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Vasile Tomescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

The entire creation is based on the principle of variation, starting from the two leitmotifs and the two themes of the main characters. We also find in the frontispiece of the score the legend that guided the composer.

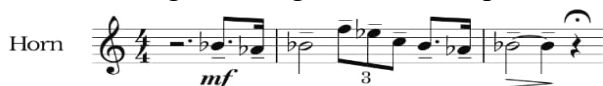


Fig. 5 Alfred Alessandrescu, the hunting motif, ms.1-3²⁰



Fig. 6 Alfred Alessandrescu, *Acteon*, Acteon's Theme, ms. 86-89²¹



Fig. 7 Alfred Alessandrescu, *Acteon*, Diana's Theme ms. 86-89²²



Fig. 8 Alfred Alessandrescu, *Acteon*, river motif, ms. 86-89²³

As in the case of the poem *Marsyas*, I have created a diagram of the first two parts of the poem:

Partea I (<i>Vivo</i>)	A (motivul vânătorii)	A1 - A2 - A3	A4 (Tema lui Acteon)	A5
Măsurile	1-30	31-140	141-160	161-213
Cadrul tonal	<i>Re#minor</i> cu inserții modale	<i>Si major - Lab major - Fa major</i>	<i>Si major</i>	<i>Si major - Sol minor</i>
Dramaturgia	Introdactiv-expozitiv	Dezvoltator	Introdactiv-expozitiv	Dezvoltător - Concluziv

Partea II (<i>Lento moderato</i>)	B (Motivul râului)	B1(Tema zeiței Diana)	B2 (Pedeapsa lui Acteon)
Măsurile	214-228	103-122	123-156
Cadrul tonal	<i>Si major</i> (V)	<i>Si major - Lab major - Si major</i>	<i>Sib major - Solb major</i>
Dramaturgia	Introdactiv	Expozitiv	Dezvoltător - Concluziv

Table 2 Musical architecture of the first two parts of the poem *Acteon*

I also drew up a diagram showing the programme's development in parts, based on my personal opinion:

1. Part I (*Vivo*) – Presentation of the male character on the hunt;
2. Part II (*Lento moderato*) – Presentation of the goddess Diana in the company of nymphs, discovery of Acteon's indiscretion and his punishment;
3. Part III (*Molto Vivo*) – Acteon, transformed into a stag, is hunted by his friends and hunting dogs;
4. Part IV (*Lento*) – The death of Actaeon.

²⁰ Alfred Alessandrescu, *Acteon*, Symphonic Poem, Full Score, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1956, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 63-64.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

4. Conclusions

The compositional process unfolds through a succession of variations on the main motifs and themes. The musical value and skill are particularly evident in the orchestration. In addition to the musical language similar to that used by Debussy in the triptych *La Mer*, which can be observed from the very first bars of the poem *Acteon*, both Alessandrescu and Castaldi demonstrate mastery in the use of the orchestral apparatus. The influence of Richard Strauss can be seen in the effervescence and brilliance of the *tutti* moments, in the virtuosity, in the shifting of the thematic material to different groups of instruments and in transpositions to other pitches. All these outlines the action and emotional states through which the main characters pass.

The two works have free structures in which orchestral variation and the punctuating of key motifs guide the form of the work and constitute models for the symphonic poem genre, rising to the quality of those from Western Europe.

Currently, I believe that associating symphonic music with a well-defined text or programme allows the listener to understand the sound universe much more easily, attracts a larger audience that does not necessarily require musical training, and provides the composer with a clear direction for the composition and the opportunity to experiment with various techniques, always using the illustrated text as a reference point.

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New perspectives on Richard Wagner's opera

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Abstract: The originality of the artistic conception and the creative principles launched by Richard Wagner in his writings on musical aesthetics continue to be a subject of research. Renowned musicologists such as Deryck Cooke, Bryan Magee or Richard Taruskin delve deeper into Wagner's conception, both through the reception of his work and through the interpretation of his literature and of the way in which it is reflected in the composing process. Starting from current research, the study focuses on explaining the composer's contributions to revolutionising the opera genre. We discuss the following components of his conception: the concept of a "total work of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), taken from romantic literature and philosophy, which deals with the perfect union of all arts, having the Greek tragedy as a model; the writing of libretti for dramas, inspired by Germanic Norse mythology and adapted to special versification techniques (*Stabreim*); the emancipation of musical dramaturgy by rethinking the composing process, using original techniques (infinite melody, *leitmotifs*); the introduction of a specific type of vocal declamation, called *Wagnerian sprechgesang*. His creation decisively influenced the evolution of opera precisely because of an artistic vision capable of rendering human experience in a complex and unitary way.

Keywords: Wagner, opera, aesthetics, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, dramaturgy.

1. Introduction

Richard Wagner's work and theories had an overwhelming impact on the development of the genre in the 20th century and continue to arouse a growing interest among performers, listeners, and researchers. This phenomenon has resulted in original interpretations, in the discovery of new meanings in the composer's theoretical writings, as well as in the elaboration of numerous specialised studies which launch present-day aesthetic and philosophical visions. Along with the detailed research of the scores and of a significant part of Wagner's writings, the present study has also involved the consultation of important scientific works signed by authors such as Bryan Magee, Deryck Cooke, Roger Scruton, Collin Cleary, Richard Taruskin and Heinrich Porges. The contact with numerous studies in specialised scientific journals has also provided me with numerous ideas and themes that have been thoroughly debated, contributing substantially to the progress of this research.

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This study aims to bring into focus new aesthetic concepts, principles and compositional practices of Wagner's work, as well as to discuss the composer's contributions to the development of the opera genre, with the goal of offering a new perspective on musical dramas and on the message that the composer wanted to communicate through them.

2. The total work of art – *Gesamtkunsterk*

The idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk [Total Work of Art] is not Wagner's invention. It appeared in the works of German Romantic writers and philosophers, such as Friedrich Schelling¹, the main theme being the necessary emancipation of the human being to the highest levels of self-consciousness, so that the artist's work would increasingly identify with the work of nature. The first mention of the term itself belongs to the writer and philosopher Eusebius Trahdorff, who, in 1827, published the work *Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst* [Aesthetics or the Study of Worldview and Art]. Starting with 1849, the idea appears in Wagner's theoretical writings (*Die Kunst und die Revolution*), the author considering Greek tragedy as the essential synthesis of the arts. The composer's subsequent writings and essays develop this principle, putting forward an entirely new and meticulous way of conceiving and treating opera, viewed from the perspective of an interdependent relationship of all its constituent arts. Wagner thus lays the foundations of clear precepts and theories on the configuration of a new genre of musical-dramatic art.²

Following the timeline of Wagner's work, we can see that his writings anticipate his operas. Regarding Wagner's theoretical writings, Bryan Magee launches the idea that one of the main reasons for their writing was that within the composer there was a glimpse of the development of new creative visions and possibilities, and, in order to clarify them, the composer tried to articulate them in the form of a theoretical system; thus, although the operas succeeded the writings, being presented to the public later, the latter are the ones that derive from the operas and not vice versa, a fact confirmed by the composer's statement:³

“Let me say that even the boldest strokes of the dramatic-musical form which I was postulating came to me because I had in mind at the same time the plan for my great Nibelungen drama, of which I had already written one part [the text of Siegfried's Death]. At this time, the conception was

¹ Friedrich Schelling (1802). *Bruno oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Dinge* [Bruno or about the divine or natural principle of things], 1802.

² *** Gesamtkunstwerk, Wikipedia, the free Enciclopedia, from https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gesamtkunstwerk#cite_note-1.

³ Bryan Magee (2009). *Aspects of Wagner*, Revised and enlarged edition, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, p. 5.

maturing in a way that made my theory little more than an abstract expression of the productive artistic process which was taking shape within me.”⁴

Wagner's central theory, due, to a considerable extent, to the experience accumulated as a result of his work in German theatres and concert halls, deals with the meaning of the opera, its genesis, its affirmation and, subsequently, its decline. In order to reimagine the genre, the composer turned his attention to Greek tragedy, considering it the highest form of artistic expression. Bryan Magee formulates five main reasons why Greek tragedy was at the origin of Wagnerian drama: 1. it constituted a successful combination of all the arts; 2. the topics were taken from mythology; 3. the content and occasion of the performances had a religious significance; 4. the performances represented a celebration of life; 5. the entire community participated. Thus, this art form was ideal because it formed a unitary whole: “its means of expression encompassed all the arts, its themes encompassed all human experiences, and its audience encompassed the entire population.”⁵

From the very first pages of *Opera and Drama*, Wagner meticulously explains the genesis of opera and how it has developed over time, so that, after an extensive historical description, the composer expresses his disapproval and criticizes the compositional habits of those that came before him. Careful analysis led him to find and denounce an “error” in the opera genre, according to which a means of expression (music) had become an end, and the end of expression, represented by drama, had become the means. In this regard, the composer deplores the phenomenon of subordination of all the elements that make up a musical performance, which has irreversibly led to the neglect of the text and dramatic action due to the belief that only music, having reached a peak of expression, can express emotions and feelings. As a result, the poet has become subordinate to the composer, since only musical means are taken into account in terms of both organizing moments and selecting subjects⁶.

However, opera had the greatest potential, because it was the only one in the modern world which could combine all the arts as Greek tragedy had successfully done in ancient times. Therefore, the need for a revolution in opera became imperative in order to turn it into a comprehensive art form, in which all the resources of dramaturgy, poetry, instrumental music, song, interpretation, gestures, costumes and scenery would be combined once again in the theatrical representation of myth (before an audience made up of all social classes). The topic of such works, although purely human, could be constituted by the deepest

⁴ Jack M. Stein (1960). *Richard Wagner & The Synthesis of Arts*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, p. 68.

⁵ Bryn Magee (2009). *Aspects of Wagner*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁶ Richard Wagner (1983). *Opera și drama* [Opera and Drama], translation by Liviu Rusu and Bucur Stănescu, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 34.

things in life. Consequently, far from being simple entertainment, opera would acquire the aura of a religious manifestation⁷.

3. Literary sources and the creation of libretti. *Stabreim*

In the process of designing and writing the libretti, Wagner thoroughly studied Germanic myths, developing the material in his own style, like the authors of mediaeval poems. The result of this practice was the revelation and development of new meanings latent in the sources, rendered through a unique interpretative vision. According to researcher Collin Cleary, myths and epics are not works with a clearly defined form, framed only under certain patterns; in the right hands, they become capable of giving rise to new ideas and connections. Specialists appreciate that the intellectual depth of Wagnerian texts is due to the direct influence exerted on the composer by philosophers such as Hegel, Feuerbach and Schopenhauer⁸.

Opera libretti, also called “poems,” as Wagner considered them, were the pinnacle of all stage creation. Unlike his predecessors, whose texts did not go beyond the level of “templates” which were to remain humble in servitude to music, Wagner completely rethought the technique of writing opera texts, explaining it in numerous articles and theoretical works. Thus, in the work *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (“A Communication to My Friends”), Wagner provides information about the form and style of the new genre of dramatic libretto, based on the ancient alliterative verse *Stabreim*, which appeared in the times of Teutonic poetry, and on the old Nordic songs and ballads (for example in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda Snora*) from which Wagner drew inspiration for the creation of the *Ring*⁹.

A characteristic of this technique is its rhythmic structure: it does not use classical rhythms or rhymes, but relies on accents and pauses. Wagner adopted this way of writing the lyrics to suggest the epic and mythological atmosphere of his texts, thus reflecting the traditional style of versification specific to the myths and heroic stories of the Northern European space. In terms of dramatic function, the presence of alliteration in the sung texts helps emphasize the authenticity and archaic character of the Wagnerian universe, giving the stage performance a ritualistic character. The Wagnerian *Stabreim* is an artistic innovation to unify the text with the music; it provides clarity and strength to the music through its sound, while the music provides the alliterated words with the depth of their literary meanings¹⁰. In addition to the fact that the texts of the

⁷ Bryan Magee (2009). *Aspects of Wagner*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸ Collin Cleary (2021). *Wagner's Ring and the Germanic Tradition*, Wagnerphile Books, U.S.A., pp. 3-4.

⁹ Richard Taruskin (2010). *Music in the Nineteenth Century, Cap. 10, Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class 1813, I)*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 501.

¹⁰ Deryck Cooke (2002). *I Saw the World End, A study of Wagner's Ring*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, p. 78.

operas form a balanced conceptual framework for the musical development, they also have exceptional dramatic clarity, highlighted both in the individual profile of each character and in the intelligibility of the stage action, whether we are referring to *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* or *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The characters' language, although succinct, is full of voluptuousness, the lyrics suggesting a multitude of meanings, even if this is about present events or the mention or remembrance of others that have already taken place¹¹.

4. Musical dramaturgy

Wagner's artistic vision, as it is treated in his theoretical writings, is about turning music into the vehicle of drama. It says that music is not an accompaniment to words, but the main channel through which the emotions conveyed in the drama are transmitted – both the motives of the characters and the reactions of the audience. However, music is not an explicit channel of representation, given that its meaning, expressed only through sound, is interdependent on the subjectivity and sensitivity of the listener. The relationship between words and music was meant to change forever, the latter taking over the task of explaining the meaning of the words. Music was to introduce into the drama all those deeper levels of meaning, symbolism and primordial emotion that words alone could only suggest¹².

Three innovations promoted this objective: the development of the construction of lyrics that would unite the movement of the music with the emotional rhythm of the words, the reinvention of the orchestra, so that it would serve the composer's intentions through all its possibilities, and the development of the entire musical-dramatic construction based on well-defined musical themes, with unlimited potential for variation, themes which could be easily correlated with any extra-musical element: leitmotifs.

4.1. Leitmotifs

In his work *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* [A Communication to My Friends], Wagner writes an extensive presentation of the leitmotif principle in the composition of musical form, explaining the principle of recurring musical themes whose purpose is to create an organic unity between music and drama; the fact that the structure of his music is influenced by the poetic topic causes the musical themes (which he calls *Hauptthemen*) to be organized and continuously developed according to the characters' moods. Thus, an essential dramatic moment acquires a specific musical theme, which is linked to other scenes and contributes to a coherent narrative. As for the origin of the term

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

¹² Roger Scruton (2017). *The Ring of Truth, The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of The Nibelung*, Penguin Books, UK, 2017, p. 146.

According to Wagner's statement regarding the entire construction of drama as an organic unity, the processing and combination of thematic materials, which must remain ever present in the viewer's mind, is an essential factor for the narrative development to reach the fullness of its aesthetic possibilities. However attentive his audience might be, one of Wagner's goals was to infuse the musical fabric with materials that would remind them of previously heard events and contexts and to show them, through combination and processing, how these reference points changed according to the relationships between characters, moods, and context over time¹⁵.

There are several categories of leitmotifs that require a separate discussion. The first category of this type consists of the leitmotifs which appear from the very beginning of the musical development in *Das Rheingold* and which gradually accumulate a wide range of meanings through various musical processing procedures (the leitmotif of *Wotan's spear*).



Fig. 1 The leitmotif of Wotan's spear

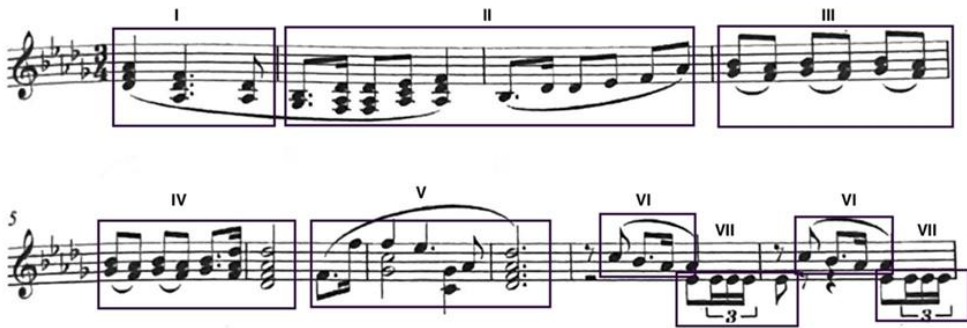


¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 502.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 503.

Fig. 2 The *contract* leitmotifFig. 3 The *storm* leitmotif

The second special category of leitmotifs consists of themes made up of several musical particles, which, when put together, form their own melody, which is easily recognizable and which gradually becomes a “focal point” of dramatic meanings; the cells can be developed separately, acquiring new meanings during the course of the drama (the *Valhalla* leitmotif).

Fig. 4 The *Valhalla* leitmotif, in sections

The third category consists of “saturated” and “unsaturated” leitmotifs. While the former can appear as clearly defined motifs, without the need to merge or combine them with other musical ideas (the *Tarnhelm* leitmotif), the latter are distinguished by their very need to receive a complement, thus achieving an intrinsic dramatic connection (the *ring* leitmotif or the *sword* leitmotif). The fourth category, perhaps the most controversial and debated by most experts, has as its point of interest a certain leitmotif that suggests a key idea throughout all Wagnerian dramas: the leitmotif associated with the goddess Freia in the *Ring*, is split into two distinct parts, the latter taking on an essential role in each scene associated with the feeling of love. This musical idea appears for the first time in the opera *Lohengrin* (the *Grail* theme) and is introduced, transformed and endlessly processed in the four dramas of the tetralogy¹⁶.

¹⁶ Roger Scruton (2017). *The Ring of Truth, The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of The Nibelung*, p. 153.



Fig. 5 The leitmotif associated to the goddess Freia/ the *love* leitmotif/ the *flight* leitmotif, *Das Rheingold*

A musical score snippet from Wagner's *Die Walküre*, Act I, Scene I, measures 212-219. It is a piano accompaniment for voice and keyboard. The score is written for Violoncello (Vc), Kontrabaß (Kb), and Violoncello (Vc) parts. The music is in E major and 4/4 time. It features a prominent melodic line in the Vc part, which is the love leitmotif. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *più p*, and *pp*. A tempo marking "Blick mit steigender Teilnahme an ihren Mienen.)" is present at the beginning. The measure number 215 is indicated above the staff.

Fig. 6 Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act. I, Sc. I, ms. 212-219 – the *love* leitmotif portraying the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde

A musical score snippet from Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Act III, Scene 3. It shows three systems of vocal and piano parts. Each system consists of a vocal line (L.) and a piano accompaniment (P.). The music is in E major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are in German. The piano accompaniment features the love leitmotif, which is highlighted by a box in each system. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 7 Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin*, Act. III, Sc. 3 – the *love* leitmotif present in Lohengrin's aria (*In fernem Land*)

5. Wagnerian *Sprechgesang*

The term *sprechgesang* designates a vocal technique that arises from the combination of singing and speech, but, in the Wagnerian context, it develops in an original manner called *Wagnerian sprechgesang*. Although Wagner did not provide a specific name, he used this type of declamation in his works, adapting it to his aesthetic principles. It is also necessary to make a clear distinction between the concepts of *sprechgesang* and *sprechstimme*. The first term is more closely related to musical techniques carried out over longer periods, characteristic of recitative or *parlando*-type sequences, than *sprechstimme*. When the term is used in this way, it mainly refers to Wagnerian musical dramas, as well as to several other works composed in the 19th century. Thus, the term *sprechgesang* may often refer only to a German alternative to the recitative¹⁷.

One of the earliest uses of the *sprechstimme* technique appears in the first version of Engelbert Humperdinck's melodrama *Königskinder* from 1897 (a section which in the 1910 version was replaced by conventional melodic writing), but it is more closely associated with the composers of the Second Viennese School. Among them, Arnold Schönberg uses this technique in a number of works: the narrator's part in *Gurre Lieder* (1911) uses this notation, but it was not until the melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) that he fully integrated it, also providing an explanatory note of the technique. The second significant member of this school, Alban Berg, would use this technique in parts of the operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*.

Influenced by the principles and practices of German theatre at the time, Wagner conceived his own model of operatic composition, according to the specific manner of interpretation of the German theatre actor, which would appear more and more often in his works after 1840. The first examples of *sprechgesang* in his works appear in solo moments, such as in the Flying Dutchman's monologue or the Tannhäuser's narration, while in *Lohengrin*, the technique would take on much larger proportions, as in the vocal writing of King Heinrich or Telramund. In the *Tetralogy*, along with numerous moments in which the vocal score follows the pattern of operatic writing, the declamatory style takes on ample proportions, giving the drama authenticity. This tendency to combine both types of speech is highlighted in the role of Wotan, a score with numerous *sprechgesang* scenes but also purely melodic sections, as can be seen in the final scene of the opera *Die Walküre*, in the *Farewell Song*¹⁸.

Wagner used the technique of rhythmic and melodic declamation, which combines singing with recitation in order to best convey the text and the emotions of the characters. This allowed for greater flexibility of vocal expressiveness, emphasizing the meaning of the words rather than the melody.

¹⁷ Ralph W. Wood (2010). *Concerning Sprechgesang*, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Martin Knust (2015). *Music, Drama, and Sprechgesang*, in *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 38, No. 3, University of California Press, Berkley, California, p. 225.

Wagner abandoned the traditional recitative characteristic of Italian opera, the new type of declamation facilitating the creation of an uninterrupted and free flow of speech, without strict metrical structures. Thus, it can be said that the characters in Wagnerian dramas must declaim, more than sing, being accompanied by a large and complex musical background, in the writing of which leitmotifs contribute to suggesting and emphasizing the emotion, feeling or context of that moment.

An example of Wagnerian declamation appears at the beginning of the *Tetralogy*, with the entrance of Alberich addressing the Rhine daughters. The melodic pattern of successive leaps, the dotted rhythm, the accents and the indication *mit rauher Trockenheit im Ton* [with harsh dryness in the sound] outline a type of discourse that differs substantially from traditional singing.

ALBERICH mit rauher Trockenheit im Ton [1876] (*Die Mädchen halten, sobald sie*

183

He-he! Ihr Ni-cker! Wie seid ihr nied-lich

dim. - - - - - p

* [Tb, KS, PE]

Alberichs Stimme hören, mit dem Spiele ein.)

190

A. neid-li-ches Volk! Aus Ni-bel-heims Nacht naht' ich mich gern, neig-tet ihreuch zu mir!

Str. p Kl. pp

* [Tb, KS, PE]

* * *

Fig. 8 Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, Sc. 1, ms. 179-186 – Alberich's entrance

6. Conclusions

In a century in constant change and marked by innovative artistic visions throughout the European continent, the composer Richard Wagner represented a turning point in the evolution of the opera genre. If, in the first part of his career, marked by the crystallization of his own style, the composer did not renounce the contributions of his predecessors, achieving a true synthesis between traditional and original elements, starting with *Das Rheingold*, he dedicated himself entirely to a new creative direction. The time spent in exile gave him the opportunity to re-evaluate his principles and values and to rethink the opera genre, which at that time was treated only as a fashionable entertainment. In the most important volumes written during the Swiss period, i.e. *Die Kunst und die Revolution* [Art and Revolution], *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* [The Artwork of the Future], *Oper und Drama* [Opera and Drama] and *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* [A Communication to My Friends], Wagner describes in detail his view of the new operatic genre, which would bear the name of *music drama*. With strong roots in Greek tragedy, Wagnerian music drama was to be the vehicle for expressing essential truths, for a representation of pure art. This would not have been possible without fulfilling an inexorable condition: that of achieving a new synthesis of all the arts, which would bear the name *Gesamtkunstwerk* [Total Work of Art]. Within this new genre, the *infinite melody* becomes the main mode of expression against the backdrop of dense orchestral support, and the musical-narrative dramaturgy, freed from the constraints of the division of musical moments, specific to opera, arises through the intensive use of the leitmotif technique.

A major influence on the composer's mature work was the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, according to which music is the highest artistic form of expression of the human will. This influence is reflected in the action of the libretti, based on themes such as the endless suffering of human existence, from which liberation and salvation can only occur through death.

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A visit to the lied creation of composer Mihail Jora

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Abstract: Being attracted to Romanian 20th century music, in this study I am performing a research on the development of composer Mihail Jora’s lied creation. His evolution as a composer was a gradual one, considering approximately half of his works called “songs”. His works based on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi prepare the diversity which we can notice in his vocal miniatures from op. 16 to the lieder with lyrics by Mariana Dumitrescu, which were unique in his time and models for his disciples. This research shows hypostases seen in such works with lyrics by Tudor Arghezi (op. 16), Ion Pillat (op. 20), and Mariana Dumitrescu (op.49). By means of a formal analysis of the lieder *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God’s Cow], *Veverița* [The Squirrel], and *Lupii* [The Wolves], we can draw conclusions about some aspects of the evolution of Jora’s style in the lied genre.

Keywords: Romanian music, Mihail Jora, *lied*.

1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 20th century, new elements of musical language appear and start to also enter Romanian culture, such as the harmony of widened tonality and neo-modalism, the impressionistic use of chromatic scales, the expressionistic auditory violence, together with aspects related to ethos stemming from the traditions of Romanian folk and psalm music. These are found in the creations of emblematic Romanian composers who are very important in musical history, such as George Enescu, Paul Constantinescu, Sigismund Toduță, but also Mihail Jora, one of the great representatives of Romanian composition, the creator of Romanian lied and ballet. Most of this composer’s vocal miniatures are called “songs,” as they are based on an intonation which is traditional or derived from such and on poems in the Romanian language.

I have set out to make musical analysis more colourful by creating a comparative analysis of three of Jora’s lieder, belonging to different creation periods.

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2. The Romanian lied

As we know, a lied is a miniature for voice and piano, created at first by classical composers and being created today, as well.

The syncretism between music and poetry has influenced musical history starting with the classical period and reached its highest point at the beginning of the 20th century.

Romanian composers who have approached the lied genre have definitely use classical and romantic creations as models, from Schubert to Brahms and Wolf. From the composers who have created miniatures for voice and piano in the first half of the 20th century, musical theatre remembers first of all George Enescu (*Trei cântece pe poeme de Jules Lemaintre și Sully Prudhomme pentru bas și pian, op. 4* [Three songs on poems by Jules Lemaintre and Sully Prudhomme for bass and piano op. 4]; *Șapte cântece pe versuri de Clement Marot pentru tenor și pian. op. 15* [Seven songs on poems by Clement Marot for tenor and piano op. 15]; *Trei cântece pe poeme de Fernand Gregh op. 19* [Three songs on poems by Fernand Gregh op. 19]), but also Sabin Drăgoi (13 songs on poems by Șt. O. Iosif, Heinrich Heine, Liviu Coman), Paul Constantinescu (lieder on poems by M. Eminescu, G. Coșbuc, O. Goga), Alfred Alessandrescu (lieder for voice and piano on poems by Elena Văcărescu, Tristan Klingson, Edmond Rostand, Alfred de Musset, Henry de Régnier), Gheorghe Dumitrescu (*Șase lieduri pe versuri de George Bacovia pentru voce și pian* [Six lieder on poems by George Bacovia for voice and piano]), Sigismund Toduță (lieder on poems by Mihai Eminescu, Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga, Ana Blandiana), but Mihail Jora's lieder, by the force and refinement of their expression, contribute in a decisive way to this genre becoming established in Romanian music.

3. Mihail Jora – small portrait

Mihail Jora was born on 2nd August 1891 in Roman. His mother and his uncle Paul Ciuntu¹, both having studied at the Dresden Conservatory, encouraged him to follow the path of music. An important part in his development was played by his 1909 meeting with George Enescu in Sinaia.

After graduating from the Conservatory and the Faculty of Law in Iași, Jora studied with Max Reger in Leipzig between 1912 and 1914 and with Florent

¹ Paul Ciuntu – Composer, pianist, conductor, teacher, very appreciated at the time, especially in Germany. For Mihail Jora, he was “uncle Ciuntu” from whom he received his first musical guidance as a child. He was born in the city of Roman, in 1866. Education: Leipziger Konservatorium (1886-1891), with Salomon Jadassohn, then in Lemberg, with Carol Miculi (piano). Conductor of the Rostock Opera, director of the Rostock Music School, director (1903) and piano teacher (1910-1918) at the Bucharest Conservatory. Works: *Simfonia în la minor* [Symphony in A Minor]; *Trio, pentru vioară, violoncel și pian* [Trio for violin, cello, and piano]; *Lieder for voice and piano on poems by German poets*; *Lay choruses on poems by Romanian and German poets*. Viorel Cosma, *Compozitori și Muzicologi români* [Romanian Composers and Musicologists], Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, 1965.

Schmitt in Paris after the war (1919-1920). In 1920, he became a founding member and vice-president of the Romanian Composers' Society. In 1926, he made his debut as conductor in the Bucharest Philharmonic. In 1928, he became director of musical broadcasts in Radio Bucharest and he laid the foundation of the institution's symphonic orchestra. In 1929, he became a professor of the harmony chair within the Bucharest Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, of which he would be rector between 1941 and 1947.

Despite all his hard work in various musical fields and the renown he had gained, Mihail Jora's life was shaken by the change of Romania's regime. After King Michael 1st's abdication in 1947 and the composer's proposition to have a silent moment for the end of monarchy, he was fired from the chair and from all the positions he had in society².

After five years of material and moral hardship, Jora reprises his rightful place in the community and in 1962 becomes consulting professor of the Bucharest Conservatory. During the same year, he receives the title "Professor Emeritus" and seven years later, in the great hall of the Academy, he is awarded the "Gottfried von Herder" award of the Vienna University. Jora's great personality enjoyed the appreciation of both Romanian and foreign colleagues. Before he was received in the Romanian Academy, he became a member of the Max Reger Institute of Bonn (1948) and, much later (1962), of the "Gesellschaft der Freunde Archieve E.V." of Vienna.³

He died on 10th May 1971, in Bucharest.



Fig. 1⁵ Mihail Jora (portrait)

Mihail Jora's creation was appreciated by both his contemporaries and the following generations. Paul Constantinescu, one of his contemporaries, said: "If Jora had only written *Cântec din fluier* [Recorder song], he still would be a great composer."⁴

4. Jora's lied

Jora's miniatures show a deep understanding of the peculiarities of our spoken

² George Sbârcea (1969). *Mihail Jora*, Editura Muzicală, București, pp.187-200.

³ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un modern european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, București, pp.14-17.

⁵ <https://www.muzicieni-in-arhive.ro/mihail-jora-ro.php>, accessed on 10.11.2024.

⁴ Ștefan Niculescu (1995). *Creația de cântece a lui Mihail Jora* [Mihail Jora's Song Creation], in *Mihail Jora, Studii și documente* [Mihail Jora, Studies and Documents], Volume I, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 64.

language and of the Romanian melody of folk origin. As the first commentators of Jora's lieder mention, these works could not, however, have appeared without an evolved Romanian poetry (writers such as O. Goga, T. Arghezi, I. Pillat, or L. Blaga); therefore, a first peculiarity of his creation is sensitivity and an openness towards modern poems, towards the problems of Romanian poetry.

Also, in the first studies of Jora's lieder, the author, Ștefan Niculescu, mentions the first sources of their conception:

"From the French 'chanson,' Mihail Jora has taken some harmonic chromatic procedures and means of accompaniment meant to give nuance to the musical image. [...] Musorgski's vocal art was the one that strengthened his decision to rely on national texts and stylise the national music creation. [...] Mihail Jora's song is the Romanian equivalent of Fauré's art song, of Schubert's and Schumann's lieder, of Musorgski's chamber vocal creation."⁵

The composer's vocal miniatures are based on poems describing Romanian landscapes, our history, national cultural customs – they tell a musical tale of Romanian realities.

The recitatives in Mihail Jora's lieder are based on the principle according to which every syllable corresponds to a note. The music of his miniatures comprises chromatic procedures, *glissando*, and spoken declamations.

Harmony plays an essential part in his songs, as the composer uses various combinations (counterpoint, polyphony, harmony) to create auditory images.

Starting with his first lieder, Mihail Jora has respected to stress points resulting from reciting the poem and therefore his vocal miniatures also contain recto tono recitatives, which are often found in ballads.

4.1. *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow] –formal analysis

The lied *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]⁶ is the third miniature in the cycle *Cântece pentru voce și pian pe versuri de Tudor Arghezi* [Songs for voice and piano on poems by Tudor Arghezi] op. 16 rom 1936, which contains four vocal miniatures (*Ghicitoare* [Riddle], *Buna Vestire* [The Annunciation], *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow], *Cântec din fluier* [Recorder Song]).

⁵ Ștefan Niculescu (1995). *Creația de cântece a lui Mihail Jora* [Mihail Jora's Song Creation], in *Mihail Jora, Studii și documente* [Mihail Jora, Studies and Documents], Volume I, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 64.

⁶ The lyrics in Romanian are: „De prin vârful pomilor/ A venit o boabă-n zbor/ De cafea,/ Năclăită în perdea./ Dumnezeu când i-a făcut/ Ființa din scuipat și lut./ Cu o pensulă de zdreanță/ A vopsit-o cu faianță/ Și i-a pus ca din greșală/ Două coji cu căptușeală/ În spinare,/ Ca să zboare,/ Și aproape în zadar/ Patru puncte, ca de zar./ Se gândea atunci că nu-i/ Greu să fie vaca lui./ Ca un nod de broderie/ Neagră și cărămizie/ Care mișcă și se zbate,/ S-a-necat pe jumătate/ În nemarginire-albastră/ Din fereastră./ Și fiindcă răsar în ață/ Stelele de dimineață./ Crede că din zare-adâncă/ Luna vine și-o mănâncă./ Și se-așează liniștită/ Ca să fie înghițită.” (https://www.tudorarghezi.eu/opere/poezii/vaca_lui_dumnezeu.html, accessed on 10.11.2024).

It can be found online in only one version, sung by soprano Mirela Zafiri. The singer conveys the kind of energy desired by the composer and portrayed in the song by means of certain tempo changes and by nuances.

This lied consists of two ample stanzas. In the first stanza, a horizontal polymeter appears. "Mirror" chords are found, derived from the harmonization of Romanian carols.

Stanza I is based on the Mixolydian mode on the G note, but at the end of it the seventh becomes major, and the mode changes to Ionian (measures 1-17, measure 18 is a transition). **Stanza II** is composed in a Lydian mode on C, comprising measures 19-30, the last measure being the conclusion.



Fig. 2⁷ *Vaca Lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]

The **rhythm** is simple, mostly in eighths and fourths. An imitation between the vocal part and the accompaniment appears in certain melodic fragments.

There are no changes in tempo as in other lieder written by Mihail Jora. The song uses plagal harmonic relationships frequently. Within the two stanzas, we notice fourth chords in the accompaniment. The piano develops its melody on long notes, fourths and seconds, but, at certain moments, very well chosen by the composer, the ornamentation formed by sixteenths (E-D-C-B) then a fourth (A) appears, providing a splash of colour to the accompaniment.



Fig. 3⁸ *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]

⁷ Mihail Jora (1956). *Cântece pentru voce și pian pe versuri de Tudor Arghezi* [Songs for voice and piano on poems by Tudor Arghezi], Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p.13.

4.2. *Veverita* [The Squirrel] – formal analysis

Veverița [The Squirrel]⁹ is the second miniature in the cycle *Patru cântece pe versuri de Ion Pillat* [Four songs on poems by Ion Pillat], op. 20, from 1941, and it is a lied written in the spirit of Romanian folklore.

It is sung frequently (Laura Tătulescu; Silvia Micu; Andreea Panu), and the differences between various interpretations are not great.

Tempo changes are few in the case of this lied. The rhythm formulae and the measure changes suggest the squirrel's running from one tree to another.

The song is structured as follows: there is a short four-bar introduction (chromatic mode 1 on Eb); **stanza I** is built on a chromatic mode with the fundamental on F#; **stanza II** is built on a Phrygian mode on G, with a Phrygian cadence.

The **accompaniment** is built like this: stanza I is built on a chromatic mode on D, the middle part, in which the main role is assigned, is based on a bi-chromatic mode on Bb, and stanza II focuses on a chromatic mode on G, with the augmented second between Eb and F#.

[illegible]

Fig. 4 *Veverita* [The Squirrel] (Introduction)

⁹ The lyrics in Romanian are: „Veveriță, care n-ai/ Casă, curte și alai,/ Legându-te îmi stai/ Sus, pe ramură, ca-n rai./ C-o alună-n gheare mici/ De nimic nu-ți pasă, nici/ De paftale și mărgel,/ Scumpe-n ochii dragei mele,/ Nici rublele de-argint/ Pentru cari se bat și mint,/ Lingușindu-se avan,/ Toți boierii din divan./ Stai pe ramura de tei/ Și te uiți de sus la ei,/ Stai pe creangă de stejar/ Și de nimeni n-ai habar.” (<https://www.versuri.ro/versuri/ion-pillat-veverita/>, accessed on 10.11.2024).

Modal instability is noticeable throughout the song, through melisma and short appoggiatura, which highlight the “popular-moralizing” character of the lyrics. The accompaniment is divided into two levels, a melodic-diatonic one and a chordal-chromatic one¹⁰.



Fig. 5 *Veverița* [The Squirrel] (Ending)

4.3. *Lupii* [The Wolves] – formal analysis

Mihail Jora approached Mariana Dumitrescu’s work when his creativity has already reached its maturity and, together with the writer, he went through subtle, but spectacular processes of stylistic essentialisation.

His acute desire to be free from symmetrical rhythms specific to European classical music can be regarded as an adaptation to Mariana Dumitrescu’s poetic rhythm.

The lied *Lupii* [The Wolves]¹¹ by Mihail Jora, op. 49 nr.3, from 1963, is sung frequently (Cristina Radu; Laura Tătulescu; Emanuela Sălăjan) and interpretations resemble each other greatly, which means that the singers understand what the composer wanted to convey.

The song opens with two introductory measures, conceived in a Mixolydian mode on D in the low register in an ascending plane and a pentatonic scale built on the 3-1 model (minor third-minor second succession), creating a bimodal structure from the beginning. These two sound planes culminate in the second measure, in an augmented chord, and introduce us to a morbid atmosphere reminiscent of expressionist creations.

¹⁰ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un modern european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, București, pp. 58-59.

¹¹ The lyrics in Romanian are: „Ființe ciudate-n cămăși de cenușă/ cu ochii sticloși, veninoși,/ Fără milă-n artere-nghețate:/ lupii.../ Triburi însângerate/ vânând fericirea altora/ cu boturi căscate.../ Ca pe vrejuri de crin sfărâmă crani și oase.../ Dorm în ierburi de sânge/ ca-n pat de mătase:/ lupii.../ Trecerea lor nu-i uragane de spaimă/ ei regi ai pădurii,/ vichingi cu gheare de aramă.../ Dar pe lupi nimeni nu-i întreabă/ de cine le e teamă.../ Lupii.../ lupii.../ lupii...” (Mariana Dumitrescu, poezia *Lupii*).



Fig. 6¹² *Lupii* [The Wolves] (Introduction)

The rhythm is determined by the line of the poem; vertically, it is worth noting the richness of the polyrhythmic formulas that appear in the context of a non-melisma *rubato* and emphasize the pre-existence of a *giusto-syllabic* divisional system.

In this lied, the minor third interval is an element playing the part of a “signal” or “symbol,” which can be seen as the leitmotif of the vocal miniature. It plays an important role in both the melodic and the harmonic structures and is part of the basic mode.

In measures 7, 8, 9, we see progressive augmentations of the intervals that lead to an important denouement: the word *lupii* (“the wolves”), which is present in several moments of the song, in different hypostases, based on the descending minor third interval.



Fig. 7¹³ *Lupii* [The Wolves], ms. 6-9

¹² Mihail Jora (2017). *Căntece pe versuri de Mariana Dumitrescu* [Songs on Poems by Mariana Dumitrescu], Volume II, Editura Grafoart, București, p. 62.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

The **coda** has a flowing melodic configuration and the tonal ambiguity is further accentuated at the end by means of the use of non-tempered intonations, micro-tones ($\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone).

The **accompaniment** focuses on seventh, ninth, eleventh and diminished octave chords (used in tense moments).

The musical score for 'Lupii' (The Wolves) is presented in two systems. The first system is marked 'Tranquillo' and 'mf'. The vocal line has lyrics in Romanian and German. The piano accompaniment features complex chordal structures. The second system is marked 'mf lamentoso' and 'mp'. The vocal line continues with more lyrics. The piano accompaniment includes a coda section with micro-tones indicated by a star symbol. A footnote at the bottom left explains the micro-tone notation: '* = 3/4 tone più alto' and 'bb = 3/4 tone più basso'.

Fig. 8¹⁴ *Lupii* [The Wolves] (ending)

A procedure extracted from the works of G. Enescu and O. Messiaen can be noted here, namely microtones, which encompass an expressiveness different from that of Romanian folk songs. The quarter tone highlights the word “lupii” (“the wolves”), sounding like howls. The harmony is abstract, with both tonal and modal structures present. We notice polychords, free chordal structures, mixtures, chords with added notes, indicating a certain “spirit of the times”¹⁵.

4.4. Comparative analysis

In these three vocal miniatures, the composer follows the climax of the text, achieving a melodic climax at the tensest moment, as they are placed in acute areas of sound force.

The feelings found in the poetic texts are also highlighted in the melodic line. *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God’s Cow] is characterized by a playful and energetic style, due to its rhythm and interpretative style, *Veverița* [The Squirrel] is an expressive and lively portrayal, and the song *Lupii* [The Wolves] has a theme of sadness and gloom, implied by the “symbol” interval.

¹⁴ Mihail Jora, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un model european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, p. 87.

The *melody* is focused on predominantly modal lines, reaching the point where, during the period of creation of the lieder on poems by Mariana Dumitrescu, Jora's songs were built with free rhythm and tonal ambiguity.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God's Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Stanza I – Mixolydian on G b) Stanza II – Lydian on C c) One note = one syllable	a) Stanza I – chromatic on D – 2+ between Bb and C# b) Stanza II – chromatic on G – 2+ between Eb and F# c) One note = one syllable	a) Tonal ambiguity b) Non-tempered intonations c) Microtones ($\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone) d) One note = one syllable

Table 1 Melody

The **harmony** in these three lieder focuses on modalism in the first stages of Jora's creation, while, in his maturity period, the composer broke free from this system.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God's Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Diatonic modes b) Plagal harmonic chains	a) Chromatic modes b) Modal chains	a) Tone and mode ambiguity b) Harmonic chains with seventh, ninth, eleventh, and diminished octave

Table 2 Harmony

The **rhythm** and **meter** are adapted for the poetic text.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God's Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) At certain moments – sixteenths (E-D-C-B) and a fourth (A) b) The meter varies, as it is adapted to the poetic text c) No tempo changes d) Polymeter in the first stanza	a) Playful, suggestion the squirrel's run b) The meter is the same throughout the whole lied (2/4) c) Few tempo changes	a) Determined by the poem lines b) A richness of polyrhythmic formulae c) Non-melisma rubato d) Pre-existence of a <i>giusto-syllabic</i> divisional system e) The meter varies, as it is adapted to the poetic text f) Frequent tempo changes

Table 3 Rhythm and meter

In the first two lieder, the rhythm is simple, focused on octave durations, while, in the song on a poem by Mariana Dumitrescu, polyrhythmic formulae, rubato segments and giusto-syllabic divisions are found. In the lied *Veverița* [The Squirrel], the meter is unchanged throughout the entire miniature, but in the other two songs it changes frequently.

The **accompaniment** in Mihail Jora's lieder becomes diversified as the genre evolves in the composer's work.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God's Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Mirror chords b) Horizontal polymeter c) Four planes d) Imitation of the vocal melody e) At certain moments – sixteenths (E-D-C-B) and a fourth (A)	a) Complementary b) Introduction by accompaniment – chromatic mode 1 on Eb c) The middle part is attributed to accompaniment – bi chromatic mode on B	a) Seventh, ninth, eleventh chords b) Diminished octave chords c) Bi-modalism d) The accompaniment consists only of chords e) Introduction and transitions made by the accompaniment

Table 4 Accompaniment

These vocal miniatures come from different creation periods of the composer, and we can notice an evolution with regards to the melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and accompaniment. Mihail Jora introduces very diverse and non-conformist techniques in the vocal miniatures.

5. Conclusions

Mihail Jora was the creator of the lied genre in Romania, creating a remarkable number of works in this genre. The lieder *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow], *Veverița* [The Squirrel], and *Lupii* [The Wolves] come from three different creation periods. Thus, lied op. 16 was composed during the beginning period and has a temperate sound, the song op. 20 has an energetic and playful side, while the miniature op. 49 is expressionistic and gloomy. Jora uses poems by appreciated poets and discovers the music hidden within them.

Florinela Popa claims that "Mihail Jora's creation identifies not only with the 'beginning' of the Romanian lied, but also with a lot of its evolution in Romanian music"¹⁶.

¹⁶ Florinela Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

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Olivier Messiaen: religious faith and musical expression. *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*

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Abstract: In 20th-century music literature, Olivier Messiaen stood out in two areas: innovation in musical language and the unique reflection of religious dogma in his works. Although most of the works in his catalogue are based on subjects specific to the Roman Catholic cult, his music has acquired unique qualities, resulting from his passion for colour-sounds and *birdsong*. The study will highlight the main elements of Messiaen's language, the cultural areas of European and non-European influence, as well as the innate abilities that gave him remarkable possibilities for sonic imagination. The piano work *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (*Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*) (1944) appeared during a period of great compositional creativity, preceded by *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941) and followed by the *Turangalila* symphony (1948), a period culminating in the publication of the volume *Technique de mon langage musical*. Starting from the 20 symbolic “views”, Messiaen transposes into music a series of theological concepts concerning the childhood of the Saviour. This research proposes a selective analysis of the work, attempting to highlight Messiaen's compositional tendencies, which contributed decisively to the “break” with traditional intonations and rhetoric, reflecting the beliefs of modern man in the last century.

Keywords: religious music, theology, 20th century, Messiaen.

1. Introduction

We can say that Olivier Messiaen represents a pillar of 20th-century sacred music. His attraction to the religious phenomenon, manifested in a huge volume of compositions inspired by Christian theology, was discussed by the composer himself, who stated that this faith emerged gradually, first through prayer, then through the books he read¹. He studied theology privately and read all the fundamental books of the Christian faith (the Gospel, the Apocalypse, then the entire Bible). Messiaen claimed that the most important message he tried to convey through music was that of faith, considering himself lucky to be

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¹ “I’ve always been a believer, pure and simple. Little by little, I’ve read books that strengthened my faith...” Claude Samuel (1994). *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Colour. Conversations with Claude Samuel*, Amadeus Press, Portland, p. 16.

Catholic². Faith is one of the three elements of his creative inspiration, along with human love and birdsong.

One of the most expressive characterizations of Messiaen's relationship with the Christian faith is provided by Paul Griffiths in his article in *Grove Music Online*, where he notes that apart from the period 1945-1962, when he launched the post-war avant-garde, Messiaen devoted his creations exclusively to religious subjects (with a few exceptions). He did not claim to have any special understanding or wisdom when it came to mysticism, but wanted to faithfully present the teachings of the church³.

The choice of subjects to be treated in his works was important to the composer: while Christian ritual music focuses on the leitmotifs of the Passion and Crucifixion, he sought other aspects of theology that were equally important to be translated and transposed into music. The hardship of sinful man and earthly life was nevertheless a subject found in the orchestral works *Les offrandes oubliées* (1930) and *Eclairs sur l'Au-delà* (1991). Otherwise, his compositional catalogue focuses on glory, on the joy of being in the Divine presence. Influenced by Sunday liturgical practice, he was often preoccupied with the mystery of the Holy Sacrament⁴, through works such as *Le banquet céleste* (1928) for organ, *O sacrum convivium!* (1937) for mixed choir, and *Livre du Saint Sacrement* (1984) for organ. He was also drawn to the mystery of the Trinity, to which the church where he was employed was dedicated.

In general, Messiaen's compositional style, as a succession of sound blocks, apparently without a line of continuity⁵, creates a spatial effect, hence the references to heavenly space, the world of angels or Paradise. The composer manages to convey this elevated vision through his works, like the souls of the resurrected. The abyss is evoked not only by the deep bass sounds, but also by melodic fragmentation, in the sense of a rupture, a chasm between man and God. Although the composer is aware of and uses this “chasm” as a metaphor for the distance between man and divinity, his compositional methods and references to sacred space denote rather a fear of God and admiration.⁶

However, as a musician and theologian, Messiaen was more concerned with the idea of time than space. All his favourite themes are based on the encounter between the divine and the human and, therefore, on the encounter between the eternal and the temporal. We can say that Messiaen's experience of faith seems to be a naive one, based on unshakeable trust in God and the afterlife. He claimed to have no doubts and, although he was fascinated by the discoveries

² “I have the good fortune to be a Catholic.” Claude Samuel, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³ Paul Griffiths (2001). *Messiaen, Olivier*, Grove Music Online, p. 6, retrieved from <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018497?rskkey=uqn61k&result=1>.

⁴ Known primarily as the Sacrament of Communion.

⁵ Paul Griffiths (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶ Fear is used here in the sense of “fear of God”, not fear or anxiety, etc.

of astronomers and geologists regarding the history and nature of the cosmos, he was not bothered by any rational objections to his beliefs⁷.

2. Language – modes, rhythms, colours

Messiaen distanced himself from the Western tradition of composition – although he admired and taught the musical styles that preceded him, he chose a different, unique path. Griffiths points out that he admired Stravinsky – with his rhythmic propulsions and formal discontinuity (specific to the ballet *Sacre du Printemps* – a work that Messiaen appreciated). He took harmony and unresolved chords from Debussy, as well as Ravel and Dukas.⁸ His creative uniqueness manifested itself through his separation from tradition and the expression of his unique personality.

It is interesting to note the difference Messiaen makes between what his music expresses – faith – and the language he uses – sound-colour. These two aspects, faith and the colour of sound, are interdependent – there is no sound without colour, nor faith without sound. Messiaen considered it necessary to systematise his technique, writing the two-volume treatise *Tehnique de mon langage musical* (1944) and the seven-volume *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie* (1949-1992). Thus, his obvious interest in unusual sounds and rhythms, as well as colour in music, found the theorisation necessary for their correct reception. We can say that this knowledge of his language and the events that influenced him in this endeavour helps us to discover the associations between the visual and auditory elements in his music, even if it limits us to the “colour palette” he imposed.

Messiaen's modes have a symmetrical construction and a limited number of transpositions; the resulting effect being called by the composer “*le charme des impossibilités*”. If the chaining of notes and the formation of a mode can be considered a common practice, the uniqueness of Messiaen's sound comes from the resulting overlaps, as well as from the chordal chains. The composer consistently stated that his mind instantly associates modes with certain colours, and that chromatic variations come from the resulting harmonies. I quote: “I quickly note down what I hear: the melody and the rhythm. I don't note the timbre. The timbre comes from a greater number of harmonics, and it is necessary to look for unusual combinations of sounds, to reinvent each moment.”⁹ The association of sounds from nature with rigorous compositional

⁷ Paul Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁹ Bernard Gavoty (1994). *Who are you, Olivier Messiaen?*, in “Tempo”, Summer, 1961, New Series, No. 58, pp. 33-36: “I write down rapidly what I hear; the melody and rhythm. I do not note the timbre. As timbre arises from a more or less large number of harmonics it is necessary for me to seek combinations of unexpected sounds, to re-invent at each moment and for each bird.” (original quote).

techniques thus led to the emergence of works that combine sound and colour, birdsong and theological themes.

Observing European religious creation, several compositional techniques for “infusing” religious themes into musical discourse stand out:

- direct quotation from Christian liturgical music (Gregorian/Byzantine);
- composition in the style of the original music, possibly reworked or stylised;
- the use of programmatic elements with direct reference to the Christian message.

In Messiaen, these techniques are harder to find, as the composer created a musical language based on theological symbols in direct harmony with the music.

We will illustrate the relationship between theology and music in Messiaen's conception through analytical observations on the work *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*.

3. *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* / *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus* (1944)

Olivier Messiaen's first major work for solo piano, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* appeared during a period of great compositional creativity, preceded by *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941) and followed by the *Turangalîla* symphony (1948). In imagining this sound universe, which lasts over two hours, the composer relied on the virtuosity of his long-time collaborator, pianist Yvonne Loriod, who also premiered the work, partially at the end of 1944 and in its entirety in recital on 26 March 1945¹⁰.

The piano cycle *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* captures the evolution of the divine word, using Christian symbols as a theological basis. The composer provides a series of theological explanations in the introduction to the score, where he specifies the nature of these miniatures, as well as how the themes are used throughout. The title of the work has its own particularities, especially considering that the author refers to the piano miniatures as “glances”, an original concept.

The three themes found throughout the work are also presented:

- *The Theme of Divinity* – representing the Creator, “through whom all things were made”;
- *The Theme of the Star and the Cross* – two symbols of the beginning and end of the Saviour's earthly life;
- *The Theme of Chords* – fragmented or concentrated like a “rainbow”.

¹⁰ Anca Elena Păduraru (2020). *Analysis and interpretative vision in Olivier Messiaen's Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus*, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 107.



Fig. 1 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, author's note

The meditation on Jesus' childhood goes through the following stages in the composer's eyes: 1. *Regard du Père* [The Father's Gaze]; 2. *Regard de l'étoile* [The Star's Gaze]; 3. *L'échange* [The Exchange]; 4. *Regard de la Vierge* [The Virgin's Gaze]; 5. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* [The Son's Gaze upon the Son]; 6. *Par Lui tout a été fait* [Through Him All Things Were Made]; 7. *Regard de la Croix* [The Gaze of the Cross]; 8. *Regard des hauteurs* [The Gaze of the Heights]; 9. *Regard du temps* [The Gaze of Time]; 10. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie* [The Spirit of Joy's Gaze]; 11. *Première communion de la Vierge* [The Virgin's First Communion]; 12. *La parole toute-puissante* [The All-Powerful Word]; 13. *Noël* [Christmas]; 14. *Regard des Anges* [The Angels' Gaze]; 15. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus* [The Kiss of the Child Jesus]; 16. *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages* [The Gaze of the Prophets, Shepherds and the Wise Men]; 17. *Regard du silence* [The Gaze of Silence]; 18. *Regard de l'Onction terrible* [The Gaze of the Terrible Anointing]; 19. *Je dors, mais mon cœur veille* [I Sleep, but My Heart Watches]; 20. *Regard de l'Eglise d'amour* [The Gaze of the Church of Love]¹¹.

What stands out at first glance is precisely the theological terminology and the use of concepts specific to the Christian faith as a “programme” through which the musical journey is outlined.

Regard du Père / *The Father's Gaze* is the first gaze of the cycle and is based on the Theme of Divinity, inspired by the Gospel according to Matthew,

¹¹ The translations were taken from Anca Elena Păduraru. It should be noted that in English, the most common translation of “priviri” is *Contemplations* – this translation has other connotations and slightly changes the perspective on the theme of the twenty miniatures.

Chapter 3, Verse 17 – the moment when the Epiphany or revelation of the Father takes place. The entire articulation is built on Mode 2.¹²



Fig. 2 Olivier Messiaen, *Technique de mon langage musical*, volume II, p. 50

The form of the first miniature is clearly defined, architectural stability being a concept often encountered in Messiaen's work. We thus have three distinct segments that use the same thematic material, each beginning with the Divine Motif. We can formally frame this piece in an A1 A2 Coda structure – note the use of the number 3, symbol of the Holy Trinity. The entire sound of the miniature can be described as being in a state of temporal and physical suspension. The distance between heaven and earth, between God looking down upon mankind, is achieved through the two planes, harmonically in the bass and melodically repetitive in the soprano.

The motif of Divinity has a diatonic structure consisting of repeated sounds and a minor third leap, which leads the composer to combine consonant harmonies, with the key of F sharp major being privileged.

In addition to harmony, melody is a key element: the line made up of octave leaps in a slow tempo gives the whole part a sober, meditative character. After a beginning that gives the impression of immobility, starting with measure 5, the harmonies become chromatic.



¹² Anca Elena Păduraru, *op. cit.*, p. 118.



Fig. 3 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard du Père*, ms. 5-6

The identical repetition of the Theme at the beginning of section A2 and the Coda provides stability and perfection to the form. The Coda finally achieves a decrease in sound marked by a diminuendo that reduces the musical line to a minimum audible threshold. Thus, the “Father's Gaze” gradually recedes, along with the music.



Fig. 4 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard du Père*, ms. 18-19

Regard de l'étoile / The Star's Gaze, the second miniature in the cycle, begins the epic thread of the Saviour's life with the appearance of the star that heralds his coming. Based on the Theme of the Star and the Cross, the piece has a dynamic character, in contrast to the first part, which invites meditation. The energetic beginning can be considered the explosion of a star in the sky, followed by the appearance of the Theme in measure 6, exposed in octaves, with the distance between the two constituent voices reinforcing the idea of the beginning and end of the Saviour's life on earth.

We observe the melodic profile of the thematic motif based on chromatic oscillations, including a reversed chromatic formula, a symbol known as the theme of the cross in universal creation.

The musical score for 'Regard de l'étoile' by Olivier Messiaen, measures 1-6, is presented in two systems. The first system is marked 'Modéré (♩=96)' and 'PIANO'. It begins with a forte (f) dynamic, followed by a piano (ppp) section, and ends with a fortissimo (ff) section. The second system is marked 'Modéré, un peu lent (♩=76)' and starts with a piano (p) dynamic. It includes a 'rubato' section. The score contains various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A dashed line at the bottom of the second system is labeled '8° bassa (Thème de l'étoile et de la croix)'.

Fig. 5 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard de l'étoile*, ms. 1-6

The composition of the miniature is arranged in a form that alternates the appearance of the star (A) with the appearance of the Theme of the Star and the Cross (B), in an alert arrangement as follows: A B A B A and Coda. We can consider the refrain A a unifying element that completes the simple, solemn sound of the Theme of the Star and the Cross.

The coda takes material from A and B, introducing a new sound that differs from previous influences, thus preparing for the appearance of the next miniature. We note the use of elements from the Theme in the first measure, followed by a conclusion with augmented fourth and fifth chords.



Fig. 6 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard de l'étoile*, ms. 40-41

The third theme used throughout the cycle is the Theme of Chords, about which the composer himself states in the introduction to the score that “*The Theme of Chords* passes from one piece to another, fragmented or concentrated in a rainbow.”

Originally, this motif consisting of four chords is conceived as an evolution from consonance to an ever-increasing degree of dissonance, the first chord being created by the superimposition of perfect fourths.

Thus, the theme is used in various forms, being varied and borrowing from the expression of the structures in which it is found. To observe this, we will focus on the 17th miniature, *Regard du silence* / The gaze of silence.

Composed of a wide variety of motifs, the piece captures the colour of the music of silence, from the composer's perspective. With a bistrophic form to which an introduction and a coda are added, the mélange of motifs and themes begins with a canon in *ppp*, next to which the composer notes *impalpable* – imperceptible. Thus, the sonority of silence is achieved through music, which Messiaen describes at the beginning of the piece with the following words: “The gaze of silence: silence in the hand, an inverted rainbow... every silence in the manger reveals music and colours that are the mysteries of Jesus Christ...”

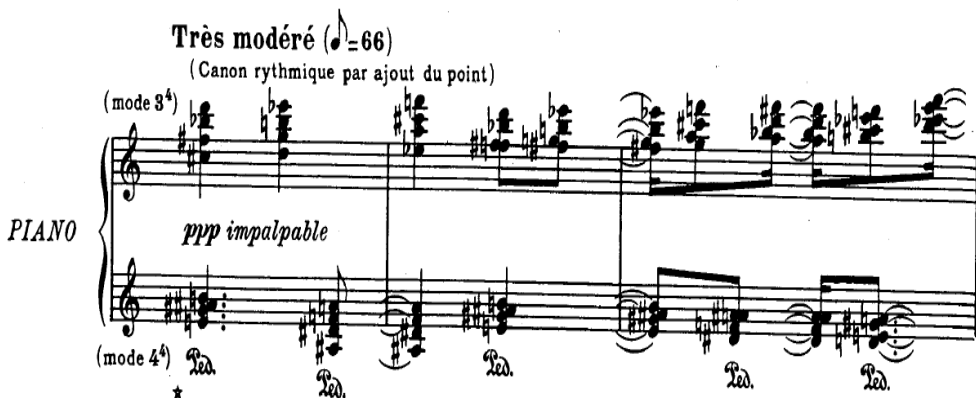




Fig. 7 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard du silence*, ms. 1-5

After the introduction into the canon – note the added value rhythm, in which the two planes evolve on two different modal structures – the first stanza interrupts the silence, beginning in *ff* and subsequently bringing in the theme of chords formed of parallel fourths, recontextualised in a broader harmonic framework. The writing of this miniature subsequently varies from static moments of silence to sonic developments based on figurations that give the work a new colour.

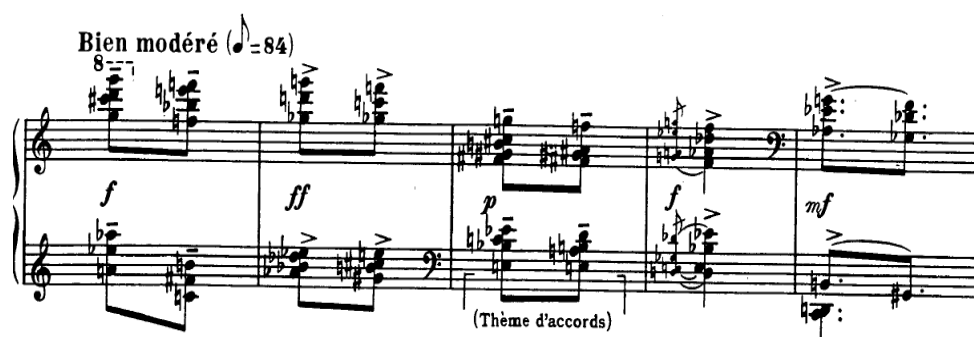


Fig. 8 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard du silence*, ms. 20-24

The return of the theme of the chords in measure 53 marks the beginning of the second verse, which varies the sound material of the first movement. 15 The coda brings a new colour, as the composer states in *the Author's Note*: “alternating chords, multicoloured and impalpable music, in confetti...”. The polymodal harmonies from the Introduction are repeated, with the right hand based on mode 3 and the left hand on mode 4, resulting in a fast-paced sound spectacle that nevertheless evokes silence due to its low dynamics. Thus, we obtain the composer's overall vision of the “gaze of silence”, in which two seemingly incompatible concepts are associated: music and silence.

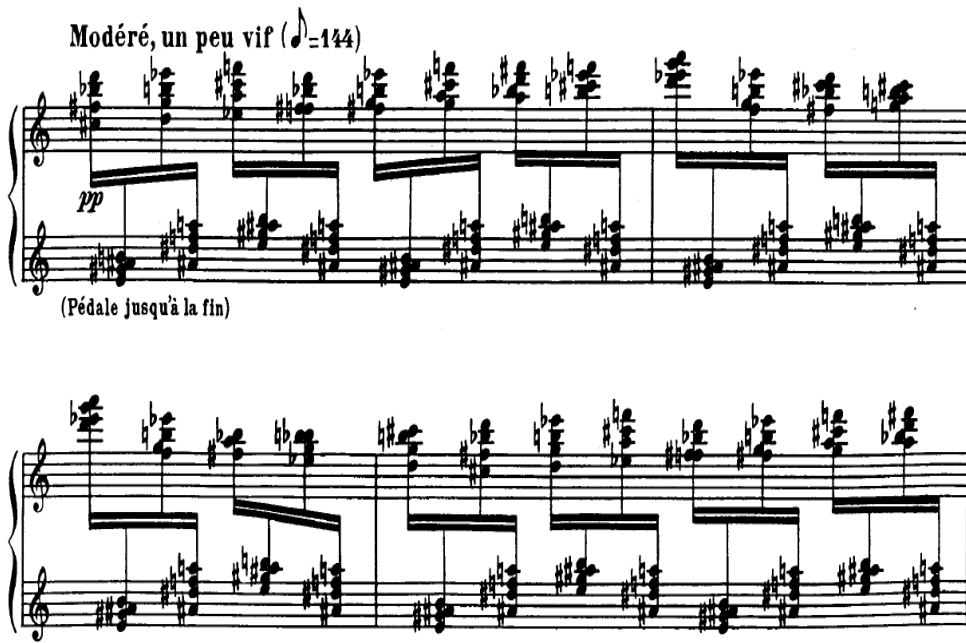


Fig. 9 Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus, Regard du silence*, ms. 88-90

4. Conclusions

Although considered by scholars to be one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, his work being frequently performed in concert halls, Messiaen does not have a name as resonant as Arnold Schönberg or Igor Stravinsky. It can be said that the profound religiousness of his music is to blame for this misunderstanding that surrounds him. For the composer, music was a means of expressing his faith in the Divine, his main goal not necessarily being to stand out among his contemporaries, but rather to live a life of faith. As Andrew Shenton states, “Messiaen lived in a time stimulated by both politics and theology, which touched all aspects of social life”¹³. The chance to stand out thanks to his theological side, among the innovative composers of the period, is something unique, especially considering the social context in which he worked.

In fact, most of the visionaries of last century's music developed their own language, and we do not consider one compositional trend to be superior to the others. Through the analytical examples provided, we have attempted to contextualise the composer's theology in relation to music, his creative uniqueness being the reason for his perpetuation in the collective consciousness as a representative figure of the last century.

¹³ Andrew Shenton (2016). *Messiaen the Theologian*, Routledge, London, p. 2.

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Music criticism in the Iași press (1840–1945). Documentary landmarks and quantitative guidelines

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Abstract: This paper analyses Iași music criticism during the period between 1840 and 1945, focusing on the role of the first specialized magazines and the contribution of the first musicologists to the formation of a national cultural identity. I aimed to carry out a predominantly quantitative analysis, followed by some comments regarding quality. The development of Iași music criticism was influenced by the work of central figures, such as Teodor T. Burada and Eduard Caudella, who contributed to the professionalization and structuring of music criticism. At first, the articles had a descriptive character and supported artistic manifestations without rigorous analysis. Later, through the efforts of influential critics, music criticism acquired an educational role, promoting clear aesthetic standards and contributing to the maturing of public taste.

Keywords: music criticism, evolution, research.

1. Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the foundation of a systematic research on the emergence and evolution of music criticism in Romania, by focusing on the Iași press from 1840 to 1945. While the history of Romanian musicology still remains a developing field, the analysis of primary sources provided by local newspapers and magazines allows for the reconstruction of the initial stages of musical discourse, especially in the context in which Iași was one of the most important centres of culture and education in modern Romania.

The chronological delimitation of the research between 1840 and 1945 is justified, on the one hand, by the appearance of the first printed publications in Moldavia that also included musical reflections (such as „Foaie Sătească”), and on the other hand, by the end of a cultural and political era marked by World War II. The year 1945 marks a significant break in public discourse, with the beginning of the Communist regime, which profoundly and irreversibly changed the tone and cultural themes promoted in the press.

This article does not offer an aesthetic or interpretative analysis of the phenomenon of music criticism, but rather provides a general framework of reference, by inventorying relevant publications, classifying musical content,

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identifying columnists and writers, as well as by presenting related technical and quantitative data. In this sense, the article opens a field of research into which the author will go deeper in her doctoral thesis, called “Iași musical culture in the first half of the 20th century”.

The aim is a systematic presentation, grouped thematically and chronologically, with an emphasis on identifying the first forms of musicological discourse, on the emergence of professional signatures, and on the typological diversity of publications.

2. Methodology and documentary sources

The analysis presented in this article is based exclusively on primary sources, consisting of newspapers and magazines printed in Iași between 1840 and 1945, accessed in digital form on the *Arcanum* platform. Publications containing explicit or recurring references to music, musical performances, choral activity, artistic education and local concert life were selected.

The selection criteria for the materials included: the existence of musical columns, mentions of the Iași Conservatory of Music, the presence of Romanian composers, columnists or performers in a local context. The publications were then ordered chronologically, analysed thematically and classified according to their type (educational, cultural, polemical, musicological, etc.).

The researched documents were checked for redundancies and overlaps, and the relevant information was manually extracted and indexed in a database that allowed the drafting of a synopsis table and the thematic synthesis presented in the article. All citations are accompanied by the mention of the year, issue and page of the source, according to scientific standards.

No secondary material was used, except for background data on the founding of publications or brief biographies of the personalities involved, for which established academic sources were checked.

3. Inventory of the publications analysed here

Table 1 presents the publications analysed from the perspective of the main information regarding the years of publication, the type of publishing house or printing house responsible for the publication, the owner or founder, whether state or private, the place of publication, as well as the alphabet used by the publication.

Nr.	Publication	Years	Publishing House / Printing House	Owner / Founder	Place	Alphabet
1	„Foae Satească”	1839–1849	Official Printing House of Moldavia	Government of Moldavia	Iași	Cyrillic
2	„Zimbrul”	1851–1877	National Printing House	C. A. Rosetti	Iași	Latin

3	„Gazeta de Moldavia”	1852–1857	Kogălniceanu Print.	Mihail Kogălniceanu	Iași	Cyrillic/Latin
4	„Steaua Dunării”	1855–1859	Printing House of the Albina Institute	Mihail Kogălniceanu	Iași	Latin
5	„Foiletonul Zimbrului”	1855	Zimbrul	The editorial team of Zimbrul	Iași	Latin
6	„Zimbrul” și „Vulturul”	1858	Zimbrul Print.	The united editorial team of Zimbrul and Vulturul	Iași	Latin
7	„Patria”	1858–1859	Unknown	Unknown	Iași	Latin
8	„Tribuna Română”	1860–1867	Unknown	Unknown	Iași	Latin
9	„Familia”	1865–1906	Sonnenfeld Print.	Iosif Vulcan	parțial Iași	Latin
10	„Convorbiri Literare”	1867–1944	Junimea Print.	Titu Maiorescu, Junimea Society	Iași	Latin
11	„Curierul de Iași”	1868–1880	The Printing House of Curierul	Iași Mayor’s Office	Iași	Latin
12	„Curierul Foaia Intereselor Generale”	1870–1890	Curierul Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
13	„Fulgerul”	1888–1889	Fulgerul Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
14	„Era Nouă”	1889–1900	Era Nouă	Nicolae Gane	Iași	Latin
15	„Ecoul Moldovei”	1890–1903	Ecoul Moldovei Print.	Burada family	Iași	Latin
16	„Evenimentul ”	1893–1944	Evenimentul Print.	Ioan N. Roman	Iași	Latin
17	„Opinia”	1897–1951	Opinia Print.	C. C. Bacalbașa	Iași	Latin
18	„Gazeta Muzicală”	1898–1899	Gazeta Print.	M. Scarlat	Iași	Latin
19	„Teatru Muzică Modă / Moda Parisiană”	1898–1900	Moda Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
20	„Curierul Artelor / Gazeta Artelor”	1902–1919	Curierul Artelor Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
21	„Carmen Sylva”	1902–1903	Carmen Print.	Artistic societies	Iași	Latin
22	„Muzica”	1908–1910	The Printing House of the Conservatory	Eduard Caudella	Iași	Latin
23	„Scena”	1908–1918	Scena Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
24	„Rampa”	1911–1944	Minerva Print.	N. D. Cocea	Bucharest/Iași	Latin
25	„Cultura”	1911–1944	Cultura Print.	Al. Philippide	Iași	Latin
26	„Albina”	1916	Albina Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin

27	„Izvoarașul”	1919–1922	Izvoarașul Print.	Unknown	Iași	Latin
28	„Lumea”	1920–1938	Lumea	Gh. Lăzărescu	Iași	Latin
29	„Revista Istorică Română”	1931–1945	The National History Institute	The Romanian Academy	Iași	Latin
30	„Cronica”	1932–1944	Cronica Print.	Grigore T. Popa	Iași	Latin
31	„Revista Fundațiilor Regale”	1934–1947	The Royal Foundations	The Royal Academy	Bucharest/Iași	Latin

Table 1 Publications of Iași with musical content (1840–1945)

4. Theme and type analysis

The musical content identified in the Iași press from 1840-1945 can be divided into several theme categories. These reflect local interests related to the musical phenomenon, but also external influences, the reception of European trends and the development of artistic education. Among the most frequently identified themes are symphonic and chamber concerts, vocal and instrumental recitals, choral and religious activity, musical education in schools and at the Iași Conservatory, as well as the presence of musical personalities in the public space through articles, interviews or evocations.

A series of programmatic articles on the role of music in the formation of aesthetic taste is also noteworthy. For example, in the newspaper *Curierul de Iași*, on 21 November 1871, the article *Classical music soirées*, signed Gzt. N., appears, which reflects on the aesthetic and educational function of classical music, and advocates for the cultivation of a refined musical taste. Although it does not seem to be written by an established musicologist, the column presents a theoretical reflection on the value of classical music, chamber genres and the educational role of listening to music regularly, within a group. The text refers to the initiative of the director of the Iași Music School to organize “soirées” for the cultivation of classical music — a pedagogical, artistic and cultural activity that reflects the beginnings of the professionalization and organization of musical life in Iași:

“Music is the art of modern times, and its purpose is much higher than the simple passing of time. It is, for him who learns to appreciate it, a source of spiritual happiness; it elevates and ennobles thought and character, as does an ancient statue or a drama of a great poet.”¹

In “Curierul” (Th. Balassan) „Foaia intereselor generale” of 1 August 1879, we find the following note about the concert of the students from the Iași Conservatory:

“On 1 July 1879, we attended the production of the students of the Conservatory and were thoroughly satisfied with the progress of this

¹ Gzt. N., “Classical music soirées”, „Curierul de Iași”, Year IV, issue no. 128, 21 November 1871, p. 2

school. [...] From the production of the students of the Conservatory, held on 1 July 1879 at the National Theatre, we formed the conviction that the first musical institute in Moldavia fully fulfils its high calling, although there were times when it had to fight with the greatest difficulties, which endangered its very existence. The Conservatory is composed of 2 piano classes, 1 violin, 1 singing, 1 harmony, 1 principles and solfeggio, 1 declamation, 1 cello and double bass, 1 clarinet, oboe, bassoon and flute and 1 for brass instruments. It would be desirable to give greater scope to the study of music on woodwind and brass instruments.”²

The article is a critical reflection on a local musical manifestation, analysing the level of training, institutional difficulties and artistic value. Furthermore, the article provides data on the internal organization of the Conservatory: the existing classes, the subjects taught, the instruments covered. This contributes to the reconstruction of the musical infrastructure in Iași in the second half of the 19th century – an essential part of the “first steps of musicology”.

From a typological point of view, the analysed publications can be classified into: a) educational publications (e.g. „Foaie Sătească”, „Curierul de Iași”), b) cultural magazines with constant music columns („Opinia”, „Evenimentul”, „Ecoul Moldovei”, „Lumea”), c) publications with a militant or ideological character („Steaua Dunării”, „Zimbrul”, „Gazeta de Moldavia”), d) specialized magazines published in the context of the development of the Conservatory and musical societies („Gazeta Muzicală”, „Muzica”, „Izvorășul”).

This thematic and functional classification allows for a clearer understanding of how music was perceived, discussed and integrated into Iași’s public discourse, reflecting both local realities and national and European trends of the time.

5. Musical personalities and the Iași columnist

The Iași press from 1840-1945 offers a diverse image of those who contributed to the development of local musical life. Numerous composers, conductors, performers, cultural promoters and pedagogues active in Iași were identified in the pages of newspapers and magazines, as well as constant collaborators of the music columns. Among the central figures are Eduard Caudella – opera composer, conductor and founding professor of the Iași Conservatory – and Teodor T. Burada – folklorist, pedagogue and initiator of musical projects which included the establishment of a local music printing house. Also from the musical education environment, we can mention I. Vlăduț

² ***, “The concerts of Conservatory students and the role of music”, „Curierul. Foaia Intereselor Generale”, Year VII, issue no. 89, 1 August 1879, pp. 2-3.

(conducting), A. Sion (piano), Plesnilă (piano), Brill (choral music), E. Mezzetti (choral and chamber music) and Roșea (flute).

In „Ecoul Moldovei” of 27 June 1897, for example, we find published a response by Eduard Caudella, director of the Conservatory, to a criticism made by a journalist against the orchestra:

“Dear Mr. Manoliu,

My sincere thanks for everything you have accepted to print in your esteemed newspaper against me. I am glad, however, that I was able to have the opportunity to get to know you better and I assure you that I prefer a frank enemy to a false friend.

My only protest is that the Conservatory orchestra is not composed only of teachers, as there are only six of them: Mr. Bursuc being ill, this time only five remained: D. Aureseu, Soceanu and the three Cirillo brothers. The others are all students or former students of the Conservatory. Completely strangers to the school were also D. Gheorghiu (double bass), Hlavsa (viola), Segal (2nd violin) and three military men.”³

This highlights the fact that the Iași press was an active platform for debating local musical life, an essential aspect in demonstrating the media's involvement in the formation of a critical musical discourse.

In „Evenimentul” from 22 July 1919, we see an (unsigned) article about Teodor T. Burada:

“15 years ago, Mr. Burada was celebrated by the General Association of Artists of Iași, on the occasion of his 50th artistic jubilee. Today, Mr. Burada, who turns 80, is celebrated by the Association of Journalists of Moldavia.

Teodor Burada is represented in all fields. In the legal field, as well as the ethnographic, folklore, archaeological, literary, and artistic ones – in all these directions, his name shines.

He was the first Moldavian student enrolled in the Paris Conservatory of Music, very often performing our folk songs at the soirées of the teachers of this Conservatory. [...]

In the artistic field, Mr. Burada, having received a distinguished musical education, appeared in public in 1854, on the stage of the old theatre in Iași [...]. His charity concerts in the country are countless, and abroad we find him performing in Varna, Chișinău, Belgrade, Bitola, Sofia, Athens, London, Odessa, Constantinople, Brașov, Budapest, Prague, Rome, etc., where he made our ‘doina’ and folk songs known.”⁴

³ D. (Eduard) Caudella (1897). *Eduard Caudella's letter to the editorial team*, in „Ecoul Moldovei”, Year VI, issue no. 51, 27 June 1897, p. 3.

⁴ *** (1919). *The celebration of Teodor T. Burada*, in „Evenimentul”, Year XXVII, issue no. 122, 22 July, p. 1.

The text recognizes and honours Burada's contribution to ethnography, folklore and music – fundamental fields in the establishment of musicology as a science in Romania. The tribute proves that the generalist press from Iași constantly and deeply covered the musical activity and the founding personalities of the field. The article is not just a celebratory account: it reconstructs the musical, artistic and institutional biography of a key figure, contributing to an early form of narrative musicological memory in the public space.

As performers, names such as Jenny Safir, Matilda Vasiliu, Vasile Gheorghiu, Liciu and Miss Darclée appear, as well as other international soloists active in concerts organized by the Conservatory or by local cultural societies. Also, the activity of the „Carmen” Choral Society, under the direction of conductor D. G. Kiriac, had a wide coverage in the press. For example, in the „Curierul de Iassi”, of 20 August 1871, a note dedicated to the recitals given by the French soprano Jeanette Mont d'Or appears:

“We welcome the young artist with great joy in our midst, whose enchanting voice will surely provide the Iași audience with the most pleasant and at the same time most welcome evenings, for years have already passed since our city has last had the happiness of seeing a singer of some value.”⁵

This article thus reflects the interest taken by the Iași press in the local musical life, showing an early form of music review. Although short, the text includes aesthetic appreciations and expresses the public's expectations of rare appearances. This type of discourse is the precursor of the specialized articles in later music magazines.

The authors of the music reviews often remain anonymous, but the language used and the references suggest that many came from among the teaching staff and former students of the Conservatory or local intelligentsia. An increase in the quality and complexity of these reviews is noticeable with the passage of time, especially in publications such as „Evenimentul”, „Opinia”, „Era Nouă”, and „Ecoul Moldovei”.

Thus, in the „Era Nouă” of 21 March 1893, there is a column about a musical soirée in which Eduard Caudella is present as a conductor and performer, alongside other soloists of the era, but also as a composer of the music that is performed:

“The program of this evening was composed of beautiful musical pieces by the greatest composers, and conducted by our well-known and beloved virtuoso Mr. Eduard Caudella; [...] The production was perfect in every way: The *Latina gintă* choir by Mr. Caudella reproduced in music, through angelic voices, the lofty idea of our great poet Alexandri, which makes the hearts of all those who come from the Latin family tremble with joy. [...]

⁵ *** (1871). *The concert of a primadona soprano* [Jeanetta Mont d'Or], „Curierul de Iași”, Year IV, issue no. 87, 20 August 1871, p. 2.

Beethoven's Trio for piano, violin and cello, performed with surprising certainty, clarity and elegance by Miss Elisa Haret, accompanied by Messrs Caudella and O. Weiss; [...] Duo Concertante by Osborne and Bériot, performed by Miss Olga Sakellary, accompanied by Mr. Caudella, who made the piano produce tones that penetrated the heart.”⁶

The article, signed by D. G. Iamandi, is an extensive and analytical column commenting on musical pieces, performers, styles and aesthetic emotions, which reflects the emergence of a critical musical discourse in the Iași press. The author evaluates clarity, certainty, harmony, expressive interpretation, etc., which shows the existence of criteria for artistic judgment, a significant step towards the professionalization of music reception. The soirée takes place in the New Young Ladies' Secondary School, in an elitist educational context, and is addressed to a “distinguished audience,” which shows the consolidation of a cultivated audience and a space for academic musical performance, important for the history of the reception of classical music in Iași.

6. Directions for future research

The research will continue by going deeper into the qualitative analysis of the musical content published in the Iași press, with an emphasis on the language of criticism, aesthetic orientations, international comparisons and the role of music reviews in the formation of artistic taste. A special emphasis will be placed on the recovery and contextualization of signed articles, the identification of French and German influences, as well as highlighting the female presence in the field of interpretation, pedagogy and music journalism.

7. Conclusions

The present study has aimed to provide an overview of the presence and evolution of music criticism in the Iași press between 1840 and 1945, through a quantitative and technical approach of the sources identified on the *Arcanum* platform. The inventory of publications, the thematic classification, the analysis of music columns and the identification of relevant columnists allow us to outline a solid documentary framework which reflects not only the history of the local cultural press, but also the first forms of musicological discourse in modern Romania. Subsequent evolution turned music criticism into an essential pillar of Romanian culture, influencing the perception and appreciation of authentic musical values.

⁶ D.G. Iamandi (1893). *Musical soiree at the new Young Ladies' Secondary School*, „Era Nouă”, Year IV, issue no. 181, 21 March 1893, pp. 3-4.

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Stylistic Similarities and Contrasts between George Enescu's *Third Sonata 'in the Romanian Folk Style'* and *Childhood Impressions*

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Abstract: This article explores the stylistic similarities and contrasts between George Enescu's *Third Sonata "in the Romanian Folk Style"* and *Childhood Impressions*, both composed during the mature period of the composer's creative life. Central to the discussion are Enescu's innovative approaches to rhythm, meter, agogics, and modal-harmonic language, as well as his ability to evoke deep emotional and programmatic layers through subtle sonic means. The *Third Sonata* alternates between rhythmic rigor and instability, drawing upon the expressivity of traditional Romanian fiddler music and the qualities of the human voice. In *Childhood Impressions*, rhythmic elements serve a vivid narrative function, depicting natural imagery and childhood memories with remarkable precision and imagination. The article also examines the dense use of tempo and dynamic markings, which contribute significantly to the dramatic articulation and coloristic richness of both works. Particular attention is given to Enescu's ability to generate expressive intensity using delicate dynamics and microstructural agogic changes. Moreover, the programmatic elements in both compositions are shown to transcend surface description, offering complex inner landscapes and psychological depth. The mature Enescu achieves a unique synthesis between folkloric suggestion and structural sophistication, culminating in apotheotic codas that encapsulate a profound existential dimension.

Keywords: George Enescu, Romanian folk elements, Rhythm and agogics, Programmatic music.

1. Introduction and Context

Belonging to the mature period of George Enescu's creative output, the *Third Sonata in the Romanian Folk Style* and *Impresii din copilărie* [Childhood Impressions] bring to the forefront a distinctive style marked by transformations at rhythmic, melodic, modal-harmonic, and dramatic levels.

Rhythm, meter, and agogic fluidity evolved continuously throughout Enescu's works. While the rhythmic writing in his first two sonatas for violin and piano remains relatively conservative, starting with his early 20th-century compositions we observe a process of gradually dissolving traditional structures – those that rely on the perception of metric pillars or strong beats – and replacing them with endless chains

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The work suggests a genuine authentication of *fiddler* performance practice, not only of the *țambal* and *cobza*, but especially of the violin. Enescu employs the rigor of classical idioms to portray the captivating timbres, articulations, dynamic subtleties, and agogic flexibility that characterize Romanian folk music.

A distinctive feature of the *Third Sonata* lies in its notational innovations, which extend into previously uncharted territory within the European tradition. Enescu devises a new symbolic system to notate microtonality on the violin: a flat with a diagonal slash lowers the pitch by a quarter-tone, while a similarly altered sharp raises it by the same interval. The performance instructions at the beginning of the violin part form a dense legend that might appear discouraging to many performers, due to the abundance and precision of markings whose cumulative effect, paradoxically, often seems remarkably subtle. Thus appear signs such as *mp*, *bp*, *pf*, *bf*, *psf*, *bsf*, *prfz*, *brfz*—indications that generate microscopic distinctions within the sonic discourse, giving the music an expressive nuance and authenticity rarely encountered in Western notational systems of the time.

3. Programmatic Rhythm and Imagery in *Childhood Impressions*

A refined example of masterful rhythmic expressivity appears in the miniature *Pârâiaș în fundul grădinii* [*The Brook at the Back of the Garden*] from *Childhood Impressions*. This scene is vividly painted through sextuplet groups combined with sixteenth-note duplet and triplet figures, brilliantly illustrating the winding and lively path of the water stream, seemingly circling around a stone.

Notably, this scene follows the highly intricate *Lăutarul* [*The Fiddler*], where the narrative unfolds through a cadence of metrical-rhythmic structures. Continuing further, we encounter *Pasărea din colivie* [*The Caged Bird*], in which the violin appears to improvise — though no sound is left to chance; every detail is meticulously notated. Similarly, in *Cucul din perete* [*The Cuckoo in the Wall*], the rhythmic character is built upon alternating triplets and duplets, sometimes elliptically omitting a sixteenth note.



Fig. 2 G. Enescu, *Childhood Impressions* – *The Bird in the Cage and the Cuckoo in the Wall*, ms. 18-19

Enescu recounted that the cuckoo was a mechanical one and was loved almost as much as the poor caged bird. The striking of seven o'clock at the end of the scene symbolized the moment when the bird was to be covered for the night.

In *Cântecul de leagăn* [Lullaby], we again witness a combination of stable and fragmented meters — for example, 2/4 or 4/4 with 3/8 — with an unexpected cadence occurring after just three and a half bars, subtly evoking the ancestral tenderness of the Romanian soundscape. In *Luna care traversează ferestrele* [The Moon Crossing the Windows], the rhythmic material is built on streams of six sixteenth notes played in a diaphanous dynamic, imparting an ethereal, flowing, almost unreal atmosphere — in sharp contrast with the well-defined rhythm of *Vântul în șemineu* [The Wind in the Fireplace] and especially *Răsăritul de soare* [Sunrise], which presents an overwhelming vision of pulse, with downbeats seemingly sculpted to depict explosive collisions between the vertical dimension (to which the composer aspires) and the horizontal one (to which he still belongs).

4. Tempo and Dynamic Nuance in Enescu's Mature Works

A fundamental feature of Enescu's mature works is his handling of tempo and dynamics. It is well known that upon their first encounter with the score of the *Third Sonata* or *Childhood Impressions*, performers are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of interpretive markings. Tempo changes are frequent — sometimes occurring measure by measure.



Fig. 3 G. Enescu, *Sonata a III-a* "in Romanian Folk Style", Part I, ms. 89–92

In *Impressions from Childhood*, the variation of tempi supports the idea of an impressionistic compositional aesthetic. The opening is marked at quarter note = 52, a rather flowing tempo that subsequently shifts to 46, 42, and 40 (the principal indications, interrupted by insertions reflecting limited deviations in flow – 52 and 46 on the metronome). The choice of a descending tempo curve

reflects the depiction of a delicate stream that gradually grows, accumulating an impressive volume—an evolution that calls for a significantly slower pace.

RUISSELET AU FOND DU JARDIN
Andante tranquillo e flessibile *harm.*

(♩=52)

dolcissimo, diáfano C.1. *p>bp* C.2. C.1. *harm.*

And^{te} tranquillo e flessibile *bp* *dolcissimo, con una sonorità acqualica*

harm. C.2. C.1. *senza rigore* *lusingando* *senza rigore* *delicatamente*

Fig. 4 G. Enescu, *Childhood Impression - Pârâiaș în fundul grădinii* [*The Brook at the Back of the Garden*], ms. 1-5

At the same time, an interesting relationship may be established between the harmonic structures—initially not overly dense, in accordance with the fluid movement—and the tempo map, highlighting the inverse relationship between motion and harmonic weight. In other words, as the sonorities become more chromatic, at times even evoking richly exotic inflections, the tempo slows down to support the imagined effect of the brook transforming into a grand and imposing flow.

In the same context, the writing in the penultimate tableau of *Childhood Impressions*, stands out through several elements, primarily related to dynamics. What strikes the listener is the muted effect accompanying the violin line throughout the entire section, as well as the consistently restrained dynamic range of the piano part. The tableau is constructed through ascending sequences, repeated without pause from the bass to the treble register—a continuously repressed motion, underscored by indications such as *obscurο*, *sordamente*, and *fluttuoso*.

Enescu deliberately avoids creating violent or overtly dramatic effects, choosing instead to counter the apotheotic discourse with the evocation of two principal sound layers: one suggestive of wind (through chromaticism and dynamic contouring—*crescendi* and *decrescendi*), and the other of thunder, which intermittently disrupts the otherwise steady sonic flow (through sudden dynamic peaks). Thunderclaps are articulated at key moments: measure 7 (*pf* > *molto p*), 18 (*rfz*), 24 (*ten. ff* in the violin), and 26 (*ff* in both violin and piano)—the final major outburst in the overall narrative.

The variation of tempi throughout the work further supports the idea of an impressionistic compositional aesthetic. The opening is marked at quarter note = 52, a rather flowing tempo that subsequently shifts to 46, 42, and 40—principal tempo markings occasionally interrupted by brief insertions at 52 and 46, reflecting subtle fluctuations in pace. The descending tempo curve reflects the image of a delicate stream gradually growing in force, accumulating volume—a transformation that calls for an increasingly slower pulse.

Moreover, an interesting relationship emerges between harmonic structure and tempo: the initial harmonies are relatively light, in keeping with the fluent motion, but as the harmonic language becomes more chromatic—at times even richly exotic—the tempo slows down to sustain the imagined evolution of the brook into a grand and imposing flow. In some cases, an extraordinary number of agogic modifications can be identified within a 2–3-minute passage. For example, in *Luna care traversează ferestrele* [*The Moon Crossing the Windows*], no fewer than 14 different tempo indications appear.

Similar observations apply to dynamic markings. Enescu's mature compositions feature an astonishing variety of expressive nuances, with a particular emphasis on soft dynamics — ranging from *ppp* to *mp* — which serve to produce distinctive colors within specific sections. Alongside his abundant agogic indications, dynamics are used to animate even the smallest musical cells, offering them either energy or heightened delicacy.

At the same time, the need for elevated dramatic articulation calls for exceptional dynamic range, marked by striking contrasts. It is worth noting that the completion of *Œdipe* in 1922 had a profound impact on the composer's subsequent chamber works for violin and piano. The heightened dramatic demands introduced in *Œdipe* would soon permeate his instrumental writing, bringing with them an expanded emotional and expressive scope.

5. Programmatic Suggestiveness and Folkloric Symbolism

When discussing the *Sonata Torso*, scholars have emphasized the importance of the coda in shaping the overall dramatic conception. However, this coda merely foreshadows the apotheotic grandeur found in the conclusions of both the *Third Sonata* and *Childhood Impressions* — truly exceptional moments, nearly impossible to match in terms of dramatic intensity within a work limited to just two instruments. This immense release of energy is further enhanced by the programmatic nature of the two compositions.

In *Childhood Impressions*, the programmatic intent is made explicit through the titles of the individual tableaux. In contrast, the *Third Sonata* evokes its own narrative world through references to the *mioritic* space of Romanian folklore, nature imagery, and the imitation of folk instruments and sounds. Musicologist Pascal Bentoïu categorizes Enescu's descriptive elements into three types: external, internal, and external as seen from within. These categories

can also be applied to the Romanian folk elements in the *Third Sonata* — such as the *fluier* (shepherd's pipe), the obsessive cricket motif in the second movement, the *hora* appearing in varied forms across the second and third movements, the *țambal* with its characteristic resonance, *chiuituri* (shouts), *whistling*, leaf-blowing sounds, and the whirling wind.

What defines the dramaturgy of these two works is the eloquence of suggestion — their ability to create images that are instantly and precisely identifiable by the listener. All of these elements reinforce the notion of the “*Romanian folk character*”. However, in *Childhood Impressions*, this idea is deepened and nuanced through the expansion of the natural tableaux. The apocalyptic *Furtună în noapte* [*Storm at Night*], for instance, is presented from an unusual perspective: not as an objective portrayal of a natural phenomenon, but as seen and felt by a terrified child. The focus is on the child's inner emotional world, which Enescu invites us to inhabit.

Here, the composer alters the angle of perception, channeling repressed energy into a musical texture that is not overly dense. The dynamic palette — *pp*, *p*, *mp* — is surprisingly restrained for a scene meant to depict a violent storm, and the use of mute on the violin throughout the entire tableau contributes to the atmosphere of subdued tension. Had the sonority been more robust or texturally dense, the center of gravity and dramaturgical arc of the work would likely have shifted. In this form, however, the paroxysmal climax in *Răsăritul de soare* (*Sunrise*) emerges as a golden crown — a culminating point that casts existential light over the entire work.

6. Conclusion: Expressive Synthesis and Existential Reach

In both the *Third Sonata* and *Childhood Impressions*, George Enescu achieves a rare and profound synthesis between folk inspiration, programmatic expressiveness, and refined structural craftsmanship. His control over rhythm, agogics, and dynamic subtleties allows for immense emotional resonance, while the interplay between evocative gesture and rigorous construction creates works of both poetic immediacy and lasting depth.

Through imagery, rhythm, color, and contrast, these two works not only honor Enescu's Romanian roots but also explore universal human emotions — nostalgia, fear, wonder, and transcendence — placing them among the most significant achievements of 20th-century chamber music.

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A musician's cultural resistance in the Theresienstadt camp. Viktor Ullmann

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Abstract: A personality shrouded in mystery for three decades since his tragic death by extermination at Auschwitz in 1944, the composer, conductor and critic Viktor Ullmann, Jewish by origin (born in Teschen, Silesia), disciple of Arnold Schönberg, integrated into a synthetic culture (Polish, Czech, German, Austrian) through his general-musical training, his creative development (influences of composers Gustav Mahler, Alexander von Zemlinsky, Alban Berg), remains little known in the consciousness of posterity. From the discovery in 1975 of the visionary work *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder Die Tod-Verweigerung* to the present day, although exegesis has unearthed full scores or fragments, manuscripts of opus in various genres, nevertheless, there is still enough reluctance to approach it interpretatively. We believe that it would be provocative, especially the approach to the works completed between 1942 and 1944, when the musician was imprisoned in the Theresienstadt camp. Starting from the fact that this year marks the 80th anniversary of his death, the purpose of this study is to evoke the personality of Viktor Ullmann, trying to highlight the idea that his openness to the creative assimilation of philosophical and literary concepts of the time was an impetus for the realization of valuable works, moreover, a form of resistance, of survival, in the terrifying context of the Theresienstadt compositional phase.

Keywords: Viktor Ullmann, opera, Theresienstadt, culture, camp.

1. Introduction

The passion for the Jewish-born musician, pianist, composer, conductor and Theresienstadt critic Viktor Ullmann was triggered by reading the essay *Goethe and the Ghetto*¹, quoted in numerous publications, which surprises with its controversial, metaphorical content, encrypted in a *code of suffering*, challenging the musicologist to decipher the depth of the message: “Theresienstadt was and remains for me a school that teaches structure [...], where one was unable to experience that weight of cruelty[...] I have composed quite a lot of new music here in Theresienstadt, mostly at the request of pianists, singers and conductors for the purpose of the Ghetto’s recreation periods[...] In addition, future generations will care little for the lack of music paper that we

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¹ Viktor Ullmann (1944). *Goethe and Ghetto*, <https://viktorullmannfoundation.com/viktor/>

presently experience. I emphasize only the fact that in my musical work at Theresienstadt, I have bloomed in musical growth and not felt myself at all inhibited: we simply did not sit and lament on the shores of the rivers of Babylon that our will for culture was not sufficient to our will to exist[...]”². Surprisingly, this essay, reflecting the artist's dignity, not without irony, was written in 1944, around the same time as the banned work *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder Die Tod-Verweigerung*.

Paradoxically, at a time when Ullmann considered that the environment did not hinder creativity, that it did not excuse a lack of compositional or interpretative performance, he was deported to *Auschwitz* together with the librettist Peter Kien in the same year, entrusting the manuscripts of the score to the prisoner Emil Utitz, the camp librarian. Utitz survived and passed the document on to another colleague, Dr. Hans Gunther Adler. The first edition was prepared between 1973-1975 by Kerry Woodward, an English musician close to the Adler family, and premiered on December 16, 1975 in Amsterdam. It is precisely the absence of an initially ideologically directed and later demonstrative reaction to the performance staged after three decades that constitutes the premise of this study.

Starting from the brief bibliography systematized a decade ago, the pianist and composer Christophe Sirodeau wondered in his article *Actualité de Viktor Ullmann*³, what was the reason for the delayed reception of the writings about the musician whose particularly complex thought could only be discovered by accessing two biographies written by Verena Naegele⁴ and Ingo Schultz⁵, as well as texts signed by himself. "Surprisingly, no serious monograph had been completed in English or French by 2013”⁶. With the exception of Jean-Jaques van Vlasselaer⁷, who had been researching for several years in order to publish a study on music in the camps in *Musiques: une encyclopédie pour le XXIe siècle* by Jean-Jacques Nattiez⁸, but which never came to be, in French there were a few pages about Ullmann mentioned in the book *Les voix étouffées du 3ème*

² Karen Lin Uslin (2015). *Writings of Musicians: the Documents of Viktor Ullmann and Gideon Klein*, in: *Grasping at Hours of Freedom: Musical Life in the Terezin Concentration Camp*, A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music of The Catholic University of America In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree Doctor of Philosophy, Washington, D.C., p. 39.

³ Christophe Sirodeau (2013). *Actualité de Viktor Ullmann' par Christophe Sirodeau*, in vol.: *Art, Intellect and Politics*, pp. 483-513, http://www.christophesirodeau.com/Christophe/V_Ullmann.html

⁴ Verena Naegele (2002). *Viktor Ullmann - Komponieren in verlorener Zeit*, Dittrich Verlag, Köln.

⁵ Ingo Schultz (1993). *Viktor Ullmann 26 Kritiken über Musikalische Veranstaltungen in Theresienstadt*, Bockel Verlag, Neumünster.

⁶ Christophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 485

⁷ Jean-Jacques van Vlasselaer (2004). *The Triumph of the Human Spirit: Ullmann in Theresienstadt*, Carleton University, Ottawa.

⁸ Jean-Jacques Nattiez (ed. 2003). *Musiques: une encyclopédie pour le XXIe siècle*, Actes Sud/Cité de la musique, Paris.

*Reich – Entartete Musik*⁹ by Amaury du Closel and a brief note in the volume *Le destin juif et la musique – trois mille ans d'histoire* by Frans Lemaire¹⁰.

Another important piece of research is the dissertation thesis *Musical Life in the Terezin Concentration Camp*¹¹, based on documents provided by the Pamatnik Memorial, the archives of the United States Holocaust Museum, and researchers at the Institute for the Study of War and Genocide in Amsterdam, as well as the testimonies of Theresienstadt survivors who have shared their stories over the years.

The chapter *Musicians' writings: the Documents of Viktor Ullmann and Gideon Klein*¹² analyzes the cultural activities in the camp from the perspective of these artists, both of whom had a rising career before their deportation. The material focuses on Ullmann's twenty-six chronicles, which paint a picture of the imprisoned performers.

2. Theresienstadt – a “model cultural-artistic center”

What was Theresienstadt? Officially a “model camp”¹³ for the Czech resistance. According to historian Wolfgang Benz, Theresienstadt was a town evacuated inhabitants by order from Berlin in February 1942, transformed into a refuge center where Czech artists arrived and were allowed to practice their profession. Rapidly, Theresienstadt's exclusively Jewish population grew under deplorable conditions of survival. However, through clever manipulation of propaganda, the Nazis misled a Red Cross delegation in June 1944 and, two months later, made the movie “The Führer Gives a City to the Jews”¹⁴, a painful testimony to a collapse of humanity. Among the personalities in Theresienstadt in 1942, it is worth mentioning that along with Viktor Ullmann, the musicians Karel Ančerl, Pavel Haas, Hans Krása, and Gideon Klein were part of the disastrous decision signed on October 16, 1944, on the basis of which they were to be deported to Auschwitz. Haas and Krása were gassed the next day, Ullmann the third, Klein was transferred to Füstengrube, where he died in January 1945. Ančerl remains the miracle of this massacre.

⁹ Amaury du Closel (2005). *Les voix étouffées du 3ème Reich - Entartete Musik*, Actes Sud /Cité de la musique, Paris.

¹⁰ Frans C. Lemaire (2001). *Le destin juif et la musique - trois mille ans d'histoire*, Fayard, Paris.

¹¹ Karen Lin Uslin, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-54.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Klass Coulembier (2017). *Présentation musique dans les camps*, translation by Carine Chauran, pp. 52-59, <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/5730>

¹⁴ Kurt Gerron (1944). *Nazi propaganda film about Theresienstadt/Terezin*, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1000172>

3. Viktor Ullmann – biographical and creative journey

Turning our attention to the personality of the musician Viktor Ullmann, we will emphasize his relations with artists of the time, his contact with the labyrinthine realm of anthroposophy, the positive and negative consequences of this pseudo-science on his career, his collaborations with anthroposophical librettists – the premises of symbolic performances in the context of a growing tense atmosphere generated by Nazi ideology, the years spent at Theresienstadt, creatively productive but psychologically catastrophic, culminating in the problematization of *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder die Tod-Verweigerung*, the assumed testament of Ullmann, the musician who recovered his identity and discovered the path to salvation.

He was born in Teschen (Silesia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) on Czech territory (like Gustav Mahler), on the borders of Poland and Moravia, in 1898. The father, an army officer who converted to Catholicism, was knighted as Baron of Tannfels. In 1909, he moved to Vienna, where he studied law at the University of Vienna, and in 1916 enlisted as a soldier, serving on the Italian front at the Isonzo. Aged 20, he felt lonely and burdened by the drama of war¹⁵.

In regards to music, there is little valid data about his studies. He had lessons with Joseph Polnauer, a disciple of Schoenberg. Before the end of the First World War, he enrolled in Schoenberg's classes at (Moedling). Another musician he had the opportunity to meet was Alban Berg, who became a friend¹⁶. He also took lessons with Eduard Steuermann, a recognized pianist. Through Schoenberg he also met Alexander von Zemlinski, whom he later joined in Prague. At the end of 1919 he became his accompanist, assistant conductor at the New German Theater, which has also influenced his creative style¹⁷. He married Martha Koref, settling in Prague for seven years. Gradually, he began to conduct successful performances (Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and Berg's *Wozzeck*), to the extent of the trust placed in him by Alexander von Zemlinski. His first elaborate compositions in the quartet genre date from 1923, although the early lieder were created in 1919, a genre he consistently favored. They are lost melodies, as are most of the works before the Theresienstadt period. International creative recognition came as early as 1926 with *Schoenberg's Variations and double fugue (on a theme) for piano Op. 3*¹⁸.

In 1927 Ullmann left Prague and became the musical director of the Aussig Opera until 1928.

¹⁵ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

¹⁶ Jennifer A. K. Zabelski (2003). *Viktor Ullmanns Terezin Lieder: A Performance Guide to Songs for Soprano or High Voice*, B.M., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, p. 15.

¹⁷ Karen Lin Uslin, *op. cit.*, p.40.

¹⁸ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

3.1. Entering the anthroposophical circle

His contact with the musician Alois Haba, who specialized in microtonics, an aesthetic that seemed far removed from his preoccupations, mediated his entry into the world of anthroposophists. Interestingly, Ullmann's first reactions to this trend were negative. In 1931, however, he gave up his musical activities in favor of managerial ones for some time, as director of the anthroposophical bookshop *Novalis* in Stuttgart, a position he held until 1933. "The decision to resign was not only due to the rise of Hitler, but also to the bankruptcy of the bookstore. He still did not feel threatened as a Jew, and the anthroposophical movement was not banned until 1935."¹⁹

3.1.1. An introduction to anthroposophy

Originating from theosophy, in Rudolf Steiner's early 20th century vision, anthroposophy entailed an insistence on the "superiority of European esoteric traditions"²⁰. Following his separation from theosophy, Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society. Shortly before the outbreak of war, he moved the organization's international headquarters to Dornach in Switzerland. While in 1886 Steiner published *The Theory of Knowledge in the Goethean Worldview*²¹, an epistemological inquiry based on reflection on others and the self, but surprisingly in 1910 he gave a lecture in Oslo on "The Mission of the National Spirit in Relation to North German Mythology"²². The "national spirit"²³ of Northern and Central Europe belonged, Steiner explained, to the "North Germanic peoples rooted in the Aryan race"²⁴. But the connection between Steiner's racially stratified pseudo-religion and the rise of the Nazis goes beyond philosophical parallelism. Anthroposophy was structured around a hierarchy of "biological, psychological, spiritual" characteristics²⁵, all correlated with the concept of *race*²⁶. The affinities with Nazi discourse are obvious. We believe that Ullmann was aware of these contradictory theories, and had assimilated Steiner's volumes and, in particular, his 1925 synthesis work, *Anthroposophical Theses*, on the esotericism of this *occult science*, which was suited to a spiritually enlightened elite whose humanist orientation was merely a *facade* masking the factual disaster of Nazi ideology through the premises of racial ideology.

¹⁹ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 487-488

²⁰ Peter Staudenmaier (2015). *Anthroposophie et écofascisme*, retrieved from <https://veritesteinier.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/anthroposophie-et-ecofascisme-parpeter-staudenmaier/>

²¹ Rudolf Steiner (1996). *Goethe's Theory of Knowledge: An Outline of the Epistemology of His Worldview*, retrieved from https://www.spiritualrs.net/Conferinte/GA002/GA002_index.html.

²² Peter Staudenmaier, *op. cit.*

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁵ Rudolf Steinerscholen, *Antroposofie en fascisme*, retrieved from <https://www.antroposofia.be/steinerscholen/wordpress/antroposofie-en-fascisme/>

²⁶ Peter Staudenmaier, *op. cit.*

3.2. Stage

Contact with Prague meant a return to a passion for music. “Ullmann was not the only artist to flee Nazi Germany to Prague in 1933, an opportunity to meet Leo Kestenberg”²⁷ (an important figure in German music education and close to F. Busoni). Although Prague in the inter-war period was characterized by an effervescence of cultural offerings, the reality of heightened tensions in the Czech, German and Jewish communities was evident. Against this controversial backdrop, Ullmann won Czech appreciation by completing the orchestral version of *Schoenberg Variations*, which, although unfavorably reviewed by the critic Th. Adorno, was awarded the Emil Hertzka Prize in Vienna.

At the same time, it is the period of crystallization of a performance on the spiritual experience of the anthroposophical movement, which the musician had been thinking about for several years. Based on a libretto by Albert Steffen, Ullmann realized *Der Sturz des Antichrist* (*The Fall of Antichrist*) in 1935. If the religious symbolism of the plot generates the traditional conflict between the evil force illustrated by the tyranny of the despot and the good one suggested by the nobility of the artist, whose spirituality of character overcomes suffering and defeats the Antichrist, from a musical perspective, the opera is a product of Schoenberg's tonal-post-Romantic school²⁸. Like Alban Berg, it incorporates instrumental structures, such as fugues in dramatic sections or extended passages in march-rhythm with clear reference to characters, to ironic, sarcastic stage moments²⁹. The stylistic influences of Alexander Zemlinsky, with whom Ullmann collaborated as a conductor at the Prague Theater, are unmistakable. It is clear, as the musician pointed out in a letter to the librettist following a meeting with the conductor Felix Weingartner, to whom he was given the score, that the association of the theme with political events in Germany jeopardized the performance. Paradoxically, Ullmann won the Hertzka Prize again in 1936³⁰.

3.3 *Der Sturz des Antichrist*

We note that in the mid-1930s, the style was original, falling between tonal and atonal, far removed from the personal dodecaphonic practice of *Schoenberg Variations*. A detail that contributed to his detachment from Schoenberg's circle, especially after Alban Berg's passing in 1935. “Can we explain the fact that although the Kolisch Chamber Ensemble, to whom Ullmann dedicated the final version of the *Schoenberg Variations* opus, took the score to America in 1939,

²⁷ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 490.

²⁸ Roberto Becker (2021). *Aus dem Inneren einer Diktatur*, retrieved from <https://www.concerti.de/oper/oper-leipzig-der-sturz-des-antichrist/>

²⁹ Roland H. Dippel (2021). *Der Sturz des Homo Deus Viktor Ullmann: Der Sturz des Antichrist*, retrieved from <https://www.die-deutsche-buehne.de/kritiken/der-sturz-des-homo-deus/>

³⁰ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

they have never performed it?”³¹. It is clear that this version had a strategic purpose for Ullmann, for recognition abroad and, above all, to save himself from the Prague trap, realizing that danger was closing in. The simple question is: why didn't the Anthroposophical Society have the power to support him to get a Swiss visa? Or perhaps there was an ideological, moral conflict between its members and Ullmann? “In March 1939, it was too late. Czechoslovakia had been invaded by Hitler. The reality was that he became the victim of a ruthless bureaucracy of the Nazi authorities that prevented him from obtaining German citizenship. It was a time of deep grief, especially as he had also lost his father in 1938”³². Unfortunately, he was unable to take part in any public activities and his only concerts were private. On September 8, 1942, he was arrested and deported with his family to Theresienstadt. At the time, he regarded deportation “as an act of resignation, after a period of painful turmoil. Once in the camp, he had the chance to be released from forced labor, proving more creative than in previous years”³³. In charge of organizing concerts, he was interested in performing old music or giving lectures on various topics such as the relationship between sound and color.

3.4. *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder die Tod-Verweigerung*: emblematic opus in the creative context of Theresienstadt

Ullmann composed 3 piano sonatas, Jewish songs for voice and piano, choirs, a quartet and other manuscript works, where the musician seems to rediscover his Jewish identity, moreover, through the quotations (Zionist songs, Slovak national anthem, Hussite song, Lutheran chorale), he shows an openness to multiculturalism and different confessions.

In the following, we will focus on *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder die Tod-Verweigerung* (The Emperor of Atlantis or The Disobedience of Death) composed between 1943-1944. From the symbolic libretto we learn that “Harlequin and Death complain of the misery in which they no longer find their place. Men no longer know how to smile and don't even respect death anymore. The Emperor has issued a decree of war among his subjects. Death takes revenge by breaking his sword: men will no longer be able to die. The Emperor discovers that public executions are useless: the prisoners remain alive. He grants his subjects the blessing of eternal life. Anarchy spreads. Harlequin revives the childhood memories of the Emperor, who goes mad. Death promises to free people from all suffering if the Emperor is ready to die first...”³⁴.

³¹ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 495-496.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 497

³⁴ John Vandevent (2023). *Opera Profile: The story of Viktor Ullmanns Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, retrieved from <https://operawire.com/opera-profile-the-story-of-viktor-ullmans-der-kaiser-von-atlantis/>

The integrated subject of the aesthetics of the absurd, following the expressionist model of the hallucinatory dramaturgy of Kafka's novels, is proposed by the artist Petr Kien, a 25-year-old poet and writer, who personifies death in an age of absolute darkness. But death refuses to *die*... Depending on his decision ...the world can be saved...³⁵. Contact with the symbolic title cannot be neglected. For it was the very legend of Atlantis, of an advanced, utopian society possessing the wisdom of world peace, that stimulated the dreamers. Ullmann responded to the challenge by going beyond the simple idea of discovering the material remains of the vanished continent, and was in fact searching not for the body, but for the soul of Atlantis.

Anchored in an anthroposophical theme, based on the idea that humans can develop the intellectual capacity to connect to the spiritual dimension by transposing into imaginary spaces with symbolic valences, Ullmann conceived the work more as an allegory, “a satirical demonstration of Hitler's phantasmagoria for the Third Reich, of the ignorance of death and the seemingly endless war of Europe. However, since the Emperor's *game* ultimately fails in the end, the faith in the dignity of the human being becomes evident”³⁶. Thus understood, the message of the libretto goes beyond criticizing the Nazi regime, being a reaction against any totalitarian system, a call for tolerance and respect for humanity.

The chamber opera score was created for 7 soloists and 12 instrumentalists (strings, one flute, one oboe, one clarinet, one trumpet, percussion), available at Theresienstadt at the time. The one-act work contains a prologue and 4 scenes. In the prologue, it is announced that a performance is to take place, where the other characters are revealed: a soldier, a bridegroom with his hair cut, a drummer, Harlequin and Death. The music unfolds in the manner of a collage, with changes of style and character causing different numbers to follow one another: melodrama, recitative, duet, trio, “in a sonority mixed with various influences in the styles of Schoenberg, jazz, dance music of the 1920s (a la Kurt Weill), but also with quotations, allusions to early music or to pages from the opus *Das Lied von der Erde* by G. Mahler or the symphonic works of Josef Suk”³⁷. The sonorous expression covers a wide range of antinomic aesthetic categories (lyrical-dramatic-ironic-sarcastic), in the manner of the heterogeneous sonority of Vienna in the first decades of the 20th century.

³⁵ Jean Lacroix (2022). *Viktor Ullmann: la Mort, porteuse de salut?*, retrieved from <https://www.crescendo-magazine.be/viktor-ullmann-la-mort-porteuse-de-salut/>

³⁶ Mindy Elicia Buckton (2013). *Re-Contextualizing Viktor Ullmann's Der Kaiser von Atlantis Within Twentieth-Century German Opera*, A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters in Arts in the School of Music, University of Victoria, p. 121, retrieved from <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/377fb1d1-22c2-42a4-9b8f-66ac6f5ffa6d/content>

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

Of particular note is the meditative final moment, inspired by the Lutheran chorale *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* [Our God is a fortress], whose emotionality comes from the transformation of the sacred text into the dramatic vision of librettist Petr Kien, a young prison inmate: "Come, O Death, dearest guest, into the room of our heart. Take away the suffering and burden of life, Give us respite from pain and misery, Teach us the desire and necessity to live, In honor of our brothers"³⁸.

Returning to one of Viktor Ullmann's aphorisms from his diary *Fremde Passagiere* [*The Foreign Passenger*], himself feeling alienated in the dictatorship of the Nazi regime, we read: "The deepest pain cannot be turned into music, no words can give it form, it does not create form out of earthly stone, it is silent, covered by the incredible intellectual dignity with which Ullmann resists hell"³⁹.

4. Conclusions

The composer, conductor and critic Viktor Ullmann, a tireless seeker of the spirituality of the imaginary sound, remains in the consciousness of posterity a model of the artist's resistance through culture in tragic conditions. The contact with philosophy and anthroposophy, fields that interfered with music, either in the conception of librettos or in the process of abstraction of technically evolved works, was a landmark in the struggle against Nazi ideology from a general-cultural perspective and, unfortunately, an impediment related to the distorted reception of symbols by the powers that be. However, the ability of the visionary musician with the realization of *The Fall of the Antichrist*, which anticipated the artificiality of the free-entry mask theater called Theresienstadt, led him to continue his survival in the search for identity by concentrating on compositions with inserted quotations and melograms, preparing the great maskless performance entitled *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, which would ensure his salvation in a universe of veiled confessional or racial discrimination.

For the past ten years, Viktor Ullmann has been a programmed, interpreted and commented artist, and the scientific and artistic actions aimed at rehabilitating his personality are well known, whether in association with the other Theresienstadt creators or on an individual level. Yet, it is impossible not to wonder. Had he survived the Theresienstadt moment, would he have had a different fate? We cannot draw a verdict, but the reality is that he would have had difficulty facing the prejudices of the years that followed, because, regardless of the general socio-political and cultural context, but all the more so when the mentality of a society is marked by ideology and, implicitly, by its consequences in the different segments of propaganda, the artist is received in relation to the era to which he belongs, to his favorite genres, to the fashionable

³⁸ Mindy Elicia Buckton, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

³⁹ Cristophe Sirodeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-498.

music. However, what was, unfortunately, the result of the valorization of Theresienstadt's creation in the following decades? That the predominant works were marches, cabaret performances, entertainment, propaganda creations, requiring a long period of time to bring to light that valuable opuses were also composed, whose authors were stuck in the trap of the time given to them. Therefore, the era once over, any recuperative act although welcome, does not benefit from immediate impact in the current reception. It remains to convince ourselves by revisiting Viktor Ullmann's music as a cultural act and beyond!

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Between globalisation and identity: polystylism and World Music in postmodernism

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Abstract: Globalization has caused contemporary music to face new challenges related to the preservation of cultural identity and the integration of stylistic diversity in a framework with increasingly permeable borders. The present paper explores the role of polystylism and of the *World Music* phenomenon in postmodern music, analysing how these trends contribute to the development of a complex musical language. Polystylism, by integrating several styles, and *World Music*, by adapting traditions to modern contexts, allow composers to create new hybrid forms. This study will provide important examples of creators who anticipated this stylistic synthesis – Heitor Villa-Lobos, Doina Rotaru – or perfected it – Osvaldo Golijov (combining traditional Sephardic and Arabic influences) and Unsuk Chin (reintegrating sounds from Korean street theatre through modern orchestration techniques). Their work demonstrates how postmodern aesthetics combine or offer new meanings to various influences, creating bridges between different cultural identities and aesthetics.

Keywords: globalisation, identity, polystylism, postmodernism, *World Music*.

1. Introduction

Globalization, an increasingly present and influential phenomenon in the contemporary landscape, has accelerated the interaction and interconnection between various musical traditions and styles and contributed to the shaping of phenomena such as polystylism and *World Music*.

Researching this phenomenon and its impact on contemporary music becomes essential for understanding the direction in which artistic creation is heading today. The difficulties of this research derive from the dynamic and fluid nature of the phenomenon. Globalization is not a linear process, and its influences on music vary depending on the cultural, economic and technological contexts. Thus, the problem of identity in music, in this context, consists of finding a balance between the influences of globalization and the preservation of cultural specificity, while providing space for innovation and personal expression. Phenomena such as polystylism and *World Music* combine various styles, but raise the question of whether these fusions are an authentic evolution or a

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simplification of cultural complexity. In this case, postmodernism provides the conceptual framework for understanding and integrating cultural and stylistic diversity in a world shaped by globalisation.

Postmodernism is a complex and elusive artistic attitude that reflects the dynamics of the ever-changing contemporary world. The study of this phenomenon has been undertaken by leading authors such as Charles Jencks (in *Die Postmoderne. Der neue Klassizismus in Kunst und Architektur*, 1987), Andreas Huyssen (in *The Search of Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s*, 1981), Jean-François Lyotard (in *La condition postmoderne*, 1979) and Wolfgang Iser (in *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 1993). Their research suggests that one of the elements underlying the evolution of postmodernism is *diversity*, whether voluntary or involuntary.

In most cases, the introduction of the term “postmodern” is attributed to the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who in 1979 mentioned it in his work *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*, where he highlighted a break from modernism that occurred stylistically. This break should not be understood as a complete rejection of modernism, but as an evolution that embraces the scientific discoveries of the 20th century, without turning them into a rigid ideology. Thus, musical postmodernism is defined, in addition to the aforementioned *diversity*, by *pluralism* and *flexibility*, characteristics that allow composers to combine the past with the present in a free and non-constraining way.

On the other hand, the concept of polystylism has been used to describe the combination of several styles or techniques in a work in literature, visual arts, film, and especially music. In contemporary musicology, there are not many sources that define polystylism. The term appears rarely and is often associated with specific composers. In direct relation to music, the term was first mentioned by composer Alfred Schnittke in 1971, in the study called *Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music*. In his essay, Schnittke defines the two main principles of polystylism as “quotation and allusion”¹. Even a cursory glance at the sources that provide explanations about the polystylistic concept shows that the use of the term is mostly linked to the post-Soviet, Eastern European cultural space (former Socialist countries). From a compositional point of view, in many cases, polystylism has been associated with the collage process, but there are also other approaches that analyse stylistic interactions in the music of the 20th and 21st centuries and frame them within the polystylistic concept. This concept is considered to be a consequence of musical postmodernism, having its roots in the

¹ “Schnittke defined the two main principles of polystylism as quotation and allusion”, Baiba Jaunslaviete (2018). *The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Post-Soviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects*, Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, 2018, retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4309/ed02c667e3b91594a6aa48bab4f9629e7b88.pdf>, accessed on 7.03.2024.

works of composers such as Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Luciano Berio, Mauricio Kagel, and Alfred Schnittke.

2. *World Music* as a phenomenon

Also, in addition to the polystylistic concept, the *World Music* phenomenon is a musical and cultural movement with a growing international popularity, in recent decades. Although this concept has been theorised and debated extensively, its exact understanding has remained a subject of interpretation and discussion. There are few sources that provide a complete definition of the World Music phenomenon, as it is relatively new in the context of music research. Broadly speaking, World Music refers to traditional music from various cultures, often re-contextualised and integrated into the global circuit of the contemporary music industry.

In a first phase of my research, I came to the conclusion that this phenomenon is an important source of enrichment of the musical language. By means of this phenomenon, musicians can explore and better understand diversity, by closely analysing the various kinds of music performed by people from other spaces. We will thus see the integration of traditional music in contemporary contexts, investigating the way in which present-day composers use elements of *World Music* and the impact of this movement on contemporary polystylism, the way in which traditional and contemporary music interact and how musical resources can be used to create authentic artistic expression.

The transition to a postmodern aesthetic marked by fluidity and intertextuality was anticipated by a series of composers who innovatively explored the boundaries of traditional music and paved the way for this pluralistic aesthetic. One example is Heitor Villa-Lobos, whose cycle *Bachianas Brasileiras* (1930-1945) incorporates Brazilian rhythmic and melodic elements in a baroque-inspired framework, creating a bridge between cultures. An example from the Romanian space would be the composer Doina Rotaru, who showed an inclination towards nature symbolism, bringing archaic Romanian elements to the fore in *Salcia* [The Willow] (1984), which reflects a syncretic approach. These examples can be seen as forms of *avant la lettre postmodernism* – composers who, without explicitly operating in the register of postmodernism, anticipated many of the themes and aesthetic strategies associated with it.

Today's composers use elements of *World Music* not only as sources of inspiration, but also as means by which they can build bridges between different musical aesthetics, thus enriching the current musical language.

From the multiple possible examples, I have chosen two composers who come from different cultural and geographical backgrounds and are less known in the Romanian space: Osvaldo Golijov and Unsuk Chin.

Osvaldo Golijov was born in 1960 in La Plata, Argentina, to a family of Eastern European Jews with roots in Ukraine and Romania. As a child, he was

exposed to traditional Jewish, Argentine, and classical music. In the 1980s, Golijov moved to Israel to study composition, and later settled in the United States, where he developed his compositional style, characterized by the fusion of Western classical music with influences from *World Music*. This path prepared him for approaching complex and universal themes in many works commissioned by major festivals and stages, such as those present in the selected work – *Ayre* for ensemble and voice.

Unsub Chin, born in 1961 in Seoul, South Korea, is an example of a modernist composer who combines East Asian tradition with Western avant-garde techniques. Chin studied composition with György Ligeti and has lived in Berlin, a centre of contemporary music, since 1988. Unlike Golijov, Chin focuses on abstract sound structures and the integration of technology to a greater extent, and is also active in the field of electronic music. Her works are characterized by a language that avoids any stylistic conventionalism. At the same time, she remains connected to her Korean roots and recalls them in her music as a source of inspiration.

Ayre, whose name means “air” or “melody” in Mediaeval Spanish, is an 11-song cycle commissioned by Carnegie Hall for soprano Dawn Upshaw. It reconstructs an auditory journey through the Mediterranean region and explores the fusion of Spanish, Jewish, and Arabic cultural and musical influences that coexisted in Spain before the *Reconquista*² period, approximately 718–722. The *Re-conquest* was the process by which the Christian kingdoms of Northern Hispania (present-day Spain and Portugal) reconquered the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims (Arabs and Moors), a historical stage that unfolded over nearly 800 years. It was recorded and published on the album with the same name, which brings together two parts, the first one, *Ayre* by Osvaldo Golijov and the second one, *Folk Songs* for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, viola, cello, harp, and percussion by Luciano Berio³. *Ayre* was enthusiastically received upon its release, enjoying positive reviews,⁴ both as an album and as an original composition.

² “The Reconquista (Spanish and Portuguese for 're-conquest') or the re-conquest of al-Andalus was a series of military and cultural campaigns that European Christian kingdoms waged against the Muslim kingdoms following the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Umayyad Caliphate, culminating in the reign of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain. The beginning of the Reconquista is traditionally dated to the Battle of Covadonga (c. 718 or 722), in which an Asturian army achieved the first Christian victory over the forces of the Umayyad Caliphate since the beginning of the military invasion. The Reconquista ended in 1492 with the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada to the Catholic Monarchs.” *Reconquista*, Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconquista>

³ “The first part *Ayre* (for voice and orchestra) the pieces are all performed by the soprano Dawn Upshaw accompanied by the orchestra *The Andalucian Dogs*. In the second part *Folk Songs* (for voice and seven instruments) the soprano Dawn Upshaw is accompanied by Helen Tara O'Connor, Todd Palmer, Ljova, Erik Friedlander, Bridget Kibbey, Eric Poland and Gordon Gottlieb. In addition to the instruments mentioned in the pieces *Tancas serradas a muru* (Sardinian) and ‘Wa Habibi’ (Arabic) a laptop programmed with electronica “beat” was

Although the text on the CD cover describes the work as a journey into the world of the Jewish Mediterranean, this characterisation is somewhat limiting. In reality, the cycle includes songs and poems belonging to various Arabic, Christian and Muslim traditions, suggesting Golijov's desire to illustrate the idea of a large family, made up of different faiths and ethnicities. Designed for voice and instrumental ensemble, the cycle is based on ancient texts and melodies, reinterpreted in a modern manner. The texts are sung and sometimes recited in several languages – Hebrew, Castilian, the Sardinian dialect. The cycle contains 11 parts and Osvaldo Golijov uses text and music sources that range from the mediaeval poetry of Yehudah Halevy and Mahmoud Darwish, to the Sardinian anthem written by the magistrate of the Kingdom, Francesco Ignazio Mannu, and traditional Sephardic songs. The composer uses classical instruments in the construction of the ensemble, such as viola, cello, double bass, harp, clarinet in Bb/bass clarinet, horn in F, accordion, flute/alto flute, percussion, guitar, exotic instruments (conch and ronroco), but also electronic ones. He proposes the use of a synthesizer for special effects on the accordion (*Hyper-Accordion effects* in *Wa Habibi Intro* and *Hyper-Accordion effects* in *Wa Habibi Outro*): at the beginning of the score, he mentions various technical details regarding the setting of frequencies and registers (examples: 1. Ping Pong Delay with degradation on repeats / analogue delay simulation, 2. Reverb, 3. Whammy Pedal/pitch shifter). He recommends the use of a Digitech GHNX3 device or a similar one for reproducing the desired effects. It is stated that the *hyper-accordion* version is preferred, but, in its absence, a classic accordion can be used, taking into account the nuances and phrasing indications from the recording on the published album, as well as the acoustics of the space where the work will be performed.

Due to the lack of a direct interview with Osvaldo Golijov, the analysis of the themes and the selection of sources of inspiration for *World Music* was carried out based on direct observations of the pieces and the historical context. This approach has allowed me to identify several recurring themes in the work: **sacrifice, spirituality, family intimacy, cultural resistance, contemplation, continuity and unity**. These are relevant both to the historical narrative of the

used to provide a rhythmic driving background.” *Ayre*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayre_\(Golijov\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayre_(Golijov)).

⁴ Several specialised articles comment on Golijov's work. In his article, British journalist Robert Dennis Harris defines *Ayre* as “one of the defining works of our century”: “This polystylistic, transcultural melting pot of a song cycle is disorienting, rapturous, unsettling and transcendent.” *Opera News*

“Golijov has fashioned a careening, vital, emotional, wild concoction that demonstrates one essential fact: that all human emotions (and *Ayre* has them all) ... are shared and shareable.” *The Globe and Mail*

“Golijov's score makes magical use of his orchestra, from a full complement of cellos to a vivid brass section, to produce richly layered suggestions of natural sounds that range from birds and insects to a more momentous sense of the shifts in the greater cosmos from agitation to calm.” *Chicago Suntimes*

Reconquista and to the contemporary cultural and spiritual realities that manifest themselves in the phenomenon of globalisation. The evocation of the Reconquista is a symbolic starting point for the composer's musical reflection on tolerance, identity and dialogue between cultures. At a time when global conflicts reflected religious and cultural tensions, the work took on a particular contemporary relevance, underlining the importance of history for the modern world.

1. Sacrifice – Inspired by biblical tragedies (*Una Madre Comió Asado*), Golijov explores collective and individual suffering, reflecting on the meaning of sacrifice in history and spirituality. He uses slow rhythms, the connection with *Jeremiah's Lamentations*. He expresses the collective and personal pain of sacrifice.

2. Spirituality – Sephardic, Arabic and Christian influences (*Wa Habibi, Aiini Taqtiru, Yah, Anna Emtzacha*) underline the religious convergence and the search for transcendence, a fundamental element in the cultural narrative of the *Reconquista*. It takes on oriental ornamentation, expansive melodic lines, Christian, Arabic and Jewish influences.

3. Family intimacy – *Nani*, the Sephardic lullaby, conveys family warmth and continuity between generations. Simple melody, minimalist accompaniment.

4. Cultural resistance – *Tancas Serradas a Muru* illustrates the struggle to preserve one's identity in the face of assimilation, a theme that resonates with the Jewish exile and the peoples' struggle for autonomy. Marked rhythms, clear structure, political theme. It represents national identity and the struggle to preserve tradition.

5. Contemplation – *Luna* and *Kun Li-Guitari Wataran Ayyuha Al-Maa'* offers moments of reflection, creating introspective spaces that connect the past with modern sensibility.

6. Continuity and unity – *Ariadna en su Laberinto*, a quodlibet of traditional and original melodies. It brings together the themes of the cycle through a complex sound tapestry and brings to mind the idea of the circle, cyclicity, an element that can return.

The second example is *Gougalōn: Scenes from a Street Theatre* (2009), where composer Unsuk Chin uses diversity as a point of inspiration, exploring sound and technology in a conceptual way. She creates a modernist sound aesthetic, influenced by the avant-garde, but subtly preserves traditional themes. We recognize it in the presence of effervescent rhythms on percussion instruments, but she avoids making direct references to cultural traditions like Golijov does.

The work was created as part of the *Siemens Arts Programme* and first performed in Berlin and Frankfurt in 2009 by *Ensemble Modern*. The final version, however, was commissioned by the famous *Ensemble intercontemporain* and performed in Paris in 2012. The title, inspired by the Old German language, reflects a moment the composer experienced during a trip to Hong Kong and

Guangzhou between 2008 and 2009. The atmosphere of the poor old neighbourhoods, located near the giant video screens and ultra-modern buildings, awakened memories of her childhood in Seoul in the 1960s. It was a time of poverty and military dictatorship, before the city's accelerated modernisation. The composer particularly recalled a group of entertainers she frequently saw as a child in a suburb of Seoul. “Gougalōn” is a form of “imaginary folk music” – stylized, fragmented, and only seemingly primitive. The music is inspired by Korean tradition and street performances. The orchestration combines elements of contemporary writing with sounds that evoke traditional Korean instruments.

3. Conclusions

The inexhaustible diversity of combinations between distinct cultural sources in postmodern music reflects the tension between globalisation and identity. Polystylism and the integration of *World Music* elements outline two directions of the use of traditions. In the case of Golijov, there is a concrete perspective, where the processing of source melodies does not detract from their colour and specificity. On the other hand, in the case of Chin, we are dealing with a more scholarly, conceptual composition, in which rituals and source melodies nourish the composition without establishing themselves in the foreground of the musical discourse. Traditional materials are sublimated into an abstract compositional language, in which source rituals and melodies enrich the musical texture without becoming dominant elements. Thus, between the direct assumption of identity and its dilution in a globalised context, postmodern music offers a wide range of possibilities for integrating tradition.

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**Adrian Rațiu. The song *S-aștept?* [Shall I wait?]
with lyrics by Tudor Arghezi.
Stylistic and interpretative aspects**

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“If we did not have a soul, music would have created one for us.”
(Emil Cioran)

Abstract: One of the most erudite musicians of the 20th century, Adrian Rațiu, composer, teacher and musicologist trained in the atmosphere of the Bucharest Conservatory, but also in the summer courses in Darmstadt, consolidates his creative act on the idea of unity and balance of musical substance, thus determining, on a compositional level, a synthesis between free and rigorously organised structures. Adrian Rațiu succeeds – through the lied *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?] – in introducing us to the realm of Arghezi's profound and rich poetry, which has often been the seed of new musical masterpieces in the chamber style. The poem conveys the feeling of love, emotion, the excitement of waiting, of departure, fulfilment and frustration, in a stirring register of soul and language. The sound semiotics developed by the composer capitalises on the semantics of the lyrics written by a poet of the highest calibre, who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A craftsman of the highest literary refinement, the poet finds the complementarity of his lyrics in a subtle heterophonic musical rendition, offering us a sensitive score. It is a tribute to the blacksmith in the garden of Mărțișor, stirred by constellations in whose contemplation he loses himself in thoughts and fundamental existential questions.

Keywords: Adrian Rațiu, *lied*, poetic text semantics, vocal interpretation, musical analysis.

One of the most erudite musicians of the 20th century, Adrian Rațiu, composer, teacher and musicologist trained at the Bucharest Conservatory and at the Darmstadt summer courses, consolidates his creative work on the idea of unity and balance in musical substance, thus achieving a synthesis between free and rigorously organised structures in his compositions.

Through his lied *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], Adrian Rațiu succeeds in introducing us to the profound and rich poetry of Arghezi, which has often been the seed for new musical masterpieces in the chamber style.

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Suggestive from the very title, Tudor Arghezi's poem *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?] is a philosophical meditation. The poetic text is built on the structure of the fusion of the iambic suitor rhythm, starting from a serious meditative note, with paired rhymes (**aabb**), feminine (unaccented) endings in the first structure and masculine (accented) endings in the second structure, rendered graphically as follows:

***S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?]**

Tudor Arghezi

I wait for life to come with its fullness (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 And wait for me from the horizon to me? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 I wait in the cold night, listening for a sound (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 A friend without a name, a stranger and without a voice? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 With wings to adore you in the moonlight (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Would I expect to be returned to my former state? (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 I would expect the memory to try again (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 At the gate between the fields, I would wait for the spark (14)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Lu-mi-ni-lor lost in dust and ashes? (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 No road leads straight to me anymore; (12)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Barely a cart, a trail like smoke. (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 There is no door, no threshold, no palmar, (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 Only they are gathered together at night in a garden. (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 What should I expect to come and what should I understand, (12)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
 When will time collapse completely? (13)
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Part of the volume *Frunze, Ritmuri* [Leaves, Rhythms, 1961], the poem conveys the feeling of love, emotion, the excitement of waiting, of departure, fulfilment and frustration, in a disturbing register of soul and language.

The verses capture the reader's attention through the power of metaphors (*asleep wings, lights lost in dust and ashes, life with full baskets*, etc.). The rhetorical question and anaphora (lines 1–3, 6–7) convey the anxiety, turmoil and doubt caused by futile waiting and the signs of the end, so that, at the end of the poem, resignation takes the place of doubt (*What should I wait for and what should I understand, / When time is collapsing all around me?*).

The poet states: “When language cannot directly reproduce sensation, it is aided by versification. Sensation strikes the word, and it opens the verse”¹.

The poem consists of 15 lines, in the form of a stanza, with complex rhyme (lines 1–8 and 12–15 contain paired rhyme, lines 9–11 contain monorhyme), with variable meter (12–13–14 syllables). There is a noticeable interweaving of iambic, trochaic, anapestic and amphibrachic rhythms. The rhetorical questions (5) make the text ambiguous. This stylistic device contributes greatly to opening up the text to multiple questions, interpretations and comments.

Beginning within the formal ABA structure – which ultimately develops a conclusion of temporality, thus highlighting the cyclical development of the inexorable passage of time, both poetically and musically the composer opens this first page of the lied using the insertion of clashing seconds and combinations of fourth-fifth chords, which induce a state of unease through sensitisation and dissonant overlaps. These same elements add tension and ambiguity to the melodic design, while also enhancing the semantic expressiveness of the poetic text. By beginning the phrase with the passing notes of the soprano voice, the composer tests the performer's technical abilities from the very first note. The technical and interpretative elaboration of this musical moment must take into account, as a primary starting point, the correct preparation and positioning of the sound in the resonant spaces, in order to prevent any risk of injustice, often encountered in the performance of these types of passages.

S-fz

<i>Mne lyublyu,</i>	<i>vá vi-e</i>	<i>via -</i>	<i>ta cu co-qu-ri-le pli-ne</i>
Мне ль яаьтэ,	что жэеу сеп-	нет -	В блис-та-тельной о - леж-де
Wert ich,	dass mir das	Le -	ge - füll-te Kör-be brin-ge?
Eh quoi?	Croire que la	vi -	e, a - vec ses pleins cor - beil-les,
To hope	for life to	step	forth, and bear-ing full brimmed bas-kets

mf

Fig. 1 Adrian Ratiu, *S-astept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 3-8

¹ Nicolae Balotă (2012). *Drama cuvântului în opera lui Tudor Arghezi* [The Drama of Words in the Work of Tudor Arghezi], Editura EuroPress Group, București, p. 63.



S - aștept să vie viața cu coșurile pline

Module I *Waiting for life to come* (3-1-3-2-2) Module II *with full baskets* (2-4-1)

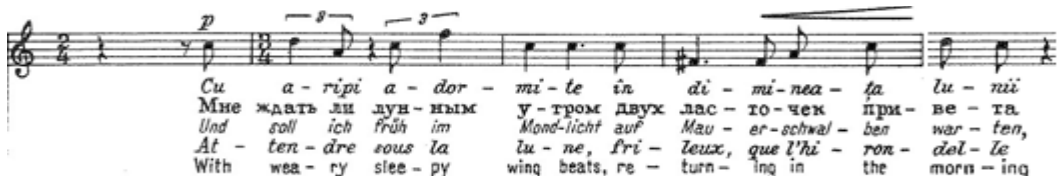
-segment from Mod I, with enharmonic elements

The repetition of the word “wait” outlines an intervallic elaboration from a soloistic perspective, from the descending diminished fourth (G-D#) infused with doubt, to the ascending sixth suggesting the return of ideas, of shoots accompanied by the sound of their return. The second “S-aștept?” (Shall I Wait?), (the second of the poisonous laurels) carries the doubt of poetic thought, holder of the light that has faded into the dust of oblivion. The rhythm completes the musical picture by alternating between binary and ternary rhythms, in a fairly fast tempo – *Allegretto* – creating the impression of an asymmetrical *aksak* rhythm, which reveals – through its pulsating balance with stops on harmonic pedals – the composer's reflection on Balkan spatiality. The melodic design follows the idea of the poem, emphasising the note of malice and the complementarity between the pianistic and vocal discourse (see the intervals associated with the words *full, gifts, empty, name*).



pli - ne da - ruri , goa - lă nu - me ,

The appearance of B becomes contrasting and full of mystery. Keeping the melodic design based on intervals in the first section (b), Adrian Rațiu allows the word to dominate. Thus, he uses the musicality of the words, to which he adds their suggestion, to create, clothe and facilitate the voice's colouristic rendering of the widest possible timbral spectrum, intended to bring the words to life and weave - among the vital filigrees of music - the most authentic projections of sound images.



Cu a - ri - pi a - dor - mi - te în di - mi - nea - ța lu - nii

Мне ждать ли лу - ным у - тром двух лас - то - чек при - ве - та

Und soll ich früh im Mond - licht auf Mau - er - schwal - ben war - ten,

At - ten - dre sous la lu - ne, fri - teux, que l'hi - ron - del - le

With wea - ry slee - py wing beats, re - turn - ing in the morn - ing

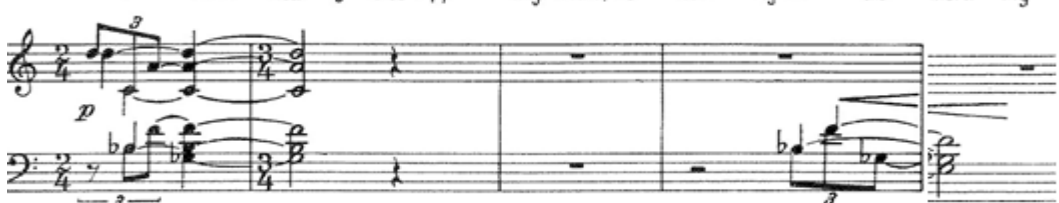


Fig. 2 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 22-26

The rendering of vocal discourse in *piano* is the first step in building a meaningful musical dynamic, in perfect accordance with the composer's requirements and, implicitly, with those of the text. What is very important to pursue in creating the atmosphere is to reduce the voice to the minimum possible sound, which allows the performer to keep intact the penetrating power and timbre of the sound, obtained by concentrating the voice in the resonators, on a laryngeal lightness energetically supported by the respiratory muscles. Due to the presence of intervallic vocal movement, this moment must be prepared in a very careful and intelligent way, through effective and anticipatory thinking, which ensures psychological comfort, perfect energy and vocal dosage, but also vocal malleability in compliance with technical rigour.

The mysterious atmosphere continues to develop in the second section of B (b1), abandoning the intervallic progression in favour of the scalar one, with the role of intensifying the poetic meaning *I wait, perhaps, for the memory to try its key again / At the gate between the daffodils?* and to render everything in a much more intimate, internalised experience, representing the generative factor of the construction of the climax of this part, of *Lights lost in dust and ashes?*

più f *dim.* *mf*
 Lu - mi - ni - lor pier - du - te in pul - be - re și scrum?
 Ho - ja - pov or - ury - mev - shix, B so - ay y - wea - shix
 Aus ei - nem to - ten Stern, der Staub und A - sche
 Des sour - ces de lu - miè - re gi - sant dans la pous - sière?
 See long for - got - ten lost lights en - gulfed in dust and ash?

Fig. 3 Adrian Ratiu, *S-astept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 39-43

Time, humanity's relentless and invincible enemy, does not spare even the poet himself. The lights are lost in *dust and ashes*, the roads pass through fog, and a deep sense of abandonment replaces the joy and jubilation of yesteryear.

The alternation between binary and ternary facilitates this accumulation of tension, which is then resolved by an unleashing of dynamics in shades of *forte*, requiring the soloist to add extra interpretative and vocal drama to convey the moment accurately. Moderate voice coverage with adequate respiratory and muscular support is very important for technically correct execution. This process provides the voice with the benefit of a natural protection mechanism, thus avoiding overstraining, singing that turns into screaming and, inevitably, open emission. However, the performer must also be aware of the danger of *falling*

into the other vocal extreme, covering the sound too much and thus straining the voice.

The structural-semantic duality of the piano discourse intensifies the vocal one – with the reprise of A – ending in a specifically Romanian *parlando-rubato*, thus completing a primordial element in the free reception of the essence.

Fig. 4 Adrian Rațiu, *S-aștept?* [Shall I Wait?], ms. 57-64

Bringing the clashes of seconds for the last time, the voice culminates in a high note, while the piano resolves, in mirror image, the idea of collapse, through an explosion of sevenths complementary to the vocal seconds.

“Poetry that is corseted, rhythmic, rhymed, versified: caught in *convention*, geometrically crystallised, compressed above all, stirs up and squeezes out sensations, memories, emotions. *The 'corset' has an impulsive role.*”²

As literary critic Eugen Simion remarks, “what is interesting to note here and in other verses is the sensation of heavy materiality left by poems permeated with desolation and loneliness. It is a common technique in Arghezi's work and stems from a kind of compensation, a revenge of the imagination”.

The deepest lyricism we find in the volumes *Frunze*, *Poeme noi*, *Cadențe* is nourished by the indistinct feeling of waiting, of watching, “at dusk”.

Contemplation is intertwined with the fear of nothingness.

The sound semiotics developed by the composer capitalises on the semantics of the lyrics written by a leading poet, who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A craftsman of the highest literary refinement, the poet finds the complementarity of his lyrics in a subtle heterophonic musical rendition, offering us a page of authentic Romanian feeling. It is a tribute to the blacksmith in the garden of Mărțișor, stirred by constellations in whose contemplation he loses himself in thoughts and fundamental existential questions.

² Eugen Simion (1981). *Tudor Arghezi – Cel cu toate în veac nepotrivit* [Tudor Arghezi – The one who is always out of place], Editura Minerva, București, p. 19.

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Feminism – a facet of *New Musicology* **Mihaela Vosganian: *Concerto for clarinet and orchestra***

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Abstract: New musicology, which emerged in the 1980s, marked a profound change in musicological thinking, distancing itself from formalism and positivism. Joseph Kerman was an important critical voice, advocating a humanistic and contextual approach to music, while Lawrence Kramer analyzed musical meanings from an interdisciplinary perspective. Contemporary musicology integrates themes such as gender identity, popular culture and music therapy, reflecting an openness to other fields. In this context, feminist musicology has had a significant impact through the work of researchers Susan McClary and Marcia Citron, who investigated the role of women in music and gender discrimination. The importance of rediscovering female composers and the social influences on female creativity has been emphasized. In Romania, the affirmation of women composers came later, but contemporary creation is represented by a significant number of female musicians. Composer Mihaela Vosganian, whom we will focus on in this study, is the founder of the Association of Women in Art in Romania and a member of *the International Alliance for Women in Music*. *The Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* combines modern vision with archaic ritual in an avant-garde musical discourse. Although composed in her youth, the work reflects a mature compositional vision, confirming the artist's skill and talent.

Keywords: Musicology, gender identity, interdisciplinarity, *avant-garde*, improvisation.

1. New Musicology

Since the 1980s, musicology has undergone a period of profound change. During this phase, the evolution of thought has led to a redefinition of musicological discourse, with a considerable and lasting impact on music studies. Modern musicology has distanced itself significantly from the language and perspectives that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, with new interpretations being strongly influenced by the expansion and diversification of musical creation. Essentially, the new musicology has made a significant contribution to aesthetic directions by challenging formalist views of music.

There are several important authors who have contributed significantly to shaping analytical approaches. Joseph Kerman, an American musicologist,

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brought an interesting and distinct perspective to the fore in his study *How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out*, by addressing an important theme, which he described at the time as *new musicology*, criticising the insistence on musical analysis determined by structuralism. This, obviously, generated diverse attitudes and controversial reactions from readers when he advocated for “a new breadth and flexibility in academic music criticism [musicology]”¹. In his book, *Contemplating Music*² (1985), he explores the divisions that exist in musicological studies, critically referring to trends such as formalism and positivism, which he considered to have had a negative effect on musicology. With strong arguments, Kerman combats analysts' insistence on demonstrating the unity and coherence of each musical creation, considering this process conventional and detached from the musical act itself. Kerman's justification is aimed at a more *human* approach to criticism, based on a parallel examination of the context of the composition, meaning: source of inspiration, biographical moment, stylistic intersections with other authors, etc.

Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, in their introduction to *Rethinking Music*³, suggest that the evolution of musicological thinking through the phrases “before Kerman/after Kerman” is a useful construct⁴. While some view post-Kerman musicology through the filter of nostalgia, considering it a forgetting of previous approaches, the majority of music analysts view the current perspective of musicology as one that allows for deeper reflections and complex critical approaches involving elements of interdisciplinarity.

Another author who has been decisive in reorienting musical thinking is Lawrence Kramer, who re-examined a fundamental problem, that of the meaning and significance of music, in his book *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History*⁵.

Contemporary analysis brings to the fore biographical elements that reveal certain subjective aspects, as well as the historical, cultural and social context. Musicology has developed a self-critical and reflective approach, visible through the diversification of topics studied in music departments and an expansion in the range of disciplines. Here we refer to areas such as ethnomusicology, popular music, cultural theory, also mentioning the increased interest in psychology and

¹ Joseph Kerman (1980). *How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out*, in *Write all These Down*, originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, p. 30.

² Joseph Kerman (1985). *Contemplating Music*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

³ Nicholas Cook, Mark Everist (1999). *Rethinking Music*, Oxford University Press, New York.

⁴ David Beard, Kenneth Gloag (2005). *Musicology: The key concepts, (Introduction)*, Routledge, London and New York.

⁵ Lawrence Kramer (2002). *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History*, University of California Press.

music therapy, along with analyses of interpretation – in other words, a development of the entire corpus of disciplines.

“Within a potential critical musicology, the idea of continually rethinking music is incorporated in order to avoid establishing new orthodoxies or grand narratives, although it generally remains concerned with finding a kind of synthesis between analysis and consideration of social significance.”⁶ This is an important point made by David Beard and Kenneth Gloag in their book *The Key Concepts*.

Approaches to new musicology often seem to be closely related to aspects of an extended postmodernism. The association of the two concepts can be supported by an increasing focus on essential details that have been ignored over time, integrating issues of feminism and gender identity in music.

2. Feminism in musical art

Of decisive importance are musicologist Susan McClary (*Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*⁷ (1991) and Marcia J. Citron, through her thorough research presented in *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993). These two researchers are, in fact, the initiators of the new approach, that of feminism in musicology, by identifying the feminine essence, rediscovering and analysing valuable works, highlighting the connections related to the cultural and social context specific to each period in the limited expression and development of women composers and performers.

The fundamental motivation and the old struggles to create a movement promoting the idea of feminism were, in a broader sense, represented by the desire to remedy situations in which women were treated differently from men, in which they were deprived of the same professional opportunities, marginalised or even subordinated to them⁸. Seen as a consequence of the economic and political positioning of women in post-war society immediately after the Second World War, feminist theory turned its attention to the thorough exploration of women's cultural experiences.

Feminism gained prominence in the field of musicology during the 1980s, alongside the emergence of other interdisciplinary approaches. Prior to this, musicology researchers had already begun to recover forgotten figures of female composers and performers. During the 1980s and 1990s, in-depth analyses were

⁶ “Embedded in a potential critical musicology is the idea of continually rethinking music to avoid establishing new orthodoxies or grand narratives although, in general, it remains concerned with finding some kind of synthesis between analysis and a consideration of social meaning.” David Beard, Kenneth Gloag (2005). *Critical Musicology in Musicology: The key concepts*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 28.

⁷ Susan McClary (1991). *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

⁸ David Beard, Kenneth Gloag (2005). *Ethnomusicology. Feminism in Musicology: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 48.

proposed of the cultural factors that contributed to the marginalisation of female composers. During the 1990s, the perspective of feminist musicology evolved towards a closer connection with the notions of *gender* and *difference*, while also interconnecting these concepts with other significant entities, such as ethnicity and narrative art.

Over time, societies have created and maintained certain norms and standards that define *specific* behaviours for men and women. Education, of course, plays an essential role in the formation of gender identity. In music, these differences are the result of cultural influences. Musical genres, themes, and performance styles are often associated with 'feminine' or 'masculine' tendencies due to the way they have been promoted and received by the public.

One can observe an openness on the part of women towards collaboration, frequently achieved between composers and performers, but also a tendency among women to incorporate elements from other cultures and musical styles. We can refer to both ideology and historical background, to elements related to tradition, when we look at the influence that the past has on female composers. Thus, German musicologist Eva Rieger has astutely highlighted several directions, personal observations regarding a certain “female compositional practice”. It is understood that these remarks are not outlined in the form of essentially feminine characteristics, but rather in the form of trends that are based on certain social conditions or contexts⁹. Among these, there is a noticeable preference among female composers to make the most of a limited amount of material. Many show a tendency towards compositional flexibility. They may also develop flexible ego boundaries, as suggested by Nancy Chodorow, a feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst¹⁰. Women therefore seem to be more open to integrating different influences into their music, while men, in their desire to assert their individuality, often resist adopting external elements.

The beginning of the feminist movement in music can be traced back to the early 20th century. In the United Kingdom, for example, there were a large number of female composers who encountered difficulties throughout their careers. They were thus determined to remain united and support each other in creating musical contexts, recitals and performances designed to showcase their compositional discoveries.

The year 1987 marked a response to the difficulties generated by the increasingly pronounced regression, with the founding of the organisation *Women in Music*. The aim of the initiative was to contribute to greater exposure for women in music, seeking visibility for composers and performers. They sought to highlight in public and in the media the gender discrimination present in all aspects of music, with the aim of organising and popularising future artistic

⁹ Marcia J. Citron (1993). *Gender and the musical canon*, New York, Cambridge University Press, p. 160.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

events and facilitating the creation of a connection, a close bond of collaboration between women musicians¹¹. The organisation continues to support women composers today, promoting equality, aiming to increase professional opportunities for female artists and contributing to their global recognition.

Returning to Susan McClary, considered the initiator of feminism in musicology, we quote Philip Bohlman's comment: "McClary criticises not only the neglect of women as music creators, but also the construction of certain types of music and musical histories as if they had nothing to do with women (*or men*) or issues related to sexuality. In a bold manner, albeit sometimes tentative and provisional, McClary takes musicology into areas where few researchers have dared to tread, and it is not surprising that this book makes many people feel uncomfortable. It is meant to do so, and therefore strongly asserts that musicology should be disturbing. The book is a relentless and personal critique of the field and its intellectual history, and for these reasons and more, the response to *Feminine Endings* has been swift and personal, coming in a growing number of publications from all corners of the field¹².

3. Composer Mihaela Vosganian and *the Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*

The confirmation of female composers in Romania came later, in the second half of the 20th century, when the level of development in society facilitated access to education for talented children, including girls. Convincing arguments in support of the value of female composition in Romania are represented by the large number of creative musicians, some of whom continue to make their mark on musical life in Romania and abroad. We list them in order of generation: Carmen-Petra Basacopol, Felicia Donceanu, Myriam Marbé, Irina Odăgescu-Țuțuianu, Cornelia Tăutu, Liana Alexandra, Maia Ciobanu, Irina Hasnaș, Violeta Dinescu, Doina Rotaru, Carmen Maria Cârnecki, Ana Maria Avram, Mihaela Vosganian, Dora Cojocar, Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea, Irinel Anghel, Diana Rotaru.

Out of a desire to promote female artistic creation in Romania – both nationally and internationally – the Association of Women in Art (ARFA) was founded in 2000 by composer Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian choreographer Liliana Iorgulescu and painter Marilena Preda-Sânc. Seeking recognition for Romanian women artists, equal opportunities and the facilitation of the integration of women's art into the global cultural sphere, the organisation carries out various activities, including the organisation of interdisciplinary cultural events – such as concerts, exhibitions, performances, conferences and

¹¹ Karin Pendle (1991). *Women & Music: A history*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 227.

¹² Philip V. Bohlman (1993). *Musicology as a Political Act*, in "The Journal of Musicology", Volume 11, No. 4, p. 416.

workshops – and developing partnerships with artistic institutions and personalities in Romania and abroad. Mihaela Vosganian is also a member of the International Alliance for Women in Music, founded in 1995. She has organised and participated in festivals such as the International Week of New Music, her initiatives reflecting her commitment to supporting and inspiring an international community of artists, with a focus on the involvement of women composers in contemporary avant-garde art.

Through her style of synthesis between modernity and tradition, the composer distinguishes herself by drawing on archetypal sources, highlighting aspects related to the sacred and ritual, integrating exotic instruments specific to pre-Christian cultures for this purpose. These elements, bearers of an archaic expressiveness, are recontextualised within a complex artistic discourse. The composer draws on diverse and highly important cultural traditions – Jewish, Islamic, Christian – without privileging any of them. This transdisciplinary and transcultural approach gives her work a universal dimension, transforming her creation into a relevant example of the connection between artistic innovation and the exploration of cultural memory, an idea emphasised by Ruxandra Arzoiu¹³.

Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian made a name for herself in symphonic and chamber music from her very first works, through thorough professional training and a well-defined aesthetic expression. A graduate of the Bucharest Academy of Music in the composition class of Professor Myriam Marbé, the artist has developed a keen sense of balance between reason and intuition. “Myriam was wonderful”¹⁴, confesses Mihaela Vosganian. “But she was the kind of teacher from whom you had to steal the craft. She didn't tell you specifically what to do, and I was like a sponge trying to absorb information in every way possible. She had a holistic view of art, and we engaged in various discussions and comparisons between musical art and visual art. She had a different way of teaching than others.” By deepening her musical analysis with Ștefan Niculescu and through contact with the works of composers Anatol Vieru and Tiberiu Olah, she completed his compositional training, going on to develop his own style, detached from the influences of the masters.

The concerto for clarinet and orchestra, composed in 1988, shortly after graduating from the Conservatory, reflects not only the direct influence of Marbé's pedagogy and compositional mastery, but also an early demonstration of Mihaela Vosganian's ability to apply and transform the principles learned into a personal, creative style. The work impresses with its dynamic sound development, which highlights the dramatic dimension of the composition. We

¹³ Ruxandra Arzoiu (1995). *Mihaela Stănculescu Vosganian*, in „Muzica”, no. 2, Magazine published by the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania, p. 4

¹⁴ Andra Apostu (2018). *Talking with Mihaela Vosganian*, in „Muzica” no. 6, Magazine published by the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania, p. 3.

observe the integration of the solo instrument into the orchestral fabric. The moments when its unique timbre stands out evoke improvisational practices and archaic sonorities. “A hybrid genre”, declares the composer, “because due to its expressiveness and creative means, the concerto seems more like a symphonic poem”¹⁵.

The complexity and value of the work are amplified by the use of a large orchestra, which allows for the exploitation of a rich timbral palette in a manner surprising for the composer's age (she was 27 at the time). This creation of new music, imagined in a sound universe and with revolutionary notation – but in perfect harmony with the musical interests of the time – reflects the knowledge acquired from Marb . The particular elements of sonority also involve an extended notation: improvisation annotations, microtones, multisonics and multiple effects designed for wind instruments – categories that influence intonation, timbre and rhythm. A sound model of new music, the work was performed the following year – but the recording was made later in a perfected interpretation, performed with clarinetist Emil Sein and the National Radio Orchestra, conducted by Paul Popescu (1997 recording).

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra. The score is written on multiple staves, including staves for Imp, 2nd Clarinet, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass, and Contrabass. A red box highlights the string instruments section, which includes annotations for 'c. legno', 'b. legno', 'foco c. legno', and 'mf'. The score is written in a complex, handwritten style with various musical notations and annotations.

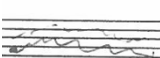
Fig. 1 Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* – Improvisation Annotations: E2, String Instruments Section

¹⁵ Ruxandra Arzoiu (1995). *Mihaela Stănculescu Vosganian*, in „Muzica”, no. 2, Magazine published by the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania, p. 8.

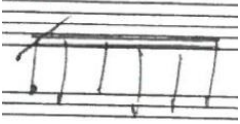
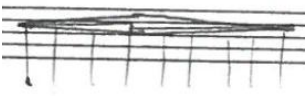
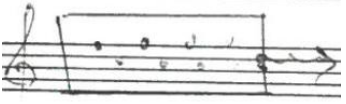
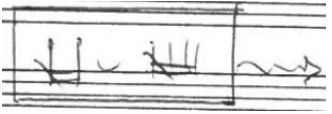
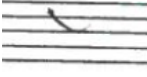
The orchestral component has an extensive, diversified structure, reflecting a modern timbral approach. The wind ensemble consists of flute and piccolo, oboe and English horn, solo clarinet in B $\flat$ and bass clarinet in B $\flat$, bassoon and contrabassoon. The brass instruments form a generous group: three trumpets, four horns, three trombones and a tuba, ensuring a rich and contrasting sound palette. The percussion section is organised into three distinct subgroups, each contributing specific colours and textures. The first group comprises timpani, four *wood blocks*, *maracas*, *ucelli*, *raganella*, *bells* and a *piatto acuto* (high-pitched cymbal). The second group includes two *bongos*, three *tom-toms*, three *temple blocks*, *tamburo piccolo*, vibraphone and *campanelli*. The third group consists of *gran cassa*, *piatti*, *tam-tam*, triangle and eolifon – a rare sound source associated with wind effects. The complex orchestra is complemented by the harp and the traditional string ensemble. This combination offers the composer a wide range of timbral resources, encouraging expressive exploration and sonic innovation. The special effects are explained in the preface to the score, as follows:

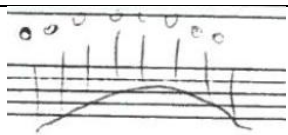
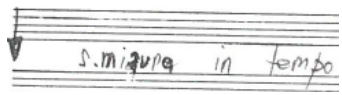
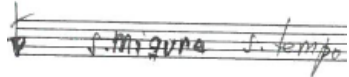
Clarinet:

	- sound with distinct harmonics obtained by exaggerated pressure
	- harmonic 5 instead of harmonic 3 obtained by increased lip pressure (fingering is for C2)
	- <i>quasi-glissando</i> improvisation on gradual movement approximately
	- the highest sound

	- quasi <i>glissando</i> with guttural sounds
	- <i>ad libitum</i> multiphonics

General:

	- sustained note <i>s. rigore</i>
	- equal and rapid group of sounds
	- repetition of the same sound
	- accelerated then sparse group
	- freestyle improvisation on the sounds indicated in the box
	- improvise on the approximate rhythm indicated
	- very short pause

	- harmonic sound
	- <i>glissando</i> on harmonics
	- the conductor indicates the entrance and exit from the paragraph
	- free chamber music passage

Conceived as a single movement, the work unfolds in a large sonata form, structured around an imaginary dialogue – in which three variants of the same solo instrument are fully exploited: the clarinet – the B-flat clarinet, the piccolo clarinet and the bass clarinet – each having a specific role in the development of the sound. The expository section is clearly delineated, at which point the clarinet outlines an expressive melodic line, the brass provides harmonic support, and the percussion, with indeterminate sounds, defines the rhythm. Throughout the development, but also with the appearance of the reprise, the thematic motifs interact, creating a varied and dynamic dialogue, highlighted by the alternation between the three types of clarinet.

The clarinet concerto by composer Mihaela Vosganian is distinguished by its complex compositional elaboration, which features a wide range of modern techniques and procedures. One of the defining aspects of the work is the use of a varied range of improvisational types, including individual improvisation, group improvisation, as well as forms of improvisation on the part, especially those involving all string instruments simultaneously. These techniques are refinedly integrated into the texture of the musical discourse, contributing to the dynamic and spontaneous character of the work.

Another interesting element is the virtuoso use of percussion, which is considerably expanded compared to conventional treatments. Percussion instruments do not only play an accompaniment role in the rhythmic, but become central actors in the expressive and timbral articulation of the sound narrative, being used in an inventive and spectacular manner.

Formally, the work stands out for its solid architecture, in which the sound material is rigorously organised, reflecting a coherent and well-articulated

compositional vision. The concert exposition is structured in three distinct sections, each characterised by its own sonority, dominant timbre and specific writing. This timbral and stylistic diversity not only brings expressive variety, but also contributes to defining a clear aesthetic identity for each section, supporting the dramaturgical progression of the entire work.

The first section of the exhibition (E1) is dominated by the solo clarinet in a free, rubato unfolding, with the orchestra instruments subtly complementing its sound. *E1* thus stands out through the improvisational but written intonation of the clarinet, which explores the low and middle registers, and also through the accumulation of an increasing number of orchestral lines. The percussion instruments (especially those in group I) and strings accentuate the mysterious, sometimes tense atmosphere with isolated or echoing sound gestures. The piccolo, bells and percussive effects reinforce the ethereal character.

Handwritten musical score for section E1 of the Concerto for clarinet and orchestra. The score is written on four systems of staves. The first system is for the solo clarinet (Cl solo) in 4/4 time, marked "Rubato" and "♩ = 80". It begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo marking "s. misura in tempo". The second system includes the solo clarinet, vibraphone (Vibr II), and cello (c. cello). The third system includes the solo clarinet and a more energetic section marked "f energico". The fourth system includes the solo clarinet and amplified strings (ampli II). The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, dynamics (p, mp, f), and performance instructions like "ben f irato", "c. motore", "piu deciso", and "flui".

Fig. 2 Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian, *Concerto for clarinet and orchestra* – section E1

The second section of the exhibition (E2) brings a clear change in colour and density. Energetic rhythmic structures, collective interventions and a more prominent presence of the brass section (horn, trumpet, trombone) appear. An inner tension emerges, contrasting with the lyricism of the first section. The solo clarinet becomes more incisive, and the dialogue with the percussion and string instruments is more intense. A polyphonic writing and an organisation of the material suggest a more solid architectural construction. It is a striking section from a dynamic and discursive point of view. The beginning of the section, introduced by the percussion instruments, is built as a double texture, consisting of a rhythmic *ostinato* improvised by the string parts and a pointillist polyphony of the wind instruments - a moment completely devoid of the solo instrument's interventions.

E 21

In tempo ♩ = 80

E 22

Handwritten musical score for section E2 of Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian's *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*. The score is written on multiple staves. The top staff is labeled "E 21" and "In tempo ♩ = 80". The bottom staff is labeled "E 22". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (mp, p, mf, f). There are also handwritten annotations like "Wa-Wa sound" and "S. sound".

Fig. 3 Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* – section E2

Fig. 5 Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* – section E3

The delimitation of sections not only facilitates the formal coherence of the creation, but also provides a perfect framework for exploring the unique characteristics of each instrument. At key moments, the B-flat clarinet brings a clear and balanced tone, the piccolo clarinet imprints the work with a brilliant energy, and the bass clarinet adds depth and gravity to the musical discourse.

Development (D)

This section is characterised by thematic fragmentation, densification of texture and extensive exploration of timbre. The elements found in the exposition undergo transformations – rhythmic, dynamic, of register – which contribute to a ly unstable and continuously evolving feeling. The interaction

between the clarinet and the ensemble becomes increasingly complex, with rapid exchanges and timbral interference. The percussion creates a focal point with accumulations towards the climax.

The tension increases through rhythmic overlaps, extreme registers and frequent interventions by the brass instruments. It is a section with a strongly evolutionary character, in which the previous material is reworked and recontextualised.

Reprise (R)

The reprise brings back elements from the exposition, motifs and gestures familiar from E1–E3, but in a concentrated form and often with a new orchestral approach. The solo clarinet takes up some thematic ideas in a different register and with heightened expressiveness. It is a moment of synthesis, in which the musical material seems to coagulate towards a symbolic finale. The overall atmosphere is one of balance, without losing the tension accumulated in the development. The finale is not grandiose, but rather a dissipation of energies in a gesture of poetic closure.

Conclusions

The Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra by composer Mihaela Vozganian is a modern and imaginative work, yet conceived with the utmost rigour. This structuring of timbres and their functions reflects a well-defined compositional thinking. The precise placement of each element clearly demonstrates the clarity of the composer's intentions and her ability to express these intentions eloquently. Through the controlled and strategic use of the solo instrument's hypostases, the work becomes an example of balance between timbral creativity and formal coherence. The sophisticated graphic writing, enriched with a multitude of effects and symbols, reveals a keen attention to detail and meticulous notation, transcending the conventions imposed by the academic environment.

The concerto reflects aspects of feminism not only through the composer's belonging to a generation of female composers who have made their mark in an artistic space historically dominated by male figures, but also through her personal artistic imprint. Deeply rooted in contemporary discourse, the work becomes a symbol of expressive emancipation, of women's access to complex means of creation and representation.

Through her avant-garde compositional language, with its rigorous structure and timbral innovation, the composer claims not only an aesthetic space, but also an ideological one – that of equal opportunities in artistic affirmation. A defining aspect of the composers' style, clearly reflected in Mihaela Vozganian's work, is the concern for finesse of detail and the inner complexity of musical discourse, with each sound gesture carefully placed, each nuance conceived not only as an effect, but as an expression of a profound experience or idea.

In *the Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, this rigour of construction is intertwined with freedom of expression, giving rise to a coherent but not rigid musical discourse – a fine balance between the rational and the intuitive, between well-articulated form and the organic fluidity of the musical idea.

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THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS SECTION

Culture and Creation. Doctoral Research as a Cultural Act

Theatre as Eroticism

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Abstract: This study explores a relationship that has been rarely discussed, but which, viewed from certain perspectives, becomes important: the relationship between theatre and eroticism. It is not about strictly scenic eroticism, conceived and led by a director working with an actor, but about multiple other layers: from the eroticism of dramatic writing to the eroticism of the critical act. One of the answers to the classic question “Why do we go to the theatre?” may therefore be the one suggested by Anne Bogart: “We go to the theatre to fall in love” or to experience states of minds similar to love in its various forms.

Keywords: eroticism, theatre, Anne Bogart.

Introduction

One of the 20th-century theorists’ favourite questions was, “Why do we go to the theatre?” Aristotle was the first to ask such questions; for him, art was not at all disinterested but, on the contrary, had clearly defined purposes; thus, the ancient Greeks were supposed to watch tragedies in order to acquire feelings of fear and pity, plus, as a bonus, the possibility of catharsis, while watching comedies was supposed to strengthen their moral sense by means of the public condemnation of society’s ills. We do not know how much Aristotle believed in these prescriptions or whether he was merely trying to mitigate the harsh sentence that his predecessor, Plato, had pronounced very forcefully: artists were corrupters and needed to be quickly banished from the city.

Beyond these initial answers, there were many others to this not-so-simple question: some go to the theatre out of cultural necessity, others go to the theatre to feel good, in the same way that you feel good at a restaurant or going fishing (like Trigorin on the lake in *The Seagull*), or walking in the park; for some, going to the theatre is something ritualistic, while for others it is the equivalent of a shopping trip to the mall; they seek to “acquire” feelings, sensations, emotions or other states that they will not find at Zara, H&M or Calvin Klein. Some go to the theatre out of snobbery because they feel that this is social validation or self-validation; a photo with the chandelier of a 19th-century theatre is worth at least as much as a photo with a cat or one with a tree

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in bloom, or a photo in your patio at sunset, with a glass of Aperol Spritz in your hand. Some go to the theatre against their will, almost forced by their spouse, family, or an aesthetically passionate fiancée, or compelled by who knows what other problematic and ephemeral context. Some go to the theatre for the director, others for the playwright, yet others for the cast. Others seek catharsis or neo-catharsis, while others go in order to prove to themselves, once again, that no purification makes sense in our day and age. And the list of answers to the question “Why do we go to the theatre?” could go on and on.

Going to the theatre in order to fall in love

I once had the curiosity to compile such a list. I was struck not only by the multitude of possible answers, but also by their discouraging diversity. Very late in life, last spring, while reading an excellent book by the director Anne Bogart¹, I came across an answer that I had never encountered before. It disturbed me and made me think. It was a very simple answer – also a very dangerous and, at the same time, incredibly seductive one. Why do I go to the theatre? Well, Anne Bogart says there, I go to the theatre in order to... fall in love. We must admit that such an answer is in itself a... theatrical coup. Especially since its author did not formulate it on a symbolic, metaphorical level. Nor did she speak of the act of falling in love as some ethereal, platonic, rational-and-poetic feeling, but used the word “love” in the most concrete sense possible. With this, we are fully in erotic territory².

Perhaps some of us, without even realizing it, go to the theatre for the same reason – we fall in love or long to fall in love. After all, why do we seek

¹ Anne Bogart (2001). *A Director Prepares. Seven Essays On Art and Theatre*, Routledge, London.

² Beyond the multitude of possible definitions, Octavio Paz’s distinction between sex, eroticism and love seems like the most acceptable one to us: “...sex, eroticism and love are aspects of the same phenomenon, manifestations of what we call life. The oldest of the three, the most comprehensive and the most basic is sex. Sex is the primordial source. Eroticism and love are forms derived from the sexual instinct: crystallization, sublimations, perversions, and condensations which transform sexuality, very often, into something unknowable. As in the case of concentric circles, sex is the centre and pivot point of this geometry of passion (...) Eroticism is, above all else, exclusively human: it is sexuality socialized and transfigured by the imagination and the will of human beings” – Octavio Paz (1996). *The Double Flame. Love and Eroticism*, translated from Spanish by Helen Lane, HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 7-8. We also mention the nuance brought into discussion by Georges Bataille – any form of eroticism is, in its essence, a disequilibrium of the human being losing himself: “I said that I regarded eroticism as the disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question. In one sense, the being loses himself deliberately, but then the subject is identified with the object losing his identity. If necessary, I can say in eroticism: I am losing myself” – George Bataille (2001). *Eroticism*, translation by Mary Dalwood, with an introduction by Colin McCabe, Penguin Books.

love?! Most likely from a feeling of incompleteness.³ We are not enough for ourselves, we feel the need for a very intimate, very organic completion, a fusion. Perhaps I go to the theatre because I am looking for the other person, an ideal other one that social norms can no longer prevent me from loving, whether I am single or I have a wife, a mother-in-law, a dog and three children. Or perhaps, even more concretely, I go to that environment full of eroticism with the hope that somewhere, not necessarily on stage, but in the fertile penumbra of the theatre hall, perhaps in the row right in front of me, perhaps somewhere in the balcony⁴, my soul mate is found, the one who would satisfy the oh-so-relative phrase “the love of my life”.

Love and the unpredictable

What defines a new love relationship? First of all, the unpredictable. I don't know what comes next, I don't know what his or her kiss will taste like, I don't know what we will talk about or how we will be silent in our intimate moments. If love were predictable, it would end up being a calm, comfortable, boring feeling of “at home”. The type of feeling that exasperated Ibsen's women... Let us remember Hedda Gabler, Nora, the Lady from the Sea and so on. Love means first of all the unpredictable! Saying that you are going to the theatre to look for the unpredictable is the same as saying you are going to the theatre to look for love.

True theatre creators have always operated with the unpredictable. I think that, when actors go on stage, they should be at least as preoccupied with producing and maintaining the unpredictable as they are with their acting technique. I am not talking about the unpredictable produced by the writing (such as an unexpected line written by the playwright), but about the unpredictable produced by the body, emotion, or energy. I believe that here, in the Romanian theatre space, we do not yet know how to really enjoy a body talking to us. We are still so captured by the verbal language, that we are superficial in our treatment of other languages which are more subtle, more capable of surprising us and putting us in the position of meeting... the unpredictable.

Sometimes I imagine that the hidden ideal of any actor going on stage is to trigger some form of “falling in love” in the audience. Actors are involved not only in an artistic act there, but also in a complicated and sophisticated mechanism of seduction. They build not only a role, but also an erotic

³ This is Plato's classic theory – see Plato (2007). *The Banquet*, translation by Petru Creția, Humanitas, București.

⁴ This situation evokes the theme and characters in Chekhov's work *The Lady with the Dog*, in A.P. Chekhov (2009). *Logodnica. Nuvele și povestiri* [The Fiancée. Novellas and short stories], translation by Anda Boldur, editor, introduction, chronology and notes, Sorina Bălănescu, Polirom, Iași.

relationship. And distinctions such as main character / supporting character or good guy / bad guy are irrelevant to this. Once upon a time, this personal bet was almost explicitly formulated. Elderly actors nostalgically remember the concrete, direct aspect of their relationships with the audience. The heaps of flowers that old actresses boast about having received in their dressing rooms (apart from the obvious exaggerations) were also the effect of the erotic success they enjoyed on stage. In the '70s and '80's, many intellectuals of Iași were in love with the actress Cornelia Gehorghiu. There was something very bohemian in her acting, although she was actually a very rational and family-oriented person. But on stage she was such a master of the mechanisms of seduction that important poets such as Emil Brumaru and Mihai Ursachi wrote poems dedicated to her, while the painter Val Gheorghiu had publicly acknowledged her as his official muse. I saw her act in the 2000's, playing Sarah Bernhardt – it was her last performance and the last production directed by Anca Ovanez. She was close to 70 and echoes of the tremendous eroticism of her past were still lingering in the air. I would leave the theatre full of a strange melancholy, with all kinds of indefinable yearnings and, generally speaking, with symptoms that most of us would associate with the terrible disease of love. In the '80's, the actress Mihaela Arsenescu-Werner came from Craiova to Iași. She had a kind of very provocative noble air, like a serene, luminous aristocrat and this generated a different kind of seduction, a different kind of eroticism.

The turn to corporality taken by the Romanian theatre quite late, in the '90's, would dilute psychological eroticism or redirect it towards something more concrete. Afrim's whole theatre work, from the beginning of the 2000's all the way to the present day, has taken on a very carefully conducted eroticism of corporality⁵ as a fundamental element – it is a refined poetics of the naked or near-naked body, meant to trouble the audience in various ways. Other trailblazer directors in the direction of this eroticism are, obviously, Silviu Purcărete and Andrei Șerban. A notable appearance in the Romanian theatre has also been that of Alexander Hausvater who, in the '90's, as we remember, was campaigning for a theatre of multiple challenges, including the erotic one. In 1999, in Roberto Zucco, a stone's throw away from the metropolitan cathedral of Iași, the whole cast had a scene including group nudity. I only saw that show on film, but the people in the audience remember the tremendous erotic tension travelling the length and the width of the Iași National Theatre.

⁵ See Ada Lupu (2024). *Radu Afrim, picătura prințului Rupert* [Radu Afrim, prince Rupert's drop], Fundația Culturală „Camil Petrescu”, București, where the actress from Iasi frequently approaches the theme of her own corporality as directed by director Afrim in her roles under his direction.

Excessive eroticism

Whether consciously or not, all these actors and directors used to cultivate the erotic emotion – an emotion which seems to be very rare in our theatre nowadays. When eroticism gave way to pornography⁶ and something lower than culture, something was lost on theatre stages. The theatre performance as flirtation is no longer possible, because the institution of flirtation⁷ (and, with it, the awareness of the fact that we are flirting) is greatly suffering right now. All we need to do is watch today's teenage generation to understand that flirtation, seduction, and eroticism seem to be archaic, outdated, useless rituals – complications whose meaning is lost on Gen Z. Nowadays, flirting has been replaced by the crush. If two teenagers have a crush on each other, they make it public immediately and they do what they need to do without the old ceremony of flirtation. Teaching in a Theatre Faculty, I use Mihail Sebastian's play *Jocul de-a vacanța* [Holiday Make-Believe] every year with my direction and choreography classes. We find in this play an environment of what used to be flirtation, in an excellently preserved form. The relationship between Corina and Ștefan Valeriu is decided mainly under the sign of flirtation. I am amused, but also sad to see my students' first reaction – these characters seem weird to most of them. And I think young actors also find it hard to act flirty on stage, not because they are not talented, but because, in an almost genetic way, they no longer have access to the diffuse, ambiguous, delicately lascivious eroticism of flirtation. Under these circumstances, the art of flirting with the audience is almost impossible – it is a lost art. We are not talking about direct acting for the audience (where the actor addresses the viewer directly), but about the very rare ability to act while being aware of the viewers' presence in your character's world. I know few actors and actresses whose acting comprises this ample and refined horizon of flirtation – Ada Lupu in Iași, Elena Ivanca in Cluj, Ofelia Popii and Cendana Trifan in Sibiu, and Claudia Ieremia in Timișoara.

Technology does not seem to get along with stage eroticism, either. The fine-tuning of the channels between the stage and the audience which can turn a video installation into an erotic entity is still missing. Technology generates feelings that are not yet so elaborate as to aspire to the name “emotion.” Right now, most Romanian actors do not manage to develop profound stage relationships with technology. This may partially be due to the fact that no acting school teaches you how to manage a relationship with a video entity

⁶ In that phenomenon called the “pornographication of Western culture” by Jeffrey Escoffier, quoted by Pranav Shah in Salman Akhtar, Rajiv Gulati (editors) (2020). *Eroticism. Developmental, Cultural and Clinical Realms*, Routledge, London, p. 80.

⁷ With its multitude of meanings and sub-meanings, of positive and negative polarities, of rational and irrational strata – see Adam Phillips (1995). *On Flirtation*, the chapter “On Flirtation: An Introduction”, Faber & Faber, London/ Boston, pp. 17-25).

which is present on stage with you. Generally speaking, we have a pretty limited view of relationships, as we only refer to two human beings talking to each other and developing a common action. This means we lose a lot in other areas. Let us only think of how infinite a relationship with an object on stage can be, or how much eroticism can be found in a hand touching an object, or the eroticism that can be triggered by a bare foot when the actor is aware of his own bare foot.

Flirtation as we know it from our own experiences and those of others is also a matter of detail, a matter of cultivating detail, of cultivating essential tiny things, fundamental trifles.

Is eroticism a cultural matter?

One of the major questions in discussions around stage eroticism is related to the sources of this eroticism. In other words, is corporality the main source of stage eroticism? Is the so-called “physical theatre” more erotic than psychological theatre simply because its main instrument is the body? Our answer to such questions is predominantly “no.” It is enough to notice that stage eroticism, when it appears, is not connected to the age of the person on stage or to any potential physical beauty standards. Even more than life, apparently, theatre destroys such biological boundaries or at least makes them secondary.

If corporality is not responsible for eroticism, then its source must be found elsewhere. To us, the actor’s personality is the bigger factor in this very delicate matter. Of course, this opens another discussion – about how the actor’s personality starts a dialogue with the character’s personality and what the result of such a dialogue can be. Another approach talks about the way in which an actor’s personality is shaped throughout the years and especially about what makes that personality compatible with the on-stage seduction we are discussing here. The hypothesis we are launching here, based on case studies performed throughout a longer period of time, is that on-stage eroticism is directly linked to how cultured the actor is. In all the cases mentioned above, we are talking about very cultured actors (with regards to general themes and to their own field), people capable of great intellectual refinement, intensely spiritual and well anchored in the culture of their time. The actress Cornelia Gheorghiu, mentioned above, had subscriptions to cultural publications, went to all the major cultural events in Iași in the ’70’s, ’80’s, and ’90’s, and maintained a rigorous theatre-themed correspondence with important figures of culture for decades (George Banu was one of her favourite dialogue partners). Mihaela Arsenescu-Werner was one of Iași’s great acting teachers, doing brilliant theatre research. Just looking at her analyses of Ibsen’s female characters is enough for us to become aware of the profound cultural background behind them. Elena Ivanca, Ada Lupu, Ofelia Popii, and Claudia

Jeremia are also more than simple stage practitioners – a beautiful demon of theory, originating from their cultural accumulations, accompanies them at all times, permeating not only their personality, but also their acting.

Flirting and the art of seduction are, after all, cultural “operations.” They are, of course, also found reflected in lower levels where “rizz”, “pick-up lines”, or “chatting someone up” are manifested in various other forms and have other (much more concretely physical) goals than the charm of flirting in itself. Even if it sounds somewhat axiomatic, we risk the quite firm conclusion that only actors who are very solidly cultured are capable of on-stage flirting and, implicitly, of generating on-stage eroticism. They are the only ones with whom one can fall in love in the way that Anne Bogart means when talking about love and theatre.

Flirting with the character

There is, however, another kind of on-stage eroticism, as well, one which is not about the audience, but which does not exclude them either – instead, it proposes a very tempting state of witness to the viewer. It is the eroticism between the actor and his character, defined as a public, visible, continuous form of flirtation. Thousands of pages have been written about one’s relationship with one’s character, there has been talk about melting in the character, but also about a distance from the character. People have lectured about taking on the character, making it an instrument, negotiating with it, composing and decomposing it. As far as we are concerned, we have never encountered this relationship from the perspective of flirtation.

Flirting announces a possible relationship, but maintains us in an ambiguous, temporary area. It is, of course, a relationship, but one that is not fully configured, one composed and decomposed over and over. It is defined by something like the tides, coming and going, trying, conquering and losing territories. Flirtation operates with the potential, with what could be, not with what is. In the theatre, such an ambiguity of the relationship with the character is usually seen as a deficit in going deeper into the role and most actors’ ambition is to control the character and “master” it completely. The actor’s behaviour towards his character is reminiscent of a decade-old marriage where no one can surprise anyone anymore, where everything is predictable and fixed forever. We thus win certainty and that is necessary on stage; but, on the other hand, we lose the freshness of the relationship, the unpredictable which everything new always brings. As far as I am concerned, as a theatre goer, I have always been interested in the tensions between actor and character, by that aspect which is raw, not yet ripe, not yet mature.

Obviously, leaving this type of freedom with regards to the role to chance can have harmful consequences and can push the actor towards a lack of professionalism. But I think that becoming aware of this flirtation, using it

methodologically and systematically and knowing how to show it could offer great satisfaction for the people both on stage and in the audience. And one of the most interesting effects would be this erotic kind of vibe of searching and trying.

Erotic context and on-stage nudity

Many times, on-stage eroticism derives not from the acting, but from the organisation of the stage. I remember Mihai Măniuțiu's *Macbeth* played at the Iași National Theatre in 2007. The director had created a bathing scene for Lady Macbeth. The scene was simple, but extremely erotically charged at the same time – a white tub, rose petals and a cleverly constructed type of lighting were hiding while offering, operating on a seen/unseen dialectics. Very uncomfortable with the nudity involved in the scene, the actress and teacher Tatiana Ionesi did not surrender to the contextual eroticism; involuntarily, trying to protect herself, she opposed it. The resulting scene was beautiful, but very cold, completely neutral from the erotic viewpoint, a kind of painting which I admired, but did not for a moment inhabit.

Another example of a very powerful erotic context is a scene from Eugen Iebeleanu's play *Teorema* [The Theorem] performed at the "Radu Stanca" National Theatre of Sibiu. Soil covers a dead young woman's body, leaving a breast visible. The beauty of this image is hard to describe, especially as, paradoxically, the whole scene breathes... life. The actress's breast makes us very profoundly revisit the old eros / thanatos formula. More than a breast, it is a statement of life which does not give up and invites us to admire its splendour even in the middle of death.

I have often wondered about the point of on-stage nudity. Fewer and fewer directors aim to obtain an authentic erotic layer – most of them want rather to produce shock waves for the viewer. Let us be honest – in most cases, the effect is embarrassing. We are troubled, yes, but it is because of an inadequacy. In extreme situations, there is something vulgar there, a pornographic-type scene, and then the audience is clearly uncomfortable. Another reason for actors to be undressed is the false impression that a naked body sells more tickets than one which is dressed. I know theatre managers whose posters contain unjustified age limits (16+, 18+) strictly for marketing reasons, not because they really want to protect innocent souls from the "horrors" of the stage.

From the perspective of eroticism, some of the most beautiful nude scenes I have ever seen at the theatre were those of Ofelia Popii in the Silviu Purcărete's *Lulu*. The actress offered her nakedness in a disturbingly natural way, as a deep nature of the character, but her nudity was also a concept-nudity, because Ofelia Popii has the power to generalise. It was not just her nudity, but the nudity of all women, as the character Lulu became the very

essence of femininity. That is exactly the kind of situation which validates Anne Bogart's theory about the audience falling in love. Many years after that play, I still remember the warm, vibrant, sensually cultural intimacy in which this character revealed herself to us in her full eroticism. The character's eroticism became the character's poetry⁸.

Ada Lupu's (half-)naked scenes in some of Radu Afrim's productions also provide erotic substance, but in a different way. It is nudity made very poetic, as Ada has the gift of producing a strange and unique lyricism. On stage, her naked or near-naked body stops being matter. You forget that it contains blood, organs, or nerve endings. This naturalistic perspective disappears and makes way for the ineffable and for an amazing floating anatomy. It is the kind of corporality which is perfect for the aesthetic surrealism cultivated by Radu Afrim – it is on the border between reality and dream. Long and slim, the actress's body evokes a dream which powerfully infiltrates the viewer's affective perception. After the play, if you try to remember Ada Lupu's body, what comes to your mind is more like the blurred lines of a silhouette. You feel the kind of ambiguity you experience when you try to narrate a dream. Her body cannot be narrated – it can only be dreamed of. The erotic effect produced by nudity in this case modifies the atmosphere of the play, remaining *on the sky of the stage* long after the actress and her character have left.

Male nudity produces different kinds of eroticism and can also fail miserably, turning into ridiculousness or vulgarity. Again, the context created by the director and actor is the one deciding whether we will watch something profound or something passing, something memorable or something ephemeral. Of course, these are certain questions which, once asked, risk making the topic laughable: Can the male sex organs provide an erotic effect on stage, for the general public, just by being exposed? However, other questions make the topic serious again: What kind of poetry does male corporality carry? Are hair, muscles, and veins able to deliver emotion?⁹

Directorial eroticism

Many years ago, the director Alexa Visarion told me that, in his opinion, one of a director's major qualities was the ability to seduce. Rehearsals for a play are, among other things, seduction exercises or a framework for the

⁸ The connection between eroticism and poetry is firmly underlined by Octavio Paz: "The relationship between eroticism and poetry is such that it can be said, without affectation, that the former is a poetry of the body and the latter is eroticism of language. They are in complementary opposition" (O. Paz, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3).

⁹ A series of nuances can be seen in the literature dedicated to dancing, which is much more preoccupied by aspects pertaining to corporality. See Ramsay Burt (2022). *The Male Dancer. Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, third edition, Routledge, London, but also Clare Farmer, Helene Kindred (editors) (2024). *The Female Dancer, a soma-scientific approach*, Routledge, London.

manifestation of a kind of eroticism which is being born (or should be) between the director and the actors and actresses with whom he is working. Obviously, there is nothing sexual in this statement – it is about a kind of atmosphere which is erotically charged by the director in a premeditated way. This atmosphere, carefully maintained within the boundaries of ethics, becomes fertile ground for creation. I had encountered something similar (although not expressed directly) in testimonials by actors of Iași who had worked with Cătălina Buzoianu in the '70's. This director used to live in the theatre, cook in the theatre, and, generally speaking, saw the cast as family, and one of the immediate effects of this attitude was assuming a personalisation of relationships¹⁰. Another director who is said to have used eroticism during rehearsals was Alexandru Hausvater. On a European level, people still talk about Giorgio Strehler's astounding capacity for seduction. All these examples are, of course, from times when the director's authority figure was the most important one in building the production, but we can also imagine such a climate during rehearsals for a devised performance.

One of the internationally visible present-day directors who admits explicitly that the fundamental actor-director relationship is erotic is Thomas Ostermeier: "In a positive sense, the actor-director relationship is an erotic one. We seduce each other. I seduce the actor so he would open up. The actor seduces me so I would believe him. One is a voyeur, the other is an exhibitionist. I need actors who feel the same erotic thrill. And we don't have to be friends"¹¹.

Playwright eroticism

Next, I would like to refer to a few types of distinctive eroticism as they are found in the great European playwrights. In the case of Shakespeare, I tend to believe we are dealing with raw eroticism, due not to any subtleties, but to the endless sexual innuendo in Great Will's work. The fact that it was possible to create a Dictionary of Sexual Terms¹² – a few thousand words and phrases – says a lot about the sexual and erotic component of Shakespeare's plays. On the other hand, however, texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* prove he also knew how to develop non-vulgar eroticism. In *Othello*, more than in other text, these two perspectives coexist and merge. The Moor's virility and romanticism form an erotic alloy which is unique in the history of theatre worldwide. *Hamlet's* erotic complications are also the topic of numerous studies and books. Freud

¹⁰ See the places dedicated to Cătălina Buzoianu in Călin Ciobotari (2010). *Cornelia Gheorghiu, între Ciocârlia și Sarah Bernhardt* [Cornelia Gheorghiu, between The Skylark and Sarah Bernhardt], Editura Junimea, Iași and Călin Ciobotari (2019). *Emil Coșeru, actorul nostru* [Emil Coșeru, our actor], Editura Artes.

¹¹ Gerhard Jörder (2024). *Backstage Ostermeier*, translation from German by Ozana Oancea, Fundația Culturală „Camil Petrescu”, București.

¹² Gordon Williams (2006). *Shakespeare's Sexual Language. A Glossary*, The Athlone Press.

and Lacan explored the play in order to argue psychoanalytic theories which are still considered valid today. For example, you cannot produce *Hamlet* without asking yourself what kind of eroticism you will take from the text and how you can express it on stage. The Elsinor prince's sex life remains a mystery, however. The eroticism in Shakespeare's work definitely takes into account the eroticism of his time and reflects it according to the theories of reflection Shakespeare formulates. It is a dual eroticism, meant to satisfy the immodest Elizabethan audience, but also the refined royal court. Shakespeare's plays are, after all, like a buffet out of which we each take what we need. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can generate a porn movie or delicate dreams... It all depends on who is handling the text...

In my opinion, Chekhov is one of the masters of theatre eroticism. His whole theatre work can be read as plays of flirtation. Most of his characters are defined by a kind of uncertainty which is specific to flirtation. Without clear goals, gravitating chaotically around their own destiny, they practice a kind of continuous existential flirtation. Therefore, in their case, flirtation is more than just a transitory attitude – it is an ontology.

As far as actual erotic relationships are concerned, Chekhov's plays are chock-full of love. Unlike Shakespeare, Chekhov always avoids vulgar eroticism, refining and elevating it to an art. He prefers the process of creating eroticism to its consummation, and even when consummation occurs (Nina and Trigorin, Masha and Vershinin, etc.), this occurs far from our sight. Let us only think of the parties in the three sisters' house, the gentle courtship practiced by the officers, the subtlety of the women's responses, the web and flow of the erotic sentiment, the way in which the fire in the third act reflects the inner fires of desire, of waiting, of seeking. Then there is the storm in *Uncle Vanya's* second act – a terribly discreet storm of failed hormonal tensions, a storm as a debate of repressed sensuality. Ignoring the characters' eroticism means starting out with a severe hermeneutic handicap. Not wondering about Vanya's sex life, about Sonya's late virginity, about Yelena's young body moving under Serebryakov's old hands, about the useless virility of Astrov, who is wandering through the forest, means missing or having more difficult access to the characters' essence. *The Seagull* can definitely be read as an *ars erotica*, a complex study of love, but one which starts from erotic non-encounter and non-fulfilment. In *Platonov*, the main character has to deal simultaneously with no less than four women who love him, while in *Ivanov* we watch, stupefied, the process through which a man ends up no longer able to love anything. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the centre of our attention is a character whose name evokes love (Lyubov) and he is bankrupt with regards to his morals, finances, and soul due to his predisposition for love – he is addicted to the erotic drug and willing to do anything to consume it one more time.

In writing, Chekhov practiced a certain discreet delicacy, although, in his day-to-day life, he and his friend Suvorin made a goal of visiting brothels in all the new towns they went to. He was a handsome man himself, admired and courted by the women around him, so he definitely knew the delights of erotic explorations, which we find throughout his literary work.

But it is not just Chekhov that makes European modern theatre be erotic theatre. He is seconded by playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Wedekind, as we can read each of their works through a strictly erotic lens. Whether we are talking about Nora, Hedda, the lady from the sea, Julia, Lulu, we are talking about actual case studies of eroticism in action. It is true that modern theatre tends to associate eroticism to the female character, but it is all the more interesting to see how the male characters of these plays are salvaged (or not) from the erotic point of view. And yes, it is truly impossible to understand why we often see productions without any echo of this tremendous, omnipresent eroticism in the source texts.

In the theatre of the absurd, if we look at a mirroring of Beckett's and Ionesco's plays (the two great trends of the genre), we are surprised to see that eroticism is the biggest difference between them. While Beckett's territories are reserved from the erotic point of view, Ionesco's territories are usually watered by obvious sensuality. In the case of Beckett, once corporality has been destroyed (by old age, decomposing, burial), eroticism is diluted. In Ionesco's plays, on the contrary, a certain surplus of vitality (even in the case of elderly characters like the teacher in *The Lesson*) brings erotic vibes with it. A comparative analysis would be worth deepening, especially as it would answer a question such as, "To what extent can we talk about the erotic absurd?"

In the Romanian space, I would indicate two major directions of eroticism. One is given by Caragiale, although the "erotic Caragiale" has been talked about too little and the whole erotic apparatus in his plays is often downplayed due to quick labelling and prejudice deepened in time by superficial readings. However, let us notice that he has no play where flirtation, eroticism, a love relationship (whether guilty or not, vulgar or not) would be absent. The other direction is set by the work of Mihail Sebastian, especially the plays *Jocul de-a vacanța* [Holiday Make-Believe] and *Steaua fără nume* [The Nameless Star], which are real tours de force dedicated to illustrating eroticism production mechanisms. If, in Caragiale's case, we can talk about a Shakespeare-like direction, with that combination of vulgarity and refinement, with Sebastian we are in an obvious Chekhov-style paradigm, with frailty, vulnerability, and bittersweet melancholy. Caragiale shows us a noisy, somewhat exhibitionistic daytime eroticism. Sebastian, on the other hand, creates a whispered, discreet eroticism which blooms at nightfall.

Critique as eroticism

I have often wondered what kind of relationship critique (such a problematic name!) should have with the work which is its subject – in this case, a theatre production. Should it occur on the background of programmatic coldness and intentional frigidity, in the name of objectivity, or, on the contrary, should the critical act be fertilised by desire, impulse, and... erotic tension? I still feel attached to Susan Sontag's early theories from the '60's, where she claimed, with superb radicalism, that interpretation is harmful. Any interpretation, any theoretical staining, she said, harms the work by changing its shape and direction. Sontag proposed, precisely in the name of eroticism of art, that we should only describe the work¹³. An erotic critical act would seek the intimate part of the play and, full of desire, would be delivered as a confession from there, from the primary intimacy of the way in which the play shows itself to us. But revealing any intimacy is abusive... What could be worse than talking about your intimate experiences with others? Another kind of betrayal of the work could appear now – an erotic betrayal. That is why we may have to accept that, in its essence, any critique contains a bit of betrayal, no matter how we define the critical act.

The kind of theatre commentary that George Banu used to practice was also in the area of the erotic. Many decades ago, the famous theatrologist had decided to practice only the so-called "affirmative critique" – the kind of critique which only talks about the positive, the success, the fulfilment of the play and ignores failure and aesthetic precariousness. But this "affirmative" was also based on something more – a formula for becoming friends with the production even from the time when it was being built. Thus, George Banu abandoned the old (and present-day) formula of the exterior commentary and preferred to be inside the topic he was talking about. This change of perspective makes critique erotic, as it becomes personalised and placed in a horizon of intimate knowledge of the work.

Conclusions

This study is only a schematised introduction to an obviously complex topic, which is relevant both from a theoretical perspective and from a practical one, useful to the stage and to the audience. I tend to believe that, by means of a methodical, competent and profound approach of the topic of eroticism in the process of creation, theatre as a performance can reach a new stage of blooming. Whether we are talking about acting, direction, choreography or scenography, the idea of theatre as an erotic art can have unsuspected benefits. Moreover, we could also reflect on the very act of theatre research as a form of

¹³ Susan Sontag (2009). *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, in "Against interpretation", Penguin Books, pp. 3-15.

eroticism dominated by the acts of seeking, meeting and exploring. The topic remains open...

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The dimensions of British humour in theatre

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Abstract: In a time marked by profound changes, the concept of “culture” transcends traditional definitions and extends into the complex realm of interactions between creation, research and society, being perceived as a dynamic process that reflects and influences contemporary realities. This global perspective allows for a broader understanding of cultural phenomena, and academic research becomes essential for analysing and understanding these dynamics. Based on this premise, the study of British humour in contemporary Romanian spectacular arts, the subject of this research, becomes relevant not only in terms of the complexity of its translation and adaptation, but also in terms of the socio-historical and cultural influences that shape its perception by the Romanian public. Also relevant is the way in which British humour transcends centuries and cultural spaces, crossing linguistic boundaries and facing the challenges of translation, as well as paradigm shifts and major changes within the art of theatre. Thus, humour becomes a spiritual imprint, an instrument of introspection and social connection.

Keywords: British humour, theatre, audience, interdisciplinary, translation.

Introduction

Humour has been a constant in human society since the earliest forms of civilisation, evolving according to historical, political, economic, cultural and religious contexts. We can consider this concept a “total social fact”¹, as it facilitates the integration of individuals into the community and their adaptation to the norms and customs of the social environment. A synthesis of the subjective and the objective, of intellect and affectivity, humour presents a complexity that makes it difficult to define or, on the contrary, offers the possibility of a large number of incomplete definitions. G.K. Chesterton, in his article on humour – *Encyclopaedia Britannica*² – states that attempting to define humour is to be humourless. George Bernard Shaw has a similar opinion, as does the English novelist and humorist Jerome K. Jerome. The scholar Solomon

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¹ *The total social fact* is a methodological process created by French sociologist Marcel Mauss in which the object of study requires the observation of all areas of social life (religion, politics, economics, history, aesthetics, etc.).

² G.K. Chesterton (1928), *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://nonsenselit.com/g-k-chesterton-humour-1938/> (accessed on 10 February 2025).

Marcus humorously mentioned how this subject should be treated: “Do not make the mistake of venturing into definitions. Take humour in the most empirical way possible, in all its forms: comedy, mockery, jokes, anecdotes, witticisms, irony, pranks, farce, satire, caricature, amusement”³.

Although humour is a universal language, it is nevertheless specific to each culture. Time has crystallised differences between peoples, nations and races in its creation and reception, with each community presenting a typical form of humour. Terry Eagleton notes in a study that humour can be treated “as a text or as a language with countless regional accents. You cannot expect to hear the same specific laughter in Belize and in London, and in Belgravia”⁴.

This article is an exploratory study that aims to serve as a starting point for the study of British humour in contemporary Romanian spectacular arts, providing a basis for further investigation into humour as a spiritual imprint and cultural phenomenon.

Current state of the literature

Comedy has a close relationship with a whole range of manifestations of this cultural-human dimension, and *humour* occupies a special place. Like laughter or comedy, this versatile phenomenon takes many forms. Patrice Pavis, comparing humour with irony, states that the latter often gives “an impression of coldness and intellectual detachment”, defining humour as warmer – “it scrutinises the hidden philosophical aspects of existence and reveals the humourist's great inner richness”⁵. The theorist Terry Eagleton quotes William Hazlitt in his work *Humour* in an attempt to better “capture” this phenomenon: “Sometimes it nestles in a clever question, a witty answer, a spiritual argument, a subtle allusion, a skilfully amusing objection or an intelligent retort; sometimes it hides in a bold, e turn of phrase, in cutting irony, in vigorous hyperbole, in a striking metaphor, in a plausible reconciliation of contradictions, or in outrageous nonsense.”⁶

For a long time, this concept was considered an English monopoly, both as a term and as a practice. It is known throughout the world that British humour is unique in its refinement, subtlety of irony and, above all, self-irony. It has evolved along with British society and culture, without neglecting influences from outside. British humour is not only open-minded, but also complex and

³ Solomon Marcus, *Umorul, dincolo de divertisment* [Essay: Humour, beyond entertainment (I)], in „România literară”, no. 9/2015, *apud* Revista „Limba Română”, no. 1-2, 2015, <https://www.limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=3085> (accessed on 10 February 2025).

⁴ Terry Eagleton (2019). *Humour*, translated by Mihai Moroioiu, Editura Baroque Books & Arts, Bucureşti, p. 18.

⁵ Patrice Pavis (2012). *Theatre Dictionary*, translated by Nicoleta Popa-Blanariu and Florentina Floria, Editura Fides, Iaşi, pp. 68-69;

⁶ William Hazlitt (1963). “On Wit and Humour”, in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, London, p. 63, *apud* Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

surrealistically inventive. It can be intelligent and ironic, vulgar, satirical, surreal or pathetic. For the British, any social sins can be forgiven if the person who commits them is able to laugh at them. Voltaire recognised the peculiarities of British humour, but not the origin of the word. Madame de Staël attempted to find a definition: “The English language has created a word, *humour*, to express that cheerfulness which is a disposition of the blood almost as much as of the spirit; it is connected with the nature of the climate and the national character”⁷. Starting in the 15th and 16th centuries, British humour indicated a direction of the national spirit, seeking a deliberately realistic comedy, in which instinctive cold-bloodedness is combined with a little disguised malice. With the Renaissance, refined humour emerged from the sphere of cultivated minds. The two directions ran parallel until Shakespeare brought them together. William Temple was the first to highlight English superiority in humour, finding three causes for it: “the native wealth of the land, the tranquillity of government and the instability of the climate”⁸. He also theorises about the origins of humour, stating that it is not a characteristic of the individual, but rather a hereditary trait: “every individual has humour without effort, because those in his family had it”⁹. Approximately three hundred years later, a team of Canadian researchers conducted a study (for telegraph.co.uk) according to which the British penchant for crude comedy and humour at the expense of others is genetically inherited.¹⁰

During the Restoration, Irish playwright George Farquhar was awarded the title of *Citizen of Humour*. In 1702, he published a collection of verse and prose that included *Discourse on Comedy in Relation to the English Stage*, “an anti-classical essay against unities.” Another Restoration playwright, William Congreve, detected in his essay *On Temperament in Comedy* (1689) the specificity of the English temperament and the traits through which it can become a source of humour. A contrary point of view on the specificity of humour is held by Pirandello, in an essay published in 1908, entitled *L'umorismo*, in which he states that he does not believe that there is such a thing as national humour, but only accidental identities highlighted by the individual creations of humourists of the same literature.

Humour is undoubtedly a serious theme and a fundamental dimension of our cultural and social life, without which the theatrical space would certainly be much bleaker. Now, more than ever, it is important that the values that define Western culture be affirmed as the hallmarks of a civilisation that has paid its tribute to history in order to gain the freedom to laugh. And humour is the

⁷ Madame de Staël (1967). *On Literature*, in *Scrieri Alese* [Selected Writings], Editura pentru Literatură Universală, București, p. 345.

⁸ William Temple (1962). *Of Ancient and Modern Learning*, quoted in Marian Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 294.

¹⁰ Andy Bloxham (2008). *British humour dictated by genetics*, March, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1581251/British-humour-dictated-by-genetics.html>, accessed on 20 February 2025.

measure of this freedom, which was not inherent to Western civilisation, but a value earned over time.

Identifying a research niche

The need to study British humour in the context of contemporary Romanian theatre is based primarily on the fact that, at present, there is no large-scale scientific work in Romania that includes a detailed analysis of British humour in relation to contemporary Romanian theatre, despite the fact that the topic has the potential to reveal new perspectives and theatrical practices, both from a theoretical and practical point of view.

There are many works and researchers discussing humour, and multiple definitions have emerged from psychological, philosophical, aesthetic and linguistic studies. A whole range of theorists and aestheticians, from Aristotle with his *Poetics* to Immanuel Kant and Sigmund Freud, and including Henri Bergson's *Theory of Laughter* and Marian Popa's *Comicology* – all have attempted to capture humour in one definition or another. Harold Bloom's studies¹¹ on humour in the works of authors such as William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde provide a solid theoretical basis, but there is no comprehensive study on the particularities of translating British humour in theatre and the challenges involved in adapting it for Romanian audiences. A few studies explore the general problems of dramatic translation, such as the transposition of language, style and rhythm in plays. Research on the adaptation of British humour in Romanian theatre is fragmented, focusing more on specific authors and contexts, e.g. *Traduceri și imitațiuni românești după literatura engleză* [Romanian Translations and Imitations of English Literature] (1924) by Dragoș Protopopescu or *Shakespeare in Romania. A bibliographical essay* (1964) by Alexandru Duțu or *G.B. Shaw in Romania* (1968) by Ileana Berlogea, but they do not provide a systematic and detailed analysis of how British humour is translated and received in particular.

The research niche identified after consulting the specialist literature therefore consists of exploring the challenges of translating and adapting British humour in theatre, with a special focus on the impact of this process on the Romanian public and on the comparative analysis of cultural sensibilities between the two nations. The translation of humour remains one of the less theorised aspects of *translation studies*, which is itself a relatively new discipline. With its deep roots in a specific cultural and linguistic context, British humour poses a huge challenge for translators. Another important niche identified is the comparative analysis between British and Romanian humour. Identifying the similarities and differences between the two forms of humour can highlight the particularities of each culture, as well as how British humour is

¹¹ Harold Bloom (1998). *Shakespeare. The invention of the human*, Riverhead Books, New York.

reinterpreted to suit the Romanian audience. The research investigates the extent to which British humour can be directly transferred into the Romanian cultural space or whether significant changes in text and interpretation are necessary for British plays to be correctly received in Romania.

In the history of Romanian theatre, playwrights such as Oscar Wilde and G.B. Shaw are less represented in the repertoires of Romanian theatres. In contrast, contemporary British playwrights – Martin McDonagh, Sarah Kane, Nick Payne, and Mike Bartlett – have found a stronger echo, especially on the stage of independent theatres in Romania, but also increasingly on that of state theatres. For example, while the current repertoire of the ACT Theatre includes five plays based on British texts: *Lungs* by Duncan Macmillan, *An Intervention* by Mike Bartlett, *Constellations* by Nick Payne, *Girls and Boys* by Dennis Kelly, *It's True, It's True, It's True!* by Breach Theatre, the repertoire of the National Theatre in Bucharest includes only three: *Beginners* by Tim Crouch, *Incognito* by Nick Payne and *'s Memory of Water* by Shelagh Stephenson. This has led to the need for an in-depth analysis of the reception of British humour in Romanian theatre.

Theatres in Romania are showing an increasing interest in diversifying their repertoire, and British texts, known for their international success, are a valuable source in this regard. The proposed research has the potential to contribute significantly to this process by analysing how Romanian theatre has absorbed and adapted British humour. This investigation can provide theatre directors with relevant methodological tools for repertoire selection, facilitating a better understanding of the integration of international influences in the local context.

In the context of globalisation, it is important to understand how different cultures influence each other. Understanding these cultural interactions is essential to examining how artistic traditions and styles combine and evolve. Successful adaptations of British plays in Romania can become a model for cultural cooperation and future intercultural exchanges. In addition, humour is often a means of reflecting society, revealing its concerns, tensions and values. This research can facilitate a deeper understanding of how contemporary Romanian society interprets themes such as power, inequality, identity or the absurdity of existence. This will have a significant impact on how current social and cultural themes are addressed and discussed.

Conclusions

Adapting British humour involves a complex dynamic between translation, interpretation and audience perception, confirming that theatre is a field of ongoing cultural negotiation. This study highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of how British humour evolves in the context of Romanian theatre and its impact on the audience. The conclusions may contribute to the development

of a theatre repertoire that is better anchored in current realities and may also serve as a reference for theatres in Romania interested in coherent programming tailored to the needs of the audience.

With its unique characteristics, British humour offers an ideal platform for reconnecting audiences with the art of theatre, making a significant contribution to understanding current cultural dynamics and interactions between different cultural spaces. At the same time, it becomes, for me, an authentic research endeavour.

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Culture in the digital age

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Abstract: This paper proposes an analysis of the disinterest of the young generation in the traditional cultural approach and understanding, in relation to the multitude of socio-cultural and economic factors and the surprising evolution of technology. In a global context that is characterised by rapid change and influenced by the emergence of digital media, profound transformations are taking place in the ways in which cultural experiences are consumed and interpreted. Constant exposure to easily accessible information, which is not always controlled and verifiable, contributes to the diversification of cultural interests and preferences. For today's young people, the evolving digital age is showing a predilection for innovative forms of expression and communication that do not always align with traditional norms. The more modern education systems emphasise the development of technical and scientific skills, the more the study and appreciation of traditional forms of culture and art is overshadowed. It is certainly possible to stimulate the interest of the younger generation in cultural traditions and values if everything takes place within a modern framework of innovation.

Keywords: culture, digital, education, values, neuroplasticity, cultural crisis.

Introduction

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language gives the following definition of culture: “The totality of material and spiritual values accumulated by mankind throughout the ages”¹. Starting from this definition and the one given by the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor who defines in his book *Primitive Culture*, written in 1871, the term culture as “that complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”² we try to observe the way in which the digital age changes the structure or just more or less significant details of traditional culture.

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¹ <https://dexonline.net/definitie-cultura>

² Culture “is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” – Edward Burnett Tylor (1871). *Primitive Culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*, John Murray, Albemarle STI, London.

The importance that certain values, beliefs, traditions and practices have for a community or group contributing to its identity and cohesion defines cultural value. Respect for traditions, diversity, innovation and sustainability play an important role in shaping collective identity and the way individuals interact with those around them and with the environment.

It is becoming clear that, as communication, relational structures and everything connected with them are constantly changing, these changes inevitably entail changes in the individual's relationship with the culture of the society in which he or she lives.

The relationship between technological change and the real values of a culture means that digitisation is merely a tool, but the changes it produces are not essential, being limited (albeit in an apparently explosive way) to the formal, without fundamentally affecting the substance.

The problems arising are complex and manifold, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them. It is almost impossible to assess the impact of the changes brought about by each individual factor: radio, television, the internet, social media, the press, etc.

The information explosion, the speed at which huge amounts of data can be accessed, can bring about different rhythms and visions, both in the work of art creators and in the perception of art creators, but it (the information explosion) also entails limitations and numerous pitfalls, such as false information, taken up indiscriminately, propagated and amplified, sometimes in defiance of the most basic common sense.

One of the problems identified with digitisation is the growing gap in the assimilation of traditional culture and its perception by the new generation of adolescents. This cannot be due to technological progress alone. The mere evolution of technology could be an answer, but not enough, although some less obvious consequences of technology are also becoming very important, such as: the absence of manual skills (replacing handwriting with simple keyboard strokes), so that personalised creation is replaced by a limited selection; drawing and painting replaced by computer graphics, music with classical instruments replaced by synthesis programmes, classical films with scripts and sometimes special effects created by complex computer software, etc.

Of course, just like video games, the user is not really a creator, but merely selects and/or combines pre-recorded situations and programmes (although some critics sometimes forcibly consider that mere selection constitutes an act of creation!). So, these so-called creations or works, although they may appear to be extraordinarily complex, are in reality nothing more than sophisticated compilations in which the originality of the author is close to zero.

Let us now look at some of the pressing and potentially dangerous issues that the galloping pace of technological change is causing, with its rapid and

unpredictable changes in the behaviour of young people (and young people in general) in relation to tradition and traditional values.

What is actually changing?

In order to try to understand at a deeper level what is happening nowadays in relation to the behavioural and cognitive changes of young people, we should introduce the term “neuroplasticity”.

It is very difficult to pin down the exact origin of the concept of neuroplasticity, as some researchers have made certain conceptualisations of the nervous system adapting and reorganising without using the term “neuroplasticity”, and others have used the term in different senses than the one used now, but the earliest evidence comes from 1783 when the Swiss scientist Charles Bonnet corresponded with the Italian anatomist Michele Vincenzo Malacarne discussing the possibility of increasing brain size by practising training over a long period of time. Malacarne proved this by experimenting with animals - dogs and birds born on the same day - to show that animals used for long-term training had larger cerebella than those in a contro group.

Based on what the Spanish neurophysiologist Santiago Ramon y Cajal (often considered a pioneer of modern neuroscience) said : “Every man can, if he so wishes, become the sculptor of his own brain”³, neuroplasticity, one of the most important breakthroughs in neuroscience, can be defined as: “the ability to change the structure and patterns of activity in significant ways, not only in childhood, which is not very surprising, but also in adulthood. This change can occur as a result of the experiences we have as well as purely mental activity - our thoughts”⁴. (Davidson & Begley, 2020)

Among those who defined the term neuroplasticity was the Polish neuroscientist Jerzy Konorsky, who proposed a theory that neurons activated by proximity to an active neural circuit change and integrate into that circuit. The change would be due to a continuous learning process, independent of age and socio-cultural-professional conditioning.

According to Cornelia Măirean's article “Changing the profile of individual learning in the age of digital technologies”, published in the volume “Digital Education”, which is based on studies by Alan Pritchard, Carol Ann Tomlinson, Elaine Hall and David Moseley, the learning styles that determine the acquisition of knowledge and the development of different ways of

³ Vida Demarin; Sandra Morovic; Raphael Bene, (2014). *Neuroplasticity*, in “Periodicum Biologorum”, Croatian Society for Natural Sciences, Zagreb.

⁴ Richard J. Davidson; Sharon Begley, (2020). *The Brain and Emotional Intelligence. How its unique patterns influence the way you think, feel and live, and how you can change them*, Editura Litera, București.

knowing may be different depending on personal preferences and characteristics and contexts.

“The individual differences created on the basis of unique learning profiles blur when we talk about digital learning.... we talk about the emergence of a unique digital learning profile... and this uniformity can be explained by the neural plasticity that enabled the development of certain skills and inhibited the development of others as a result of early exposure to various digital environments” (Măirean, 2020). This is what was to be demonstrated in relation to the young generation's disinterest in traditional type culture. So, the way of assimilation of information through digital media affects relational behaviour not only formally, but also structurally, often it seems irreversible.

There are two tendencies among scientists regarding the impact of technology on the behaviour of young people – one optimistic and the other, conversely, pessimistic. Unfortunately, the most pertinent and numerous arguments favour the latter. From an optimistic point of view, it can be seen that exposure to digital media can help to develop visual skills at a higher level: visualisation, spatial scanning, hand-eye coordination, the ability to react quickly to spontaneous events and to go through a very large amount of information in a very short time.

Advantages include young people's rapid access to diverse cultural resources such as films and music from different corners of the world viewed on platforms such as Netflix, Spotify, YouTube, etc., while at the same time creating and distributing cultural content and influencing cultural trends. However, from a pessimistic point of view, exposure to digital media from a very young age may lead to overdevelopment of certain lobes of the brain, but at the same time there is decreased activity in the frontal lobe, the part of the brain that is responsible for abstract thinking, planning and thinking ahead. Digital stimulation can hinder the development of neural pathways that are directly involved in empathy and social skills. Digitisation allows access to a wide range of cultures, but at the same time it can very easily lead to standardisation.

What is also worrying and can even cause or worsen Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) by stimulating temporal lobe activity at the expense of frontal lobe activity in children and adolescents is video games and other digital activities in which they become immersed and lose track of time. Research shows that childhood and adolescence are critical periods for the development of cognitive and social-relational skills, but the direct link between brain development and learning behaviour is still unclear, and what is already known about neural plasticity is not sufficient to explain the development of individual learning profiles as a result of exposure to technology-based learning environments.

The distance that young people have from traditional cultural values has much more complex causes, and addressing them requires an in-depth, albeit difficult, study, because each term considered entails other and other aspects that in turn compete for primacy, and ranking them in order of importance is difficult.

Recent neuroscience points to pathways in the brain that are needed to hone interpersonal skills, empathic abilities and effective personal instincts. In digital natives who have been raised in technology, these interpersonal neural pathways are often left unstimulated and underdeveloped.

Just as the brain controls our ability to search online or respond to emails, it defines our humanity - our self-awareness, creativity, social intuition, and the ability to experience empathy, trust, guilt, love, sadness, and a range of complex emotions. Neuroscientists have discovered subdiagnostic neural circuits that define these mental states and make us feel human.

Looking from a neuroscience point of view, they have noticed that in our brains there is a gland called the anterior cingulate cortex which controls our ability to recognise facial expressions and intense emotions and is responsible for attention, empathy and motivation. When we make a mistake, the anterior cingulate cortex activates and indicates its role in our experience of guilt. A child under the age of 16 who spends more than two hours a day on a tablet, mobile phone, or any gaming device containing frames manages, through this exposure to digital media, to shrink this gland, and slowly but surely, it disappears. In this case, a child who no longer has attention, no longer manages to accumulate anything to evolve. And when you no longer have empathy, you no longer manage to communicate with anyone, when you no longer have a direction, a motivation, you no longer have goals, and in the end, it means that you no longer have a destiny.

A critical aspect of what defines human behaviour is the ability to act appropriately in social situations and to experience empathy. People who lack empathy to the extreme are sometimes called sociopaths. They tend to feel no guilt and lack the capacity to love. Of course, in addition to neuroplasticity, it becomes important to take into account psychological studies of young people's behaviour, social, socio-professional, linguistic studies, sexual behaviour, the influence of psychoactive substances and many other factors. The development of these topics would be the subject of a much more comprehensive work than this one.

Is there a cultural values' crisis in the digital age?

To the question of whether we can speak of a (new) crisis in the understanding of cultural values, the answer is undoubtedly yes! We will consider both terms of cultural impact: the degree of culture, originality and sensitivity of the creator and the degree of interest of the younger generation, whom we will call the receiver of the artistic act. It is absolutely necessary to

study the extent to which these two terms, placed on the balance of a scale, can reach a balance in such a way that they communicate and resonate with each other. It becomes clear at a certain point in this analysis that, given the lack of a high level of education among young people (a worrying proportion), we can only speak of a fairly small number of subjects who show these compatibilities.

At the risk of attracting criticism, let's take a very small example of the reception of an element of classical culture by a possible young recipient today: a famous painting: "Aman apologising to Esther"⁵, a masterpiece by Rembrandt in Romania's National Museum of Art, which young people pass by almost every day without paying any attention to it.

In order to resonate with this monumental work, the recipient should, in addition to an elementary knowledge of the biblical text from which the subject of the work is inspired, be familiar with important elements of the history of Dutch painting in the 17th century, details about the chiaroscuro technique, colour theory, the theory of light contrast, proportions, the significance of the attitude of the characters, etc., so that finally, by correlating all these elements, he/she can define (and possibly explain) the emotion he/she feels (or experiences) in contact with this work. Any one of these missing elements can lead to a vitiation or even a lack of genuine emotion, the result being clearly disinterest. The disinterest is obviously due to an elementary lack of culture that allows the aforementioned work to be given the same importance as any meaningless image

Another idea to be considered regarding the relationship between the digital age and cultural values is a careful analysis of the level of education of the young people to whom art creators are addressing. As they are much more receptive to any idea wrapped in the forms of digital language, it goes without saying that these forms can be and are preferable to be used in relation to them.

Another trenchant question would be: Is the creator of art at a level above or clearly above the possibilities of assimilation and interest of the younger generation? And if so, will he yield to the tastes and demands of young consumers by aligning himself with their level, or will he try (at the risk of becoming ostentatiously didactic) to raise the cultural threshold, betting (perhaps wrongly) that by inciting them he will trigger a hunger for information, an avalanche of ambitions among them?

Often a creator who is aware of these problems will take precautionary measures like the example of Umberto Eco who, when accused that in his famous novel *The Name of the Rose* he wrote the first hundred pages less attractive than the rest of the novel, replied that it was his way of selecting his readers, so that those readers who could not pass this threshold meant that it was not worth reading the rest of the book, built on several levels of cognition.

⁵ <https://mnar.ro/descopera/galerii-permanente/76-galeria-de-arta-europeana/descopera-lucrurile-din-galeria-de-arta-europeana/92-aman-in-fata-esterei>

This is an attitude that should be taken into account in the art creator-consumer relationship.

And with this example, I have introduced another facet of this relationship. Of course, this aspect could be considered elitist, and in reality it is. It can be summarised simply and understandably: not everything is for everyone! The explosion of information due to enormous technical progress, in addition to the advantage that everyone has of being able to access almost anything, gives rise, among other things, to a disinterest due to opulence, like a lack of appetite when faced with a lot of food.

On the other hand, as the basic element, the “building block” of a work of art is emotion, lack of self-knowledge as an essential lack of introspection in education, means that the exponent of the younger generation (the subject of this article) does not understand his emotion, sometimes does not identify it, or even does not feel it. In the absence of a minimum of self-knowledge, of an unexplored or even ignored sensitivity, the effect expected by the art creator in relation to his audience is identical to talking to the walls, or often even less so.

In the performing arts, in theatre in particular, where emotion is conveyed directly, often without requiring solid classical training on the part of the spectator, the lack of impact may be due to a lack of empathy, which is also regrettably a characteristic of young people educated by the internet and video games, as demonstrated earlier in addressing the discussion of neural plasticity.

A survey conducted in the US by the Pew Research Centre in 2024 on the use of technology and social media among teens aged 13-17 reported that YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat are the most used social media platforms among young people. Nine in ten teens say they use YouTube (down slightly from 95% in 2022). TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat remain widely used among teens, with about six in ten teens saying they use TikTok and Instagram, and 55% say the same for Snapchat, while just 32% say they use Facebook (down from years past), 17% use X .com (formerly Twitter), 23% use WhatsApp (up from 2022), 14% Reddit and just 6% use Threads (launched by Meta in 2023). The survey found that nearly half of US teens are online regularly, with 96% saying they use the internet daily. Another study by Common Sense Media shows that young people spend on average more than 7 hours a day in front of screens, which can affect social interactions and mental health.

In the book *Digital Dementia. How new technologies are clouding our minds* by one of Germany's leading neuroscientists Manfred Spitzer, he concludes from the studies and research he presents that the internet and computers not only alter our thinking, memory and attention, but also our social behaviour.

The result of this extensive research shows that above all our brain is a social brain. According to “The Social Brain: The Neural Basis of Social

Knowledge”, Ralph Adolphs argues that some of the psychological processes that distinguish social cognition in humans also represent aspects of human social behaviour that are unique, such as culture and civilisation.

Some studies show that when the brain is utilised it grows and when it remains unutilised it atrophies. Social skills relate to the activity of certain areas of the brain that recent research shows increase in volume due to social activity when the corresponding brain centres are stimulated. Lack of self-control, loneliness and depression are among the most important stressors in our society, which lead to nerve cell death and in the long term may favour dementia. The disappearance of real human-to-human contacts and their replacement by online digital networks can cause the reduction of the social brain as mentioned above.

Conclusions

The problems become serious and very serious when we talk about the moral aspect of traditional values. If the aesthetic and cultural side of traditions can be subject to discussion, to analysis in which one orientation or another can be questioned, the moral side of tradition, when dissolved, can even lead to the disappearance of a culture and ultimately to the disappearance (even physical) of the group that is represented by that culture.

To conclude, we must look at the real source of the problem, the distance of the younger generation from traditional, and in particular cultural, values. Of course, the contribution of the rapid development of digital technology has, as already mentioned, a significant impact on young people's behaviour, by altering their learning capacity, reducing empathy and generally distorting perception due to information that is filtered or selectively targeted (some prefer the term manipulation) in a particular direction, as more or less obviously desired by software developers through algorithms of unprecedented complexity.

But associated with this is also the absence of traditional-style education; the young people we are talking about, having been educated by TV programmes, video games and the Internet, etc., are the ones who, instead of telling their grandparents' fairy tales, have spent hours in front of their tablets and phones, structuring their behaviour according to the models taken from there.

There is a need to encourage a balanced consumption of digital and traditional culture and to have school initiatives and programmes that include: visits to museums, collaborations with local artists who use technology to teach students, events that involve socialisation, interactivity, etc.

Otherwise, resolving the identity crisis characteristic of puberty and adolescence sometimes takes unnatural forms (although, following the whole process of lack of socialisation, direct contact, perfectly predictable). The effects can be surprising and unpleasant. For example, during the Covid-19

pandemic, in very many cases in lower education (second and third grades) after two years of online teaching, it was not without astonishment that many of the students even forgot how to write. The lack of direct contact over a long period of time has altered (sometimes irreversibly) the relationships between them and between them and adults, making them almost sociopaths. The solution would be to become aware of emotions. So, educate the emotional plane if the mental plane is compromised. Instead of the abuse of information usually practised in education, let's start to work on awareness and the development of emotional intelligence: What am I feeling? Why do I feel this way? How am I in relation to what I feel? How do I change what I feel? Who feels? What is emotion? Can I transmit it? Can I feel it in others? Can they feel mine? How does it change? Why does it change?

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Doctoral research in art: between the preservation of cultural values and the challenges of the contemporary crisis

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Abstract: A fundamental point of doctoral theses is their contribution to the preservation and valorisation of cultural heritage by means of a critical approach that integrates both historical research and innovative perspectives on artistic practice. However, there is a constant concern that many of these works remain limited to narrow academic circles, without achieving the desired impact on the general public or the artistic community. Thus, their effectiveness in the face of the current cultural crisis, marked by the rapid fragmentation and uniformity of cultural products, is questioned. The contemporary cultural crisis is deeply rooted in socio-economic changes, and the status of the artist is often undermined, being seen more as a producer of aesthetic goods than as a creator of fundamental values. In this context, doctoral theses should respond to these challenges and contribute to a redefinition of the role of art and the artist, thus facilitating cultural regeneration in a constantly changing landscape.

Keywords: crisis, culture, doctoral thesis, artist.

Introduction

In popular discourse, “culture” is an all-encompassing term that can be invoked to explain the behaviours or failures of any individual or group. As researchers, we aim to build more precise models that avoid the fallacies of stereotypes and other intuitive biases about social differences. However, when we narrow our definitions of culture, we must always consider whether narrowing our definitions will also narrow down the questions we can address.

Some people think of culture in the singular, as it was conceived in Europe during the 18th and early 19th centuries – as something achieved through evolution and progress. This concept of culture reflects the inequalities within European societies and their colonies around the world; in short, it equates culture with civilisation and contrasts both with nature or non-civilisation. According to this understanding of culture, some countries are more “civilized” than others and, therefore, some people are more “cultured”

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than others. Mircea Vasilescu writes, “We will have to decide quickly: is culture a luxury that we can give up when we don’t have enough money, or is it a necessity of modern man, worth making efforts and sacrifices for?”¹.

When people talk about culture in the sense of civilisation or sophistication, they are actually talking about “high culture,” which is different from the sociological concept of culture. High culture refers to elite goods and activities, such as theatre, fine arts, gastronomy, fashion, museum-quality art, and classical music. In common parlance, people may refer to others as “cultured” if they know about and participate in these activities. Someone using “culture” in this sense might argue that classical music is more refined than pop or rock music or indigenous musical traditions. Popular (or “pop”) culture, on the other hand, is more general and is influenced by the media and public opinion.

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This definition of culture recognizes only one standard of sophistication to which all groups are held accountable. Thus, people who differ from those who consider themselves to be “cultured” in this sense are not usually understood as having a different culture; they are understood as uncultured.

The culture of a society is reflected in values, norms, and practices. This is observed through individuals to reflect perceptions, practices, and values and in the transfer of technology. The emphasis on identity and diversity has led to a fragmentation of culture, with each social group developing its own cultural references.

In the case of the disinterest that has emerged in the new generations, there is a perception that young people are increasingly less interested in traditional forms of culture (classical literature, visual art, theatre, etc.). This could be attributed to:

- The acceleration of the pace of life: Consumption of fast and superficial content (social media, short videos) has become the norm.
- The accessibility of technology: The internet and mobile devices offer an infinite range of entertainment options, which can make other forms of culture seem less attractive.
- Changing concepts of leisure: Young people seek immediate and interactive experiences, while traditional forms of culture may be perceived as passive and boring.
- Redefining the concept of culture: The line between culture and entertainment is becoming blurred, and many cultural products are now created with the primary purpose of entertaining. Why watch a dramatic performance that will make me sad, make me think, and remind me how horrible people can be when I could watch a short cat video?

¹ <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/cultura-in-criza-iar-612185.html>

- Digital culture: New communication networks have generated new forms of artistic and cultural expression (gaming, vlogs, digital art), which can be considered part of contemporary culture. Technology has a crucial impact on fundamental aspects of all our cultures, including language, art, mobility, education and religion. A community's culture acts as a standard for perceiving, judging and evaluating technology, since technology affects all cultural components and determines the direction of its development.

To occupy a broader cultural dimension, modern technology needs to be in harmony with the social and cultural conditions of the community – otherwise there is friction between technological development and the preservation of values. A rational balance allows people to exercise their freedom of expression in the technical world, which transcends each person's ethnicity, age or level of education. People use it to fulfil their fantasies, but a cultural decline can occur due to the lack of restrictions, regulations and/or consequences.

What contributions are we trying to make through doctoral research and through studies like this one? What do we bring new in relation to the old "humanistic cultures"? Are researchers "men or women of culture" or have they, without realizing it, already turned into technicians who follow certain text patterns of producing small-scale research just to check a requirement from a file? Are these mere pre-established rituals that make their steps predictable actions devoid of the spectacular nature of an act of creation? "You cannot write well... if you do not have a solid cultural background. The spontaneous and illiterate writing that lurks around us is very dangerous,"² Andrei Pleșu says.

Controversies surrounding artistic research often focus on the issue of demarcation. What distinguishes artistic research from artistic practice? And what distinguishes it from scientific or academic research? Underlying these issues of demarcation is a question of legitimacy.

Experimentation and play as forms of knowledge: As classical forms of artistic expression were no longer sufficient, attempts were made to mix them with other media starting a hundred years ago. First the papier-collé of Cubism, then Picasso's sculptures, Duchamp's Fountain, Dada, later we reached increasingly unconventional installations and the story goes on. At some point, art consumers found themselves in the position of seeing ordinary objects presented as art. Aestheticism has perished, and if it still survives somewhere, it is accused and unwanted, criticised when it does not praise an artist or director. There are new rules of a game that takes place in the artistic realm. The art-reason couple is formed in the public and political space.

² https://adevarul.ro/stil-de-viata/cultura/andrei-plesu-elemente-de-criză-exista-pestă-tot-1856299.html#google_vignette

The art market with all its fields and the stress of artistic production leave artists little room to “stop and contemplate” what they are doing. Many artists must act as free entrepreneurs in the “creative industry” market, a market which is not oriented towards reflection, but which expects its suppliers to provide a constant flow of new products and projects.

Art is now immersed in the universe of reason, whether that is the economic and social world of the market, the institutional one, or the intellectual world of knowledge. Art received in a public space can only be conceived in the circulation of works that acquire the status of a commodity. Art also needs to coexist with science, research and thought, freeing itself from the very beginning from purely aesthetic judgment. The state structured by public space establishes the condition of new artistic creation, namely freedom. But is this freedom complete? “It will be useful to study new strategies that respond to the crisis on a large scale and to explore the extent to which cultural heritage can be a way to address environmental, economic and social problems around the world.”³

And thus, we arrive at freedom of expression, the freedom to choose the camp we want to be in. Most artists outside the University may not know much about what is happening or what is being researched inside a doctoral school, just as the reverse is also frequently true. But the artists’ values were and are the same. They have always sought solutions for expression, trying to find themselves. Knowing themselves, they express their inner world in relation to what is happening around them.

And yet... Does the exigency of culture remain valid, in the case of the artist, or must we accept the relaxation to the point of dissolution of a once essential criterion? “Art and science are not two separate worlds; they complement and enrich each other.” Renaissance artists proved that art and science or research, could and should collaborate to create unique innovations and solutions. Combining artistic creativity with scientific reasoning can lead to remarkable achievements.

Has the status of artists changed from curious bohemians eager to know more and more to simple pieces of today's industrial-technological mechanism? We cannot know that yet, but they remain in solidarity with the events of the era in which they live, be they actors, directors, graphic designers, musicians, architects, sculptors, photographers, puppeteers, visual artists, writers, or translators.

The world of art and culture in general is forced to adapt to a world in constant motion. Theatre, music and visual arts are losing ground to the media arts and the digital world in general. Progress in any science requires a willingness to rethink fundamental concepts, even concepts that might be

³ <https://www.firstonline.info/ro/cultura-in-crisi-una-visione-futura-del-patrimonio-globale-qual-e-sara-la-nuova-sfida/>

intuitively correct. Sciences tend to start with popular everyday ideas – products of intuition. These can be useful for a while, but they eventually hinder progress on certain issues and lead to a cultural crisis.

Erosion of cultural values: The lack of a common cultural foundation can lead to a loss of collective identity and difficulties in building a cohesive society.

Declining levels of cultural education: A less cultured population is more vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation.

The cultural crisis is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes and long-term consequences. To overcome this crisis, concerted efforts are needed from all the actors involved: cultural institutions, educators, content creators, but also from society as a whole. This is the advice of ChatGpt for humanity. So, the virtual friend also offers me a conclusion and possible topics for discussion at a future meeting.

“A cultural crisis occurs when a breakdown in values, behaviours and societal norms negatively impacts employee well-being and performance. This results in low morale, high turnover, lack of trust, disengagement and potentially even ethical lapses. Dropping levels of management support, poor communication, and empathy worsen the situation, leading to burnout, dissatisfaction and instability within the organisation.”⁴

The institutionalization of art involves the emergence of specific fields and an adequate methodological programme. The number of institutions that have emerged (museums, galleries, auction houses, art centres, independent spaces, etc.) reveals people’s interest for this world. Somehow, the role of the sponsor is taken over by all these public institutions. But, while the sponsor only exhibited the artist's works to a small and well-selected audience, they are now seen and accessible to the entire public, to all people regardless of social status or intellectual training. Thus, the second problem enters the equation: finding visual solutions adapted to our contemporary world.

Conclusions

I said above that the increasingly rapid technological evolution puts the cultural world in a bind. When people have comfort as their primary goal, and this depends on science, they will invest in it. Social status is calculated today according to comfort and the number of objects that make life easier. Most people do not need culture and art in order to climb the social ladder.

Is Dostoevsky's idea that “beauty will save the world” still valid? The best answer and the most conclusive definition is found in Baudelaire: “Beauty is nothing but the promise of happiness”. Of the happiness of freely choosing

⁴ <https://www.isaca.org/resources/news-and-trends/isaca-now-blog/2024/the-hidden-culture-crisis-and-human-burden-undermining-cybersecurity-resilience>

with whom we want to be compatible in common principles, convictions and inclinations. Of the happiness of designing a work that is relevant from a cultural point of view, avoiding kitsch, bad taste and fashion. Although kitsch is also consumed and present now more than ever in our lives.

From theatre, painting, literature, music, film, publications, works of fiction, comics and advertisements – products whose purpose is exclusively financial. If we adapt this definition to today's society, we will realize that everything we consume is kitsch. Our favourite TV series, the music we listen to, the album we buy, all have elements of kitsch in their composition. Of course, not everything that surrounds us is kitsch, just as we cannot label every creation as art.

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From independent cultural worker to professional cultural worker

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Abstract: Emergency Ordinance No. 21/2023 of 5 April 2023 (published in the Official Gazette on 7 April) was introduced as a measure to recognise independent cultural workers as real contributors to the labour market. Part of a more complex research project that seeks to provide an overview of independent cultural workers in Romania, this article will present the results of a fiscal and socio-economic analysis of the status of professional cultural workers and the impact it will have on the independent sector in Romania. The study looks at the conditions for obtaining the status, how to obtain it, the form of organisation and the tax obligations resulting from cultural activity. At the same time, for comparative purposes, the forms of contracting currently available to independent cultural operators will be presented, with the intention of analysing the differences and similarities that a professional cultural worker (as presented in GEO 21/2023) may have in relation to the current forms of employment in the field. For the comparative analysis, the report refers to the 2024 fiscal year, which is considered to be the end of the fiscal year. Finally, the conclusions of the research will be presented, highlighting the level of applicability to the actual functioning of independent cultural workers.

Keywords: cultural worker, labor market, independent.

Introduction

According to the preamble to this ordinance, the action comes as a measure to protect and reform the cultural sector, in an attempt to diminish the disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector and to align Romania with EU policies in this regard, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

This preamble defines the concept of independent/professional cultural worker in legislative and fiscal terms as “the author or performing artist, as defined by Law No. 8/1996, republished, with subsequent amendments and additions, and/or the natural person carrying out a cultural support or auxiliary activity, among those listed in the annex, who have

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registered as such for tax purposes for a period of three years”¹. Therefore, this designation includes holders of copyright and related rights, but also cultural workers who until now have not been classified as an integral and recognised part of the independent cultural sector community: cultural managers, specialists in communication and cultural promotion, technicians, producers, etc. The preamble also describes independent cultural workers as having “atypical” contracts, working part-time, “earning irregular and mixed incomes”, with a tax structure consisting “mainly of micro-enterprises, organisations and small businesses”².

The ordinance comprises eight chapters, which define the status of professional cultural workers and regulate their legal, fiscal and social regime, rights and obligations, and present support measures and possible methods of association in forms similar to those of a trade union, etc. For this analysis, however, we will focus on Chapters I, II, III and IV, which deal with the fiscal and social regulations of cultural workers, and we will discuss the benefits they bring, the conditions for fulfilment and the steps that an independent cultural worker must take to become a professional cultural worker, similarities and/or differences between the tax regime that applies to them with or without the status of a worker registered as a professional, and we will conclude by comparing the two modes of operation according to the practical reality of the field.

Eligibility conditions

- To carry out independent activities in accordance with the CAEN codes attached in Annex 1 to this ordinance (in short, we are referring to CAEN codes from groups 58 - publishing activities, 59 – Motion picture, video and television programme production activities; audio recording and music publishing activities, 74 – Other professional, scientific and technical activities, 82 – Landscape activities and building services, 85 – Education, 90 – Creative and artistic activities)³

- Not have an employment contract in the cultural field at the time of registration as a professional worker

- Not hold public office

- Have had income of at least 50% from artistic or related activities in the previous fiscal year⁴ (this can be demonstrated by an income certificate issued by ANAF and includes income from fixed-term employment

¹ OUG21/2023, Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph k.

² OUG 21/2023, preamble.

³ Classification of activities in the national economy - CAEN Rev. 2 of 20 April 2007, published in the Official Gazette, Part I No. 293 of 3 May 2007.

⁴ OUG21/2023, Chapter II, Article 3, paragraph 1.

contracts, income from PFA, copyright and related rights, and income from services – all in the cultural field⁵)

Procedure for obtaining the status of self-employed professional:

- Registration in the register of professional cultural workers;
- Once every three years, an application is submitted to the Ministry of Culture, which is the administrator of the register, accompanied by supporting documents:

Tax documents proving income from copyright contracts or services exceeding the threshold of 50% of total income (these may also come from fixed-term employment contracts, although they are not accepted for continuation during the period when professional cultural worker status is held, and the employer must have one of the CAEN codes from the list accepted in the ordinance): income certificate or single declaration from the previous year, certificate from the employer, etc.

Affidavit regarding the information declared in the registration application

- The “registry administrator” as mentioned in the document is required to approve or reject the application within 30 days, with the possibility of appeal.
- Following the approval of the file, *the natural person – independent cultural worker* becomes a *natural person - professional cultural worker* with a unique registration number, similar to a PFA or SME, but with its own tax regime.

It is important to note that the status of professional cultural worker is valid, following registration, only for the next three years and only if no employment contract is signed for work in the field, at the end of which an application for its extension can be made, as long as the same conditions as for the first registration are met (proof of income from artistic and cultural activities accounting for at least 50% of total income). The status of professional cultural worker may also be suspended in situations such as: the appointment of the person concerned to public office, maternity leave, childcare leave, medical leave, etc., with the possibility of resumption.

Tax obligations

The only difference between the way independent cultural workers are currently contracted and the way this is presented in GEO 21/2023 is that, following contracting, a type of withholding tax is added, namely the employment insurance contribution (which covers, among other things, unemployment benefits), which is currently only present in individual employment contracts. This has a value of 1%, calculated on the gross

⁵ National Agency for Fiscal Administration.

amount, and the payment is made by the employer without affecting the cultural worker's gross income. Otherwise, the taxation procedure is the same as it is currently for any independent income, as shown in the attached table.

TABLE 1.⁶	employment contract	contract DA 2024	CV 2024 contract	DA contract ⁷ LCP	CV LCP contract
income tax	10	10% with a flat rate of 40% of the gross amount	10	10% with a flat rate of 40% of the gross amount	10% with a flat rate of 40% of the gross amount
health contributions (CASS)	10	10% of the equivalent of 6.12 or 36 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded**	10% of the equivalent of 6.12 or 36 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded**	10% of the equivalent of 6.12 or 36 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded**	10% of the equivalent of 6, 12 or 36 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded**
social security contributions (CAS)	25	0	25% of the equivalent of 12 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded***	25% of the equivalent of 12 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded***	25% of the equivalent of 12 gross minimum wages per country, if this ceiling is exceeded***
employment insurance contribution (CAM)*	2.25	0	0	1	1
total out of 100%	47	45	45	46	46

⁶ Please note that these calculations are made in accordance with the Tax Code for 2024 and that they may vary depending on subsequent changes.

⁷ Explanation of abbreviations: DA = copyright and related rights contract; CV = civil agreement, equivalent to a service contract for individuals; LCP = professional cultural worker

* unemployment, workplace accidents, sick leave, etc.

** for 2024, we are talking about amounts of 1,980, 3,960 or 7,920 lei.

*** for 2024, we are talking about the amount of 9,900 lei.

Social insurance

According to Chapter 4, Articles 13 and 14 of OUG 21/2023, from the moment they register with the Ministry of Culture and obtain a registration number for their activity, professional cultural workers have certain social security rights, similar to those of an employee, as outlined below⁸ :

- Sick leave for illness or occupational accidents
- Maternity/paternity leave and other leave related to maternity (maternity risk, sick child care leave, etc.)
- Unemployment benefit
- Pension

To better understand these regulations set out in OUG21/2023, it is necessary to draw a parallel between the current situation and the moment when a cultural worker has this status. More specifically, at present, anyone who earns income from self-employment is required to declare and pay social security contributions based on the income threshold reached during a fiscal year, with the exception of income from copyright, if the person in question has employee status.⁹

In this situation, the type of income is not important, whether it comes from cultural activities or not. When the ceiling of 12 minimum wages per economy in a year is exceeded, 25% of its value or 10% of the value of 6/12/24 minimum wages per economy is paid if we are talking about health insurance¹⁰. If the total income is below this ceiling, then the person in question is not obligated to pay either of the two contributions and, automatically, does not benefit from health insurance, social insurance or unemployment benefit, unless this is paid voluntarily.

From the moment of registration as a professional worker, the individual therefore has the same obligations as before (with an additional tax - the employment insurance contribution paid by the contracting legal entity) but enjoys a number of benefits that were not guaranteed or were more difficult to obtain in the initial form of activity.

Conclusions

After this detailed analysis of the most important aspects of the emergency ordinance and taking into account the reality on the ground and the context in which independent cultural workers carry out their activities, we arrive at the following conclusions:

- The legal framework does not differ greatly from the current situation. There is the advantage that the work performed by a cultural worker is recognised as seniority, that the cultural worker is no longer obliged to find

⁸ OUG 21/2023, Chapter 4, Art. 13-1 and Art. 14-1.

⁹ Law no. 227/2015 on the Fiscal Code, Title 5, Chapter II, Section 5, Art. 150, paragraph 2.

¹⁰ Details can be found in the comparative table.

contracting artifices in order to be able to carry out their activity (and here we refer to different legal forms for those working on the executive side of projects and programmes), having their own status similar to that of the liberal professions (a registration certificate, etc.). At the same time, the conditions under which they are contracted are presented without any exceptions to the provisions of the tax code, which in practice means short-term contracts of a maximum of 30-45 days.

- If we take as an example a young artist or cultural manager who does not yet have experience in the field, they will lose a year of seniority because they cannot prove their status as a cultural worker, having no way of demonstrating their activity and income in the field from the previous year.

- It is specified that professional cultural workers can be hired through copyright contracts or, in the case of those who perform auxiliary activities (provision of services), through collaboration agreements. However, the provisions of the tax code and its methodological norms¹¹ are not sufficiently clear regarding the period of validity of this type of contract, which may lead to a multitude of interpretations by the control bodies, with organisations unwilling to risk the consequences of such an interpretation (e.g. it may be reinterpreted by the Territorial Labour Inspectorate in the event of an inspection as a dependent activity and reclassified as an employment contract). This may result in very large fines and penalties for the legal entity drawing up the contract¹². Therefore, as this is not specifically regulated for this field, it raises questions about its applicability.

- This Emergency Ordinance refers to the recognition of the activity of independent cultural workers by classifying contracts as proof of seniority and work experience, but only for activities starting in 2023. For people who already have considerable seniority (some even more than 20 years) in the field, these years are not recognised as seniority. Therefore, all the experience and seniority in the field accumulated up to this year is null and void in the context of retirement.

- It is unclear to us how the granting of unemployment benefits for this type of activity could work in practice. Since the income of self-employed workers is not permanent, but depends heavily on the number of projects and the level of funding available to the organisations with which an individual collaborates, it is difficult to estimate professional opportunities. What we are trying to emphasise here is that the dynamics of a cultural worker's activity are too unpredictable and that we cannot anticipate whether they will have a stable

¹¹ Law no. 227/2015 on the Fiscal Code, Chapter III, Art. 7, paragraph 3.

¹² Field experience has shown that many accountants recommend drawing up this type of contract for very short periods (30-45 days) or not at all, leading many independent cultural workers to set up entities such as limited liability companies (SRL) or sole proprietorships (PFA).

income for at least one year¹³, which would allow them to pay this type of contribution in order to be eligible for benefits. Working mostly on short-term contracts, there are often breaks in an individual's contractual activity, even if these may only be for a month, for example.

That being said, OUG 21/2023 is a long-awaited measure for members of the sector and beyond, but, after passing it through a practical filter and applying it to a few practical examples, we can say that it only partially solves some of the basic problems faced by self-employed workers. Unfortunately, the same rules apply as for a profit-making enterprise, without taking into account the fact that the income of those in the field is not generated from a commercial economic activity, but from activities that provide a public service, and the same tax measures cannot be applied to them if the aim is to encourage them to continue their activity in the field.

Almost two years after the ordinance was promulgated, on 26 February 2025, the Methodological Norms regarding the Register of Professional Cultural Workers were published in the Official Gazette¹⁴ and are expected to be implemented (we hope) as soon as possible. Due to the lack of a national awareness campaign, many cultural workers were unaware that they could have registered as early as 2024. We hope that this will happen in the future, as the information is currently being passed on by colleagues, acquaintances and other people who are volunteering to promote this opportunity.

However, to end on a positive note, the Professional Cultural Worker Statute does offer some clear social security benefits. For the first time, an individual can receive unemployment benefits as long as they pay their contributions, can take sick leave following an illness or accident, can more easily take leave and receive child-rearing benefits, and most importantly, their work is recognised as seniority and professional experience. Even if it does not solve all the problems of the independent cultural sector, it is a big step forward and a long-awaited change in the position of artists and other workers in this sector.

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¹³ Currently, according to Law 76/2002, unemployment benefits are only granted to those who can prove that they have worked or contributed to the unemployment insurance budget.

¹⁴ [ORDER No. 2.618 of 13 February 2025](#), published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 172 of 26 February 2025.

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Research and culture. The Middle Way

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Abstract: The interest of the young generation in something that brings a lot of money safely and quickly at the expense of something that would contribute to their personal training in the longer term, can generate frustrations. It is normal for frustrations to arise for the young actor trying to find his way in life and theatre today, but for those who have a richer intellectual life, the damage is less. In acting talent matters a lot, but if this talent is not honed through work, through a personal effort of self-knowledge and cultivation of one's own virtues, then this talent cannot shine to its true value. Because the most successful actors are those who are able to devote more time to the important things that really give life meaning. We live in a historical period marked by crises, plagues, calamities, wars. All these leave their mark on our life, on our becoming. We are still trying to find a way to move forward. The way I propose through my article is *the middle way*. Between impulsiveness and cowardice, I propose a middle way: *the courage*. The courage that is based on our reason to fit our actions to the circumstances and to respond intelligently to the different facets of the situation. I propose to young people to find a spiritual freedom that gives meaning to their lives. I propose ways and exercises through which they can choose and build their own system of moral values that will allow them to aspire to a supreme goal: *love*.

Keywords: research, culture, middle way.

Introduction

In order to function coherently, any community needs to be based on a value system approved by most members. It's just that value is not the “good” in itself, but a means to get to what is good. Or at least it should be, as there are also values that lead to evil. Non-values. We can easily observe them, because they are built on lies and generate meanness. Those who decide how these values are used (for good or for evil) are those who form a community – in our case, the community of theatre people.

“In the language of modern civilisation – the way we live today – MORALITY is an objective measure allowing us to attribute a value to the individual character or behaviour. It is intellectually connected to the social categories of good and evil and represents the relationship of the social

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individual with an objective duty, with an “as it should be” which is compartmentalised in partial “virtues.” Each person’s MORAL character attributes an objective value to that person, based on the scale of virtues approved by the whole society.”¹

How are theatre productions born today? How are young actors trained today? Is there a need for continuity in young actors’ training? Does tradition mean anything to that end? Is there any connection between the actor’s personal character and the depth of the dramatic characters that actor plays? If theatre schools placed no emphasis on tradition, how could the young actor’s spiritual enrichment be achieved? Can an actor’s training be thought out and appreciated taking into account only the spirit of those particular times and the social circumstances in which the actor grew? These are some answers that this article aims to answer.

Older actors feel an organic need to get close to younger actors and interact with them. What both sides gain from this interaction is a dose of spontaneity, of getting out of a rut for the older ones and a bit more experience for the younger ones. This might be the secret of the perpetuation of values. Of course, the older ones need to take initiative and choose their apprentices, as those who are in caught up in the ardour of youth do not necessarily wish to receive advice or to recognize old values. However, this interconnection is the sure way for the whole group to evolve. Although, when we think about it, actors are ageless.

C. I. Nottara, actor of the National Theatre of Bucharest and professor at the Dramatic Conservatory of Bucharest, one of the most important figures of Romanian theatre (1859-1935), believed that, regardless of age, actors should be constantly seeking, continuously aiming to improve themselves, permanently analysing the vices and preferences (pleasures) of the society in which they lived, carefully observing reality in order to be able to create fiction on stage as believably as possible. Nottara believed that actors were creators, not interpreters, claiming that they (actors) were the only ones able to fill the holes in a play with psychological details that the playwright never even thought about. “A craft which is very hard to do, but also often easy, is that of the actor, since anyone can assimilate it, although not everyone has certain qualities, and, since this craft is considered among the liberal careers, without being controlled in the same way as others, the number of worthless actors increases by the day, seriously damaging both talented actors and the audience, whose artistic sense should be carefully developed and led on the cultural path only by those actors who have acquired a vast experience and solid knowledge due to long, serious studies of human mores and passions.”² As a professor in a theatre school, Nottara recommended students to study not

¹ Christos Yannaras (2002). *Libertatea moralei* [The Freedom of Morality], Editura Anastasia, p. 7.

² C.I. Nottara (1960). *Amintiri* [Memories], Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, p. 84.

only beauty in art, but also the habits and customs of our people, together with our moral conduct. He basically proposed to them to study ethics and mores.

I believe that the first question we need to ask ourselves about the actions of our character is whether they are moral or immoral, just or unjust, sincere or insincere. And, since we are doing that, why would we not ask the same questions about our own actions, in all the aspects of our lives? Whatever we do, we need to make decisions, and, in order to make the right ones, we need to take into account a set of logical rules, based on a value system, guided by our own conscience, both personally and professionally, because, just like there are rules for ethical conduct in our lives, there are rules of ethical conduct for the theatre.

The topic of my doctoral research is *Virtue – the moral quality of the fulfilled actor*. Virtue is defined as behaviour demonstrating high moral standards, “doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.” A fulfilled person is not one who promotes happiness, but one who offers happiness to people, and that person could be (why not?) *The Actor*. The actor promotes happiness, offers it, and, to paraphrase Grotowski, researches it: “He must learn to use his role as if it were a surgeon’s scalpel, to dissect himself (...) to use the role as (...) an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask (...) in order to sacrifice it, expose it.”³

Taking all this into account, the name of this article could be something like this: *Virtue, the moral quality of the fulfilled actor, the one who offers people happiness, not the one who promotes it, the one who avoids what is wrong and does what is right*. Would that be of interest to anyone? To young people? We live in a paradox – although the younger generation seems to take an interest in theatre, their interest in actors appears in inverse proportion to it. Is the younger generation of viewers’ lack of interest in theatre actors wrong? What is theatre like today? Director Andrei Șerban analyses today’s Romanian theatre: “...I can say there are two trends now – one is the young theatre trend, engaging in strongly political and social theatre. It’s good that this is happening. The danger there is that there is a lot of propaganda in the theatre and theatre which is infiltrated by ideology and propaganda of any kind is not a convincing one. This is not what theatre is for. Ideology and propaganda have another place – in social struggle. Theatre for me is a field where the heart is touched, the soul is touched.”⁴ This is a creed to which Andrei Șerban has remained faithful all his life. Even now, at 81, the production *Mary Stuart* by F. Schiller, directed by him, is played at the National Theatre of Bucharest with standing room only.

³ Jerzy Grotowski (1998). *Spre un teatru sărac* [Towards a Poor Theatre], Editura Unitext, București, p. 58.

⁴ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/interviu-andrei-serban/32190115.html>

“Socrates warns us that there is something among ephemeral things which is not perishable – what we manage to make of ourselves. What I have done disappears, but what I have made of myself remains. I will forever be what I have made of myself. Where are the norms for these deeds? In my soul. The traces will be impossible to erase. For eternity – as death will not change anything – I will be that beautiful or hideous soul. That is why it is important to watch over the quality of our soul, to not make it ugly by doing something unjust and, if, sadly, we have had the misfortune to do that, to erase the defilement by accepting to do penance for it.”⁵

Antonin Artaud said that “the actor is an athlete of the heart, he needs to use his emotions the way an athlete uses his muscles.”⁶

Sadly, many of today’s productions emanate a sort of coldness, a soulless, cerebral nature. It seems that, nowadays, performance art has stooped to an inferior, dark, gloomy, and artificial level. The spirit of today’s viewer rarely finds joy in these productions. Things are presented on stage only on their exterior, corporeal level. A show which presents a world not taken through the filter of the soul lacks the idea of good.

This type of show has formed an audience seemingly avid for theatre, desperately consuming the production of the moment, but, not finding what they are looking for, these viewers are already poised for the next *very successful* production, while the one they have just watched disappears from memory the moment the final applause ends. These viewers are permanently seeking, due to the permanent deception which is afflicting them while they are seeking – it is a never-ending problem, as a soul that lacks something can do nothing other than yearn. We, actors, even if we realise this and even if we understand that we cannot offer viewers the good they are looking for, without being too able to explain why, can only be glad that they continue to come to the theatre.

The fact that these contemporary shows lack the good does not mean that this happens because their creators do not know “good”. They can very well know the right path to follow – the middle way – and yet they choose an extreme, allowing themselves to be convinced by trends and political correctness.

“Moreover, the good that we need to assimilate is not a general good, it is the good of the human being, more precisely the good of this or that human being; since virtue consists of a moderate *middle way*, it will be different according to each person’s aptitudes. Within the unique limits of my own

⁵ Hubert Grenier (1995). *Marile doctrine morale* [The Great Moral Doctrines], Editura Humanitas, București, p. 18.

⁶ Antonin Artaud (2024). *The Theatre and Its Double*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, p. 159.

development, I need to become myself. I carry my own model within myself.”⁷

Physical pleasure, which comes from nowhere other than the belly, is the one ruling the art of contemporary performances. But the troubles and pleasures of the soul are much stronger than those of the body. An art that expresses only the pleasures of the body is an art without fulfilment, almost reduced to an animalistic dimension. And, just like the body cannot keep the pleasure, the viewer does not keep it, either, after the end of the show.

For the viewer to keep something, for something to remain after the show, the production needs to access the soul, because the soul is the only one which, through thoughts, is able to remind the viewers of what they felt a while ago, when they saw the show.

Theatre culture, which we actors love to talk about, is, for the viewers, the totality of the moments when they felt happy in their souls at the theatre and which they can remember at any time, all the moments about which they can say *now* that it was worth it for them to be *there then*, during that show, all the moments that they felt joy.

“We need to make a bridge between the universal human and today’s human,” Andrei Șerban says. “My dilemmas as a human are ever-living, just like they were in *Oedipus* 2,500 years ago, such as *who am I? what is my purpose in life? what is my potential? what is my responsibility as a human being?* not as a political or social being. The fundamental question is about the *Human* with a capital *H*. This is a category”⁸. The role of theatre school and teachers is to exercise and develop the young actors’ character and human quality. If actors knew themselves, they would know which roles are fitting for them to play successfully. By refusing introspection exercises, by not knowing themselves, actors could be convinced that all roles fit them and that they could play anything at any time. Sadly, we, Romanian actors, have formed this reflex, this professional fault that we hold onto so desperately until we retire and beyond: *we do not want to know who we are!* Because we think that, if we find out, our aura disappears and we fall from our superhuman position that we have been holding ever since we got into theatre school. We do not want to know who we are. However, we want as many people as possible to know *what we are*, namely actors, and we want things to stop there and to remain like this, if possible, for eternity. We believe that what we are, not what we create on stage, is a value in itself. I will now get back to Andrei Șerban and the two trends splitting the contemporary movement in theatre:

“The second category is that of ‘popular’ theatre, of the huge shows that are made this way, which bring tremendous money. These shows are

⁷ Antonin Artaud, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁸ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/interviu-andrei-serban/32190115.html>

boulevard theatre. There are some good boulevard theatre texts out there, comedies which touch on social topics, and they are needed. But this is not Theatre with a capital T.”⁹ As an aside, let me ask this: if this “popular” theatre brings, I quote, *tremendous money*, and we all know it does, why do we not study it in theatre schools? Do students and teachers of artistic higher education not need money? What would it be like if one of the graduation productions were one of “popular” theatre? It would, of course, be done professionally and it could then be played for *tremendous money* for years to come by that generation of students after graduation, as follow-up for what they have learnt in school. Of course, these shows which bring tremendous money and are played in their “spare time” by actors of state theatres also come with significant costs. They are performed outside of the rehearsal schedule of that theatre and obviously require time (which always seems to be insufficient) and energy (which usually is not inexhaustible, even if that is what we believe about ourselves or what our viewers believe about us). This habit of working overtime and more than we really can is not recent – it has always been there, as we can see from the words of the great Petre Sturdza (1869-1933), actor of the Bucharest National Theatre: “I have noticed, in the case of some of the great artists we have had in the theatre, who were gone after a brief career, that nearly all of them seemed to have a premonition of their short passage through this world. Subconsciously ruled by this feeling, they were in a constant frenzy of consuming activity, which left them no time to rest. They played during the season, and when they did not play in their theatre, they would keep organising productions in whatever other town they could, wherever they found anything, wherever any manager would take them.”¹⁰ This artistic dissipation is called *aesthetic delight* by Kierkegaard: “As soon as it arises, the moment must be sipped. It is drunk in one gulp. But the moment disappears as quickly as it appeared. It melts as we taste it. Another moment follows, then another. Each time the aesthete who lives in infidelity and renunciation will know, throughout his motley wasted existence, nothing but the monotony of the same brief pleasure followed by the same disappointment, in a time that is composed only of moments and decomposes only into moments.”¹¹ And this happens because, many times, this type of show – the “popular” theatre production – lacks its essence: a soul.

The dizzying changes that are now happening in the world can produce an incoherent, confused vision in certain areas, such as theatre, and not only in certain areas but even in our lives in general. The changes that are

⁹ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/interviu-andrei-serban/32190115.html>

¹⁰ Petre Sturdza (1966). *Amintiri. 40 de ani de teatru* [Memories. 40 years of theatre], Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti, p. 126.

¹¹ Hubert Grenier, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

occurring require new approaches. But the human being in general resists change. When these changes are multiple, as they are happening now, the human being becomes disoriented and confused. In contemporary society, everything seems to be falling apart and decomposing. And people have to deal

I with this decomposition that seems to create an ever-increasing void in their souls.

“In every theatre production I put on,” says Andrei Șerban, “I try to see what the essence of the play is, how I can touch the essence of life and convey it to the audience, so that they can feel it too. There is something that we all have within us, but we fail to connect, our souls are not open. We are far too frustrated by the problems of life, we are afraid, we do not have the openness and freedom to live our lives. And theatre must give you the desire to live your life.”¹²

During the years of training, actors need to understand that the fundamental feature of their existence is a deep awareness of responsibility, and that, once acquired, this will determine their personal style, the characteristic of their artistic uniqueness, and the set of values that they will later impose through their art and lives. The awareness of personal responsibility and the personal set of values will precisely determine the place of these young actors and their mission in that place. “From the vague awareness of responsibility, the specific awareness of a mission will develop, the experience of being meant to have a place in the world, with an extremely precise personal mission. However, nothing makes man surpass himself more, nothing can activate him more, nothing allows him to overcome unpleasantness and difficulties more than the awareness of his own responsibility, the awareness of his special mission.”¹³

One of the concerns of the theatre school, perhaps the most important one, should be the type of people it wants to form. The type of human beings we, as actors, should be. The moral principles discovered in school and the rules of conduct that would result from these principles should be found in the work and the general activity of the young actors, as well as in their statements and interviews. The question that should concern students (future actors) and their teachers equally is the same one that concerned the great Greek philosophers thousands of years ago, namely: “What is the best way to live?” More precisely: “What is the best way to live in the theatre?” We find the answer in the same great philosophers of ancient times. As Aristotle said about 350 years b. C.: “The best way is *the middle way*.”

¹² <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/interviu-andrei-serban/32190115.html>

¹³ Viktor E. Frankl (2005). *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții* [Man's Search for Meaning], Meteor Press, p. 20.

“The middle way is central to the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue. It is sometimes misinterpreted as a call for moderation, in the sense of finding an equidistant path between things, but this is hardly its real meaning. As the following quotation will make clear, the ‘middle way’ must be defined only in relation to reason. For example, the virtue that stands in the middle between cowardice and impulsiveness is courage. Courage is based on the individual's reason, not on his rational instincts: the central idea is that actions must be appropriate to the circumstances, determined by practical wisdom, and capable of intelligently responding to the different facets of the situation.

Virtue is then a state of the character concerned with choice, which dwells on the middle way, being, certainly, related to reason. It is a middle way between two vices, one of which is excess, and the other, deficiency, and also lies in the middle, because vices are either an insufficient or an excessive amount of what is good, both in the realm of passions and in that of actions, while virtue always finds and chooses the middle way.”¹⁴

Of course, for any young person trying to find a middle ground in the theatre today, all kinds of frustrations arise. But for those who have a richer intellectual life, the damage is less serious. In fact, all these smaller or greater frustrations only deepen the young person's spiritual life, thus creating a place for them to retreat in order to be able to return more enriched and freer from a spiritual point of view. If we look more closely, we can realize that young people with a richer spiritual life cope more easily with the frustrations that arise in the acting profession.

The middle way that I propose in becoming artists does not refer to their creation, to their work, but to themselves, as a result of their own intentions, thoughts, actions, creations.

“Once asked what the virtue of a young man consisted of, Socrates replied: ‘Not exceeding the good measure in anything.’ [...] Which amounts to stating something very commonplace: that nothing is good beyond its proper measure. You will rightly exclaim: modernity and measure! Let modernity not exceed the proper measure! Haven't we – modern people exhausted by the increasingly relentless demands of an inexhaustible modernity – long ago exceeded all measures, deceiving the expectations of the best and completely fulfilling only those of people who would have been content with anything anyway? Modernity itself is already the excess of a lack – of the lack of the unseen. In order to no longer be an excess, modernity should be counterbalanced with something, as it was with the texts of mediaeval manuscripts... In the Middle Ages, people still had the strength to accept both life and God as

¹⁴ *** (2017). *50 de idei pe care trebuie să le cunoști. Filosofie* [50 Ideas You Need to Know. Philosophy], Editura Litera, București, p. 98.

they were, according to a good separation of powers in the cosmos – of the Creator transcendental to the world and of the creature connected to its Creator by an infinite proximate distance”¹⁵.

Conclusions

We, actors, are taught that the reward for our art at the end of the performance is applause. And so it is. But after the applause, is there anything else? Is there anything left? Some would answer: the actor's fame, celebrity. Others say that there is nothing left. The artist's true reward is not money and fame, but the recognition of eternity in his work. An artist is fulfilled not when the audience recognizes him, but when the audience recognizes eternity in his work. The recognition of eternity in an artist's work produces that spiritual health that humanity has and will always need. That is why culture is important, because it maintains the spiritual health of a nation. Of course, political decision-makers are very important in this sense, but those who produce culture, those responsible for it, are the artists.

Original sin pushes us to extremes, to an aggressive or cowardly approach to life. The point of culture is to distract us from the extremes and lead us to the middle way – the depiction in art of the beauty of life – something that comes from the depths of the artist's soul in an attempt to connect with the soul of the audience.

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¹⁵ Horia Roman Patapievici, *Om recent* [The Recent Man], Editura Humanitas, București, 2001, p. 11.

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Female identity from the perspective of acts of violence Rape as a weapon of war in contemporary drama

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Abstract: In this paper, we intend to analyze how theatre addresses the extremely traumatic implications of sexual assault during military conflicts. Specifically, using the *close-reading* method, we will identify the ways in which contemporary drama brings the trauma of such an event to the audience. Rape and violence against women have become a topic of focus, implicitly in theatre, since the 1960s¹. The terrifying realities and stories of women who were victims of war have inspired many contemporary playwrights, their plays being also the subject of our research: *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* by Matei Vişniec, *Ruined* by Nottage Lynn and *9 Parts of Desire* by Heather Raffo. These texts help us to outline an overview of how theoretical studies and analyses of the rape of women as a strategy of war are reflected in contemporary drama, as these are three plays that deal with different wars. Through their analysis, we want to answer several questions: How is the female character constructed? How are the subject of war and the atrocities committed against women presented? How accurate is the historical context? How does theatrical style relate to this controversial subject? As the title suggests, the paper aims to investigate the relevant subject of war and how it is treated in contemporary drama, with an emphasis on the victim, most often a female character.

Keywords: female, identity, violence, drama.

Introduction

Rape represents an invasion, the destruction of an intimate, personal place, in a violent and destructive way. Beyond the physical horror that the term literally defines, rape can be the rejection of the other, of their way of thinking, of expressing themselves, of being, and the imposition of other ideas through their dehumanisation. Often, rape and sexual violence are used to communicate an idea or convey a message. In an ethnic war, this becomes paramount for the attacker. Rape used as a strategy of war knows no boundaries or historical periods. In critical times, rape becomes a weapon against the enemy.

One of the major themes of contemporary theatre, frequently addressed by both playwrights and stage practitioners: war, which, although it reminds us of the horrors of the past, is still part of recent reality, and theatre seeks to fulfil its purpose, that of being a “mirror” of the world we live in, bringing harsh

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¹ Lisa Fitzpatrick (2018). *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

realities to the audience, which we sometimes perceive in a fragmented or distorted way. Theatre often proves to be an effective means of information and dialogue, of revealing sensitive or controversial topics in a world characterised by scepticism, misinformation and manipulation, especially on the part of what we call the 'official media'.

Social and historical context

The traces left by war in the lives of its victims is a subject that has been addressed by many playwrights, regardless of the conflicts they have chosen to talk about. The characters' lives are directly affected by war, and one thing is certain for all of them: nothing will ever be the same again. Theatre is a constant dialogue between what happens on stage and its audience. It speaks, or at least it should, about the society of the moment, its tensions, realities and shortcomings. Although our society is constantly changing and evolving, we see recurring themes and subjects that have remained a constant in theatre since its inception, and war proves to be one of them, regardless of the historical period.

While the first text talks about the traumas of the Bosnian War, *Ruined* is based on interviews with Congolese women who were sexually abused and assaulted during the armed conflict in Congo, and *9 Parts of Desire* is the voice of Iraqi women in their struggle for justice, peace and freedom.

In all three texts, rape as a weapon of war is the main subject. Each female character faces a drama of the traumatic consequences of war. As part of the humiliation and annihilation of the opponent's identity, rape is one of the most commonly used methods by which soldiers show their dominance over the other. In one of the chapters of the book *Sexuality and Society. History, Religion and Literature* by Andrei Oișteanu, which is dedicated to rape as a weapon of war, the official report of the commission sent by the Council of Europe on the violence during the Bosnian conflict is presented: the rapes and sexual abuse committed by Serbian military troops must be placed in the same context as the other atrocities (massacres, mass graves, looting, destruction) and cannot be analysed as isolated actions, intended only to satisfy the sexual urges of the rapists. Given the manner in which the rapes were committed and the scale of the phenomenon in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is clear that the aim of the rapists was to denigrate human dignity and to subject women, families and the entire community to a humiliating and degrading treatment. The rapes of Muslim women are committed on such a scale and in such a manner that they form part of an easily recognisable pattern that is an important element of the strategy of war: rape is seen as a weapon of war.²

Since ancient times, the captivity or assault of women has been a means by which men have secured their power and domination. The violence of war goes beyond the front line and spills over to the families and women of the adversaries, who are often subjected to rape, torture and other reprehensible and degrading acts by the victors, or rather, by the invaders. In Ancient Greece,

² Andrei Oișteanu (2016). *Sexualitate si societate* [Sexuality and Society], Polirom, Iași.

it was common for the women of the defeated to be taken hostage by the aggressors, a subject also found in the writings of the Greek tragedians.

Some wars were fought for women and to win their love, and others to defend their dignity. However, in most cases, the results of wars leave indelible marks. Women were often traumatised, raped, assaulted or taken hostage as a result of conflicts. One of the ways of celebrating victory was even the mass rape of the women of the defeated. Rape during wars is also mentioned in the Bible and in Homer's Iliad: "Sexual violence during wars is not a new phenomenon of the 20th century. We find references to the capture of women in wartime in both Homer's Iliad and the Hebrew Bible."³ The outbreak of war therefore intensifies this problem, given that, generally speaking, during a war, women become subordinate to male power.⁴

In *Gender and New Wars*, we find a good observation that we can use to summarise the above: "Men and women tend to experience war differently, especially in terms of how men and women are predisposed to violence and experience it as a result of their gender."⁵ Whether we look at wars long past or contemporary ones, mass rape and aggression against women can be seen as a military strategy. Women, or more precisely their abuse, often become a motivating factor for soldiers, but also a reason for the psychological and demographic destruction of the enemy.

With regard to rape during armed conflict, studies have recorded the following rationales: the rape of women from the defeated camp as an additional demonstration of strength by the victorious side, rape as a reward for victorious soldiers by turning women into "war trophies", sexual assault to demonstrate the inability of defeated men to protect their women, rape as a means of humiliation, subordination and depression of the defeated.⁶

Added to this observation are concrete examples from wars in which women became a clear target. Rape as a strategy of war has never been limited to a particular historical period or geographical area. During the Second World War, Nazi soldiers raped countless Jewish women, despite the Nazi idea of "racial defilement", which also happened on their way to invade the USSR. In turn, Russian soldiers committed the same abuses on their way to Berlin.⁷

³ Robert Masterson, Sayan Dey (2018). *The Indigenous Voice of Poetomachia: The Various Perspectives of Textuality and Performance* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, p. 80, in our translation "Sexual violence in wartime is not new to the twentieth century. We find references to it in Homer's Iliad, as well as references to the capture of women in war in the Hebrew Bible".

⁴ Penny Summerfield (1997). *Gender and War in the Twentieth Century*, "The International History", Vol. 19, No. 1, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., p. 3.

⁵ Christine Chinkin, Mary Kaldor (2013). *GENDER AND NEW WARS*, "Journal of International Affairs", 67, no. 1, pp. 87-167.

⁶ Dorian Furtună (2015). *Homo Aggressivus. Why wars and violence do not stop*, <https://adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/violurile-ca-strategie-militara-1646440.html>, accessed on 28.01.2025.

⁷ Sabrina P. Ramet (1999). *Gender politics in the Western Balkans: women and society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 204-205.

Recent history also provides several examples of rape during wartime. In the Pakistani fight against Bangladesh's independence declared in 1971, about 200,000 women aged 8 to 60 were raped by Muslim soldiers who invaded the region. During the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, there was a shocking and painful case in which twenty-five girls who told Turkish officers that they had been raped by soldiers were subjected to further sexual abuse. In Peru, the rape of women by law enforcement agencies is commonplace. In 1992, Human Rights Watch documented forty rapes committed by soldiers during interrogations in emergency areas in Peru. The same organisation also analysed numerous cases of rape committed by Indian security forces and militant groups in violent conflicts between Indian security forces and Muslims in northern India: "We received orders from our officers to rape you."⁸

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, tens of thousands of women were attacked and raped. A study of 68 women shows that the raped women who participated in the observation were Croatian and Muslim (Bosnian) women residing in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Forty-four of them were raped multiple times, 21 were raped every day during their captivity, and 18 were forced to witness rapes. Most of the rapes were accompanied by physical torture. Of the 29 women who became pregnant as a result of rape, 17 had abortions.⁹

In 2014, militants fighting to establish the Islamic State (ISIS) turned the sexual exploitation of women in conquered regions into a "normal" part of the state-building process. And one of the most recent wars, the war in Ukraine that broke out in 2022, has seen multiple cases of rape and assault against women, despite the fact that support for women's rights is increasingly present in every corner of the world. Female refugees who managed to escape the war have testimonies that are difficult to imagine: a survivor from Kharkiv recounts how Russian soldiers came after her and other family members in the basement of the school where they were sheltering. One of the soldiers took her away, raped her and assaulted her repeatedly for almost two days: "He took a knife and told me to do what he said if I wanted to see my child again. He raped me again, put a knife to my throat and cut the skin on my neck. I also cut my cheek with the knife and cut off some of my hair. He hit me in the face with a book and slapped me repeatedly."¹⁰

Case studies

Taking as its starting point the war in Bosnia and the atrocities that took place there during the three years of war, Matei Vişniec's *Woman as a Battlefield* is a play about the disastrous consequences that remain in the wake of such conflicts. It is a harrowing text about trauma and conflict, about healing and wounds, about collaboration and support, about a cruel world, about

⁸ Sabrina P. Ramet, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.

⁹ Loncar M, Medved V, Jovanović N, Hotujac L (2006). *Psychological consequences of rape on women in 1991-1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, "Croat Med J", 4-7 February.

¹⁰ Verbal testimony of a Ukrainian woman during the war in Ukraine.

struggles for supremacy and power, about the interests of those in power who destroy and permanently mark the destiny of the many and often invisible. It is about Dorra, a woman from the former Yugoslavia, a victim of the horrors of war and revenge. Dorra is a woman who was raped and who has been included in a programme to help victims. She is trying to recover with the help of psychological therapy, supported in this endeavour by another woman, Kate, who has also been marked by the events around her. Two opposing worlds, two different histories, meet in a former American army medical centre on the border between Switzerland and Germany, travelling together on a path to healing.

Višniec wrote the play while he was in Avignon in 1996, motivated by a desire to understand what happened in the Balkans and how these events transform “normal people into brutes and ordinary people into savages”. The drama is structured in 30 scenes that capture the dialogues between the two women and their most hidden feelings, deeply marked by the experience of war. In many moments, the historical context is reflected, with Dorra becoming a way of representing on a large scale the experience of war for women who were assaulted, raped and tortured throughout the Bosnian conflict.

At first, Dorra does not speak. The first time she does so is in scene 6, but she is alone, and it is not until scene 13 that she speaks to Kate for the first time. The previous scenes show how Kate tries to initiate a dialogue with Dorra through therapeutic methods and how she notes information about the patient in her diary. Reflecting further on the study *Psychological Consequences of Rape on Women in 1991-1995 War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, the reality of Višniec's character is supported by the consequences of rape presented here: the most common psychological symptoms experienced immediately after rape () were depression, avoidance of thoughts or conversations associated with the trauma, and suicidal ideation. Although none of the women had a history of mental illness prior to the rape, at the time of the study, 52 suffered from depression, 51 from social phobia, 21 from post-traumatic stress disorder, and 17 had sexual dysfunction.¹¹

The discussions between the characters provide a good opportunity to outline the social context of the Balkans. Throughout the play, Dorra often revives the portrait of the Balkan man: “This is the Balkans... A sentimental powder keg. In the Balkans, men know how to drink. Damn it, we haven't seen each other in three weeks, that's a long time, it's unbearable, let's have a drink. And drink, and drink until dawn.” “That's right, if you drink every day after work, between six and ten in the evening, yeah, that's okay, then you can go home and spend fifteen minutes with your kids. Or with your wife. Your wife is nothing but a baby-making machine.”¹² Whether or not Dorra presents a

¹¹ Mladen Lončar, Vesna Medved, Nikolina Jovanović, Ljubomir Hotujac (2006). *Psychological consequences of rape on women in 1991-1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, “Croat Med J”, Feb., 47(1), pp. 67-75, retrieved from https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2080379/pdf/CroatMedJ_47_0067.pdf

¹² Matei Višniec (2002). *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War*, Romania: LiterNet, p. 26.

reality is explained to us by historians in their discourses on the Balkans: "It is or was an exotic peninsula with lively people who eat spicy food, drink strong drinks, wear brightly coloured clothes, love and kill easily, and have a wonderful talent for provoking wars. Westerners, less imaginative, looked at them with contempt, with hidden envy, snorting at their royalty, laughing at their pretensions and fearing their savage terrorists."¹³

The character's frustration in this scene can be linked to the ongoing struggle that women in the Balkans are waging in the name of equality. Women have fought with various weapons for emancipation, status, recognition, and equality. This is especially true in the Balkan countries, where most studies conclude that women have the same status in the collective consciousness: submission to men, non-recognition of achievements to the detriment of the male line, a patriarchal society that has existed since the region's beginnings, lack of equality in various essential aspects of life such as education, politics, work, health, but especially high levels of violence and sexual abuse against women.

Dorra confesses that she was raped by five men, but does not know their identity: "There were five of them. But I don't know if they were Muslims, Croats or Serbs. You know, in Bosnia we all speak Serbo-Croatian."¹⁴ This highlights one of the characteristics of rape in the Bosnian conflict: in a barbaric and unexpected way, women were raped and assaulted by their neighbours or friends, people with whom they had lived together until the outbreak of war. In most cases, women raped in the context of inter-ethnic wars are victims of attackers they know. Another aspect pursued by the attacker is to punish the victim if she is in a mixed marriage, married to a man from another ethnic group.

Sexual violence against women and girls during war is the most common form of oppression and remains a critical issue for women's rights. Despite the evolution of human rights discourse, abuses continue to exist in a violent and difficult to digest manner.¹⁵ This raises many questions about women's rights in general, as wars bring this harsh reality to light. This is also touched upon by the character Kate in one of her monologues: "In today's ethnic wars, rape is a form of blitzkrieg. Nothing can destabilise the ethnic enemy more effectively than when his women are raped."¹⁶

People's lives change radically when it comes to war, and free will and choice become almost non-existent. The dehumanisation that occurs during a conflict leaves deep scars on society, and new mechanisms and ways of alleviating these traumas need to be found.

Another real consequence of sexual assault during conflict, which is reflected in the journey of the play's victim character, is the pregnancies

¹³ Antoaneta Olteanu (2004). *Homo balcanicus; features of the Balkan mentality*, Editura Paideia, București, p. 7.

¹⁴ Matei Vișniec (2002). *Despre sexul femeii – câmp de luptă în războiul din Bosnia* [*The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War*], LiterNet, București, p. 30.

¹⁵ Cf. Miranda Alison (2007). *Wartime Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 33, No. 1, Cambridge University Press, p. 75.

¹⁶ Matei Vișniec, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

resulting from these violent acts. The unfolding of the story brings to the fore the fact that Dorra is pregnant:

„DORRA: It will never be my child. I didn't want it. Nobody wanted it. This child has no mother, no father. It doesn't exist, Kate.

KATE: Yes, it does. It's growing inside you. You are its mother.

DORRA: And the father? Who will be his father? If he ever asks me who his father is, what will I tell him? Who is his father?

KATE: The war. His father is the war”.¹⁷

The end of the play reveals how Dorra decides to keep the child, overcoming to some extent the trauma caused by the war and its aftermath, in order to find a new path and new possibilities. From her conversation with Kate, we learn that Dorra is applying to immigrate to Canada or Australia. She is heading towards a new world, far from the country where she was raped, leaving behind stereotypes and international tensions:

„DORRA: One day, after you left, I went for a walk along the lake shore. I was walking and looking at the water and the trees... And suddenly, an inscription on a tree caught my attention. I approached and read the following text: we inform you that this tree is dead. it will be felled between 2 and 8 april. A young tree will be planted immediately in its place, for your joy and happiness. signed: parks and gardens service. I read this text once, twice, several times. And then I decided to keep the baby”.¹⁸

The play has been translated into over 10 languages and performed in over 15 countries. The first performance took place in 1997 at the Avignon Theatre Festival (off), at the Théâtre des Roues, directed by Michel Fagadau. Reactions from around the world continue to pour in regarding this text: “given the horrific stories from Bosnia, it is a powerful thesis. Vişniec announced it journalistically and rendered it dramatically”; “it shows you the situation of these two women and then turns them into something more than symbolic victims”; “this work by Matei Vişniec circumscribes the Bosnian war, female victims, Balkan men and the Freudian nature of nationalism.”¹⁹

The terrifying realities and stories of women victims of war have inspired many contemporary playwrights. Soldiers in Congo have the freedom to kidnap and rape women, who are victims of unimaginable things. Based on interviews with women abused in the armed conflict in Congo, Nottage Lynn's *Ruined* brings to the fore characters with a particularly painful burden, women who have been raped and assaulted and who still suffer from the harsh reality they witnessed helplessly. The story takes place in a brothel, one that shelters

¹⁷ Matei Vişniec, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

¹⁹ *The body of a woman as a battlefield in the bosnian war*, <https://www.visniec.com/pages/femmeenglish.php>, accessed on 28.01.2025, our translation: “given the horror stories that came out of Bosnia, it is a perfectly tenable thesis. My only cavil is that Visniec announces it journalistically and then proceeds to illustrate it dramatically”, “engages you with the plight of these two women and turns them into something more than symbolic victims”, “but this work by Matei Vişniec, the exiled Romanian writer, is an impassioned two-hander that encompasses the Bosnian war, victimised women, Balkan men and the Freudian nature of resurgent nationalism.”

victims of rape and assault, women with no future, nullified as human beings and excluded from society. Mama Nadi, the character who owns this place, tries to create the illusion of hope for women left without a home, without a family, simply because they have been subjected to sexual abuse. The dialogues highlight the trauma these women have to live with: “Sophie: When I sing, I pray for this pain to go away, but what these men did to me lives inside my body. With every step I take, I feel them inside me. Punishing me. And that's how it will be for the rest of my life.”²⁰ The women in the play also suffer the humiliation inflicted on them by their families, as they are both victims of rape and expelled from society for this reason: “Mother: This is your home now. Mother takes care of you. If you want to go back, go, but they, your city, your people, won't understand. Oh, they'll think: she's ruined. She's been with too many men. She let those dirty men touch her. She's a whore.”²¹ Josephine, Salima and Sophie, three women whose destinies were decided by others, with no place in society, simply because they were raped and assaulted, find themselves in this brothel where they have sex to earn a living. However, Josephine believes she can start a new life with Harari, Sophie struggles, believing she will be able to remove the marks on her body, and Salima confronts her attackers: “You will no longer fight your battles on my body!”²² The play offers a realistic, unvarnished portrait of the lives of women in Congo: “When I started interviewing women, I was surprised by the physical destruction they had endured. We know there was emotional and physical destruction, but the hardest thing for them was to talk about the latter.”²³

A similar aggressor to the one in *Ruined* can also be found in *9 Parts of Desire*, namely an oppressive system that allows cruelty and injustice to be directed at defenceless victims. The author becomes a messenger for Iraqi women in their desire for justice, peace and freedom. The story, presented in the form of monologues in poetic language, shocks with the complexity of the emotions of the nine female characters: “I wanted the audience to see these women not as 'the other', but rather as someone like themselves.”²⁴

The play tells the story of nine women forced to face the tragedies of a war that will probably never end for them: Mulaya, a professional mourner,

²⁰ Lynn Nottage (2010). *Ruined*, Dramatists Play Service, New York, p. 23, our translation “SOPHIE. While I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside my body. Every step I take I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life.”

²¹ Lynn Nottage, *Ruined*, p. 44, our translation: “MOTHER. (To Salima.) This is your home now. Mother takes care of you. (Mother takes Salima in her arms.) But if you want to go back out there, go, but they, your village, your people, they won't understand. Oh, they'll say they will, but they won't! Because, you know, underneath everything, they will be thinking, ‘She's damaged. She's been had by too many men. She let them, those dirty men, touch her. She's a whore’”.

²² Lynn Nottage, *Ruined*, p. 63, our translation “You will not fight your battles on my body anymore.”

²³ Lynn Nottage on *Ruined*.

²⁴ Raffo Heather, *9 Parts of Desire*, p. 166, our translation: “I wanted the audience to see these women not as the 'other' but much more like themselves.”

Layal, an artist, Amal, a middle-aged Bedouin woman, Huda, an elderly expatriate in London, a young doctor, a 9-year-old Iraqi girl, Umm Ghada, a mother who lost her son during a US military bombing raid, an American woman, and Nanna, a homeless woman. Although so different, what unites these nine women is the common experience they share and the trauma that has come to define their lives. The stories of the nine characters encompass a painful experience, with endless conflicts, spanning a long period of time, between the First Gulf War and the invasion of Iraq. The nine stories aim to bring to the stage experiences such as pain, fear, death, exile, defeat, terror, brutality, and the struggle for survival. The invaders occupy the place called “home” for these characters, a place that should be safe and welcoming, turning it into the most terrible nightmare. The stage is the place where the stories of the nine women come to life, where a part of history becomes reality again and where the atrocities of war are conveyed to the audience through powerful images that aim to confront a tragic past: “Laya: These stories live in me/ With every woman I meet or hear about/ I cannot separate myself from them”²⁵, referring to the painful memories that focus on the torture of one of her friends by the military. Another character, Umm Ghada, offers harrowing testimony about the bombing in which her family was burned:

“Umm Ghada: This is the Amiriya bomb shelter/ Here I write names/ With chalk over the burnt figures/ Here, on the ceiling, you can see/ Charred traces of hands and feet/ Of people/ And here the silhouette of a woman/ Vaporised by the heat/ This huge room became an oven/ And they threw themselves against the wall to escape the flames”²⁶

The analysis of the three plays that address the theme of rape as a strategy of war offers us a profound perspective on how theatre responds to human suffering and the impact that wars have on victims. Although each play takes place in different social and historical contexts, significant similarities can be observed between the drama experienced by each character, the way they are constructed, how they respond to trauma, and their respect for the historical context.

In all three texts, rape becomes an instrument of oppression and control used on a large scale, not just incidentally, highlighting not only the brutality of war but also the complexity of human relationships. The characters in the plays, whether victims or witnesses, are in a constant struggle for survival, equality and dignity. Approaching the subject through contemporary drama allows us to look beyond appearances and statistics.

This theme continues to be relevant and necessary, reminding us that art has the power to bring to the fore social issues, the shortcomings of human

²⁵ Raffo Heather (2006). *9 Parts of Desire*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, p. 9, our translation: “These stories are living inside of me/each woman I meet or I hear about and I cannot separate myself from them.”

²⁶ Raffo Heather, *9 Parts of Desire*, 29, our translation: “This is Amiriya bomb shelter. / Here they write names/ in chalk over the smoked figures. / Here, on the ceiling, you can see/ charred handprints and footprints / from people who lay in the top bunks. / And here a silhouette of a woman / vaporised from heat. / This huge room became an oven, / and they pressed to the walls to escape from the flames”.

beings and the dehumanisation to which we are subjected. These approaches urge us to reconsider our perspectives on war and violence against women in all its forms.

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How to make theatre attractive for teenagers

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Abstract: In Romanian performing arts institutions in general, and national ones in particular, there are cultural marketing strategies that can maintain young people's interest in theatre. Theatre managers could include productions for young people aged 9 to 16 in their repertoire. After the age of 9, we no longer talk about children's shows because, at a certain point, they no longer consider themselves children and no longer want this type of show. At 13-14 years old, there is a need for a different language, a different dramatic structure; we want to educate them and become friends with them. To achieve this, we bring education and culture together. Starting from this premise, that of improving the theatrical experience in the sense of increasing and diversifying the audience, one of the possibilities is to develop a strategy based on the perspective of the spectator-consumer, that of educating young people and including education as a marketing tool, especially in promotion.

Keywords: theatre, teenagers, education.

Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, the fusion of theatre and education appears to be a compelling strategy for cultivating a dynamic and well-structured learning environment. Theatre, with its layers of creativity, collaboration and critical thinking, offers unique opportunities to improve traditional educational methodologies. Integrating theatre practices into the curriculum not only enriches the learning experience, but also addresses the holistic development of students, preparing them for the complexities of modern life. “Youth theatre is a form of theatre that is defined by and for its audience, as the use of the preposition – ‘theatre *for* youth’ – indicating the young audiences (children and teenagers) is absent from the definition of other forms of theatre.”¹

We can say that there is theatre for young audiences, which we would define as having a very careful consideration for the spectator, for the way in which the artistic message is conveyed, but also for its pedagogical stakes. As the name suggests, we note that the target audience is clearly defined and that

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¹ Elise Wilk (2022). *Teatrul pentru publicul tânăr* [Theatre for Young Audiences], UartPress, Cluj University Press, p. 11.

its mission is very clear. On the other hand, as Elise Wilk said in her doctoral thesis, its name has contributed to a devaluation of the meaning and value of the artistic act – for *young audiences* is often translated as “inferior quality” or even “a minor genre of theatre”. This may be due to the fact that, for a long time, youth theatre was only an educational tool, while truly artistically valuable performances appeared much later.²

Cultural marketing, a starting point

The premise of the article is that young people need a theatrical education in general, and in particular their own theatre, one for teenagers, which is different from that offered to adults, where the artistic act should be different. This can be achieved through various cultural activities, communication or promotion strategies. The role of cultural activities in society has been much discussed in terms of their economic impact, without considering their impact on social life. Many studies have attempted to identify the influences that different leisure practices have on educational capital.

For this article, we started from cultural marketing, which is the process and, at the same time, the art of offering the artistic product to the target audience, combining it with tools such as price, placement, promotion and staffing of organisations to achieve management objectives. Contrary to how marketing works in the logic of the modern market economy, the artistic product does not respond to an expressed consumer demand, but identifies the right audience for an existing offer and creates a horizon of expectations. At the same time, cultural marketing aims at a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and consumers.

We say that theatre is what facilitates the act of creation and has the necessary resources to create a unique experience for the audience. The artistic product can only exist in the presence of its audience; theatre is a social and participatory event in which the reality of the artists and that of the audience merge. We can identify strategies through which theatre institutions in general, and national theatres in particular, could educate the younger generation through appropriate programmes. This is an activity practised with reluctance in cultural organisations, which proposes a meeting between organisational thinking and consumer behaviour, in this case that of adolescents, in an attempt to offer performing arts institutions practical guidelines specific to cultural marketing. Theatre managers could include in their repertoire productions for young people aged between 9 and 16, because after the age of 9, we no longer talk about children's shows. At a certain point, this type of audience no longer recognises itself in this category and no longer wants this type of show. For the age interval 13-14, there is a need for a different language and a different

² Elise Wilk, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

dramatic structure. To achieve this, we bring education and culture together. Starting from this premise, that of improving the theatrical experience in terms of increasing and diversifying the audience, one of the possibilities is to develop a strategy based on the perspective of the spectator-consumer, that of educating young people and including education as a marketing tool, especially in promotion.

An analysis of the literature has highlighted a number of theoretical perspectives that aim to identify the social impact attributed to participation in cultural activities, analysing aspects related to active citizenship, civic engagement, social integration and democratic participation.³ For example, *the European Parliament Resolution* of 11th December 2018 on the “New European Agenda for Culture” refers to “the active role of culture and cultural and creative industries in achieving the objectives of cohesion and social inclusion policies”⁴, thus establishing the unique contribution of cultural life to the consolidation of a democratic society.

If in 2022, as the Cultural Consumption Barometer tells us, in Romania: “The situation is slightly better than in 2021, but slightly worse than in 2019”⁵ and consumption trends in 2022 - the first report after the Covid pandemic - show that Romanians are gradually returning to cinemas and movie theatres, in 2023, as noted by the Minister of Culture at the time, Raluca Turcan: “It highlights significant developments in cultural consumption, in the context of a society in constant change. The figures confirm the correct direction of our actions at the Ministry of Culture, investments in heritage and cinema. We have purchased books, supported poetry and literature festivals, and placed an emphasis on cultural education. The percentages must increase in the 2024 Barometer!”⁶

For the first time, the Barometer links cultural consumption to democratic citizenship, showing that Romanians who are frequently exposed to cultural practices tend to be more involved in community life. In terms of public cultural consumption, 34% of respondents went to the cinema at least once in 2023, a percentage close to the pre-pandemic figures. At the same time, however, participation in performing arts events outside of festivals remains low: only 25% of respondents went to at least one theatre performance and

³ M. Sharon Jeannotte (2017). *The Social Effects of Culture. A Literature Review*, Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa.

⁴ European Commission (2018). *European Parliament resolution of 11th December 2018 on the new European agenda for culture*, accessed on 20 January 2025.

⁵ <https://www.radioromaniacultural.ro/emisiuni/timpul-prezent/timpul-prezent-barometrul-de-consum-cultural-2022-carmen-croitoru-situatia-e-ceva-better-than-in-2021-but-slightly-worse-than-in-2019-id40493.html>, accessed on 20 January 2025.

⁶ <https://www.radioromaniacultural.ro/sectiuni-articole/muzica-dans-arte/s-au-publicat-rezultatele-barometrului-de-consum-cultural-pe-anul-2023-catalogul-se-poate-consulta-online-id46225.html>, accessed on 20 December 2024.

24% to at least one classical music performance in 2023. It is also true that respondents represent the generation that grew up with television, a massive generation that received everything and made no effort to decipher the messages it received, so that their relationship with the internet was built at the same time: an image accompanied by an induced message. The lack of cultural infrastructure (performing arts or any cultural centre) discourages the consumption of culture and can lead to escapism on the internet. In their private life, at home, 53% of respondents access streaming platforms to watch films. Less than 50% of households nationwide have subscribed to streaming services or platforms.⁷

This problem is also found among cultural content producers, because they will have to rethink their means of expression and gradual education. But we are not talking about arts education: dance, painting, music that we do in school classes, and those with talent are selected for vocational schools. We are talking about a cultural education that allows easier access to cultural products and understanding them as they are created. This is a concern that is on the public agenda not only in Romania, but in all European countries, where the level of understanding of cultural products is declining quite dramatically.

There are several perspectives that could be taken into account: one would be related to the impact of the pandemic on the emotional state of the population and the use of leisure activities as a form of stress relief or relaxation in crisis situations, as shown by studies conducted in the year immediately following the pandemic. Another could be the paradigm shift in cultural management, which, in its desire to attract new audiences, has moved towards a more leisure- and entertainment-oriented offering, focusing more on fun and pleasure and less on functional and symbolic benefits.

A brief analysis of cultural consumption before and after the pandemic could lay the foundations for a public cultural policy. Thus, starting from the definition of specific objectives, the means of achieving them and the impact they would have on young theatre audiences and beyond, we have outlined two perspectives: the external one, in which national theatres could have programmes dedicated to young people, and the internal one – a series of activities that could support the education of young people.

As for the external perspective, national theatres could expand and diversify their repertoire and adapt it for teenagers. Among the tactics they could apply, we could mention a series of performances based on major international dramatic works adapted to our times, in chronological order, starting with ancient theatre. This would be a win-win situation: teenagers would learn more easily, and the theatre would build a new audience. Another tactic would be to facilitate young people's access to an environment that

⁷ <https://www.forbes.ro/barometrul-de-consum-cultural-2023-53-dintre-romani-accesseaza-platforme-de-streaming-pentru-a-viziona-filme-416658>, accessed on 13 February 2025.

stimulates their creativity by creating age-specific programmes and gradually implementing the concept of theatre education, in order to build their loyalty.

From another perspective, the internal one, we could talk about educating young people through theatre: Raising the educational level of the younger generation through theatre involves integrating theatrical practices and principles into educational programmes to improve learning outcomes and personal development. One of the main benefits of incorporating theatre into education is its ability to transform passive learning into an active, engaging process. Traditional education often relies heavily on rote memorisation and lecture-based teaching, which can disengage students. Theatre, on the other hand, requires active participation, whether through acting, directing, or set design. This hands-on approach makes learning more interactive and enjoyable and fosters a deeper connection with the material. By engaging both the mind and the body, it would help students retain information more effectively and develop a passion for learning.

Another aspect that could be considered is the development of transferable skills. A theatre education programme would successfully cultivate these skills, which are often overlooked in traditional curricula. Students would learn to articulate their thoughts clearly, listen actively and interpret non-verbal cues. These skills are invaluable in any professional setting. In addition, theatre requires teamwork and collaboration. Students could learn to work together to produce a successful performance, learning to negotiate, compromise and support each other. These collaborative experiences develop interpersonal skills and make them aware of the value of collective effort. Creativity and critical thinking are also cornerstones of theatre education. Whether it's developing a character, interpreting a script, or solving technical challenges, theatre stimulates innovative thinking and problem solving. Students would learn to approach problems from multiple perspectives and think outside the box, skills that are crucial in today's rapidly changing world.

Theatre also offers cultural awareness and empathy, as well as a unique perspective through which teenagers can explore different cultures, historical periods, and social issues. By stepping into the shoes of characters from diverse backgrounds and time periods, they gain a broader understanding of the world and its complexities. This exposure fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity, qualities that are essential in our increasingly globalised society. We have said that theatre cultivates empathy. To portray a character convincingly, one must delve into their motivations, emotions, and experiences. This process of understanding and embodying different perspectives helps them develop a deeper sense of empathy and compassion for others, enhancing their social and emotional intelligence. Thus, for the future, academic performance would be improved, confidence in their own abilities would increase, and they would be well prepared for their future careers. The skills developed through theatre

education have broad applications in the real world. Communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking are highly valued in the workplace. Employers in various industries are looking for people who can think creatively, work well in teams, and communicate effectively. By incorporating theatre into education, we prepare students not only for academic success but also for the demands of the modern workforce.

Conclusions

Integrating theatre into education can significantly improve the learning experience for younger generations. It promotes balanced development by combining cognitive, emotional, and social growth, preparing students for both academic success and personal fulfilment.

Improving the education of young audiences through theatre becomes a tool for achieving social and economic goals and has a dynamic and cross-sectoral value. It responds to the needs of the younger generation without preventing other generations from meeting their needs.⁸

Creating hubs for development, research, education and innovation, including for entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors, is one of the biggest challenges and a necessary part of the process of educating the younger generation through theatre. Thus, the cost of development centres will attract new theatre productions and improve investment activity. The return on investment will generate cash flow.

The process of human development is sometimes mistakenly evaluated only in terms of increased material well-being or a high standard of living. In reality, it has a number of other equally important dimensions: by improving the skills of the young people involved, they will acquire new skills after the training period, which, depending on the number of hours allocated to each participant, will ultimately lead to better results and greater audience satisfaction.

Human development therefore means diversifying individuals' options for a long and healthy life, for education, i.e. for acquiring a level of knowledge that meets their changing needs, and for access to resources that guarantee a decent standard of living. In addition to these options, other options relate to political freedoms and the exercise of other fundamental rights and freedoms.⁹

⁸ Delia Mucică (2017). PhD – *Cultural Policies and Strategies (course)*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

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Cultural dimensions of doctoral research in the field of Theatre and Performance Arts

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Abstract: Culture represents the main method of understanding society, closely related to the values, norms and behaviours of the individual. They are influenced by several factors, acquiring a collective dimension manifested through customs, traditions and symbols from which the feeling of belonging results. Each person thus reflects the perspectives of the culture. Globally, culture has no geographical boundaries, and the doctoral research becomes a concrete cultural act based on the deepening of several fields and forms of expression, having a cultural, literary, philosophical or scientific nature. Scientific-artistic disagreements remain in some particular aspects. However, through open dialogue and interdisciplinary collaboration, the “man of culture” could understand the language of the “technical man”. Theatre is a form of cultural expression that links art to history and then to society. In this media era, the perspective of scientific work as a form of cultural creation, where the focus is on thought, reflection and debate, is a vital factor. However, not all research of this type is necessarily cultural in depth. When the interest is limited to the scientific perspective, it remains institutional. The relationship between the doctoral student and the coordinator is also a defining one, as it values the result of the common research as a cultural act or a scientific tool. For a beneficial result for the readers, it depends on the relationship of the two creative forces to be directed towards the well-being of the research and at the same time to be loaded from a cultural point of view through different formal or informal activities and experiences.

Keywords: culture, creation, doctoral research, art, theatre.

Introduction

Culture is a concept of remarkable complexity and depth and it is essential for understanding the human experience. On a personal level, it is reflected in the values, norms and behaviours which each individual adopts and integrates in their daily life. These elements are influenced by the social, economic and historical environment of that person and a unique personal

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identity is shaped in their interaction. Each individual thus becomes a “lens” through which culture is reflected in subtle and varied ways.

When we look at it from a general perspective, culture acquires a collective dimension, where it becomes a phenomenon of the interactions of a group’s members. Whether we are talking about small groups, communities or whole nations, culture is manifested by means of traditions, symbols and discourses which strengthen social cohesion and the feeling of belonging. “Culture involves the ideas of patrimony, heritage, transmission, and, even if it is enriched, it is renewed with each generation.”¹ These cultural practices contribute to the creation of a collective identity which is essential for maintaining unity in the face of diversity. To that effect, culture is not only a sum of elements, but a dynamic network of relationships forming the foundation of social existence.

On a global scale, culture goes beyond geographical limits, being a vehicle of diversity. Forms of artistic, literary, philosophical and scientific expression enrich each other and thus contribute to developing a common cultural patrimony. Globalisation made the ties between cultures tighter and tighter and this phenomenon offers us new opportunities to understand and appreciate human diversity.

Doctoral research in cultural field

In this context, doctoral research is not only an academic process of going deeper into our knowledge in a specific field, but becomes a cultural act in itself. Each topic, question, and conclusion contribute to the expansion and transformation of human knowledge, thus influencing the evolution of culture. By generating new ideas and by reinterpreting the already existing ones, doctoral research not only advances scientific understanding, but it also adds value to the global cultural patrimony. This way, the doctoral research process becomes an active form of cultural creation. This entails the accumulation of information and a deep reflection on the world, an active contribution to the global cultural dialogue and a manifestation of our intellectual commitment in a broader social and cultural context.

Culture is the one that often raises the alarm with regard to society’s problems. “Literature and art were essentially alienation, sustaining and protecting the contradiction – the unhappy consciousness of the divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed. They were a rational, cognitive force, revealing a dimension of man and nature which was repressed and repelled in reality.”²

¹ Alexandru Călinescu (2008). *Societatea post-culturală (Post-cultural society)*, „Dilema Veche”, no. 245, retrieved from: <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/societate/ieri-cu-vedere-spre-azi/societatea-post-culturala-612732.html>

² Herbert Marcuse (1964). *One-dimensional man*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 43.

In our society, there are texts which very well depict a world far from utopia, point out what does not work and push us towards a need for solutions. As viewers, we need to identify or resonate with the characters on stage. That is due to the need for belonging, which often guides us when making our daily decisions. People are social beings, as Aristotle said in *Politics*, so they need to feel part of a group. “But he who cannot or does not need to live in society due to his suffering is not a member of the state, but either a beast or a god.”³ Also, from the perspective of the character on stage, there is a need for viewers who feel close to them, offering the character the safety of knowing that they are not the only one having such an experience. Thus, the need for belonging is fulfilled due to a theatre world that is not far from reality.

Artistic creation is deeply marked by the culture of the artist, as it is influenced by the traditions, values, experiences, and social context specific to that culture. Although innovation and originality are essential in the creative process, many works are closely connected to prior cultural influences. The theory of intertextuality suggests that all works are built based on previous texts, which proves a dependency from the previous culture.⁴ Many works are the result of interactions of various cultures and global influences, which can make it difficult for us to attribute them to one cultural tradition. Contemporary works can be seen as a dialogue between tradition and innovation. The need for culture remains relevant, but its nature changes. In the context of globalisation and of the diversification of artistic styles, some criteria may be reinterpreted or even relaxed. Still, that does not mean that cultural standards are completely abandoned, but rather that they evolve in order to reflect the new artistic realities. Accepting diversity in art may lead to a deeper understanding of cultural values and a broader appreciation of different forms of artistic expression.

A cultural “air” should be intensely present on the pages of a doctoral thesis, as this is not only a scientific work, but also a contribution to the existing cultural and academic discussions. At the same time, originality should not be ignored, so the author’s unique perspective needs to be emphasised. This way, the cultural “air” not only enriches the content of the thesis, but it also strengthens its relevance in the academic and cultural environment. A doctoral thesis should be a point of departure for new discussions and a reflection of a deep understanding of its context.

Nowadays, technology is no longer just a factor of influence – it is a determining force in shaping culture and it goes beyond traditional limitations. The foundations of European culture are faced with important changes in the context of digitalisation and emerging technologies such as artificial

³ Aristotel (1996). *Politics*, translation by El. Bezdechi, Editura Cultura Națională, București, p. 36.

⁴ Julia Kristeva (1980). *Desire in Language*, translation by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 12-72.

intelligence or augmented reality. Technology can offer access to knowledge and create new platforms for expression and creation. However, there is also the other side of the coin – excessive digitalisation runs the risk of reducing the cultural experience to simplified, quickly consumable forms, which may erode the depth of reflection and of the dialogue which is essential for authentic cultural development.

Doctoral candidates' cultural experiences are fundamental not only for their formation as researchers, but also for their formations as people of culture. These experiences contribute to refining their critical spirit, stimulating their creativity and deepening their understanding of their field of study and also of the social and cultural context of their research. Ideally, cultural experiences should be diverse and include both formal and informal aspects, allowing the candidates to become holistic researchers. That would allow them to build a diverse cultural baggage and integrate multiple perspectives in their academic endeavours, thus having a deep impact on society and culture. Moreover, doctoral coordinators have a responsibility going beyond mere academic guidance. By promoting an attitude of openness, interdisciplinarity and critical reflection, together with their involvement in concrete cultural activities, they can contribute to the training of complete researchers who are able to be both active intellectuals and agents for change.

For better communication between the academic space and the cultural environment, the quantification of tensions could be done by case studies, interviews or polling analysing the attitudes and perceptions of actors in both fields, pointing out conflicts and differing opinions. Moreover, an analysis of partnerships between universities and cultural institutions and of the success of common projects may indicate the degree of collaboration and integration.

It is essential for us to promote an open dialogue and collaboration between the academic and cultural environments. Creating discussion platforms, funding projects and mobility between the two sectors are a few solutions which may facilitate mutual understanding and the consolidation of ties. Universities may also develop educational programmes integrating academic research with cultural activities, thus preparing professionals who would understand both the demands of scientific rigour and the creative dynamics of the cultural sector.

Researchers as “people of culture” are intellectual figures deeply involved in cultural development and in the perception of humanity. Research is not just the technical activity of accumulating knowledge, but also a creative act contributing to social change and to enriching culture. On the other hand, in the context of the neo-liberalisation of education, modern researchers may become “technicians” or “craftspeople” of knowledge, focusing on producing quantifiable information and abiding by rigid standards. That may lead

researchers to becoming mere doers rather than creators, and research as a cultural act runs the risk of becoming lost.

However, a balance between the two roles is possible. Interdisciplinarity can break the barriers between humanities and technical sciences, while protecting the autonomy of research allows us to approach questions that run deeper than mere usefulness. Researchers can be “people of culture” and “technicians” at the same time, but that depends on the institutional context and the use of information. It is essential for us to keep research as a cultural act, not only as production of knowledge, and to recognise its contribution to creating meaning for society. In theatre studies, this cultural reflection takes place for a complete understanding of artistic phenomena, beyond a simple technical analysis, because theatre is deeply connected to its own historical, social and cultural context.

Theatre is an art form which reflects not only the aesthetic tastes, but also the values, beliefs and social tensions of an era. “Theatre reproduces social situations and actions in the form of drama, and society, by its famous structural ceremonies, portrays various forms of performance in their dynamics.”⁵ To understand a theatre play, it is essential for us to analyse the cultural context in which it has been created. For instance, Bertold Brecht’s theatre needs to be understood in the political and social context of inter-war Germany, where Brecht used theatre to criticise social realities. Raymond Williams underlines that theatre is both an artistic representation and a reflection on society. “The artist, in this case, is not the lonely explorer, but the voice of his community.”⁶

Superficial research of theatre focusing only on its formal aspects may omit the deep meanings of the play. Reflection helps understand the symbolism behind the text and the performance. For example, Beckett’s or Ionesco’s theatre of the absurd needs to be understood in the cultural context of post-war Europe, marked by alienation and disillusionment. Hans-Thies Lehmann shows how contemporary theatre reflects the cultural and social changes of the modern world.⁷ Theatre is not only about a performance – it also involves the social interaction where themes that are relevant for the community are debated. Social or community theatre, such as the work of Augusto Boal, uses art in order to approach societal issues and generate change.⁸

⁵ Doina Papp (2020). *Teatrul social* [Social Theatre], „Bucureștiul cultural”, no. 99, article retrieved from: https://revista22.ro/bucurestiul-cultural/bucurestiul-cultural-nr-99-teatrul-social?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on 31/01/2025.

⁶ Raymond Williams (2001). *The long revolution*, Broadview Press, Toronto, p. 47.

⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*, translation by Karen Jürs-Munby, Taylor & Francis, London.

⁸ Augusto Boal (2017). *Teatrul oprimaților și alte poetici politice* [*Theatre of the oppressed and other political poetics*], translation by Georgiana Barbulescu, Editura Nemira, București.

Moreover, the criteria for cultural relevance have changed. Apart from the aesthetic and intellectual value, aspects such as social impact, innovation and accessibility are now also taken into account. Current themes such as human rights, climate change or cultural diversity are frequently appreciated as being relevant. However, traditional institutions have not completely lost their purpose. Universities, museums and theatres continue to play an important role in recognising cultural values and preserving patrimony.

Cultural relevance is influenced by a mixture of local and global factors, by societal tastes, but also by the social and political changes shaping the cultural discourse. In the end, that which is considered relevant is the result of a complex interaction between various voices and cultural agents, each having their own selection criteria.

The relationship between the doctoral candidate and the coordinator can definitely be regarded as a cultural one, in the sense that it often goes beyond the formal institutional framework and includes a spiritual and intellectual dimension. Even if, on an official level, it is an academic contract, in which the coordinator guides and supervises the progress of the doctoral research, in reality, this relationship can turn into a collaboration where spiritual and cultural elements communicate with each other.

First of all, a central aspect of this relationship is intellectual communication. Doctoral candidates choose their coordinators not only based on academic competences, but also according to a cultural or philosophic affinity. Sharing certain common values and principles can help create an environment favourable to the development of the research and to the understanding of the studied topic. This relationship can be described as a continuous dialogue between two minds which find themselves not only in a professional collaboration, but also in a cultural interaction in which each mind brings and answers the questions of the research. In the relationship between the candidate and the coordinator, culture is not just a topic of study, but also an environment in which ideas and concepts are born, while professional principles are transmitted in a broader framework. At the same time, the coordinator is the one guiding the candidate towards resources that are valuable for the research, such as actors and directors that can be interviewed and films and theatre productions that can be analysed in order to then be studied in the context of the doctoral thesis. In this type of relationship, institutional limitations can be overcome and the coordinator can become a kind of cultural guide for the candidate, not just a technical supervisor. Such a mentor can inspire the candidate not only on the level of knowledge, but also on the level of philosophical and ethical reflection, helping the integration of the values of a larger culture in the research. However, not all relationships of this kind are necessarily cultural in a profound sense. Some of them remain strictly institutional and professional and interest is limited to scientific objectivity.

Conclusions

In conclusion, doctoral research is not only a technical and methodological process, but also a cultural act, entailing a deep immersion in the values, ideas and principles of a culture. This goes beyond the boundaries of a simple academic activity and becomes a continuous dialogue between past and present, between tradition and innovation, between the theories and the perspectives shaping up the foundations of knowledge. The candidate guided by the coordinator becomes not only a specialist in a field, but also an active participant in a wider cultural process, with the ability to influence both the academic community and culture as a whole.

In a globalised and interconnected era, doctoral research is more and more diverse and dynamic, as it is influenced not only by institutional values, but also by social, political and technological change. Thus, it can be seen as a form of cultural creation, where thought and reflection on reality become fundamental acts of creating the cultural, academic and social future. From this perspective, each piece of doctoral research becomes not only a step in the evolution of knowledge, but also a contribution to the greatness and complexity of a constantly changing patrimony.

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The actress in research – between emotion and reason

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Abstract: Our presentation aims to identify the challenges faced by an actress-researcher and possible solutions. When referring to “the spectacular nature of a creative act,” we inevitably think of emotion, the unexpected, and experience. On the other hand, research is defined by objectivity, pragmatism, and precision. Doctoral research in the field of performing arts represents a challenge – a clash between the actor's visceral nature and the researcher's rationality. This year's conference theme, *Culture and Creation: Doctoral Research as a Cultural Act*, provides an interesting perspective on my research topic – in what way can the actress and the researcher or doctoral candidate coexist? The article *The Actress in Research – Between Emotion and Reason* aims to answer this question, drawing from my study of the concept of the complete actress in contemporary theater. In my research, I have linked the idea of the complete actress with activism – both on and off the stage. This introduces a new challenge for the actress in research: finding a balance between activism and doctoral studies. The profession of acting is deeply connected to the concept of humanity. In sociology, humanity is defined as the largest social group, envisioning the possibility of uniting all people into a cohesive unit of action with a shared goal of addressing major issues. Thus, we can associate actors with the desire to effect change in the world and the drive to touch the hearts and minds of people. My doctoral research, *Hypostases of Femininity in Contemporary Theatre*, brings me closer to my own answers and helps me understand that one of the most important reasons I chose to be an actress is to rewrite and redefine the destiny of women.

Keywords: emotion, reason, theatre, culture.

Introduction

The doctoral research *Hypostases of femininity in contemporary theatre* was born out of the vital need to understand the goal and role of the actress both in society and in the world of theatre. From the sociological viewpoint, one of the main characteristics of humanity is that people, by their nature, aim for certain goals. This is also why people started to organise themselves in social groups, understanding that achieving goals cannot be done in total isolation. Everything we do in life is caused by seeking or chasing a goal.

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Goals can be material and pragmatic, such as choosing a partner, a home, a career, or immaterial and hard to quantify, such as the desire to cause change in the world, to help, or to create a community. The latter are aspirations pertaining to the ideal and artistic universe and most of the time they involve exposing ourselves, vulnerable and sincere. We can thus deduce that any action we perform is for a certain goal. Moreover, though, people want to understand the motives behind desires, as well. And that is how the question “Why?” appears. In our childhood, there is an age called the *age of why*, when children focus on the relationship between cause and effect. As time goes by, this question remains constant and it is only the topics that change.

One of the most common questions is “Why have I chosen this profession?” The answers can, of course, vary greatly – fame, money, tradition, parents’ expectations. But art, and especially theatre, leads to the appearance of specific questions and answers. The answer is quite rarely (perhaps almost never) about money or safety. It is said that theatre is a vocation or gift. It is fascinating to think that there is a profession where someone goes up on stage and pretends to be someone else, in front of other people who are watching and accepting what is going on. In the beginning of my doctoral research, I formulated an opinion which is controversial, especially for our time: “It may sound utopian or naïve, but theatre has the power to change the world.” I will add now that actresses could be the first ones here and my research focuses on the concept of *complete actress*. The topic of this year’s conference, *Culture and creation. Doctoral research as a cultural act*, brings us an interesting perspective and opens a new direction in research: “How can the actress and the researcher or doctoral candidate coexist?” The article *The actress in research – between emotion and reason* aims to answer this question, starting from my study about the concept of *complete actress* in contemporary theatre. In my research, I associated the complete actress with activism, both on stage and off it. I have thus identified a new challenge for the actress in research – finding a balance between activism and the doctoral research.

The actress in research – between emotion and reason aims to identify the challenges of the *actress-researcher* and their possible solutions. When we talk about the “spectacular nature of an act of creation,” we inevitably think about emotion, about the unexpected, about an experience. On the other hand, research is identified with objectivity, pragmatism, and precision. A doctoral research in the field of performance arts is a challenge – a clash between the actor’s visceral nature and the researcher’s rational one. As we have seen, we can associate the acting profession with the need to bring change into the world and with the desire to reach people’s souls and minds. Robert J. Landy and David T. Montgomery talk about the concept of change in the theatre: “In very many ways, the purpose of theatre is change. The spectrum of change goes from a change for the better of one’s state in the case of a good comedy to a

change in one's thought, inspired by a challenging drama. In the context of social theatre, the main goal is to develop the participants' critical thinking – a development which inevitably leads to a change in perspective.”¹

The research I am conducting brings me closer to my own answers and I am starting to understand that one of the most important reasons why I have chosen the acting profession is in order to rewrite and redefine women's fate, by any means possible, including academic research. This is where the *why* of my research comes in and that is why it becomes so important to understand an actress's mechanisms – to identify those that really work in order to produce change. A first example of a woman in arts who is animated by the same goal is Patricia Erens, who describes women's representation in cinema over time: “The story of women in movies is mainly a history of how men depicted them. The image of the big screen heroines varied throughout time, from idolisation to infamy. Their fate depended on economic and social pressures and their physical aspect varied according to fashion and the manipulated trends.”²

The *goal* is an essential concept when we think about the situation of the *complete actress in research*. As we have seen already, many times, goals are related to affect, and, as we well know, emotion cannot be very visible in academic research. When the acting profession is defined by emotion, humanity and activism, it becomes difficult to master these aspects within objective, precise research. This is where we need balance – a crucial concept in the discussion about theatre, activism, research and the definition of the *complete actress*. When we talk about activism, we need to put in the balance our perspective on that social issue and the needs of the community members. In the case of research, objectivity needs to be stronger than emotional involvement. Theatre can cloud objectivity, as it is closely connected to emotions and the soul. That is why, when we talk about the *actress in research*, we need to highlight the separation between emotional involvement and social involvement.

Women's voices in theatre and research

On a global level, we can see many contradictory aspects regarding women's status. On the one hand, when it comes to presidential elections in many countries, we see more and more women in the final stages (Maia Sandu, Elena Lasconi, Kamala Harris, etc.). On the other hand, abortion is illegal in 22 of the US states and in two European countries (Malta and Poland), while access to abortion becomes difficult in numerous countries, including Romania. A recognition of the fact that misogyny is political and social in

¹ Robert J. Landy, David T. Montgomery (2012). *Theatre for Change – Education, Social Action and Therapy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 1 (our translation).

² Erens, Patricia (ed.) (1979). *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*, Horizon Press, New York, p. 13 (our translation).

nature comes from the UK: “The new Labour government, which has a progressive orientation, will include extreme misogyny among the forms of ideological extremism, according to a statement sent out on Sunday by the UK Home Office.”³ UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has said that hatred towards women is on the rise.

In Qatar, women were denied participation to the United Nations conference in Doha. In Italy, a protest was organised against femicide and the participants threw red paint on the Spanish Steps in Rome in memory of the 130 women killed in Italy last year. In Gambia, Parliament rejected the proposed law which aimed to make genital mutilation (forbidden by law since 2015) legal again. The reason why the law was proposed was related to the cultural and religious aspect of female circumcision, which is in fact a serious breach of women’s right. In Argentina, three lesbian women were killed in May, when a man set them on fire with a Molotov cocktail. Romania is on the last place regarding gender equality according to the latest report of the *European Institute for Gender Equality* and on the last but one place with regards to women’s political power.⁴

The road to diversity, inclusion and equity is long, complicated and by no means straight. We see significant progress being made, but we also see actions causing a regression of the woman’s status. But what is most important is that the discussion about gender equity is wide open. Moreover, women’s voices become stronger and stronger. Finally, women are no longer forced to be silent.

We can see the silence imposed on women as a form of violence. People who cannot tell their stories are deprived of their fundamental rights. Depriving women of their right to vote was a way to keep them silent and a form of aggression. Women who are afraid or who do not have the necessary space to talk about sexual harassment and rape are silenced. Abortion is a way to keep them silent. Domestic violence becomes political from the viewpoint of this silencing. Imposing silence also means enforcing a lack of credibility – we can often see that women are reticent about telling their story, because they are not believed. Silencing creates victims and strengthens aggressors. The recent investigations regarding sexual harassment in the Romanian academic environment proves that women’s voices are still small and that there is still no safe space for women’s experiences to be shared. Silencing women is a form a violence and support for the aggressors, with significant political and social effects.

Fortunately, we live in a time when more and more women break the silence. Our voices become stronger and surer. Even if fear is still felt in our voices, our stories are the only way to become free. It is important to remember

³ <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/guvernul-britanic-include-misoginia-printre-formele-de-extremism-ideologic-2899251>, accessed on 19.08.2024

⁴ See <https://centrulfilia.ro/>

that stories can come in different forms – testimonies, interviews, films, shows, music or even *doctoral papers*. Women will be equal to men only when their stories are as valuable as men's stories. In my research, I analysed the relationship between activism and fame a lot, proving the influence of actresses who are socially involved on public opinion. If we analyse the close connection between fame and activism, it is interesting to note that, in most cases, those celebrities are not experts on the topics they support. Which raises the question "Why would an actor or singer's discourse be relevant regarding a global social issue?"

One explanation can come from the emotional aspect of activism – a cause we are supporting or for which we are fighting usually has emotional and personal implications. When I am asked why I fight for inclusion and women's rights, the answer is simple: I don't want others to go through what I have gone through. Traumas and negative experiences are most easily healed by offering help to others, which also gives them a meaning and a positive direction. Thus, sometimes, it is easier to empathise with an artist we like than with an expert or academician. An actress supporting women's rights and enjoying the three defining elements of attitude change (charisma, credibility and fame) has a chance of appealing to more people than a "normal person." But if the same actress is also an expert in that social issue, her reach and credibility can be much greater. This is how valuable the experience of an actress in research can be and that is how activism and research can complete each other. By doing these things correctly and carefully, the actress in research can be a perfect combination of emotion and objectivity. It would be interesting, therefore, to think about research not as a form of activism, but as an instrument for strengthening credibility and fame, caused by the objective, precise character of the research.

Beauty – advantage or challenge

Beauty in theatre is an important direction of research for the study of the complete actress. The question "Is beauty in theatre an advantage or a challenge?" can be regarded and studied from multiple perspectives. First of all, it allows us to go back to the issue of the female character types. If we think about the myth of beauty in drama and its effects on women's status, we can say that beauty is one of the most deceptive traps of clichés and stereotypes. If we look on the social level, we can see that an actress's beauty, especially if she is young, can be dangerous for her, raising the question of ethics and morality. It is not news that men in important social positions can abuse their power. The best example is the *Me Too* movement, which had cases that were proved legally. Statistically, these cases occur especially in the case of men in positions of power and in artistic environments. Silencing women has allowed aggressors with strong voices and public positions to make victims

for too long with no one stopping them. Rebecca Solnit describes a few cases of men who used their fame and power to silence those they abused: “Roges Alles, Fox News CEO, whom a few women accused of sexual harassment in the workplace, persecution, exploitation, blackmail and psychological abuse for over 50 years, Bill Cosby with serial rapes facilitated by drugs for just as long and Jian Ghomeshi from Canada, accused of unimaginable abuse by several women.”⁵

Seeing and understanding beauty as a source of power can be a deceptive concept. It is indeed hard to deny that beauty and attractiveness are a source of privilege. But, apart from its ephemeral nature (because, in women’s case, beauty is closely connected to youth), it is important to mention that the force of beauty is manifested by its power to attract. In essence, it is not a source of power independently, because it has no value without someone else’s (financial, political, social or decision) power.

From this perspective, we could even say that beauty and, more precisely, the way women have been taught to relate to it, can encourage and increase dependency.

Regarding the *actress in research*, it is important to mention that, in the 21st century, beauty is many times identified with frivolity and a lack of depth. At the opposite pole, intelligence and depth are usually associated to a sober or even common physical aspect. This is seen in drama, cinema, on stage or even in an academic environment. The latter is defined by depth, seriousness, and importance, and that is why women in this environment often tend to hide or minimise their beauty. This minimisation of beauty is problematic and all the more difficult in the case of actresses, whose bodies and physical aspect are an integral part of their profession. As I have said, female beauty can be associated with frivolity, while attributes such as confidence, authority and power are perceived as predominantly masculine. By rethinking their physical aspect, actresses in an academic environment more easily and quickly express traits such as strength, intelligence and power, which are associated with masculinity. But changes of their physical aspect, through which women make themselves smaller, more modest and basically invisible are not a sustainable solution for fighting gender roles and stereotypes. Ideally, femininity should be consciously assumed in the academic environment – this is the only way we can begin to associate it with aspects such as academic integrity, power, authority, etc.

Another interesting research direction from the perspective of an actress’s beauty in the academic environment is the relationship between femininity and confidence. Looking at traditional gender images, we notice that confidence is predominantly a male attribute. In the past, women were taught

⁵ Rebecca Solnit (2020). *Mama tuturor întrebărilor* [The Mother of All Questions], Black Button Books, București, translation by Anca Dumitrescu, p. 27.

to be nice, kind, and modest, while concepts such as pride, assertiveness, and authority were specifically masculine. It is interesting to notice that, among women's depictions in the past, modesty was an excessively used trait. Let us see the example of the woman who is gorgeous, but unaware of her own beauty – a stereotype of classical drama. The allure of the woman who does not know how beautiful she is has been intensely promoted in art. A woman who does not realise her own beauty is depicted as being much more attractive than the one aware of her own beauty – as the latter is described as vain and full of conceit. Something about women who do not realise how beautiful they are is incredibly attractive to men.

This way of seeing a woman's beauty translates to numerous social aspects of the relationship between men and women and significantly influences the path of an actress in research. Sadly, the effects of the separation between femininity and confidence go way beyond the physical aspect and are very complex. Considering that confidence in women has been blamed for a long time, they will not enjoy any success the same way that men do, whether that success is professional or personal. Women's successes are minimised first of all by themselves. Another negative consequence is that women tend to not be as vocal or assertive. They will not support their own views with the same intensity, because, many times, in the case of women, confidence is mistaken for being aggressive or emotional.

The separation between confidence and femininity can also be seen in the *leadership styles* used by women. It is important to mention this aspect, since a woman in an academic environment may have various positions of authority. Kurt Lewin, a pioneer of social psychology, has identified three main leadership styles within organisations and groups: *autocratic (authoritarian) leadership*, *democratic (participative) leadership*, and *laissez-faire (permissive) leadership*. There are major differences between leadership styles of women and men, starting precisely from the concept of authority identified predominantly with masculinity. Studies suggest that women more frequently tend to use participative and transformational leadership styles, compared to the more authoritarian or transactional styles traditionally associated with male leadership. Sadly, preferring these leadership styles relates more to a social conditioning or constraint than to choice. Social challenges are huge for women, especially due to gender roles. Regarding leadership styles, women often choose more inclusive approaches in order to fight leadership stereotypes.

Activism

In 2024, we cannot speak about a *complete actress* without also speaking about activism. Radu Apostol brings an interesting perspective regarding the actor's civic conscience: "Artists should not be only the promoters of their own art, more or less inspired merchants of cultural or handmade products, but

should also take on a civic and social conscience similar to the artists in the theatre company that Hamlets leads in *The Mousetrap*.”⁶ I believe that having a voice, telling our stories, being listened to and taken into account are among the most valuable forms of liberation. Today’s actresses, female directors and female playwrights are the pioneers of liberation.

What is significant about women’s stories depicted in art is that they have a double value. First of all, they open the way for gender equity, giving value and credibility to the female voice. But, moreover, the power of women’s stories offers a better understanding of women’s experiences. More simply put, if men watched more stories about women, they would understand them better.

Activism in our time has multiple facets and numerous channels – and one of them, I believe, can be doctoral research. But, in this case, rules are much stricter than in the case of other channels, such as art or protests, since balance is absolutely essential. What is important to remember about activism is its relation to the social context and environment in which we live – how prepared that society is for discussing certain social issues. We use the term “prepared” from several viewpoints – education, level of information, openness, and civilisation. For example, we cannot use the same type of activism in France and in Romania and expect the same results, as France is a deeply progressive, liberal country, much more advanced than Romania. The road to equity and inclusion is an education and learning process, and Romania is still at the beginning. A very strong, aggressive form of activism about any issue or field can have a negative boomerang effect in a traditional society like Romania. In the case of social actions, it is important to highlight what that community really needs, not what we believe should be said or solved. That is why it is absolutely necessary to talk about balance in activism, since balance is the one that predominantly paints the picture of the *complete actress*.

Major social change has always occurred after significant forms of activism. Shock clearly opens the discussion of a certain social issue, especially in the times of social media. But we cannot give a clear answer about the positive effects it has on solving the problem. Shocking people by means of an extreme gesture is not necessarily good. In the case of persuasive messages, *constancy is more important than cognitive dissonance*. Sociological studies have shown that the frequency with which we are exposed to persuasive messages is predominant in determining the attitude change process.

Another important aspect about balance in activism is the need for significant research and documentation. That is why an actress’s doctoral research can be immensely beneficial for her activism. A celebrity or, in our case, a *complete actress*, cannot randomly choose a social issue to debate and

⁶ Radu Apostol (2018). *Teatrul social – Perspective asupra rolul teatrului în raport cu societatea* [Social theatre – Perspectives on the role of theatre in relation to society], UNATC Press, București, p. 9.

support. A very good example is found in the women's sexual liberation movement in the '70's. Early feminism regarding female sexuality focused first of all on women's right to be sexually active anytime, anywhere, and with anyone. But it is very important to understand that sexual liberation is much more than that – the right to abortion, easy access to contraception, the importance of tests, and sexual education in school. Without these aspects, women were not really in control of their own sexuality. The '70's were a time when sexual liberation was synonymous with promiscuity in the Western world. What contemporary feminism, which has much more information and documentation and is not as drastic, has taught us is that, although sexual liberation can mean promiscuity, it can also mean chastity, marriage, and one partner for life. Just like in Hegel's philosophy, it is important to keep in mind that two things can be true at the same time. Liberation actually means the right to choose, whether we talk about sexuality, politics or education. That is how important *research, documentation, and information* are in celebrities' activism.

Another important aspect about balance in activism is fighting stereotypes. This is particularly important in the case of the actress in research. "Actress" and "researcher" may seem like totally opposite concepts. Art, theatre, and actresses are identified with freedom, emotion, non-conformity, rebellion, passion, etc., while the researcher and the academic environment are identified with concepts such as seriousness, rigour, strictness, rules, codes, etc. Blending the two can have a significant effect on fighting stereotypes. Many times, society imagines a feminist as a short-haired woman wearing no makeup, with loose clothes and harbouring deep hatred for men. They will imagine that someone who fights for making cannabis legal is a long-haired hippy wearing colourful clothes and driving a van painted with colourful spirals. An animal rights activist is seen as a "single cat lady" – an unmarried woman with a houseful of cats.

And yet we have the feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who wears high heels and is the image of the makeup company *Boots*. Moreover, she often talks about the tendency she had in her youth to hide her high heels and makeup in order to have credibility and about the strong semantic charge of the word *feminist*. "Feminists are women who are not happy because they cannot find husbands. So I decided to call myself a Happy Feminist. (...) Since feminism is not African, I decided to call myself a Happy African Feminist. At some point I got to be a Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men and Who Likes Lip Gloss and Who Wears High Heels for Herself and Not for Men."⁷ In the case of making cannabis legal, we can give the example of MEP Nicu Ștefănuță – an educated person, vice-president of the European

⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2016). *Feminist(ă), Feministi* [Feminist, Feminists], translation by Anca Dumitrescu, Black Button Books, București, p. 10.

Parliament, married, with children, destroying the stereotype of the marijuana-smoking hippie. Joaquin Phoenix, an animal rights activist, redefines the stereotypical image of a single person with a lot of animals. And an actress in research can become an unstoppable force by blending opposite elements such as emotion and rigour. We can continue to give examples, but what is important to keep in mind is that authenticity is a priority in activism. We don't need to turn ourselves into a poster for a social issue. Sincerity and authenticity absolutely suffice.

Also, activism does not have to always be sombre, serious, and shocking. Especially with regards to feminism, *humour* has often been used for opening important discussions. Sometimes, it may be easier and more beneficial to challenge social constructs in a disarming manner, rather than by some dramatic social action. Humour offers a simple and pleasant way to bring difficult, controversial topics in the discussion. Moreover, comedy also brings many other positive aspects – it fights the image of the angry, frustrated feminist, it proves that women can be funny and normalises topics which used to be considered taboo. Actresses like Lily Tomlin, Amy Poehler, Tina Fey, or Lena Dunham prove the power of comedy in activism. The writer Mesa Story Melton speaks about the value of humour in activism: “Humour has long been useful as a nonviolent form of rebellion in which the oppressed can speak out in a way that is viewed as less threatening than other popular ways of expressing discontent. Unlike protests or violent action, comedy provides a safety net for the activist who utilises it (...). Comedy has also proved to be an important way of coping with personal tragedy (...).”⁸ Even though humour is not recommended in a doctoral paper, it is important to mention that the specific academic language can be used in a less “stuffy” way. One proposal would be to use a general, common, more accessible language together with the specialised one, so that the doctoral research could have visibility both for the limited, niche target audience and for the general public.

Another important aspect about balance in activism is imposing a distance between the social involvement and the emotional one and this is maybe the most important aspect of the topic of the *actress in research*. Emotional involvement often leads to the clouding of objectivity and critical thinking, two fundamental concepts of activism and research. I can explain this aspect from my own experience. With regards to my research, this has been my biggest challenge. The topic of my paper is very important for me on a personal level and it has been difficult for me to impose a distance between emotion and objectivity, especially at first. Robert J. Landy and David T. Montgomery discuss the issue of emotion in social theatre: “Ironically, although theatre is associated with emotion and the inner life of actors and

⁸ Mesa Story Melton (2018). *Familiar: An Artistic Exploration of Feminism Through Comedy*, Honors College Thesis, p. 7 (our translation).

characters, influenced by years of interpretation of Stanislavski's classical text *An Actor's Work*, most artists in social theatre stay away from psychological processes and the power of emotions, some of them accepting Boal's idea that catharsis reduces the power of social actions."⁹

Conclusions

Our research leads to the conclusion that, in 2024, the *complete actress* cannot separate herself from activism. Whether we are talking about simple forms, such as an informed and consciously assumed choice of roles, projects and people with whom she works, or about including activism in performances and doctoral research or about participating in protests and social actions or about a simple mention of a social issue in an interview – all these forms of activism, from the most simple to the most complex, are essential in proving how strong and important a woman's voice can be. Theatre creators who use women's stories are the first on the path towards equity and inclusion. Also, taking into account aspects such as constancy, charisma, documentation, information, authenticity, and humour is crucial for the efficiency of activism.

In the doctoral study *Hypostases of femininity in contemporary theatre*, I have analysed the numerous challenges faced by actresses – their physical aspect, stereotypes, gender roles, and age. In the case of an actress in research, other difficulties are added – the conflict between emotion and objectivity, the separation between femininity and confidence, female beauty being identified with frivolity, the balance of activism in academic research or imposing a distance between research and emotional involvement.

The article *The actress in research – between emotion and reason* has identified a series of solutions, such as: consciously assuming one's femininity in the academic environment, using means of communication pertaining to the sphere of authority, using accessible language in research, authenticity and sincerity, fighting the stereotypes about leadership by diversifying leadership styles, studying a community's level of openness to certain social issues, etc. I have also identified some benefits of actresses in research – fighting stereotypes, research seen as a new form of storytelling, consolidating credibility and fame, diversifying the target audience, or intensifying women's voices in the academic environment. This identification of benefits has brought me the most joy, as it proves that the actress in research has the power to create a space where other voices can get the courage to be heard. And this is actually the ultimate goal – not just reflecting the world, but actively participating in transforming it.

The article borrows information from various fields connected to theatre – sociology, psychology, world literature, and marketing. A lot of this article has been a discussion of what silencing women means and its political and

⁹ Robert J. Landy, David T. Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 175 (o. t.).

social implications. It has been very important for me to write about silence from the viewpoint of being deprived of rights. Silence inevitably creates victims and strengthens aggressors. Stories are a form of liberation and the representation of women's experiences in theatre and cinema is essential for reaching equity. If I could sum up this article in just a few words, those would be *the voice of actresses in research*. In this context, the actress in research becomes a symbol of a woman who consciously assumes the power of her voice and uses it towards education, inclusion, and change. Research and theatre together become instruments not only for understanding the world, but for rewriting it, as well.

The path towards equity and inclusion is a learning process – an aspect which I have felt throughout this year. The woman I am now is largely the result of valuable reads I have had during the past year and a demonstration of the power of the messages to which we are exposed. In the end, I believe that stories, the desire to cause changes, empathy and the fight for equality are characteristics of both contemporary theatre and personal rediscovery.

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The UK government includes misogyny among the forms of ideological extremism
<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/guvernul-britanic-include-misoginia-printre-formele-de-extremism-ideologic-2899251>

<https://centrulfilia.ro/>

Open/Closed PhD or How and for Whom Does One Write?¹

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Abstract: The thesis and, implicitly, the doctoral research are components essential for the development of their respective field. This way, when one analyses the theatrical sphere, these two have to be treated, evidently, as cultural acts and, thus, generated by – and directed towards an “audience”, direct beneficiary of the research process’ results. This paper will analyse the differences between a PhD that focuses on a narrow community and niche (on a local or national level), in comparison to one centred around a wider geographical area (with a regional, international, or, why not?, global focus), from both the point of view of managing possible issues regarding linguistic and stylistic accessibility, and through the study of possible structure peculiarities. The form and content generate each other, but are, nevertheless, in a permanent contact with the environment of each individual research and with the details that distinguish the community it addresses and which, to a certain extent, “requested” the specific study. The open PhD is a means of internationalizing, due to the fact that it requires access to international databases and publications, plurilingualism, and inter- and transnational cultural exchanges, although, concomitantly, implying a more reduced contact with the possible local niches that do not represent points of interest or focus for the majority of the other countries included in the respective study. Here one needs to stress the importance of a closed PhD, not in the literal sense, but in reference to the size of the focus-group and its “closed circle” functionality, vital for understanding the characteristics of certain subjects centred around the interests of reduced communities.

Keywords: doctoral thesis, internationalizing, cultural act, audience, research.

Introduction

The concept of “cultural act” branches far beyond the palpable limits of a cultural product, although most processes require a quantifiable result, in order to appeal to the requirements imposed either by the institution “hosting” the delivery of said product, or by the grading standards to which the result is subjected. An example of such cultural act is the research process, visible, yet intangible by its nature. Research, however, does comply with the rules of the “quantifiable result”, through the materials published after the final stages.

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An initial form of such process is the doctoral research, an essential first step towards the professional fulfilment of a member of the academic sector. Albeit limited, the outreach of a doctoral research is represented by an “audience”, the readers of the thesis (i.e. final product of the process). Benefiting from this “encounter” both directly and indirectly, the previously mentioned audiences branch in these respective categories, in turn generating the dichotomy presented in this paper.

The indirect beneficiaries take advantage of the impact of a research process onto the “greater scheme of things” - the implementation of the (possibly) proposed solutions, the furthering of the discoveries, or the auxiliary research generated by the initial results. This leads to an open type of work, in one's specific case, an open PhD. If the in-depth analysis was, however, commissioned by a specific group of individuals or references a narrower niche, the beneficiaries are inherently direct ones.

This paper will detail the peculiarities of both previously mentioned types of doctoral research, following an analysis pattern focused on the form and contents of both individual types, followed by a comparative description of the style and languages used in each of the cases. One does not aim to create a rank of the two or state one's superiority over the other, but rather provide the reader with an objective overview of their particularities and uses in certain situations. Nevertheless, one will not refrain from highlighting the contextual value of the former, given universities' need for expanding their international networks.

Open/ Closed PhD

Before one commences the analysis of open and closed PhDs, it is vital to note that these two derive from the concept of “cultural act”, which, as priorly stated, exists in a multitude of “states of aggregation”. Firstly, there is the *kinetic* or *performative* one, mostly in the shapes of theatre, dance or music performances, but also represented by *para-theatrical/-musical* manifestations, such as the conglomerate of events a festival is composed of, or book launches for each artistic sphere. The latter is a category marked by profound theatricality (in the literal sense), but implies kinesis, physical movement of people. Not only contemporary culture is represented here, heritage-related events following the same criteria are also part of the kinetic cultural acts' group.

Although closer to a cultural “product” than to an “act”, the *static* class, generally comprising sculpture, painting (visual arts in the broader sense), also includes publications, printed copies of written works, photography albums, or even manuals, “theory&praxis” books. Acting as the link between *kinetic* acts and the last group, publications introduce the third class of cultural acts, *process-based*, such as archiving, conservation, and research.

This category exists and functions without a final product, its focus point being outside the quantifiable realm. Even so, the impact it has on society

eventually becomes visible, either through results from the first two classes, or through expansion within its own group. According to Gibson et al. (2015)², there could be economic benefits for society arising from such endeavours, in turn leading to new directions for investments and, therefore, logically, improvements and more (new) results. Political impact also counts as an effect of process-based cultural acts, both *ad litteram*, as well as in what concerns policies (may them be cultural or not only).

The cultural act highlights “the real, the urgent, the exciting.”³, doctoral research aiding with the development of certain professional niches by working towards expanding this “exciting” unknown or revealing new perspectives on previously-analysed subjects. Narrowing the statement down to just the field of theatre and performing arts, one must note that there are no major differences in regards to the (underlying) capacities of the research process in what concerns its impact on the field of study.

Deriving from a professional necessity, doctorates in theatre and performing arts (to be named TPA further on) originate in two radically different contexts - by personal or by guild’s demand. The former aims to fulfil one’s own curiosity or to test personal beliefs in regards to the professional area, while the other roots in a more exterior pressure, either the lack of materials regarding a specific topic (such as local monographies) or plea from a group of individuals, an example of which would be researching local historiographies, as a response to a community’s call. Certainly, these two have clear equivalencies with the first part of this paper, the open, respectively closed PhDs.

Given the field’s reduced size, TPA research connects theoreticians and practitioners directly, allowing spaces for dialogue⁴ to flourish. One of these practices consists in giving the feedback for the doctoral theses (mainly during their defence). The debates generated in this context not only help the student observe the impact of their research or the aspects incompletely detailed throughout their PhD years, but also mark the starting points for further research endeavours, though the ideas discussed in plenum during the said feedback session. The impetuously necessary improvement, generative condition of any doctoral research, makes its presence felt, thus emphasizing once more the value of these contributions to their respective niche.

Pragmatically, the value of a PhD is attributed to the impact of their final product, therefore one must point out the fact that, in the case of every such

² Chris Gibson, Chantel Carr, and Andrew Warren (2015). *Making Things. Beyond the binary of manufacturing and creativity*, in Kate Oakley, Justin O’Connor (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries* (1st ed.), Routledge, p. 91.

³ Justin O’Connor (2013). *The Cultural and Creative Industries*, in “The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture”, individual article page 1.

⁴ Aitor Gómez, Lidia Puigvert, and Ramón Flecha (2011). *Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing Real Social Transformation Through Research*, in “Qualitative Inquiry”, volume 17, issue 3, pp. 239-240.

endeavour, the results take the shape of a published thesis, accompanied by the findings of the research. Regardless of whether they address a major-scale issue or are focused solely on a local “problem”, they stir discussions, open new perspectives, and (ideally) either solve, or, at least, explain the cause that laid the foundation of the work.

Returning to the main point of this paper, one will, from here onwards, detail the peculiarities of each of the types of PhD, commencing with the so-called “closed” one.

Constantly bearing in mind the visualisation of the concept of “focus group”, the closed PhD addresses the smallest “circle”, perceived as such from mathematical or geographical perspectives. This “closed-circle” approach generates, in turn, specificities related not only to the topics analysed, but also to the language used, the size of the community which it addresses marking the limitations of this type of research.

In terms of “causes” of such PhDs, they can root, as mentioned prior, in the necessity to address the lack of materials on a certain subject, or could be the direct result of a community supporting (financially, morally) a more in-depth analysis of a topic. If the former falls in the category of a more intuitive feeling of the necessity of a research, the latter also aids with the preservation of the local heritage, “foster[ing] individual and group identity”⁵ by expanding the knowledge on certain communities, activities, currents or personalities with a local or national impact. As a result, numerous such endeavours further, with modern means, pre-existent researches, not with the purpose of nullifying the initial findings, but rather with the intention of offering a new (more) modern perspective on aspects of patrimonial importance. Given the previously-described “shape” of the closed PhD, one must mention the fact that numerous such attempts receive state funding, not only from the community they address, but also from larger governmental bodies, in order to (once again pragmatically) enhance the attractiveness of such research processes and, in turn, increase the quantity of materials available on subjects related to local history and/or the quality of certain parts of the country’s/community’s heritage’s preservation.

The closed-circle functionality of the research’s background (so-called “shape”) generates, in this case, aspects related to the final product’s contents that come across as specificities of this type of PhD. Addressing a small(er) community, the topic is clearly geographically locatable, and, thus, generates a “snowball effect”, gathering the style of the writing, and even the vocabulary used, in the category of “local”. Albeit operative in a smaller, more limited environment, closed PhDs do not focus only on physical spaces, but also on social ones, examples of such research being, in the TPA field, the theatre or

⁵ Hamid Mowlana (2024). *Intercultural Communication and Interactions. A history and critique*, in Shi-xu (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Discourse Studies* (1st ed.), Routledge, p. 70.

meta-theatrical performances of certain ethnically minoritarian groups, enhancing their community spirit through art praxis. Furthermore, on an international scale, PhDs can adhere to the “closed” denomination by collating information in multiple countries (or even worldwide) on the cultural behaviour of a certain social class – their preferences, cultural habits, aesthetics, colour palettes etc. Even given this broader perspective, the closed PhD still addresses a single community and, therefore, if they manage to avoid the necessity of translation, still face the possibility of operating with jargon, limiting the reach of their researches’ findings to the ones willing to take the extra step into unfamiliar linguistic territory.

Operating with such research products as an “outsider” is, most definitely, a culturally-enriching experience, developing, at first, one’s vocabulary in order to understand the community’s jargon, and, eventually, broadening one’s understanding of the cultural diversity of either a fixed geographical space, or a set period of time. Regardless of whether they take the shape of monographies or not, closed PhDs also aid with the reconstruction of heritage lost due to colonization or ethnical/racial/social cleansing practices, giving the researchers the possibility to eventually “open” the closed PhD.

Communities, however, are not, even within the limits of the TPA niche, defined solely by textual cues and, given the recent technological improvements, one can include not only visual, but also audio input in a PhD. Unlike the verbal/written aspects, these, as both a positive and negative result of globalisation, are more familiar to the “outsider” and, in spite of clearly belonging to a specific community, can be culturally translated. The risk here is that of “translation” through appropriation (the negative result mentioned previously), which inherently cancels the good intention of the research. These para-verbal means of communication deepen and strengthen the natives’ bond with their own heritage, therefore, if the attempt at researching comes from outside the community, the researcher must first understand the distinctive aspects of the “circle” before entering it.

Who do we write for when it comes to a closed PhD? As detailed in the above paragraphs, clearly not only for the community spotlighted by the research, although it does represent the main focal point. The target audience is, thus, alongside the constituent parts of said community, the people interested (from both professional and personal perspectives) in the topic, individuals willing (and also capable) to learn and un-learn decisive aspects and communicational patterns, part of the local history analysed in the research.

On the opposite end of the spectrum lies the “open” PhD, strangely much more pragmatic in “causes” than its closed-circle counterpart, partially because of the institutions need for broadening their connections and, therefore, pushing for more internationally-oriented research topics. Due to synthesizing a greater quantity of information, open PhDs have a higher risk of delivering an only

fractional result or, even more unfortunate, of mismanaging cultural mediation between the environments included in the study⁶ by improperly balancing between the ranking/power of said cultural spaces - inherently subjective classification, based on the importance of certain (e.g.) countries in direct relation to the research. This type of research thus implies the need for a more acute cultural sensitivity, especially due to its broader reach and, in turn, its (more) general interest in comparison to the “closed” one.

Contextually, a PhD can count as “open” research as long as it analyses at least two focus groups, in the case of TPA niches – theatrical or cultural spaces. The background setting the foundation for this type of research is, usually, tributary to international students⁷, whose interests can be focused on their home country but researched abroad, or whose vision on local aspects from their country of studies are filtered by their new, distinctive approach, international by nature. This permanent connection of environments through the person and personality of the student emphasizes a perspective on the concept of research that cannot be attempted with a “closed” PhD, i.e. a parallelism between cultural spaces in the forms of comparative and also complementary analysis, a development of the concept of globalization towards an affirmative, mutually-enhancing interconnection of multiple countries.

There are, nonetheless, drawbacks to this inclination of the researchers towards inter- and transnational cultural exchanges, and they generally take the shape of the “local-global relationship[s] in whose binarism a greater hierarchical value of the global over the local has been observed”⁸, creating the false impression of inherent higher quality of the research focused on greater scales.

In terms of contents, one of the disclosing signs of an open PhD is represented by its language, not necessarily the one of the research, but of the final product, this automatically implying a greater quantity of analysed materials being read in languages of international circulation, in addition to the linguistic opening owed to the students’ native languages and the materials they can explore with the help of this. The plurilingualism is closely paired with making use of the international databases and publications for the niches in question, broadening researches’ horizons even more.

As a consequence of relying on multiple languages for research and making use of a widely spoken one for presenting the results of the

⁶ Rona Tamiko Halualani (2024). *Situating and Unwinding “Intercultural Struggles” In Critical Intercultural Communication Studies*, in Shi-xu (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Discourse Studies* (1st ed.), Routledge, pp. 101-109.

⁷ Martyn Polkinghorne, Julia Taylor, Fiona Knight, and Natalie Stewart (2023). *Doctoral Supervision: A Best Practice Review*, in “Encyclopedia”, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 48-49.

⁸ Walkyria Monte Mór (2024). *Beyond The “One-Key-To-The-Universe View” Expanding Critical Perspectives in Cultural Discourse Studies*, in Shi-xu (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Discourse Studies* (1st ed.), Routledge, p. 455.

documentation process, the jargonization of the vocabulary of the thesis is far reduced compared to the one of the closed PhD, in the attempt to eliminate the need for contextualization when addressing the outcome of the research. Similarly, when it comes to visual and/or audio insertions, they do follow the path of their linguistic counterparts, but are, unfortunately, limited to examples that can be rapidly placed in analogies to familiar images/sounds, so the prospective reader has access to the entirety of the conveyed information without having to perform research activities that are not necessarily related to the one currently being read.

Apart from form and content, PhDs could be “open”, in fact, from other perspectives, such as from the one of the framework – allowing practice-based doctoral research meant allowing for new approaches and testing methods, irrespective of language or (even!) topic, and, according to Kiley (2020), increased the number of applicants⁹ and, therefore, broadened the palette of perspectives resulting from a school’s doctoral candidates.

Conclusions

As the culture of research is founded on formal and informal working groups¹⁰, the differences between a “closed” and an “open” PhD range far beyond their generative, starting point, and branch into the use of language, vocabulary and jargon, images, and sound insertions. Another key difference between the two is represented by the workspace – unrelated to the previously-mentioned details. The “closed” research has lower chances of allowing the doctoral student to operate in a remote setting, their dependence on the environment and sometimes even site-specific (field)work obliging them to an “on-site” approach, in flagrant opposition to the (mainly) “remote” research conducted during the “open” PhD years, which can even imply travel, institution-subsidised or not, yet strongly connected to the object of study and, most importantly, to the (cultural) spaces in question.

Maintaining an ethical approach to one’s research when scrutinizing different cultures or backgrounds unfamiliar to one’s own is, nonetheless, a vital aspect connecting the two and, implicitly becomes a “red thread” linking any type of doctoral research, may it be in the TPA or related fields or on subjects unrelated to the Arts. This major similarity can, eventually, account for a fusion of the two types, generally from “closed” to “open”, either due to the nature of the subject, or through the expansion of the research and its need to be covered on a both micro and a macro scale.

⁹ Margaret Kiley, *Australia*, in Stan Taylor, Margaret Kiley, Karri A. Holley (Ed.) (2020). *The Making of Doctoral Supervisors: International Case Studies of Practice* (1st ed.), Routledge, p. 1.

¹⁰ Polkinghorne *et al.*, *Ibidem*, p. 50.

Regardless of the format, each research and supervision process requires strategy¹¹ and action, defining a behavioural ecology of the academic research system¹² and, essentially, specificities of this type of work, the research in Theatre and Performing Arts.

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¹¹ Christine Bruce, Ian Stoodley (2013). *Experiencing Higher Degree Research Supervision as Teaching*, in “Studies in Higher Education”, volume 38, issue 2, p. 25 (explained clearly in Table 4).

¹² Michael E. W. Varnum, and Igor Grossmann (2017). *Cultural Change: The How and the Why*, in “Perspectives on Psychological Science: A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science”, vol. 12, issue 6, individual article p. 8.

Research for the benefit of the community

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Abstract: In a world where things are evolving at an astonishing pace, where the jobs of the future have increasingly looser connections to human beings and focus on automation and digitisation, we must ask ourselves whether our research in the field of art is still relevant. The professions we are preparing for, whether we are talking about acting, directing, set design or choreography, are increasingly fragile, and our country's leaders are not making much effort to ensure that artists remain relevant in this particular context in which we find ourselves. Given these factors, we must consider whether our research has a place in this chaotic landscape, or whether it is simply a bureaucratic exercise that allows artists to teach university courses after completing their bachelor's and master's degrees. My article aims to bring into debate the role of our research, first and foremost for cultural and educational institutions, and then for the society as a whole. The second point I want to raise is related to the research budgets available in our country, but also in other European Union countries, and to try to explain as transparently as possible the differences between countries in terms of the budget allocated to doctoral research. Thirdly, I propose to discuss and identify the exact beneficiary of our research, whether it is the student or the actor, and whether the language should be academic or adapted to the needs of those working in the arts.

Keywords: research, artists, theatre, budget, community, education.

Introduction

Our research in the field of art should have direct applicability, which should materialise in a benefit that artists can enjoy in their work. Theatre productions staged by directors on professional stages should maintain continuous communication with researchers in the art world, and their work should be a valuable study material for them, helping them to build an improved theatrical language adapted to the times we live in, with an emphasis on innovation. An artist needs a lot of practice to fulfil themselves, but they must not reject theoretical study from their artistic life, because only in this way can they reinvent themselves and constantly seek new forms of expression. The great theatre theorists have written books of major importance for the field of theatre. Their research stemmed primarily from a desire to find

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what was relevant to their profession, as they were constantly searching for the theatrical language they wanted to highlight. Declan Donnellan, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba have all left behind extremely valuable research works for researchers and artists from all corners of the world. The relevance of the works of the above-mentioned authors is measured by the exposure they have received. Their works did not remain locked away in drawers, but on the contrary, they found their way into educational and cultural institutions around the world.

Artists must bear this in mind, namely that their research work should have direct applicability and be relevant both to the academic environment and to artists who continue to develop theatre performances. “Thus, skills are as fundamental to theatre and performance research as methods and methodologies. And even if another trilogy of terms (skills/ methods/ methodologies) can form another level in the game of defining disciplines and thus lead us further into quasi-disciplinarity, there is nothing at the base of any step in the order of the trilogies that cannot be rearranged in its horizontal and vertical alignments”¹. An actor's qualities should not stop at simply contextualising their artistic means of expression, but should also include the ability to monitor their progress and be constantly attentive to what could be improved. For this to happen, they need access to research papers in order to clarify their thoughts and learn how to and structure their work in such a way that it becomes relevant from a theoretical point of view, not just a practical one.

With regard to the academic progress of research papers, we can say with disappointment that very few of the doctoral theses of researchers in the arts are made available to students and professors at relevant universities. Even though, in terms of the motivation for writing the thesis and its applicability in educational institutions, it is stated with great aplomb that all theses are addressed to the latter, they do not actually reach them. There are multiple reasons for this, which must be highlighted. The first is related to the quality of the research, which in many cases does not meet the necessary conditions for publication, and the second reason is related to the overly academic language, which repels the reader and shifts their attention elsewhere after only a few pages. The heads of doctoral schools should establish more clearly, from the outset, who the research in question is aimed at, and the language should be adapted so that it can be understood by everyone. More accessible language does not mean a compromise on quality. The word 'academic' should not lead us towards rigidity and impenetrability, but should open the way to knowledge.

¹ Baz Kershaw, Helen Nicholson (2011). *Research methods in theatre and performance*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p. 12.

Research budget

Given that the budget allotted for „special pensions” in Romania slightly exceeds that allocated to culture, which is only 1,274,537,000 lei, we can say that we choose our priorities in a rather strange way. Unfortunately, people in the cultural sector do not rebel, choosing instead to complacently accept the situation and give up hope for change for the better. The education budget does not rank among the shameful figures allocated to culture, amounting to 58,062,930 lei. The RDI (Research, Development, Innovation) component does not receive significant support from the state, with the budget allocated to research amounting to only 2,148,957 lei, according to the 2025 budget execution. The comparison with France is irrelevant, as the budget allocated to research exceeds even that which we allocate to the entire education system, reaching 16 billion euros in 2022, five figures above ours.

Ultimately, no matter how hard we try to find relevant research topics, we will inevitably be blocked by shortcomings in terms of the prospects for developing doctoral theses, as the gap between our system and the Western one is far too wide for us to keep up with. The great challenge for a doctoral student is to find the time to devote to research, trying to squeeze in between the various projects they have to accept in order to earn a living. The amount of a scholarship for a doctoral student at UNATC (National University of Theatre and Film Arts in Bucharest) is 3,700 lei per month in the final year of study, with the grant being lower in the first and second years. Students must also attend faculty courses as teaching assistants, which complicates matters in terms of time management. Practical experience is very important in the work of a researcher, but since this work is not remunerated, students will have to find other activities to earn the money they need to cover their daily expenses and purchase the books necessary for their research.

In these circumstances, students are forced to look for alternative sources of funding for their research, and such programmes are made available to them by both the Romanian state and the European Union through various funding programmes. Universities are the ones that can obtain funding for doctoral students. Within the Ministry of Education, they can access grants through the fund management body, which provides funding for higher education. Uefiscdi is such a structure through which universities can obtain funds for the actual activity of the institution, but also for research². A second national programme that supports doctoral students is managed by the Ministry of Investment and European Projects and can offer scholarships for researchers in their final year of study, as well as for those in the post-doctoral stage, amounting to 400 and 600 euros per month for 12 months, respectively³.

² <https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/finantare-invataman-superior>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

³ <https://mfe.gov.ro/apel-deschis-burse-si-sprijin-profesional-pentru-minim-1-800-de-doctoranzi-si-cercetatori-post-doctorat/>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

Even if the amounts are small, and excessive bureaucracy does not encourage students to apply for such support, it is important that it exists, and ways can be found to get this information to students through university representatives. A very important step to mention and implement is related to counselling them by professionals in the field who have the necessary qualification to provide support to students and guide them through grant programmes, so that they are not intimidated and understand that this information is hidden somewhere, but with a little openness and time allocated to discovering such programmes, their journey through doctoral school will be a smoother one.

Romanian students can also apply for scholarships abroad, where grants are more generous than in Romania, much more diverse and can add value to their research, provided that the student is willing to sacrifice certain aspects of their personal life. In order to benefit from a scholarship in France, moving to Western Europe is inevitable, and the student will have to break contact with their family and the artistic world for a period of time, dedicating more time to research.

Motivation is very important during the study phase, as the arguments that each student finds relevant to their research will lead them towards research that is more focused on theoretical study, with practical work in the theatre faculty's workshops not being essential for them. However, given that the research has a more direct application, experimenting with theoretical studies in the courses will add value to the research, and under the given circumstances, the internship abroad should be short.

Tuition fees in France are much lower than in Romania, if we refer to UNATC requirements. The average fee at a state-funded institution is €1,564 for the entire cycle, and for a PhD started at a private university, it varies between €3,000 and €10,000. The University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest charges a fee of 10,000 lei per year, which amounts to 2,000 euros for one year of study. This amount exceeds the entire budget that a student must allocate to an entire study programme at a university funded by the French state budget. It is very important to note that in France, students can also apply for various research grants to offset their expenses. They can apply for support from the "Eiffel" programme, through which they can obtain a scholarship of €1,800 per month for 18 months, as well as medical insurance, subsidised housing and return air tickets. CROUS scholarships, funded by the Ministry of Education, are also a source of income for doctoral students, with grants of up to €571 per month to cover accommodation and living costs. Another programme is CIFRE (*Conventions Industrielles de Formation par la Recherche*), through which students can obtain a full-time job for a period of three years with a French company or research laboratory⁴.

⁴ <https://www.findaphd.com/guides/phd-study-in-france/funding>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

The budget for research is not easy to obtain; it requires sacrifice, adaptability and understanding, and things may turn out in favour of the doctoral student, but it is very important that they know what they want, what sacrifices they are willing to make, and what is most beneficial for their studies.

The direct beneficiary

Academic research must first and foremost comply with rules and standards of writing that meet the requirements of a scientific paper. In the arts, compromise is fully understood and accepted by decision-makers, as it is a field in which it is impossible to gather accurate data on how viewers receive the actors' message through both rational and emotional filters. The mechanisms of assuming a character, from the perspective of an actor working on their role, are subject to rules relating to their body, and especially to the actor's psyche, which must be engaged in the most personal manner possible. No technological devices have yet been invented to measure the exact parameters that an artist uses to create a work. EEG headphones that measure neural activity, made available by doctors to monitor patients with various mental disorders, including epilepsy, have generated noteworthy results in research projects and theatre performances, but an actor or director cannot work under close monitoring because our profession, whether we like it or not, does not work with exact data.

The language of the research paper must be thought out and adapted to the needs and resources available to the doctoral student, but this should not be determined before focusing precisely on the target audience of the research. If the direct beneficiary is the student from the acting department of the theatre faculty, then the academic language must be constructed in such a way as not to be off-putting. The most important books on theatre theory written by the world's great directors speak the language of artists, and this has ensured that their works have stood the test of time. Unfortunately, many research papers remain locked away in library drawers, and no one reads them because the topics covered are not adapted to the current needs of the theatre and social system, and the language used is far too academic. As long as academic research is aimed only at the scientific community, it loses much of its value and fails to become relevant.

Artistic research should not be confined to overly academic language, but neither should researchers shy away from the responsibility of incorporating scientific elements into their work. The fields must be combined, even if the art of theatre is primarily a practical one, artists need to experience first-hand the messages and subjects that playwrights raise through their plays. If “art” is nothing more than a mode of perception, then “artistic research” must be a mode of carrying out a process. Therefore, there can be no categorical

distinction between 'scientific' and 'artistic' research – because the attributes independently modulate a common carrier, namely, the goal of knowledge in research"⁵ .

Collaboration, understanding, and trying to find a middle ground should be the main strategy that researchers in the artistic world should consider when writing a doctoral thesis. Things cannot remain superficial; it is important that the expression respects academic language and contributes scientifically to the work, but at the same time, they cannot forget for whom they are writing these works. The professional experience of researchers should not be left aside, but should be integrated into the scientific course of the work, as the practical part of the doctoral thesis structure is very important for the quality of the research.

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⁵ Julian Klein (2017). *What is artistic research*, in “Journal for Artistic Research”, April, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research> , April, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research>, author’s own translation from English.

Writing a doctoral thesis in the field of theatre – a voluntary, necessary or “imposed” act

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Abstract: In nowadays Romania, when the interest in encouraging and promoting our cultural values has greatly declined, writing a PhD thesis in theatre may prove of less importance. Along with the weaker educational background provided by both family and school, a relatively new issue that reflects on the scientific and cultural benefits of the paper in question has emerged into this process, namely that of continuing to a PhD immediately after graduating an MA. In my study I will try to indicate the reasons that underlie the above picture. As such, I will emphasize the importance of the PhD supervisor – candidate relationship and the differences that may appear when the candidate has recently completed his MA studies. Without claiming that my own doctoral research has fulfilled this cultural objective so far, I will advertise in my study the need for any PhD thesis in theatre to grow into a cultural expression. Also, I will point out a series of general ethical aspects defining the writing of any scientific paper as well as the specificities of a theatre PhD paper: rules, requirements, relationships, cultural experience and subjectivity. I will focus more on the last term as it defines the process a candidate who develops a PhD thesis in parallel to acting goes through.

Keywords: PhD thesis, culture, education, ethics.

Introduction

The following three factors have been crucial in choosing the topic of this article: 1. the fact that I belong to a period when interest for professional and, implicitly, cultural evolution was constant; 2. the need to highlight a topical issue which is not discussed enough – that of the importance of writing a paper as vast as a doctoral thesis in the field of theatre, which obviously has considerable cultural potential; and 3. my desire to show a number of aspects related to the ethical behaviour involved in writing such a thesis.

For starters, I have considered it useful to offer some general information about Romanian doctoral studies, based on the article written by Cătălin-Daniel Pop, associate professor with the Department of Political Science within the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences of Babeș-

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Bolyai University of Cluj, called *Evoluția legislativă și istoria studiilor doctorale din România între 1898 și 1995* [The legislative evolution and history of doctoral studies in Romania between 1898 and 1995]¹.

Looking for legislative answers

As the author says in the beginning of his research, “This study will present and analyse chronologically the elements of innovation or return to the old doctoral traditions appearing throughout history. The two important historical periods we will refer to with regards to doctoral studies are between 1898 and 1948 (the time of the Romanian Kingdom) and between 1948 and 1989 (the Communist regime).” But this does not prevent him from also analysing the following periods, discussing the doctoral phenomenon between 1990 and 1996 and also offering brief reflections on the period after that. Using mostly the information found in decrees, government decisions and laws regarding university studies and, implicitly, doctoral studies organised within this framework, found in the *Official Monitor* (law publication existing officially since December 1832 and authorised by Law no. 202, with modifications and additions, in 1998), Cătălin-Daniel Pop reviews a great deal of key moments in the history of Romanian doctoral studies. At first, doctoral studies were not discussed (Law 1150/25 of November 1864 published in the aforementioned publication) and the only thing mentioned was the organisation and structure of university studies, called “higher education,” in the law created by the mathematician Spiru Haret (Minister of Education and Religions and the first Romanian obtaining a doctorate in Paris), referring to “secondary and higher” education².

This law talked about *autonomy, studies and awarding a doctoral diploma* and about the number of years needed to obtain one, which “should definitely [...] not be fewer than [...] 5.” No. 151/1898 of the *Monitor* shows progress in this direction, stipulating that the four years of university studies will end with a state exam, followed by a fifth year offering the candidate the opportunity to become a *doctoral candidate* and by at least five years of writing a “scientific treatise” which will then be presented in public, in front of an examination commission in charge of deciding whether the candidate will become a *doctor*. The beginning of the 20th century brings some modifications, in the sense that the title of doctor needed to be certified by royal decree, not just by the Minister of Public Education, the rector of the university and the dean of the faculty, following an oral examination. A quote that I found

¹ Cătălin-Daniel Pop (2019). *Evoluția legislativă și istoria studiilor doctorale din România între 1898 și 1995* [The legislative evolution and history of doctoral studies in Romania between 1898 and 1995], published online on 25.09, retrieve from: <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/27-Article-136-2-10-20191011.pdf> (accessed on 25.11.2024).

² *Ibidem*, p. 89.

relevant with regards to this is that offered by Pop from art. 12 of the Regulation/1908 of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of Bucharest, defining the awarding of the doctor's diploma as having the purpose of "proving that the candidate has succeeded in going deeper into a specialty, so that he can further work successfully to help develop the science in which he is specialised."³ The candidate went through annual exams in front of a commission of four professors and a final exam in front of a commission of five professors, in the months of "October, January, and June,"⁴ the title "doctor" was awarded upon him immediately after the exam, and his diploma was offered after the aforementioned royal decree.

The year 1912 brings changes in the doctoral process, basically reducing these studies to 2 years, taking into account the fact that the bachelor years and the doctoral years indeed made up a number higher than 5, of which the first 3 years were dedicated to the bachelor studies; the final exam was taken in front of a commission of 3 professors and the acquisition of the doctoral title was facilitated by the dean, who filed a request, through the rector's office, to the Ministry of Education. Between 1912 and 1918, regulation appears regarding the names of the general and specific courses to be taught within doctoral studies and a series of fees to be paid by the candidate, while the right to become a doctoral candidate outside of the field of one's bachelor studies is restrained. During this time, the task of certifying the validity of the doctoral thesis is given to the coordinating professor and the dean; it established the number of pages of the paper, the final number of copies, but also an aspect which will later become an important topic of debate, namely the fact that "the faculty considers the opinions presented in this work as belonging to its author and does not express any approval or disapproval of them."⁵ In 1932, when Nicolae Iorga was the Minister of Education, Religions, and Arts, new regulations appear, namely the exclusion of the royal intervention and the certification of the title of doctor by the rector and by the dean of that faculty, as well as by the Ministry of Education; moreover, the candidate was free to take the doctoral exam at any time throughout the year, which is maintained as a regulation nowadays. The duration of the doctoral studies was also established then, according to the principles of university autonomy, to be 1 or 2 years within each academic institution. In 1936, within the Faculty of Law, which Pop mainly refers in the aforementioned article, the duration of the doctoral studies is reduced to just 1 year, preceded by 4 years for the Bachelor's Degree.

Trying not to take up too much space with the broadest possible image of the evolution of the doctoral approach in the Romanian space, I will skip a

³ Cătălin-Daniel Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 94,

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

number of years marked by less notable events in this context and I will briefly present the new coordinates of doctoral studies after 1948. The following period is considered by the author to mark a break from the previous doctoral process – only the candidates who had graduated from universities and polytechnic schools were guaranteed the right to become doctoral candidates; this excluded “higher levels of specialists destined for production, such as engineers, agronomists, doctors, etc., as well as schoolteachers.”⁶ On the other hand, just like nowadays, they were allowed to also become doctoral candidates within other faculties than the ones where they had got their Bachelor’s Degree, with 3 years of study, but the number of spots for each faculty was decided not on the local administrative level, but by the Council of Ministers, according to the needs of the country. In 1950, the Ministry of Public Education decides that bachelor’s studies should be followed, after an exam, by 3 years of “aspirantship” and 3 years of doctoral studies. The “aspirant” benefitting from a grant from the government throughout the 3 years of study was supposed to be 40 at the most and to have a university degree in the same specialty that he was about to study for the following 6 years. In the end of the 3 years of “aspirantship”, the candidate presented a thesis which needed to be original and this gave him the title of “sciences candidate” and the possibility to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral thesis needed to be an “(original) paper of high scientific qualification,”⁷ and it was presented not in front of the examination commission, but in public, which facilitated the elimination of candidates who were not accepted politically and made it impossible for them to teach in academic institutions. The year 1967 brings interesting changes for doctoral candidate: the “aspirantship” exam disappears, they can take a doctoral entry exam (which should be marked with at least 7 out of 10) even if their degree is in a different field, and there is an alternative examination, namely an initial discussion, but, in that case, the candidate is not paid and the studies will last for 4 years.

Another important aspect in this context is the title of “teaching doctor” which was given the doctor of science and enabled him to become a doctoral coordinator. Just like in present times, the title of doctor was given by the Professors’ Council of that faculty, but it was later confirmed by the Ministry of Education and Teaching. According to the present-day website of the Ministry of Education, “... the doctoral commission proposes the awarding of the title of doctor and this proposition is sent to the National Council for Certifying University Titles, Diplomas, and Certificates (NCCUTDC). Following the evaluation of the file, the NCCUTDC will propose the awarding or non-awarding of the title ‘doctor’ to the Minister of Education. After the

⁶ Cătălin-Daniel Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

validation of the doctoral thesis, the title “doctor” is awarded by order of the minister.”⁸

The year 1978 brings another change, namely the elimination of the intervention of the Professors’ Council in awarding the title “doctor” – now, the State Council is the only one in charge. After 1989, according to Government Decision no. 301/30 April 1996, published in the *Official Monitor*, doctoral studies last for 3 or 4 years full time or 4 or 5 years part time and the NCCUTDC gets directly involved, which offers legitimacy and academic recognition (in institutions accredited by the Ministry of Education) to these studies and to the doctoral coordinators, professors or scientific researchers holding the title “doctor,” whether from accredited institutions or not, the latter being able to be doctoral coordinators only in accredited institutions. The doctoral candidate can now obtain a grant either by means of a competition within the institution providing his doctoral studies, where he would have the professional rights and obligations of an instructor, or from their own income, in the form of sponsorship or donations for this purpose. From the generous range of stipulations of the aforementioned government decision, I thought it would be useful to also mention some aspects of interest for this research, namely: the minimal entrance average is 8 out of 10; the doctoral coordinator can coordinate the papers of no more than 15 candidates simultaneously and they decide the number of spots offered during each competition; “the methodology regarding the organisation of doctoral programmes and the awarding of the scientific title ‘doctor’ is elaborated based on the provisions of the current decision by each institution which organises doctoral studies.”⁹

With regard to the specificity of the organisation and progress of doctoral studies in the field of theatre, specialised Romanian websites I have checked have not proved too generous, as they offer similar information and point out aspects found in the norms presented in the previous paragraphs. It was surprising for me to discover that, among the many faculties presented in the central website of Bucharest universities, which promoted its doctoral studies offer thus: “a wide variety of fields, from humanities and social sciences to natural sciences and mathematics, for all cycles and all organised forms of university training, as well as for numerous other post-graduate programmes, professional conversion and improvement...”¹⁰, the Theatre Faculty was not present and it had its own website. When checking it, we can see that, right

⁸ The Ministry of Education and Research. *Doctoral University Studies* in <https://www.edu.ro/studii-doctorat/> (accessed on 25.11.2024).

⁹ Decision no. 301/30 April 1996 regarding the organisation and progress of doctoral studies, published in “Monitorul Oficial” no. 102/20 May 1996, in <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/9046> (accessed on 25.11.2024)

¹⁰ Doctoral University Studies, University of Bucharest, in <https://unibuc.ro/studii/programe-de-studii/doctorat/> (accessed on 28.11.2024).

now, according to “international standards in the field,”¹¹ the doctoral school within the UNATC (which includes Theatre, Cinema, and Media) only offers the possibility of becoming doctoral candidates in a scientific doctorate. Possibly contradicting this regulation, the description provided by the website points out the close connection between research in the field and the act of artistic creation, containing “... profound creative aspects (...). The doctoral studies within the “I. L. Caragiale” UNATC directly involve research and artistic creation. Artistic creation, in its turn, directly involves continuous, maturely undertaken research.”¹²

This situation is found not only in the Bucharest doctoral school, and the degree of involvement of artistic creativity in scientific doctoral studies can be questioned and become a topic of ample debate which I am sure would interest many others, as well. In this context, I would dare state that the interest of many actors aspiring to the title “doctor” in their line of work, especially that of those with a sufficient number of years of experience, consists (for a significant percentage of them) precisely in the need for “artistic” expression. The high degree of subjectivity and the emotional involvement due to the constant presence on stage in various hypostases are two important factors turning the writing of a scientific doctoral paper into a more difficult process. The need for using very precise information in writing a scientific doctoral paper can constitute a supplementary professional effort for an actor who is less used to the rigours of such an endeavour. In agreement with the goal of the Theatre and Performance Arts Doctoral School within UNAGE Iași, as seen on its website, which underlines the need for connecting *art* with *research*,¹³ we have taken another quote which is subject to interpretation, to continue the statements above: “Artistic experience (whether from the classical field or from performance) does not exclude reflection – rather, it includes it as a necessary stage. The analysis of the creative process, based on inner knowledge / experience on stage, is a *possible* strong point by means of which the transition is made from descriptive models to applicative ones, determined by the adoption of a different perspective and the exit ‘from the square’.”¹⁴

Just like in the case of the UNATC regulations, in the Theatre Doctoral School of Iași, which is over 20 years old, various modifications have been made throughout time, and the result right now is that the scientific doctorate is predominantly accepted. In the context created by the topic of this research,

¹¹ Doctoral Studies – Theatre and Performance Arts, “I.L.Caragiale” Theatre and Cinema National University, Bucharest, in <https://admitere.unatc.ro/doctorat-teatru-si-artele-spectacolului/> (accessed on 25.11.2024)

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Metodologii cercetare Teatru* [Theatre research methodologies], DOCTART IOSUD UNAGE IAȘI, in <https://doctart.ro/metodologii-cercetare-teatru/> (accessed on 29.11.2024)

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

without taking anything from the value, importance and usefulness of the scientific doctorate formula, the lack of an alternative ensures, from the beginning, the presence of a *determined* act. A possible structuring of the *voluntary act*, according to the article on the subject written by psychologist Liliana Irofte, would contain: 1. Conceiving the situation – establishing the goal to be attained; 2. Deliberation – examining the available solutions, going through pros and cons, according to the system of values that they have, hesitations and oscillating between various alternatives; 3. Decision – retaining one course of action from all those available; 4. Execution – acting and attaining the proposed goals.¹⁵ Analysing the four stages presented above, we can easily see that, in the case of only one possible course of action, we are no longer talking about a voluntary act, but rather about an *imposed* one. I, for one, first had to deal with hesitations, fears, and doubts regarding the fact of taking on an endeavour the size of a scientific doctorate, but, without an alternative, I “dared” go down this road, accepting its challenges and novelty.

Imposed and *necessary* are both terms showing different degrees of obligation, since a *necessary* action also involves some degree of constraint on one’s will. It is now known that doctoral studies are indispensable for obtaining a teaching position in an academic environment. This “requirement” can attract the appearance of a considerable number of cases of “forced” completion of bachelor’s and master’s studies by means of the doctoral ones and the formal, unjustified awarding of the title “doctor.” To that effect, I will quote from an article which is also applicable to the present context, referring, this time, to the situation of medical graduates who desire a university career: “A doctorate is compulsory if you want to enter the teaching system and, if you go into research after graduation, you implicitly arrive at a doctorate.”¹⁶ This quote is followed by an optimistic statement which is also a goal: “A doctorate is not a burden, it is only a necessity for those who want to teach.” Searching for arguments for these statements, I discovered a series of opinions about this on a well-known forum and I will only quote two of them which are more or less opposed to each other: 1. “You don’t pursue a doctorate for it to ‘help you in life’ – it is only for people who want to not only go deeper into a field, but also to contribute to its development.” and 2. “...yes, it has helped me realise that I would never go through that again. No one so far has mentioned the psychological burden of a doctorate, if you are the type of person who really

¹⁵ Liliana Dorofte. *Structura și calitățile actului volitiv* [The structure and qualities of the volitional act], in https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/107-112_22.pdf (accessed on 29.11.2024).

¹⁶ Ioana Nicolescu (2015). *În ce condiții este doctoratul obligatoriu pentru absolvenții de medicină* [The terms under which doctoral studies are compulsory for medical graduates], “Adevărul”, 12 January, in <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/educatie/in-ce-conditii-este-doctoratul-obligatoriu-pentru-1592032.html> (accessed on 29.11.2024).

wants to be good (not to say perfect) at what they do. Going deeper into any field shows you how little you actually know about it, so, paradoxically, the deeper you go, the more you think you have no business being there.”¹⁷

Regarding the term *culture*, which is the basis of the current endeavour, from the multitude of existing definitions, I have chosen the one that seemed to me to support the certification of doctoral studies as a cultural act: “Culture is the social heritage made of thinking, feeling and thinking patterns characteristic to a population or society, including the expression of those patterns in concrete things.”¹⁸ Constituting a thinking pattern becoming concrete in the paper itself, the doctorate is doubtlessly part of the social heritage of a population and is a result of its author’s action and feeling. Ever since I engaged in the doctoral endeavour, I did not hesitate to see it as something other than a cultural act. Doctoral topics should not ignore the cultural contribution that they can bring by being developed in ample papers. After checking some university websites which allow us to see the names of the doctoral theses in the field, I have become convinced that they contain, in essence, topics of cultural interest. Locally, the archive of the Doctoral School of Iași contains paper names such as: *Teatrul Național din Iași în anii de tranziție 1945-1948. Directori și directorate* [The Iași National Theatre during the transition years – 1945-1948. Managers and managing plans], *George Banu. Portretist al marilor creatori de teatru* [George Banu – a portraitist of the great theatre creators], *Monologul shakespearian în spectacolul contemporan românesc (1990-2015)* [Shakespearian monologue in the contemporary Romanian theatre performance (1990-2015)], while the Theatre and Performance Arts Doctoral School within the UNATC Bucharest proposes papers such as: *Școli de teatru, stiluri, metode, generații, poetici* [Theatre schools, styles, methods, generations, poetics], *Interferența teatrului cu alte arte și fenomene culturale* [The interference of theatre with other arts and cultural phenomena] or *Noi direcții în estetica și teoria teatrului* [New directions in the aesthetics and theory of theatre].

A final point of interest for this paper’s topic will be a brief presentation of the professional ethics criteria which are the foundation of the relationship between the doctoral coordinator, the candidate and the doctoral commission, although we certainly cannot exhaust a topic which involves a high degree of mobility and unpredictability. These criteria, which have also been expressed

¹⁷ Do you have doctoral university studies? If so, have they helped you in life in any way? – reddit/Romania, in https://www.reddit.com/r/Romania/comments/uutiag/ave%C8%9Bi_studii_universitare_de_doctorat_dac%C4%83_da_vau/?rdt=38944 (accessed on 01.12.2024).

¹⁸ *Cultura – definiție, componente, termeni înrudiți. Tipuri de cultură* [Culture – definition, components, related terms. Types of culture] in <https://ro.scribd.com/document/252598815/Cultura> (accessed on 01.12.2024).

by imposing limits in professional conduct, especially in the direct relationship between the coordinator and the candidate, also refer to the various possible situations in which: 1. the candidate's age is close to the age of the coordinator (and the commission!), 2. the candidate is younger than them or has recently earned their Master's Degree or 3. (less frequent) the coordinator is younger than the candidate. Some of these criteria are:¹⁹ honesty (towards oneself and towards one's partners during the doctoral studies) and moral integrity, reflected also in discouraging any fraud, plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of the information in the paper; there is a General Code of Ethics in Scientific Research which has in view international regulations in the field regarding ethics in scientific research.

Conclusions

In this context, I believe that it is fundamental for the doctoral coordinator to possess a high level of culture, general knowledge in the field and openness towards the novelty of the subject proposed by the candidate, as well as to show constant interest in supporting the candidate in the specific research they are undertaking. To the same degree, corrections and suggestions coming from the coordinator should be received objectively by the candidate, who needs to use them in the paper according to the former's guidance. Certainly, there are many cases when the candidate opposes these modifications, considering them unfounded, so the coordinator's task is that much more complex – as they need to convince the candidate that they are right, find a middle ground or even give way to the candidate altogether. The mediator role in such situations may be played by the doctoral commission, as they may have to reunite particularly for this purpose before the presentation of a “problematic” report or even the final paper.

I, for one, have enjoyed support and have been offered specialised literature and welcome suggestions, necessary modifications and appropriate advice, all while a doctoral coordinator may have to make a tremendous effort in this process, as they are often overwhelmed by many other tasks within the institution where they work. The change that occurred during my studies, due mainly to the situation presented above, has not altered my doctoral endeavour and has improved and enriched my personal relationship with my new coordinator and with the members of the current commission. The materials and suggestions offered by the whole team have contributed to the improvement of the current form and structure of my future doctoral thesis.

¹⁹ The Romania Government, The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, *Ghid practic privind etica în cercetarea științifică* [A practical guide regarding ethics in scientific research], in <http://date-cdi.ro/sites/default/files/uploads/1.%20ghid%20privind%20etica%20%C3%AEn%20cercetarea%20%C8%99tiin%20%C8%9Bific%C4%83%20.pdf> (accessed on 01.12.2024)

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The performance of doctoral research

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Abstract: This paper highlights the similarities between doctoral research and a theatre performance, showing how both processes involve exploration, interpretation, and communication. Just like a theatre production needs rigorous preparation, collaboration, and a clear message sent to the audience, the doctoral research involves a structured endeavour, interaction with the academic community, and a coherent presentation of results. The narrative, performative, and relational dimensions common to the two fields are analysed, underlining the importance of creativity, of the discovery process and of the impact on receivers, be they viewers or researchers. By means of this interdisciplinary approach, the article aims for a deeper understanding of doctoral research as a dynamic process, in which doctoral candidates, just like actors, play an active part regarding the topic they are studying.

Keywords: research, theatre, semiotics, collaborative.

Introduction

Semiotics is the study of the mechanisms of communication and of the signification process. According to the Hungarian-American researcher Thomas Sebeok, semiotics can be defined as the process of exchanging various kinds of signs, a process supported by the systems of signs and the codes on which they are based. The meaning of a message can be interpreted only to the extent to which the receiver has all the necessary knowledge to decipher its code. Therefore, semiotics studies the theory of meaning, trying to explain how it is built by means of signs and codes.

Each field of activity has its own specific code system and the professionals in that particular field are those who know the codes and use them efficiently in order to reach their professional goals. Culture, and theatre in particular, are no exception from that necessity. Umberto Eco underlined the importance of language and signs in creating culture, saying that “human identity is defined by language, since culture is a complex system of interconnected signs, (...) the whole culture is a phenomenon of signification and communication and (...) humanity and society only exist when

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signification rapports and communication processes are established”¹. Even when the individual believes that he is freely expressing his thoughts, he is actually influenced and shaped by the rules of sign-usage. Understanding these rules means not only deeper knowledge of society, but also an exploration of semiotic structures which determine that which, in the past, was called *res cogitans*, namely the ensemble of factors forming, organising and shaping our thinking². In this context, the theatre actor needs to master various communication systems and conventions in order to send a clear, coherent message to the viewer.

Theatre needs to be conceived as a dynamic system able to generate content continuously and to adapt its messages, thus being both a system of organised theories and an expression of the living system theory. The essence of theatre lies in the creation of a dialogue between the director, actor and viewer, which is why using a system of codes and symbols is fundamental for ensuring efficient communication. Within a theatre performance or event, each element present on stage becomes a sign with a clear signifier, meant to send a message to the audience. “Theatre techniques are actually communication techniques.”³

Russian director Lev Dodin points out this relational dimension of theatre, stating that the theatre he is trying to create is one which brings people together, facilitating the connection and dialogue between them; that he is not an extremist or fanatic who demands extreme sacrifices in the name of art. He believes that there is something way more valuable than success, fame, or applause, namely the process of collective exploration and learning. These moments of searching are the ones giving us true satisfaction. The joy is not in finding a final solution, but in the continuous deepening of the search. For us, theatre is not just a form of art, but an extension of life and even something bigger than life itself⁴. His perspective underlines the role of theatre not only as an artistic form, but also as a process of collective knowledge and continuous exploration of humanity.

The connection between this perspective on theatre and doctoral research lies in their common nature as a continuous process of exploration, learning and discovery. Just like theatre is not only an artistic form, but also a means of collective knowledge and investigation of humanity, doctoral research is not

¹ Umberto Eco (1982). *Tratat de semiotică generală* [Treatise of General Semiotics], Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, p. 36.

² Umberto Eco (1996). *Limitele interpretării* [Limits of Interpretation], translated by Ștefan Mincu și Daniela Bucșă, Editura Pontica, Constanța.

³ Viola Spolin (2008). *Improvizație pentru teatru* [Improvisation for Theatre], UNATC Press, București, p. 24.

⁴ Lev Dodin (2008). *Călătorie fără sfârșit. Reflecții și memorii* [Journey without End, Reflections and Memoirs], traducere de Cătălina Panaitescu, Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu, București.

limited to accumulating information, but involves rigorously seeking the truth, critically going deeper into the studied topic, and significantly contributing to that particular field.

In both contexts, success does not reside only in the final result, be it a performance or a doctoral paper, but is found especially in the exploration process, in the continuous learning and the discovery of new perspectives. Also, both theatre and doctoral research involve a permanent interaction between various actors in the field: between the director, actors, and viewers, in the theatre, and between the doctoral candidate, the coordinator, and the academic community, in research.

Doctoral research can be symbolically understood as a cultural act in theatre, by the fact that the research process can be likened to an artistic performance. This analogy can be explored from several angles, starting from the dynamics and structure of a theatrical act.

Within the doctoral research, the process of discovering, bringing arguments, and communicating the results can be seen as a performance. Just like an actor assuming a role on stage, the researcher takes on an active role with regard to the studied topic. Thus, the whole research experience can take place in a dramatic framework, with tense moments, inner conflicts (methodological dilemmas), but also with moments of enlightenment (significant discoveries).

The involvement of the audience

The same way that a theatre performance involves an audience receiving, interpreting and reacting to the message sent by the stage, the doctoral research is destined for an audience made of specialists, academicians, and other researchers in the field. Both processes are built for communicating ideas, causing reflection, and generating new perspectives on reality.

When it comes to theatre, a show's success depends not only on the actors' performances, but also on their ability to send a clear, coherent message to the audience, so that the viewers could understand it and integrate it in their own systems of thoughts and emotions. Similarly, a doctoral thesis is not only the result of an individual research effort, but an intellectual process which should be clearly formulated, well argued, and relevant for the scientific community. The readers of the thesis should be able to understand and capitalise on the results of the study in order to integrate them in their own academic endeavours.

There is also an element of interpretation in both theatre and research: just like every viewer can have a different perspective of a performance, each reader of a thesis can understand and analyse the conclusions according to their own frame of reference. Therefore, both the director and actors and the

doctoral candidate need to be aware of the importance of the clarity, coherence, and impact of the message they send.

Moreover, the audience's feedback plays an essential role in both fields. In theatre, the viewers' reactions can influence the performance and evolution of a production, while in research, the questions, comments, and criticism of colleagues and professors can contribute to the improvement and refinement of the arguments in a thesis. Both processes involve an exchange of ideas leading to increasingly deeper knowledge.

A research paper, just like the text of a play, has a clear narrative structure: there is an introduction (establishing the context and objectives), a development (presenting the methodology and analyses in detail), and a conclusion (to synthesise the discoveries and open new directions of research). Each act has a precise purpose and contributes to the evolution of the whole narrative. "The hunger for structure expresses the need to avoid boredom, and Kierkegaard⁵ underlined the evil caused by unstructured time – boredom becomes synonymous with emotional malnutrition and can have the same consequences."⁶ Humans need structure, rules, codes, they feel the need to organise their lives and use hierarchies in order to function optimally. This structure provides peace, clarity and a possible bird's eye view needed to project an idea of the future, and all these offer safeties.

However, research is not a completely rigid process, but rather one which also entails great flexibility and adaptability, just like in the case of an actor who is always ready to react and improvise. "Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality which we see and explore and according to which we act; in this reality, the fragments of our self-function as one whole. It is the moment of discovery, of experimenting, of creative expression"⁷. Although the researcher follows a well-defined research plan, in the process of exploring a topic, new questions, ideas, or directions of study may arise which had not been initially planned, and the researcher needs to be able to react and adjust quickly.

A dialogue with tradition and innovation

Just like a director who relates to theatre traditions, but also to contemporary innovation, the researcher is in a continuous dialogue with papers that have already been written in the field and with the new challenges and questions that the research is addressing. To that effect, research is a continuous act of interpretation of tradition and innovation, just like a theatre production can readapt or reinvent a classical play. "Theatre techniques are by

⁵ S. Kierkegaard (1947). *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Princeton University Press, p. 22.

⁶ Eric Berne (2020). *Jocurile noastre de toate zilele* [Games People Play], Editura Trei, București, p. 38.

⁷ Viola Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

no means sacred. Style in theatre changes radically with the passage of years (...). Using current communication is much more important than the method used. Methods change according to the needs of time and space”⁸.

A group of researchers⁹ from the University of British Columbia published an article in 2021 describing an innovative concept of blending together the doctoral research and the practices of theatre. Research-based Theatre – RbT is an innovative methodology integrating theatre practices and conventions in the process of scientific research with the goal of facilitating and promoting research. This approach is fundamentally collaborative and relational, actively involving the participants in the research and also involving the artists and researchers in practical activities such as generating data, analysing and exchanging information. This methodology includes stages such as writing, rehearsing and performing monologues, scenes or plays based on research data.

In this article, the authors present three recent examples of interdisciplinary projects in which researchers and artists collaborated with various communities in order to dramatize the data by the RbT methodological approach. In order to contribute to the literature of the field, they analyse their experiences in coordinating RbT projects in three distinct fields: theatre, sociology, and therapy. The authors also examine the way RbT reconfigures the relationships between participants and, at the same time, the way these relationships influence and transform the methodology itself.

By means of methods such as practice-as-research, doctoral candidates experiment with new techniques in acting, directing, playwriting, and stage design, analysing their impact both on the creative process and on the audience’s reception. For example, this research can explore the integration of digital technologies in the production (augmented reality, video projection, artificial intelligence used in stage design), the use of non-conventional movement and body expression techniques (physical theatre, Meyerhold’s biomechanics, Viewpoints), or new forms of collaborative and interactive playwriting.

Doctoral studies also allow for the testing of innovative directorial approaches, such as immersion theatre, which dissolves the boundary between actors and viewers, or documentary theatre, which capitalises on real testimonies in order to build productions with a strong social impact. At the same time, doctoral research provides a framework for the critical reinterpretation of theatre traditions, revisiting and adapting well-established techniques in a contemporary context.

In doctoral research, just like in theatre, a creative act is essential. Although research is based on methodological and theoretical rigour, in many

⁸ Viola Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁹ Tetsuro Shigematsu, Chris Cook, George Belliveau and Graham W. Lea.

cases, the researcher needs to be an innovator, to have the courage to ask unconventional questions and to discover new connections between concepts or ideas. This creative side is essential for the progress of the research and can also be compared with the direction and performance process in a show.

The relationship between the creator and the audience

Just like in theatre, in the doctoral research there is a complex relationship between the author of the paper (the researcher) and the audience of the thesis (the evaluation commission and the academic audience). This relationship is not purely unilateral, but involves a continuous exchange of ideas and interpretations. Just like actors can allow themselves to be influenced by the audience's energy, researchers are influenced by the feedback received during the research and evaluation process.

The audience is the most honoured element of theatre. Without an audience, there is no theatre."¹⁰ The audience is the essential element, the catalyst turning a simple performance in a living artistic act. Without viewers, theatre loses its purpose, remaining just a series of gestures and lines with no impact. Each technique assimilated by the actor, each stage design detail, each carefully placed light or detailed directorial analysis are conceived not only to impress, but also to create an authentic, captivating experience for the audience.

Just like there is a memorable last scene with which an actor ends a performance, the doctoral thesis is the researcher's final performance, a synthesis of all the efforts, ideas, and discoveries accumulated throughout the research. It is presented in a formal, finalised form, but it is also a living document, which can continue to influence and to open new discussions and directions of research. Thus, doctoral research can be seen not only as an academic activity, but also as a profound act of culture, in which the researcher expresses ideas and contributions to knowledge in an artistic, innovative way.

Conclusions

We need symbols and codes to be able to communicate, evolve and develop in society, while in theatre, in order to harmonise the messages we express, theatrical symbols are like gifts with an emotional value – that is why we look for them everywhere in art. The secret in art is to find a way to suggest, allowing the viewer's imagination to work and to notice what you wanted to say – it is a field in which imagination dictates to reason, while reason enjoys it and plays in the imaginary space that has been created. Although Lucian Blaga claims that a symbol has its own evidence and that a symbol which needs arguments is not valid, in the case of doctoral research, we

¹⁰ Viola Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

need arguments and explanations for them, as research itself is a series of explanations and arguments.

Research in the field of theatre plays an essential part in the profound understanding and development of the theatre phenomenon, contributing to advancements in the theory, practice, and teaching specific to this field. Theatre, as a living artistic form, is continuously transforming, adapting to social, technological, and aesthetic changes specific to each epoch. In this context, doctoral research plays a fundamental part in investigating and developing new artistic directions, contributing to the diversification of the stage language and to innovation in the art of stage performance. By case studies, and artistic experiments, doctoral candidates contribute to defining emerging tendencies in contemporary theatre, influencing not only the academic scene, but the professional one, as well. Thus doctoral research becomes a driver of innovation in performance arts, ensuring a continuous development and a permanent connection of theatre to the realities and challenges of the modern world.

The scientific endeavour plays an essential part in preserving and reinterpreting the theatre patrimony, providing a deeper understanding of stage traditions and of the way they can be brought up to date and integrated in contemporary theatre practices. Historical and analytical studies allow for an investigation of the aesthetic, technical, and ideological evolution of theatre, from its archaic and ritualistic forms, all the way to the avant-garde experiments of the 21st century.

More than simple documentation, doctoral research stimulates a reinterpretation of these traditions according to contemporary sensibilities and challenges. For instance, traditional acting techniques can be revitalised and adapted to new forms of stage expression, while older stage design aesthetics can inspire modern theatre productions. Thus, doctoral candidates do more than just preserve the memory of theatre – they facilitate a dynamic dialogue between the past and the present, contributing to the training of new generations of artists and viewers who understand and use the heritage of theatre in an innovative, relevant way.

The synthesis of the comparison presented in this paper is that doctoral research in the field of theatre is not just an academic endeavour, but also a creative, innovative process, essential for the understanding, developing, and continuous transformation of the art of theatre. It does not only go deeper into the theoretical knowledge, but it also influences the way theatre is practiced, taught, and perceived in contemporary society.

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Aspects from the common history of theatre and radio

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Abstract: The present research started from one of the questions found in the conference’s introduction: does doctoral research in the Arts field represent a form of culture (as well)? The inquiry is a welcomed challenge, especially when taking into consideration the subject of my own research: “The theatre person and the Radio. Landmarks and coordinates of a common history”. The aim of this paper is to bring to light, as well as enhance the aforementioned common history – one that became part of Iași’s cultural heritage through the connection between theatre people, the forms of expression characteristic to theatre, and radio programmes. This strong bond is part of our cultural history, both on a national, as well as on a local level, since theatre people contributed to the development of a “theatre without seats or a curtain” or a “theatre without a stage”, as they call the radio theatre. Cultural history shapes the way a community evolves, as well as its aspirations. Ignoring this past would result in a society without cultural landmarks – thus, without a chance to progress. In conclusion, the answer to the aforementioned question posed by the theme of this conference is, without doubt, an affirmative.

Keywords: radio, culture, theatre.

Introduction

This text is part of a bigger paper we are working on, called *Omul de teatru și Radioul. Repere și coordonate ale unei istorii comune* [Theatre people and the radio. Landmarks and coordinates of a common history], and its goal is to highlight and capitalise on this history which is part of the cultural baggage of Iași city, due to the connection that has always existed between theatre people and the modes of expression characteristic to theatre on the one hand and radio programmes on the other hand. This strong connection is part of the local cultural history, as theatre people contributed to the evolution of the “theatre without seats or curtains”¹ or “theatre without a stage”², as radio theatre is also called.

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¹ Mihai Zirra (2009). *Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic* [I have chosen radio theatre], Editura Casa Radio, București, p. 46.

² Ion Moldovan (2023). *Alexandrina Halic – Lumea magică a teatrului radiofonic* [Alexandrina Halic – The magical world of radio theatre], Editura Ecou Transilvan, Cluj-Napoca, p. 121.

One of the missions of public radio is to educate and this process cannot occur outside of the cultural field. Cultural programmes of public radio stations also have this connotation, which can be considered as a main one. Cultural programmes cannot be conceived without theatre people and the modes of expression specific to this art. Radio theatre, children's radio theatre, stories, poetry recitals are instruments promoting national and universal literature. Of course, means of communication have changed with digitalisation and with the changes in the audience's listening habits. Theatre and radio people have adjusted (or should adjust) their style, repertoire choices, and work process to these new demands, because public radio cannot fulfil its educational mission without a numerous audience for its cultural programmes. Even though there is a certain financial comfort insured by the state budget, drawing consistent listeners guarantees that the information will reach a numerous, heterogeneous audience. This mention is necessary in order to fight the perception that public radio can circumvent audience polls and their results, the argument being that it also needs to broadcast programmes meant for a smaller audience and that cultural shows are considered "niche." Artistic director Mihnea Chelaru from the National Radio Theatre Department of the Romanian Radio Broadcast Society (RRBS) has achieved a metamorphosis of radio drama which has kept it among the audience's preferences. Mihnea Chelaru graduated from the

"I. L. Caragiale" National Theatre and Cinema University of Bucharest, specialising in film direction, and borrows cinema techniques for radio theatre productions. Recordings made outdoors, with an authentic sound background, transport the listener more easily and effectively in the space and atmosphere of the script.

Radio theatre

Nowadays, the listeners' activities are very different and their lifestyle is much faster than a few years ago. Their time for listening to the radio is limited and fragmented. That is why scripts need to be relatively short and productions should take no more than 60 minutes. In the case of classical theatre, since one cannot interfere with the text, plays can be offered for listeners online. Radio Romania has such a website, called eTeatru.ro, where we can find and listen to Romanian and international plays, classic and modern texts, old and new recordings, and great performers from all the times that theatre and radio have collaborated.

The great number of radio theatre plays which have been taken from Radio Romania without permission and shared online and the thousands of views these plays get answer the question about the public interest for this form of theatre – for this mode of expression assimilated by the radio. The comments are full of praise. While piracy is illegal, this situation can still offer a great measuring instrument in this case. The radio company can fight this

phenomenon by making its official website secure and offering these theatre productions to listeners with much better conditions.

Radio is a perfect promoter of culture by broadcasting theatre shows, cultural news, and entertainment programmes. The connection between radio and theatre, made by their common modes of expression, but also by theatre people also working with the radio, is well documented.

This relationship has worked both ways right from the beginning. Like I said, theatre has provided the means of expression for radio to exist and to appeal to as many listeners as possible. At the same time, theatre has provided the people who know how to use these means of expression – those who have the best skills for it: actors, directors, theatre theoreticians.

On the other hand, the art of acting and the theatre production are ephemeral. Remarkable performances remain in the memory of those who have been in the audience of exceptional theatre productions. These moments are mentioned in reviews, interviews, and books. Those emotions and voices could be saved from oblivion only by descriptions, if “...this miracle which is the radio”³ had not come along “to save the memory of great theatre actors who now only ‘live’ in our memories”⁴. This is a “generous gesture” made by the radio to artists and to many generations of listeners, as it maintains, in sound format, memorable performances of national and universal literature. The public radio sound archive, also called the “gold archive,” preserves a real “national treasure”⁵. The Secretary General of the RRBS, Dragoș Șeuleanu, has underlined the important contribution that this media institution whose President and Director General he was between 2001 and 2005 has brought to the enrichment, promotion, and preservation of culture: “The Romanian Radio Society is not only the preserver of its own past – and, we may add, a true school for the major culture creators and consumers of Romania – but also the treasurer of a significant part of national culture.”⁶

For the radio, offering access to this history of theatre and literature is fulfilling its educational goal. In my opinion, bringing to light the precious past that theatre and radio share (sometimes so much, that we cannot tell them apart) is an academic and cultural endeavour of public interest. When we are talking about a smaller community, such as a city, the purpose of the (regional or local) radio is even more important. Preserving the local cultural values and putting them at the public’s disposal is an honouring and essential task. To a small extent, the actors or directors of Iași have sometimes been invited to

³ Ion Moldovan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶*** (1998). *Orele culturii. Antologie de conferințe din Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune* [Hours of Culture. Antology of lectures from the archive of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Society], Vol. I, 1931-1935, Editura Casa Radio, București, p. 7.

record theatre, poetry, or humorous shows in the Bucharest studios of the Public Radio Company. The radio theatre director Mihai Zirra remembers that, right after theatres in various cities were founded, the Public Radio found different ways of promoting their productions by using its own means of expressions, such as news reports. Then, teams from Radio Romania went to those theatres and recorded performances which were later broadcast. “My collaboration with actors in various cities started right after those theatres were founded and continued as they evolved. First, we made news reports accompanied by examples of scenes recorded during shows or rehearsals; then, gradually, we recorded whole radio theatre shows with the cast of that theatre, based on scripts sent by us. Therefore, our recordings gradually broadcast, for the first time, the voices of actors who had less of a chance of making themselves known this way, because they were not working in Bucharest. So we started by connecting and then spending quite long periods of time with theatres from Iași, Cluj, Craiova, Turda, Sibiu, Brașov, Ploiești, Petroșani, Reșița, Bacău, Piatra Neamț, Tg. Mureș, Brăila, Galați, Constanța, Pitești, Baia Mare, Arad, Oradea, Timișoara, Bârlad.”⁷ Much later, in 2012, director Mihai Lungeanu initiated a project for promoting theatre news from several cities – Iași, Cluj, Timișoara, Târgu Mureș and Craiova – on the occasion of the Caragiale Centennial. The recordings were made in the local studios of Radio Romania. “Within the aforementioned project, initiated, coordinated and executed in order to be able to offer exceptional performances by important actors of national theatres to posterity, we have had the honour and joy of collaborating with a few extraordinary, iconic names of the ‘Vasile Alecsandri’ National Theatre of Iași. I will mention Mr. Dionise Vitcu, Petre Ciubotaru, Ms. Mihaela Arsenescu-Werner, Mr. Constantin Popa, Mr. Emil Coșeru, and they need no introduction. I am just glad we made this happen. At the same time, the technical team of the Local Studio, all very professional, generous and helpful people, have helped us continuously and so we managed to record everything we needed, even though circumstances forced us to do it all very quickly.”⁸ Theatre and radio together once again found a way to preserve and capitalise on the work of our most important playwright – an act of culture.

Another important role of the public radio is entertainment. Entertainment has always taken up a lot of space in radio programmes. The famous show called *Happy Hour*, later called *Radio Magazine*, then *Satire and Humour*, *Happy Waves* and then *Happy Hour* again is one of the listeners’ favourites. The one who had the idea of creating this show was the actor Ion Manu from the National Theatre of Bucharest, director Sanda Manu’s father.⁹

⁷ Mihai Zirra, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸ Ioana Soreanu (2024). *Interview with Mihai Lungeanu*, in “Dacia Literară”, Nr. 1 (172).

⁹ Octavian Iordăchescu (2007). *Ion Vodă cel... cumplit!* [Ion Vodă the... Terrible!], Editura Casa Radio, București, p. 94.

Next to great entertainment authors, these shows contained dramatisations of texts by classical authors: Caragiale, Muşatescu, Alecsandri, Chekhov, Ilf and Petrov, Mark Twain. The actors invited there were also important ones. Director Ion Vova remembers that there was no great comedy actor that was not part of his programmes: Birlic, Giugaru, Beligan, Dem Rădulescu, Mircea Crişan, Stroe, Zizi Şerban, Nataşa Alexandru, Florica Damian, Florin Piersic, Ştefan Bănică Senior, Fory Etterle, Marin Moraru, Colea Răutu. Their success was so huge that the show travelled to several cities in the country, with great actors of the time, either with the technical team of Radio Romania or with teams from the studio radios, as director Ion Vova remembers: “Sometimes we used the technical stuff we found in various places, in the local radios. For instance, from Craiova, we went to Băileşti with the people from that local station. We did the same in Iaşi...”¹⁰

These projects initiated by the Public Radio offered actors a second stage and the chance to remain in the auditory memory of the theatre and radio audiences and, at the same time, they gave the people not living in Bucharest the chance to listen to great voices and performances from Bucharest theatres. Moreover, due to the radio, people from cities who did not (and maybe still do not) have a theatre have access to this art, to plays, to literature, to culture.

The Regional or Local Radio Studio of Iaşi has offered a second stage to actors of Iaşi and of other theatres of Moldavia and has, up to a point, archived plays, poetry recitals, shows, stories, interviews, and theatre reviews in a sound archive which is just as valuable as the one in Bucharest. If voices of great actors of Iaşi can be heard now, helping us to better understand their appeal to the audience, that is due to the radio. This media has preserved, in an audio format, the cultural history of Iaşi, which is essential for our understanding of the importance of the city from this perspective. This same archive, whether in the form of writing or sound, lets us know what the cultural anchors and cultural potential of Iaşi are.

Sadly, the past few years have brought a lower number of recordings of radio theatre, poetry recitals, and children’s stories in Radio Iaşi. The presence of theatre people is sporadic and only found in shows where they are invited for dialogue. Actors are no longer even asked to do ads, because it is cheaper to use the voices of radio people. On the other hand, the National Radio Theatre, which has been an independent department since 1 November 1996, continues the activity started on 18 February 1929 with *What the village knows* by Ion Valjan. Mihai Zirra speaks about the great number of theatre plays recorded and broadcast here, much higher than the number of any other theatre: “...in the theatre, I would work on 8-9 plays a year, while in radio theatre, I would direct 40 plays a year.”¹¹ Mihai Zirra became an artistic director of radio

¹⁰ Octavian Iordăchescu, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹¹ Mihai Zirra, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

theatre during the autumn of 1944. Throughout his career as a studio or artistic director there are 500 plays that he has interpreted, adapted or staged for the radio theatre.¹² The National Radio Theatre still has funds for production. For the Iași Studio, such funds are non-existent. The recording of the only production in 2023 was possible due to sponsorship. In 2024, no such projects were developed.

If the doctoral research I am performing highlights and capitalises on this common cultural history, providing testimonials of theatre and radio people and proving documents, then it acquires the value of a cultural act.

And, since the best way to support a theory is the power of example, I will bring as argument a written document accompanied by its sound version, which I discovered this autumn, while doing research in the Romanian Radio Broadcast Society archive. Very carefully organised by people who are dedicated to preserving the history of radio, in files containing the numbers corresponding to documents stored in a few rooms on different floors, the RRBS archive is a huge and priceless source of information. I have chosen an example which, to me, is relevant for this demonstration. It is a radio theatre play broadcast on 13 December 1976. The script is signed by the writer and theatre and film critic Ștefan Oprea and is called *Theatre biographies: the history of the 'Vasile Alecsandri' National Theatre of Iași*. It is an evocative text written for the anniversary of 160 years of theatre in the Romanian language, so it shows the deepest roots of Romanian theatre. By an “imaginary play with time”¹³, the author allows himself to be carried by the “legend” to another December, that of 1816, in the house of Commander Constantin Ghica. “It is hot in the hall, and the viewers are noisy, unaware that they are part of a historic act. They joke and laugh, and some are worried about their offspring, who are already in their ‘dressing rooms’ getting ready to confront not only that evening’s audience, but also the whole future of Romanian theatre.”¹⁴ Full of emotion, but keen on fulfilling his journalistic duty, the author “interviews” Gheorghe Asachi. “Here is Mr Gheorghe Asachi. He is a slightly emotional young man, sombre, almost severe. I’d like to approach him, but I lack the courage. This is maybe my most difficult interview – an interview with shadows.”¹⁵ The story flows on, mentioning, one by one, other characters with essential roles in the appearance and evolution of Romanian theatre and of the National Theatre of Iași: Vasile Alecsandri, Costache Negruzzi, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Mihai Codreanu, Ionel Teodoreanu, Iorgu

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹³ Ștefan Oprea (1976). *Biografii teatrale: Istoria teatrului Național „Vasile Alecsandri” din Iași* [Theatre biographies: the history of the „Vasile Alecsandri” National Theatre of Iași], Archive of the RRBS, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

Iordan, George Topârceanu. He evokes the actors and directors who served the theatre of Iași and the essential role played by this theatre in Romanian culture. The text is accompanied by fragments of productions of the National Theatre of Iași which have been preserved in the radio sound archive: *Baba Hîrca* (written, produced and played by Matei Millo), with Miluță Gheorghiu, Ștefan Dăncinescu in *Căruța cu paiate* [A Cart Full of Clowns], by Mircea Ștefănescu, of course, *Chirița în Iași* [Chirița in Iași] and *Chirița în provincie* [Chirița Out of Town], again, with Miluță Gheorghiu, *Povestea Unirii* [The Story of the Union], by Tudor Șoimaru, *Barbu Lăutaru*, played by Constantin Sava, Margareta Baciuc in *Mutter Courage*, or Teofil Vâlcu as Cațavencu in *O scrisoare pierdută* [The Lost Letter]. The script also contains testimonials about theatre given by the actors Any Braeschi, Constantin Sava, Ion Lascăr, Ștefan Dăncinescu, and Teofil Vâlcu. The whole history of the theatre of Iași from 1816 to 1976 is evoked here and the script mentions the involvement of theatre people in key political moments, when they staged productions that would stimulate the aspirations of the Romanian people of those times. I will mention here the 1859 Union. In my opinion, Ștefan Oprea's script has all the characteristics of a theatre drama documentary. This text highlights the historical relationship between theatre and the social, cultural and political life of Iași. Radio keeps the text and the recording which were so valuable back then, when it was broadcast, and are also valuable now, when the listeners can go along with the author to imagine the atmosphere of the time when the first manifestations of theatre in Romanian appeared and the way they evolved all the way to 1976. This is an important part of the history of the "Vasile Alecsandri" National Theatre and of the culture of Iași, captured in this script discovered during the research for my doctoral paper. This is how I expect my paper to fulfil one of its goals.

Conclusions

The past few years have proved that, without human and financial resources, the connection between theatre and radio runs the risk of breaking. It is unimaginable for periods or events of the past to be missing from the national history books. It is just as inconceivable for the radio to no longer be able to ensure the permanent presence of theatre and actors in the public memory, if recordings of radio theatre or cultural shows are discontinued. This danger needs to be denounced as being of public interest. This is another goal of the doctoral research called *Omul de teatru și Radioul. Repere și coordonate ale unei istorii comune* [Theatre people and the radio. Landmarks and coordinates of a common history], which aims to serve the cultural act of Iași.

Dragoș Șeuleanu, the Secretary General of the RRBS, mentioned above, says that "the future is possible when you have a past and you know how to

capitalise on it.”¹⁶ The history of culture shapes a community’s aspirations and development. Ignoring this past leads to a society with no cultural landmarks and, therefore, no chances for evolution.

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¹⁶ *** *Orele culturii. Antologie de conferințe din Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune*, op. cit., p. 9.

The post-1989 Romanian theatre dynamics in relation to the legislative and fiscal framework dedicated to performing arts in the *independent* sector

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Abstract: My work examines how funding systems and the legislative framework impact the development of cultural spaces (whether independent or state-run) and how they influence their relationship with the communities they are part of and the audiences they cultivate. I consider that the development of the theater sector in post-1989 Romania is closely tied to a form of resilience shaped by the decisions of central or local authorities. In 2024, amidst a war at the border, an increasingly acute energy crisis, inflation that constantly disrupts budget planning, a growingly undeniable climate crisis, and, not least, at a time when the “golden generation” of Romanian theater is beginning to step away from the spheres of influence that shielded this field from abusive or radical interventions, I believe the entire sector needs to unite and advocate for restructuring and improving the legislative and fiscal framework. This would allow theater to gain greater autonomy and build communities around it that justify its importance and relevance. Starting from an analysis of operational models and repertory policies developed in the cultural sector in Romania after 2000, I aimed to understand to what extent the vision of a cultural space is shaped by the dynamics of funding systems and how the legislative framework contributes to the formation of working models. I also sought to identify potential reforms that could contribute to the sustainability and development of long-term projects. The analysis is technical, drawing on specialized literature and a series of interviews with various recognized cultural operators from Romania.

Keywords: cultural policies, funding frameworks, organizational models.

Introduction

I believe that the development of the theatre field in post-revolutionary Romania is closely linked to a form of resilience built around the decisions of central or local authorities. In 2025, with a war on the border, an increasingly acute energy crisis, inflation that constantly upsets all the calculations that should clarify a production budget, a climate crisis that is increasingly difficult to ignore, and last but not least, at a time when the “golden generation” of Romanian theatre is beginning to leave the spheres of influence that have

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protected this environment from abusive or radical interventions, we are at a point where the entire sector must come together and campaign for the restructuring and improvement of the legislative and fiscal framework, so that theatre can gain greater autonomy and build communities around it that justify its importance and relevance.

Theatre must urgently reclaim its function as a public service. It must be accessible to all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical location, through reasonable prices and forms of mobility, through frameworks for dialogue, through education and training projects dedicated to young audiences (but not only), through the promotion of diversity and tolerance, through the promotion of national or universal heritage, cultural values that have played a decisive role in defining us, and last but not least, through research and experimentation frameworks designed to improve relations with the younger generations, who have different needs – which are changing ever more rapidly under the influence of technology and new media and means of socialising or spending free time.

The future of theatre depends on us and our ability to remain connected and attentive to the formation and development of audiences, and we can achieve this more easily together, in a framework of collaboration and mutual support. Our islands will become increasingly smaller and more suffocating if we do not choose to bring about a healthy change in the dynamics of the sector to which we belong.

The evolution of the legislative and fiscal framework dedicated to theatre in relation to the development of the cultural theatre in different systems of organisation and operation

In the first years following the 1989 Revolution, the entire legislative and fiscal framework was extremely fragile and precarious, and people's distrust of the state did not create the necessary conditions for a solid and articulated construction for a future in which we could break out of the logic of the dominant financing system.

Reform and the creation of complementary systems of organisation and operation for Romanian theatre were an important issue for those in leadership or political positions in the early 1990s. But any major change in that context, with an extremely unstable political and economic situation, a precarious and incomplete legislative framework, and failed privatisation models, would not have been accepted by the vast majority of those in the system. People were afraid, and a secure salary was extremely important.

Alternative systems of production and performance, independent companies and venues emerged in the early 1990s, when most theatre people hoped to revive the model of the famous companies of the interwar period. Between 1990 and 1993, there was even a certain effervescence in the attempt

to develop new productions, in public-private partnerships, touring shows, shows with stars, etc. But the turmoil of those years, fraught with protests, miners' riots and major changes in our society, with an acute financial crisis, emptied the theatres, or at least the interest of the general public was extremely low.

“The accounting records kept in the archives of the Ministry of Culture show, for example, that in 1994, the National Theatre in Timișoara had an occupancy rate of 39%. In 1996, for the ‘Vasile Alecsandri’ National Theatre in Iași, the occupancy rate of the large hall was 20.2%, and the studio hall had an occupancy rate of 23.5%, with a funding level of 96% (amounting to 532,100 lei, meaning that own revenues of 21,648 lei represented only 4% of the total budget), of which 79.30% went towards personnel expenses. The National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, in the second part of the season (1 January - 30 June 1996), had an occupancy rate of 14% for the main auditorium and the studio hall 39%, with a subsidy of 94.8% (440,000 lei) and total revenues of 23,934 lei, with personnel expenses accounting for 73% of total expenses.”¹

In such a situation, any discussion of a major change, a restructuring of the entire financing system, was bound to scare everyone.

The legislative framework underlying the organisation and financing of the independent cultural sector

Ordinance No. 51 of 11 August 1998, published in the Official Gazette No. 296 of 13 August 1998, was drafted during the term of Ion Caramitru, Minister of Culture in the governments of Victor Ciorbea, Radu Vasile and Mugur Isărescu, between 1996 and 2000. It currently forms the basis for the funding of projects or programmes in the independent, private or state sector. In practice, today, on the basis of this law, funding competitions are organised by the Ministry of Culture, the National Cultural Fund Administration, the Romanian Cultural Institute, as well as by some town halls or county councils in the country: Timișoara, Brașov, Bucharest, Sibiu, etc.

In 1998, this law did not refer in any way to the *independent* sector, being dedicated to the main credit authorisers and their subordinate institutions. In seven articles, the law defined the concept of a project, cultural programme², and clarified, in a superficial and technical manner, a framework for financing and co-financing public cultural institutions, while also establishing a form of financial management for events organised by state institutions.

¹ Ioana Maria Tamaș, Doctoral thesis – *Cultural policies in post-communist theatre. A comparative study of Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary*, p. 160 – Data from the Ministry of Culture Archives. *Balances 1994, 1996, Quarter II. Theatres. Works.*

² a) the cultural programme represents a set of cultural projects that take place over a longer period and in a wider space;

b) a cultural project is an action or a set of cultural actions carried out in connection with a specific objective or theme for a fixed period and in a fixed location.

The ordinance could have created the conditions for project- or programme-based funding, or could have supported the launch of complementary funding models, for both public institutions and the independent sector, but it merely gave the state the possibility to finance subordinate institutions on the fly. The ordinance did not clarify the evaluation systems and their objectives, and there was no transparency regarding the distribution of resources or the monitoring of their use. The concept of co-financing was introduced and beneficiaries were encouraged to seek complementary sources of funding that did not come from the state budget, but Article 2(1) stated that co-financing could be provided *from local and state budget allocations, with the approval of the respective chief authorising officers*.

The ordinance was first amended in 2001, by Law No. 245 of 16 May 2001. Six new points were added to Article 2. Point 1 establishes that cultural foundations and associations may receive financial support for the implementation of cultural projects or programmes.³ The following points mention that funding is granted according to certain criteria, through a series of methodological rules, but also that the beneficiaries of such funding will be subject to forms of control and monitoring, and a list of beneficiaries will be made public. Last but not least, the eligible expenses for these funds are clarified and supplemented.

The year 2001 brought recognition of complementary forms of organisation and operation within the theatre sector, which was important for the development of the *independent* environment. The state's openness to organising competitions for the financing of cultural projects is a first step in the process of making the relationship between the financier and the cultural operator, whether public or *independent*, more transparent.

Although at that time the law did not receive enough amendments to function transparently and efficiently, and even if there was no capacity to set objectives and directions for development, a sign of a lack of vision, a number of improvements can be recognised in the state's perception of the theatre sector and its needs.

Valeria Seciu's pioneering work with the Levant Theatre between 1990 and 1996, the emergence of the company ART-INTERIOR-ODEON in 1995, which became the Act Theatre Foundation in 1998, the emergence of Luni Theatre at Green Hours – launched in 1997, as well as the theatre company “777” (1996), under the coordination of Theodor Cristian Popescu, or the

³ “(1) Romanian associations and foundations with legal personality, as well as other non-governmental non-profit organisations that initiate and organise cultural programmes and projects, may receive subsidies allocated from the state budget or, where appropriate, from local budgets, which shall be used exclusively to cover part or all of the expenses related to the cultural programmes and projects established as beneficiaries of the subsidies.”

“Teatrul Fără Frontiere” (Theatre Without Borders) led by Mihaela Sârbu, the work of Alina Nelega in the “DramaFest” Foundation between 1996 and 2000, which coordinates a series of writing residencies, as well as a festival and a magazine the events supported by “Casa Tranzit” in Cluj-Napoca since 1997, etc., all of which have influenced the state's perception of the directions of development and needs of the emerging cultural sector. But there were other factors that led to the first notable changes in the legislative framework we know today:

- in 1995, Romania began the process of joining the European Union, which brought to the state's attention the possibility of accessing European funding, funding that was only possible through well-written and transparently implemented programmes and projects, not to mention the pressure from the Council of Europe to develop and implement public policies for culture;
- between 1996 and 2000, in addition to the Ministry of Culture, a working group was set up to organise a series of debates with the cultural sector, thanks to which the ministry gained a broader understanding of the problems in the system, which unfortunately also led to slower development, as dialogue with the cultural sector further tempered the idea of solid reform, but at least provided a much better understanding of the issues;
- in 1998, Government Decision no. 134 on the organisation and functioning of the Ministry of Culture led to a restructuring, with new functions and competences being defined;
- In 1998, the ECUMEST Association was founded, led by Corina Şuteu, which made a significant contribution to the formation and consolidation of the *independent* cultural sector through the development of cultural policies, the organisation of courses and professional training programmes for managers, the development of international programmes and projects, exchanges of good practices, etc.

The period 1995-2000 saw good momentum in the development of co-financing and co-production frameworks, as most representatives of the independent sector were also part of the public sector or had been validated by the dominant theatre system (which I imagine greatly facilitated dialogue and the process of establishing frameworks for collaboration).. Most projects from the independent sector were carried out in partnership with public institutions, which was advantageous for all parties. It is also worth mentioning that during this period there were no partnerships between different independent organisations, most likely due to a lack of resources or a lack of frameworks to justify such opportunities.

The end of the 1990s coincided with the launch of much larger generations of graduates, both from traditional schools and newly created ones.

In the 1990s, the number of students in all higher education institutions gradually increased. It was a period when more and more artists could not find their place in the central system, either literally or in terms of their artistic identity and interests. With the emergence of new generations of young people who were not part of the system or who were not validated by it, the dynamics of collaboration changed. Following the amendments made to Emergency Ordinance No. 51 of 1998 by Law No. 245 of 16 May 2001, the cultural sector gained greater visibility and was characterised by an increasing dynamics. In Bucharest, the groups DramAcum (2002) and TangaProject (2005) appear. In Cluj, the Transylvania International Film Festival (2002) and the Imposibil Theatre (2002) appeared, in Târgu-Mureş - Teatrul 74 (2004), in Timișoara - Teatrul Auăleu (2005), etc. The climate is somewhat more favourable. The country is beginning to overcome the acute economic crisis of the 1990s and inflation is moderate.

More and more artists are interested in contemporary drama, in theatre that is more closely connected to the problems of the communities to which they belong, or have a real interest in taking a critical stance towards the central system, which has led to the support and development of alternative/independent/complementary systems. "The independents have eroded the monolithic image of the theatre field. The reaction of the political and administrative factors has been slow and timid, but above all confused and unprofessional."⁴

The early 2000s also represent the first moment when we can talk about the formation of an independent theatre sector. The first years after the revolution were characterised by an vibrant pioneering spirit, led largely by people who were either integrated into the public theatre system or strongly connected to it, with the possible exception of Voicu Rădescu, founder of the Luni Theatre at Green Hours, which was awarded the UNITER Senate's Excellence Award in 2005.

The emergence of these new generations, disconnected from the moment of the December 1989 revolution or from the central theatre system, also brought about the first fracture between the two sectors. The generation of the revolution, which in the early 1990s dreamed of change, began to tire and settle more comfortably into the system, while the younger ones seek a new revolution, are somewhat more mobile in their organisation and have a much more project-oriented mindset, influenced by the funding provided immediately after the revolution by international foundations that sought to support Romania's transition to a democratic society with transparent organisation and functioning:

⁴ Runcan Miruna (2006). *Instituțiile teatrale după 1989* [Theatre institutions after 1989], în Malița, Liviu (editor), *Viața teatrală în și după comunism* [Theatre life in and after communism], Editura EFES, Cluj, p. 387.

Almost all representatives of independent theatre groups rightly criticise the cumbersome functioning of subsidised theatre institutions, their inability to break out of a deadlock that is not only legal and administrative (in the absence of reform or even the beginnings of change), but also one of thinking and attitude, generated by the inability of many directors and “managerial” teams to adapt to a different professional rhythm, to adopt a constructive and less conservative mentality. At the same time, no matter how much autonomy and freedom independence brings, it is clear that no one can survive on their own (within normal parameters of quality and quantity) in the field of culture and theatre in particular ly, without the responsible intervention of a state subsidy system, whose duty is to support and financially sustain valid cultural projects.”⁵

Even though the state's relationship with the associative sector has not been dynamic, visionary or coherent, the early 2000s saw a shift, with this sector receiving recognition and validation both from the state, through changes to the legislative framework, and from the dominant theatre sector. For example, since the late 1990s, the National Theatre Festival has organised sections dedicated to *independent* productions – “Atelier” or “Theatre of Tomorrow”. The organisation of sections separate from the main selection is debatable, but we must accept that it is ultimately a form of recognition, even if we cannot call it validation. In the mid-2000s, the *independent* sector received its first coherent and predictable forms of funding from the state.

In 2005, through Decision No. 802 of 14 July 2005, published in *the Official Gazette* No. 697 of 3 August 2005, the National Cultural Fund Administration acquired a legal and transparent framework for its organisation and operation. Established in 1998, but without transparent funding regulations, politically controlled by the Ministry of Culture and operating intermittently, the Administration gained an important form of independence. This happened under the ministry of Mona Muscă, in the government led by Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. Fifteen articles regulate and organise the functioning of the National Cultural Fund Administration as a public institution with legal personality, subordinate to the Ministry of Culture. This law establishes the objectives of the Administration: managing the national cultural fund, financing cultural programmes, projects and actions, and supporting international relations. It also establishes the management structure: the Administration has a director with a number of responsibilities:

“a) takes the necessary measures to organise the selection of offers for the non-reimbursable financing of cultural programmes, projects and actions, at least twice during a financial year;

b) publicises the launch of the selection of bids through the media;

⁵ Anca Măniuțiu (2006). *The Phenomenon of Independent Theatre in Romania 1990-2005*, în Malița, Liviu (editor), *Theatre Life in and after Communism*, Editura EFES, Cluj, p. 407.

c) takes the necessary measures to set up committees for the evaluation and selection of tenders;

d) grant, by direct award, non-reimbursable funding to meet urgent cultural needs;

e) concludes financing contracts with the beneficiaries of non-reimbursable financing and verifies their implementation;

f) appoints the persons authorised to check compliance with the obligations to pay contributions to the National Cultural Fund;

g) appoints the persons authorised to establish contraventions and apply the sanctions provided for in Article 20 of Government Ordinance No. 10/2005, approved with amendments and additions by Law No. 146/2005.

(2) The director shall perform any other duties in accordance with the law.⁶

The director is assisted by a board of directors consisting of eleven members - one representative of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, one representative of the Ministry of Public Finance, one representative of the Romanian Cultural Institute, a representative of the Council of National Minorities and seven representatives appointed by the Ministry of Culture, based on proposals made by cultural operators, legal entities under private law, with more than three years' experience and demonstrable representativeness. At the same time, a number of sources of funding for the budget for financing projects are established.

Perhaps the most important thing to mention is that the board of directors is assigned a number of tasks, including:

“a) establishing the strategy and priorities for financing from the National Cultural Fund;

b) establishing the total amount of funding for each session, depending on the availability of funds in the National Cultural Fund;

c) establishing, for each session, the thematic area of the cultural programmes, projects and actions to be financed, as well as the deadline for submitting documentation to the Administration;

d) appoints the members of the evaluation and selection committees.”⁷

The formation of a council composed mainly of independent experts was a major step forward for the development of the cultural sector. So we are at a point where the state, probably influenced by the models imposed by external foundations and organisations that supported the cultural sector in the 1990s, understands that it must also have a series of objectives and requirements regarding the financing of the cultural sector.

This law subsequently underwent a series of minor amendments, intended to correct certain dysfunctions identified in the process of its

⁶ DECISION no. 802 of 14 July 2005, <https://legislatie.just.ro>, accessed on 03.06.2023.

⁷ DECISION no. 802 of 14 July 2005, <https://legislatie.just.ro>, accessed on 03.06.2023.

implementation. Thus, in 2007, it was clarified that: “A person who, during their term of office as a member of the Council, is part of the management bodies of a cultural operator applying for non-reimbursable funding from the National Cultural Fund cannot be a member of the Administrative Council”⁸.

The National Cultural Fund Administration has played an extremely important role in the coherent development of the independent sector. Thanks to the establishment of funding priorities and guidelines, more and more operators have been able to develop a type of thinking directed towards the public, with a focus on the idea of public service.

Ordinance No. 51 of 11 August 1998 received the following series of amendments, the most substantial of which were made in 2008. Ordinance No. 2 of 30 January 2008 amended and improved most of the articles and introduced two new chapters. This is a sign that the state is beginning to understand the dynamics and needs of the cultural sector. However, these additions are also strongly influenced by the National Cultural Fund Administration, which has had a successful running-in period in terms of the dynamics and development of the cultural sector.

Thus, in the first chapter of Ordinance No. 2 of 30 January 2008, its stakes were clarified and nuanced, and several terms commonly used in funding competitions were defined: funding authority, public funding, cultural asset, cultural action, cultural project, cultural programme, cultural offer, applicant, beneficiary, urgent cultural need. For the first time, a series of principles related to free competition, transparency of selection procedures, support for newcomers, cultural diversity and multidisciplinary, and non-discriminatory treatment, regardless of the community or cultural field to which the applicant belongs, were introduced. Local or national authorities were given responsibility for establishing annual funding programmes and setting a dedicated budget. The possibility of multi-annual funding for cultural programmes was opened up. The selection procedures were clarified and, for local public authorities (mayors' offices, county councils), the obligation to organise at least one funding session each year was introduced, and for the National Cultural Fund Administration, two. Eligible and ineligible expenses were supplemented and all stages of contracting, financing and proper settlement of projects were clarified.

The second chapter of the Ordinance establishes a series of operational procedures for organising funding sessions and details the stages involved in the selection of cultural offers: announcement of the competition, administrative verification of applicants, ranking of offers, communication of results and resolution of appeals.

⁸ DECISION no. 802 of 14 July 2005, <https://legislatie.just.ro>, accessed on 03.06.2023.

The eligibility criteria that applicants must meet are set out: “they must be an authorised natural person or a legal entity established in accordance with the legal provisions in force, have no debts to local or state budgets, and have settled previous funding contracts in good conditions.”⁹

The composition and formation of the evaluation committees has been established, as has the fact that the number of members must be odd and the number of specialists must be greater than the number of representatives of the funding authority. Last but not least, the method for ranking cultural offers has been clarified, the procedure for filing appeals has been established, as well as the manner and time available for resolving them – on this point, the law gains its most important additions. The fact that the majority of evaluators are independent experts ensures, at least in theory, for the first time in our country, a politically autonomous funding framework, inspired by the model of the National Cultural Fund Administration. It is precisely because of these additions that local authorities have rejected the use of this law as much as possible, preferring to organise the allocation of non-reimbursable funds on the basis of Law No. 350 of 2 December 2005, a law that is not dedicated to the cultural sector, but to the financing of non-profit projects of general interest, and which allows the distribution of resources by local councillors and people employed in local or county public administration structures.

The third chapter of the Ordinance in question is dedicated to the Administration of the National Cultural Fund. For the most part, this chapter repeats, with minor changes, the provisions of Government Decision No. 802 of 14 July 2005. The Administration is headed by a director, who is assisted by a council of 11 members, including two representatives of the Ministry of Culture, one representative of the Romanian Cultural Institute, one representative of the National Minorities Council and seven members appointed by the Ministry of Culture on the basis of proposals made by non-governmental organisations in the field of culture.

In addition, the sources of funding for the administration's budget were detailed and supplemented, and the procedures and deadlines for payment, as well as the penalties or sanctions for any delays or non-payment of obligations, were clarified.

The fourth chapter established, through a series of final provisions, that this Ordinance forms the basis for the financing of cultural actions, projects and programmes. However, to this day, many town halls or county councils choose to finance cultural projects illegally, through Law No. 350

⁹ Ordinance no. 51 of 11 August 1998, consolidated form, <https://legislatie.just.ro>, accessed on 03.06.2023.

of 2 December 2005, a law that should be dedicated only to non-profit activities of general interest.

One thing I would like to emphasise, along with these additions, is that the state gives the impression that it has a vision and is developing a strategy for the future of the theatre sector. We have a special institution under the Ministry of Culture, which is autonomous in setting funding and evaluation guidelines, but also has funding sources that are independent of the state budget. This is important both for the *independent* sector and for state institutions.

In the early years of the National Cultural Fund Administration, the relationship between public and *independent* institutions in terms of access to non-reimbursable funds was somewhat balanced. Starting in the mid-2000s, managers of cultural institutions were appointed for a fixed term and on the basis of a project competition, which opened the doors to people familiar with project writing and with solid knowledge of managing projects with non-reimbursable funding, while the associative sector was still in its infancy.

The end of the 2000s brought an important change: the *independent* sector had more and more cultural operators with expertise in project writing and a well-oriented mindset in this regard, and the evaluation grids of the National Cultural Fund Administration (but not only) rightly began to prioritise funding for the associative sector in the context of the financial crisis and the accelerated development of the *independent* sector (with ever-increasing needs), which led to a significant dysfunction in the relationship between the two sectors: Public institutions have begun to rely more and more on “front” associations, both to have a better chance in funding competitions and to be able to autonomously manage projects of interest to the institution, reducing the number of collaborations with *independent* structures.

New funding directions and relative predictability in terms of project competitions, both nationally and locally, as well as the lack of funding for medium-sized or large associations, or for associations that have moved beyond the start-up phase, create another anomaly. More and more associations are beginning to structure an annual budget and a coherent programme in relation to a number of funded projects. And, in order to streamline budgets and expenses, cultural operators are starting to set up companies, associations or sole proprietorships to manage services that would normally have been covered by employment contracts or outsourced to other economic operators or companies.

Nevertheless (or despite the anomalies reported), between 2005 and 2019, the *independent* cultural sector experienced a relatively stable period of coherent and organic development. There are more and more cultural

workers in this sector and a form of solidarity that has never been seen before and is unlikely to be seen again in the coming years. The economic crisis of 2008 and the gathering of a critical mass around the Roșia Montană case (2013-2014) have increased interest in strengthening artistic or public communities around certain spaces or initiatives. And the collapse of the real estate market has created a series of opportunities for the development of *independent* cultural spaces, something that would be much more difficult in a different context.

In 2009, Fabrica de Pensule was established in Cluj-Napoca, and in the same year the company Váróterem Projekt was launched. In 2012 Teatrul Fix appeared in Iași, and in 2014, the Reactor space for creation and experimentation appeared in Cluj-Napoca, while in Bucharest, the Replika Educational Theatre Centre appeared in 2015 and Macaz in 2016, etc. The collapse of the real estate market created a series of opportunities for the development of independent cultural spaces, something that would have been much more difficult to achieve in a different context. The sector's interest in moving in this direction was significant and influenced the dynamics of collaboration between various operators.

Until 2022, Ordinance No. 51 of 11 August 1998 will not undergo any major structural changes. It is worth mentioning the period 2013-2015, when the National Cultural Fund Administration no longer benefited from the 2% share of the Romanian Lottery's revenues, which had a significant impact on the Administration's budget, and the period 2018-2019, when the evaluation committees included a member appointed by the Ministry of Culture, which was perceived by the cultural sector as an attempt to politicise the evaluations.

In 2022, Emergency Ordinance No. 83 of 16 June 2022 introduced a series of important amendments to Ordinance No. 51 of 11 August 1998.

New terms are defined, such as: applicant's guide or non-economic cultural activity, and a register of non-reimbursable funding is introduced as a transparent database for identifying funding opportunities and for better predictability for access to resources. Priority is given to funding start-ups, or rather associations that have been operating for less than two years. A series of new funding priorities are established, focusing on: the European dimension, cooperation and co-production frameworks, cultural entrepreneurship and the exploration of new technologies, excellence and the artistic value of the project. The possibility of financing a project from several public sources is clarified, as well as the financing of several projects by the same financier – this is only possible by clearly and unequivocally highlighting the differences between the projects proposed for financing.

Possible sources of co-financing for projects under implementation are detailed, and a number of income-generating activities are permitted, provided that the income is used in the projects. For the first time, eligible expenses include the purchase of fixed assets, up to a maximum of 25% of the total funding, which is useful for equipping spaces or companies with the technical or logistical resources necessary for their proper functioning.

In 2022, attempts were made to correct some of the dysfunctions that had arisen in practice, but also to improve and clarify the funding system both at national level for the Ministry of Culture and the National Cultural Fund Administration, and at local level for town halls and county councils. The period 2009-2019, a somewhat stable period for the cultural sector, led to the formation of a large number of associations with solid expertise in writing, implementing and settling projects, with competition for non-reimbursable funds offered at local or national level reaching a peak in 2019. During this period, many associations experienced rapid growth, and their support needs became increasingly complex. The lack of additional funding frameworks for large or medium-sized organisations led in some cases to a form of monopoly for experienced “subscribers”. Between 2019 and 2022, the state attempted to limit access to non-reimbursable funds and sought to curb associations with a large number of projects in implementation. Instead of seeking to supplement funding systems, the state, lacking vision, chose to stifle what was working. Unfortunately, this idea only led to the formation of new anomalies. Spaces operated by multiple associations or companies, collectives organised in increasingly complex legal forms, multiple funding for the same activities.

Conclusions

Improving collaboration models and developing sectors could be easier simply by establishing a legislative framework that encourages these aspects and by clarifying by some high-level working directions. A change of perspective is needed within the Ministry of Culture and Education - this is where changes in organisation, functioning and legislation should come from, encouraging and supporting the development of new models, some of which are functional in the true sense of the word.

Thirty-three years after the revolution, we have a patchwork legislative framework that lacks vision, a framework that has led to a series of legal loopholes in the functioning and organisation of performing arts institutions, whether public or *independent*, artifices that prevent the implementation of medium- or long-term projects and the development of healthy and transparent relationships between various cultural operators.

Article 33 of the Romanian Constitution, which forms the basis of cultural legislation, highlights/establishes the role of the state as the main

body responsible for the development and support of cultural sectors, through measures that determine their dynamics, through public and cultural policies with clearly defined objectives:

“Article 33. Access to culture

(1) Access to culture is guaranteed, under the conditions of the law.

(2) The freedom of the individual to develop their spirituality and to access the values of national and universal culture cannot be restricted.

(3) The state must ensure the preservation of spiritual identity, support national culture, stimulate the arts, protect and conserve cultural heritage, develop contemporary creativity, and promote Romania's cultural and artistic values throughout the world.”¹⁰

The state can regulate and clarify a trajectory for the cultural sector through the Ministry of Culture and the subordinate County Directorates of Culture.

“Another aspect related to legislation, however, is that of the system for structuring and providing perspective on those artistic fields and related activities that give substance to the very life of culture, in our case theatre culture. In other words, institutions are nothing more than manifestations, and sometimes even symptoms, of cultural policies, if they exist. But... do they exist?”¹¹

A major problem in building solid foundations for development lies in the fact that, thirty-three years after the revolution, we still do not have a cultural strategy adopted by the government. We need medium- and long-term co es, strategies that cover a range of objectives in the development of cultural sectors and in establishing the relationship that cultural institutions must develop with the communities to which they belong and to which they are addressed. After the revolution, the legislative framework was developed in parallel with the development of the cultural sector, and the lack of a coherent direction led to a series of anomalies. Sustainable models emerged that were built on the edge of the law, models that were tolerated, even appreciated, but not supported by a solid vision to empower them.

“Well, cultural practices, not policies, have determined the evolution of the context and given rise to a concrete alternative to a rigid administration that maintains its centralised inertia. These organic, connective cultural practices, produced mainly with the support of foreign financial resources or through individual initiative, have built and are building a reality that will clash more and more and more conflictually with that of an outdated, unreformed bureaucracy, a clash

¹⁰ The Constitution of Romania, <https://www.cdep.ro>, accessed on 29 May 2023.

¹¹ Miruna Runcan, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

that will culminate in 2019 in the breach of the contract of trust between civil cultural society and the public administration of culture.”¹²

By analysing the legislative framework in the field of culture, in which the cultural sector, and in particular the theatre sector in our country, has been formed and developed, we understand why it is insufficient to work solely on the basis of the current dynamics of the sector or a series of problems identified at the present moment. Without a medium-term or long-term projection, the legislative framework will always be one step behind, and this will lead to dysfunctions in the organisation and development of the entire sector.

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¹² Corina Șuteu (2019). *Creative Practices and Cultural Policies (II)*, “Revista 22”, <https://revista22.ro/cultura/practici-creative-si-politici-culturale-ii>, accessed on 15.05.2023.

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Animation theatre: creativity and socio-cultural determinations

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Abstract: In the theatrical realm, doctoral research involves the analysis, reinterpretation, and innovation of stage practices, often drawing attention to traditional performance forms. In the case of puppet theatre, such a study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of this field or opens new perspectives on the processes and techniques of stage creation but also positions doctoral research as an activity with significant cultural impact, contributing to the enrichment of cultural heritage. Exploring aspects such as rhythm and the soundscape within puppet theatre, as addressed in the doctoral research „The Soundscape in Animation Theatre: Practical approach”, represents a valuable contribution to understanding how sonic elements influence the dynamics of a performance. It also highlights the importance of studying these language components for puppetry students and emerging puppeteers. Delving into the sonic aspects of a puppet performance and analyzing how they have evolved over time to meet the socio-cultural needs of the era provides creators with new expressive tools and cultural theory material by deepening the connection between sound and artistic expressiveness. Currently, several researchers, such as Ida Hledíková, Deena Kaye, and James LeBrecht, emphasize the technological contributions to puppet theatre performances in relation to audience perception. They underline how new technologies enhance the message conveyed through animated objects. Additionally, there is a noticeable trend in recent years toward a return to the roots of animation theatre, employing stylized techniques adapted to contemporary times.

Keywords: animation, puppetry, creativity, culture.

Introduction

Straddling the traditional and the modern, animation theatre is a complex artistic field combining the immaterial cultural patrimony with the new technologies, relating to contemporary tendencies and to the needs of present-day audiences. A study of this form of art is right where theory meets practice and, by analysing and documenting this form of theatre, we contribute to its revival by interpretations which showcase the new creators' creativity and need for artistic expression. Since we live in a time when technological advancement occurs very quickly, while the fields of culture tend to interest the general

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public less, animation theatre has the mission of reaffirming its relevance and become a platform by means of which traditional values are brought back to people's attention and adapted to the needs of today's audience. Therefore, the study and analysis of socio-cultural influences on animation theatre, together with the exploration of creative dimensions, contribute significantly to the understanding and development of this form of artistic expression.

Culture and animation theatre

In the field of theatre, doctoral research is right where theory meets practice, dealing with the analysis, reinterpretation and innovation of stage practices. To that effect, animation theatre is a complex field where the traditional and the modern coexist and traditional forms of performance are very valuable sources of inspiration. Doctoral research about animation theatre is not limited to an academic analysis of a niche field, but becomes an active process contributing to its revival. Whether we are talking about mask theatre, folk puppets, or ancestral puppetry techniques, traditional forms of performance contain universal elements which resonate with today's audience's sensibilities and are living documents regarding the immaterial cultural patrimony; they can be used again by integrating new technologies and adapting them to the contemporary artists' needs for expression. By rediscovering and reinterpreting these forms, doctoral research obtains the role of a significant cultural act which may bring added value to this field; innovation is not a goal in itself, but a way of maintaining the interest for this theatre genre alive. A reinterpretation of these forms does not mean a simple reproduction on stage, but a creative reconstruction. For instance, the puppetry techniques inherited from the folk tradition can be combined with multimedia elements (video projections, digitally generated sounds, etc.) in order to create performances which bring tradition to the present without compromising its identity.

In an age when the audience is more and more exposed to images with unimaginable dynamics, advanced technologies, smartphones, tablets, etc., animation theatre needs to reaffirm its relevance. Academic studies contribute to creating a theoretical framework supporting artists in exploring new directions; moreover, this research can also have an educational role by including its discoveries and studies in artistic training programmes. Puppeteer students and beginners can learn both from the techniques and principles found in tradition and from the way in which these can be adapted and enriched in today's context. During the beginning of digitalisation, this process caused countless polemics between the practitioners and theoreticians of theatre, but, right now, most performance creators have adapted the multimedia techniques in order to make theatre up-to-date: "The direct influence of technological advancements on contemporary arts has led to the birth of a global community.

The evolution of technology has made an increase in the number of art consumers possible.”¹ Therefore, we notice that new technologies, when adapted to the needs of the stage, contribute both to the expansion of creative horizons and to the attraction of another segment of viewers.

Since animation theatre has kept reinventing itself and adapting throughout the centuries by combining tradition with innovation, it has become a theatre field which is favourable to exploring the dynamics between the past and the present. In this context, the universe of sound has an essential role in this process, as it has evolved significantly, influenced by the global tendencies, by the (accelerated) technological progress and also by a change in the needs of the audience. However, a lot of the traditional structures have been kept or reinterpreted, offering a solid basis for innovative developments – thus, animation theatre becomes a synthesis of the old and the new, which makes it a dynamic, flexible theatre field that also maintains a fixed, stable basic structure.

In the Romanian space, starting from the traditional structures documented by Teodor T. Burada, H. H. Stahl, Constantin Brăiloiu and other researchers who have contributed to the creation of a rich database about customs, rhythms, musical structures and folk forms of expression, we can build an essential connection between the cultural patrimony and contemporary theatre art. “Regardless of the time it was conceived, together with the puppet, the musical sign was important in the economy of the performance. T. T. Burada, due to his musical training and his preoccupation with documenting musical folklore, offers important transcriptions of the songs in the puppet performances, so that the show could be performed even now with no risk of deformation.”² The studies by the authors mentioned above are a valuable point of departure for integrating traditional elements in puppet shows, thus contributing to the diversification and enrichment of the artistic universe.

Teodor T. Burada studied the dramatic customs of Romanian folklore, such as carols or mask theatre, showing us a complex relationship between text, gesture, and expression. For example, the structure of a carol, with rhythmic dialogues and repetitive choruses, can be turned into a dramatic sequence in animation theatre. The text used as a pretext for playing can be adapted to support a universal story, while the puppets’ gestures can underline the meaning of each idea. This approach not only keeps tradition alive, but it renews it, as well, offering the contemporary audience access to cultural values reinterpreted in a modern, accessible stage language.

¹ Dana Trifan Enache (2025). *Extensii ale tehnicilor multimedia în limbajul teatral* [Extensions of multimedia techniques in theatre language], the AGIR Brochure, no. 1.

² Anca Doina Ciobotaru (2011). *Teatrul de animație – între magie și artă* [Animation theatre – between magic and art], Editura Artes, Iași, p. 181.

H. H. Stahl underlines the role of rituals in social and cultural cohesion; this aspect can be integrated in puppet shows in order to reveal the atmosphere and symbolism of these practices. Ritualistic sequences or ceremonial elements can be used as part of the story – either as an extra scene or in order to underline the relationship between human being, puppet and sacredness. For instance, during an exam for *Stage language in animation theatre*, where the studied technique was the ball-on-finger puppetry system, as a preliminary to the development of the Bi-Ba-Bo puppetry technique, puppeteer students had to approach a topic called “The human being and the divine” and to develop the double hypostasis of actor and puppet actor. The indications for the students were that they should imagine a dramatic situation where the human being interacts with the divine, using body expression means and exclusively non-verbal language. This topic approached in animation theatre has the ability to transcend the limitations imposed by reality, because it can symbolically express the relationship between the human being and the sacred; in this context, animation theatre can create a direct bridge between the material and the immaterial, suggesting the dimension of divinity by strong metaphors, movement, and rhythm. The means of expression offered by animation theatre allow for a much deeper exploration of existential questions.

The traditional element becomes a fertile ground for innovation, allowing the puppeteer actors to explore authentic themes, rhythms and expressions that connect the past and the present. Being inspired by such structures, puppeteers can create very meaningful shows, which speak both to the contemporary audience and to the viewers inclined towards traditional cultural values.

The rhythms identified by Constantin Brăiloiu in the traditional Romanian music, characterised by asymmetries and dynamic alternation, can be used in animation theatre in order to enrich the musical composition of the show. For example, the uneven rhythms present in the “doina” or in slow “hora” music could generate a unique, mystical atmosphere, evoking traditional roots and inviting the audience to introspection; moreover, these rhythmic structures can become a guide to the inner rhythm of the characters. The puppets’ movements and their way of interacting can be influenced by rhythmic alternation, creating new contrasting forms. For example, a sequence of quick, uneven, irregular dancing can suggest chaos or a frenetic state, while a slow, constant rhythm can induce a state of melancholy and introspection. This relationship between music and motion adds an extra layer of expressiveness, turning theatre into a multi-sensory experience.

A question appears, therefore, which helps us understand the evolution of traditional elements in our times: “What parts of the traditional structures have been maintained?”

One of the maintained elements of the traditional structures is the relationship between sound, gesture, and emotion. The specific rhythms and

intonations, as well as the use of sounds to convey the theatrical message, are techniques which have been kept all the way to present times in puppet theatre, regardless of the cultural context. The ritualistic function of sound has also been kept, even if it is in a stylised form. This evolution from ritual to artistic expression has been a preoccupation of several theoreticians throughout many studies, and they have reached a unilateral conclusion: “Long before the reign of religions – from ancient times all the way to the Middle Ages – drama existed in its embryo form of a few ritualistic gestures, corresponding to a time of primitive beliefs. We are talking about magical drama, more recent than magical painting, but based on the same method [...] It is all-powerful before the organisation of religious disciplines, which encompass it, but do not manage to vanquish it. Moreover, it has endured all the way to our times, causing the survival, in certain folk practices, of those separate rudiments of magical drama whose origins need to be sought a very long time ago.”³

In traditional puppet theatre, most of the time, sounds used to mark the transitions between scenes or even indicated the appearance of important characters. This technique is still used today, enriched by new technologies. Moreover, rhythm remains an essential tool for creating and maintaining the atmosphere on stage, as the relationship between rhythm and emotion is also inherited from traditional forms, but adapted to the contemporary context.

A doctoral research studying the sounds in puppet theatre (such as *The sound universe in animation theatre – applicative perspectives*) significantly contributes to the understanding and fruitful use of this field. The detailed study of the relationships between rhythm and emotion can propose new perspectives on the process of theatre creation, opening new ways of innovating in future. From a theoretical point of view, such research enriches the literature of the field, documenting the evolution of the universe of sound and its relationship with the socio-cultural dynamics, offering concrete instruments to the creators in the field and encouraging the exploration of new forms of expression combining technology with the traditional heritage. By documenting and reinterpreting the traditions of sound, research contributes to maintaining and reviving the immaterial patrimony. This not only enriches theatre culture, but it creates a bridge over time, allowing the viewers to rediscover the beauty and complexity of animation theatre.

Conclusions

Straddling tradition and innovation, the sound universe of animation theatre is an element which has not been studied enough, but which is essential for reviving traditional musical structures; their preservation shows the ability of animation theatre to adapt over time, without losing its identity. Doctoral

³ Ion Marin Sadoveanu (1973). *Istoria universală a dramei și a teatrului* [The world history of drama and theatre], Editura Eminescu, București, p. 31.

research approaching such topics contribute to consolidating this field, offering a more profound understanding of the dynamics between sound and artistic expressiveness; thus, animation theatre continues to be a space for experimentation and cultural reflection, connecting the past to the present and opening new perspectives for the future.

To conclude, research in the field of animation theatre, focusing on the sound dimension and traditional structures, can bring new perspectives with regards to the creation process and also contribute to maintaining and reviving traditional values. Consciously integrating technological elements offers a solid basis for developing new forms of expression, consolidating the position of animation theatre in the socio-cultural dynamics of the 21st century.

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VISUAL ARTS SECTION

**Cultural Practices in Techno-Scientific and
Eco-Creative Contexts**

Affective imagination as a form of temporal resistance in technocapitalism

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Abstract: In the technocapitalist regime of accelerating and quantifying attention, disorder does not betray a deficit, but opens up cracks: fragile spaces where affect can become counter-temporality. *Disordered* attention, as Claire Bishop envisions it, is no longer an error, but a poetic gesture of perception that refuses productive synchronisation. Attentional disorder no longer signals failure, but becomes a gateway to another temporality. Thus, drawing on the theories of Sara Ahmed and Brian Massumi, but also marking the ontological substratum envisaged by Martin Heidegger, we explore how affect – melancholy, delay, boredom – does not constitute a pathology, but a silent resistance that dislocates the productive rhythm and creates sensitive breaches in the perceptive infrastructure of the present. Art, in these contexts, no longer seeks to clarify, but to suspend, to invite a melancholic derivation of time, where melancholy and delay become forms of subtle resistance. In this economy of deviation, affect not only disrupts rhythm, but opens up a minor politics of imagination – a different time, that is impossible to capture.

Keywords: affective imagination, temporal resistance, technocapitalism.

1. Introduction

The problem of disorder, in the philosophical sense, has navigated Western thought for many decades – not defined as pure chaos, but rather as a potential fissure through which another type of order could emerge. From Pascal's description of the human condition to Bergson's lived experience of duration (*durée*), or from the emancipatory discontinuities identified in Foucault's archaeology of power to the deterritorialisation of becoming in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, disorder has not mainly revealed itself as simple deviation, but has instead materialised an immanent, generative, disruptive force. In this tradition, what Claire Bishop currently articulates as “disorderly attention”, a characteristic belonging to a rhythmicity specific to algorithmic society (in the literal sense or as industrialised ordering/order), can be read beyond the semantic colour referring to the presence of an omnipresent deficit of perception, becoming, in fact, a symptom of a profound temporal

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disagreement: between the measurable time of technocapitalist governance and the ungovernable time of affect.

Attention does not disappear. It retreats, breaks, circulates through spaces where the conditions for the constitution of a horizon of expectation are not met. In an age of endless notifications and algorithmic repetition, what we call “disordered attention” is not an error, but a form of survival of the senses, it is the body that refuses to jump on command. It is a poetic derivation of perception, an insubordination that disturbs the tranquillity of productivity.

Claire Bishop sees in this troubled attention a problem of reception, symptoms of an exhausted relationship between art and the viewer. But what if, on the contrary, disorder is precisely the space in which perception is freed from the burden of meaning? What if, in fact, distraction does not signal absence, but proposes a form of temporal (affective) tactility, manifested through a crack, an opening through which the body feels the rhythm of the world differently? Because time, under the auspices of technocapitalism, no longer flows, but pulsates in spikes of attention or losses similar to reverie. We are now living in a quantified, monetised time, accelerated to the point of absence, and the chronopolitics is one of colonisation of the senses: a regime in which the gaze must produce, retain, consume. But the body is not an algorithm. It falls into daydream, stops and wanders. Affect then becomes the place where time breaks down and recomposes itself into informal forms: sigh, melancholy, disgust, waiting. Affect refuses the temporal pressure both to convert and to be turned into a familiar and easily manoeuvrable feeling.

This configures a diversion of meaning: what if disordered attention were not a failure of aesthetic reception, but rather its reconfiguration? What if the distracted viewer were not absent, but already attuned to a different rhythm, a different pulse, a time that capital cannot instrumentalise? With industrialisation, the regulation of time became inseparable from the regulation of bodies. Taylorist time, broadcast time, algorithmic time, each marks an era of chronopolitical management of attention, the subject always already being timed.

But affect persists where time is most densely managed. Affect appears as delay, as deviation, as interruption. Melancholy arises not as lack, but as a gesture of refusal. Boredom converts the impression of emptiness, being in fact saturation without exit. Forms of affect thus become not pathologies, but “minor temporalities” – what Walter Benjamin would have called *jetztzeit*, time open to something else.

Art that produces affective distortion is not limited to contemplation, but activates friction, a sense of searching. This friction is not sterile; it is speculative. Following Brian Massumi's idea of affect as unformed potential in the wake of Arjun Appadurai's concept of imagination as a collective faculty for triggering action, the article updates the phrase “disordered attention”, crossing

the initial field of the intentional and its deviations towards a different meaning: disorder as a decoupling from the techno-capitalist rhythm. External disorder thus triggers the birth of this minor inner temporality that gives way to the manifestation of a form of affective imagination: the bodily capacity to feel other temporalities, other lives, which are not yet actualised but are already present in the fibre of perception.

By analysing the works of Mircea Suciú and Dumitru Gorzo – works that stop, disturb, disorientate the audience– we can see how art can function as a space for temporal sabotage. Their aesthetic operations offer no redemption or clarity. Instead, they open a breach in the temporal regime of capital, staging not utopia, but rupture—an invitation to imagine differently, to feel time differently.

2. Technocapitalism and the chronopolitics of attention

2.1. Technocapitalism and temporal infrastructure

Under the technocapitalist regime, time no longer flows, executes, or accompanies life, but precedes it, constrains it and measures it before it has happened. The clock becomes an algorithm and duration becomes a commodity. Jonathan Crary observes that, in 24/7 capitalism, time is emptied of human consistency, becoming an instrument of perceptual capture: “Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval that cannot be colonised and that has no value as an instrument of productivity”¹. In this world without night and without forgetting, the pause becomes a dysfunction, and sleep – the last bastion of somatic resistance.

Franco Berardi defines this mutation as a hyperacceleration of subjectivity: thinking is replaced by reaction, reflection by impulse. “When the social body is wired by techno-linguistic automatisms, it acts as a swarm: a collective organism whose behaviour is automatically directed by connected interfaces.”² The subject becomes an open mechanism, always ready to be activated, available on demand. In this affective economy, Brian Massumi sees a regime of pre-capture, in which it is not what is expressed that matters, but what can be felt in advance: “The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory.”³

Attention becomes transactional energy, a psychic valence convertible into clicks, data, performance indices. It is no longer enough to look – we must be detectable, quantifiable, reactive. Technocapitalism constructs an invisible architecture of temporality that not only manages our time, but trains the way we feel it.

¹ Jonathan Crary (2013). *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Verso, London, p. 10.

² Franco Berardi (2012). *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, MIT Press, London, p. 14.

³ Brian Massumi (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 45.

Massumi⁴ observes that the unequal exchange between money and time becomes the essence of this exploitation: subjects sell their lived duration – that is, life itself – in order to gain access to the future. Time is fragmented, inscribed in flesh and converted into productivity. Thus, at the heart of neoliberalism lies a clock that extracts.

2.2. Chrononormativity and the politics of speed

If technocapitalism extracts time, chronopolitics disciplines and normalises it. In this regard, Paul Virilio⁵ states that speed not only accelerates movement, it also deactivates thinking. In a world where speed becomes the norm, waiting becomes a form of error. Thus, the right to hesitate is lost.

Elizabeth Freeman calls this structuring of life into productive stages *chrononormativity* – a silent regime that assigns functions to time: education, career, reproduction. “Chrononormativity uses time to organise individual human bodies towards maximum productivity.”⁶ To live “on time” means to be correctly inserted into this sequence. To deviate means to dislocate the social semantic layer of duration.

Sara Ahmed⁷ adds an affective dimension to these norms: “institutional time” regulates not only actions, but also emotions. In this sense, affect becomes institutional choreography: we learn not only what to feel, but *when* to feel it. Ahmed notes that dissonant affects – sadness, anger, discomfort – fall out of this regulated rhythm. They slow down, interrupt, dislocate. In institutional logic, they are treated as dysfunctional. In critical logic, they become fissures—moments of confusion that refuse synchronisation. Thus, affect becomes the counter-politics of temporal rhythm.

2.3. The economy of attention as psychopolitical infrastructure

Bernard Stiegler⁸ analyses “hyperattention” as a symptom of a society in which consciousness is captured through overstimulation, as it is no longer just a mental act, but an affective, regulated infrastructure with the potential for extraction and redistribution. Crary⁹ adds that this attention is not new, nor has it changed radically, but rather intensified: historically, it has been disciplined by school, industry, and the media, but in digital capitalism, it is directly monetised in an intrusive form that attempts to offer no breaks from production, reverie or retreat into inaction – a context that was otherwise understood in the

⁴ Brian Massumi (2015). *The Politics of Affect*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

⁵ Paul Virilio (1997). *Open Sky*, Verso, London.

⁶ Elizabeth Freeman (2010). *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 3.

⁷ Sara Ahmed (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University, Durham.

⁸ Claire Bishop (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London.

⁹ Jonathan Crary, *op. cit.*

past as a possible trigger for the imagination. Xavier de Maistre¹⁰, author of *Le voyage autour de ma chambre*, proposed a fictional detour set in motion by imagination instead of an *embodied* experience. But today, the gaze becomes metric, the gesture is monetised, and the pause is seen as a loss for the profile of the master who becomes his own slave and vice versa. In a 24/7 regime, attention is not only consumed, nor even hypervigilant, as described by Bernard Stiegler, but exhausted.

Consciousness becomes “available brain time” – a cynical expression used in the French media industry and analysed by Stiegler¹¹ as a symptom of profound psychological colonisation. The absence of free thought fractures the compass of attention into exploitable intervals. In this context, slowing down is not a cognitive error, but a political gesture. Slow-paced reflection becomes a form of resistance to the accelerated economy of perception. That is why Stiegler proposes the defence of deliberate attention not only as an individual practice, but as a fundamental right of the digital subject.

2.4. Disorder of attention as an affective strategy

In this regulated territory of perception, disorder is not an error – it is a strategy. It appears as a small form of visceral resistance: a wandering gaze, a delay in thought, a refusal to react immediately that becomes an involuntary act of protest. When faced with the works of Mircea Suciú and Dumitru Gorzo, Romanian artists who work with intrinsic temporalities, the viewer is not informed, but rather turned (back) onto their own affectivity: an encounter with a delayed time that may not belong to them, a state that is not aligned with current narratives, a deviation from the imposed meaning.

These artistic practices do not demand understanding, but signal fracture, demand disorientation, awakening from the supposed “presence”. In front of them, time refuses to be perceived in linearity – it bends, suspends itself, overlaps with the unknown, so that ambiguity becomes tactical, repetition becomes a calculated slowdown, and melancholy becomes the forcing of time dilation. Their art is no longer a medium of transmission, but a staging of the fracturing of tempo.

The “disorder of attention” invoked by Claire Bishop is thus a form of critical aesthetics. It does not oppose the frontal system, but short-circuits it from within. It creates delays that become breathing spaces, pauses that give the subject the possibility to feel time differently – not as a vector of productivity, but as the elastic matter of perception. In this small deviation – a moment of wandering, an affective hesitation – a possible reconfiguration of temporal

¹⁰ Xavier de Maistre (2003). *Le voyage autour de ma chambre*, Flammarion, Paris.

¹¹ Bernard Stiegler (2010). *Taking care of youth and the generations*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

politics is born. Here, affect is no longer synchronised, but liberated. It no longer flows in the imposed stream, but creates counter-flow rhythms.

Where time is command, disordered attention becomes counterpoint.

3. Affect as temporal distortion

Far from being a simple reaction or personal emotion, affect is currently interpreted as having a collective character, ontologically necessary for relationships, a density that “sticks” (as Sara Ahmed points out), a way in which time becomes unstable in the body, because it is not strictly anchored in any “time” – present, past, future. Ahmed nuances these overlaps by referring to the notion of “flashing” (“the flicker in the corner of the eye signalling the presence of the stranger, which registers as a disturbance on the skin before we have recognised the stranger as a stranger”¹²).

“Before we are affected, before something happens that creates an impression on the skin, things are already in place that incline us to be affected in some ways more than others. To read affect we need better understandings of this “in place”, and how the “in place” involves psychic and social dimensions, which means that the “in place” is not always in the same place. For example, the flicker is more likely to become an emotion that we retrospectively recognise as fear in places that are already given affective value as fearsome (the ‘rough neighbourhood’ is one that we anticipate to be frightening), or for somebody whose body remembers other flickers becoming frightening.”¹³

Affect cannot be narrated or explained in this way, because it does not come after the event, but surrounds it, opens it up. “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects”¹⁴. Brian Massumi, on the other hand, describes affect as “an autonomous residue” that escapes consciousness and linearity, an intensity “that cannot be fully actualised at a given moment”¹⁵. Affect produces a subtle desynchronisation: between event and interpretation, between the present and what is felt beyond it.

“For Massumi, emotion is ‘qualified intensity’ or ‘a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of experience which is from that point onward defined as personal’, while affects are ‘in-tensity’ that is unqualified and beyond narrative (2002b: 28).”¹⁶

This desynchronisation is more than poetic, it is political. Lauren Berlant called it “slow death”: not sudden death, but a slow, systemic wear and tear, a

¹² Sara Ahmed (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University, Durham, p. 231.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Brian Massumi (1995). *The Autonomy of Affect*, in “Cultural Critique”, no. 31, pp. 83-109.

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University, Durham, p. 24.

chronology of exhaustion experienced at a slow pace¹⁷. Bodies that survive, do not progress, can no longer keep up with productive time and, in this dislocation, create another way of living duration, one that is dissonant, often invisible.

3.1. Micropolitics of disrupted attention

Massumi states that: “Affect is autonomous. It is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognisable. It is not what is felt or displayed. It is that feeling of having been moved”¹⁸. Moreover, affect is defined by the capacity to affect and be affected: “Affect is the capacity to affect and be affected”¹⁹. This means that affect is primarily a domain of potentiality – an open field in which movement, attention and time are always on the verge of being modulated. It is “movement felt in the body before it becomes action or emotion”²⁰. Affect occurs in the interval – between stimulus and response, between perception and expression, between social times and lived temporality.

What artistic practices generate is not just another aesthetic, but a micropolitics of perception – a regime of sensitivity that disrupts the dominant norms of rapid attention and immediate meaning. Brian Massumi proposes an understanding of affect as pre-individual intensity, a “field of virtualities” that precedes both consciousness and interpretation²¹. Thus, affect does not align itself with the logics of rapid signification, but persists in a hesitant, desynchronised time.

When viewing Mircea Suciuc's works, the gaze is not guided by a single narrative or symbol, but is absorbed in a visual melancholy that suspends clarity (historical, “Chantal Akerman interdisciplinary biographies in a theatre of care”, 2018). When viewing Dumitru Gorzo's works, discontinuity, irony and absurdity fragment any attempt at perceptual coherence. Time multiplies, breaks, expands, passing through the artist's body to materialise unfinished and continuously beyond itself or the work. Art no longer offers solutions, but delays.

These delays are not mere pauses. They function as zones of affective reverberation, where perception becomes unstable and time is felt as latency. Nick Srnicek²², in *Platform Capitalism*, describes how platforms value only what can be quantified, reacted to, updated. In this landscape, any form of perception that does not produce data becomes useless. Art that refuses to deliver immediate meaning or reaction thus becomes a political anomaly of perception: it cultivates a time that cannot be extracted or measured.

¹⁷ Lauren Berlant (2007). *Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)*, in “Critical Inquiry”, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 754-780.

¹⁸ Brian Massumi (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Duke University Press, p. 35.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. xvii.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²² Nick Srnicek (2017). *Platform Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

This delay is a form of affective resistance. Not a frontal refusal, but a subtle deviation, a gap between impulse and reaction, between image and understanding. To look without understanding. To remain. To feel without formulating. In such moments, attention is converted into affect, and affect is converted into a form of temporal disobedience. Gilles Deleuze called this type of reaction a minor gesture: “an imperceptible deviation that bypasses dominant structures without confronting them head-on”²³. The minor, in the Deleuzian sense, does not mean marginal, but deviant: it is a movement that undermines the norm through an imperceptible variation, a delay or a change of rhythm that reconfigures the space of the possible.

In the context of this article, the minor gesture corresponds exactly to the manifestation of that form of disordered affective attention which, instead of reacting according to algorithmic expectations, produces a silent rupture in the functional chronology of perception. Thus, art becomes not only a space for aesthetic expression, but a minor infrastructure through which affect can reimagine our relationship with time—not through great revolutions, but through the subtle ability to feel differently.

3.2. Slow affects: interruptions and potentiality

Attention is, therefore, more than a simple cognitive act. It becomes an affective configuration: a bodily state that shapes the way we relate to the surrounding world. In this sense, *disordered attention* is already an expression of an affective relationship modified by time – a form of perception that withdraws, hesitates or reconfigures itself in the face of an imposed rhythm. Sara Ahmed herself proposes a reading of affect as a form of bodily orientation: “Emotions do things: they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments”²⁴. Thus, affects shape not only what we feel, but also how we align ourselves temporally with spaces, institutions, expectations.

Slow affects – sadness, fatigue, melancholy, shame – are not “dysfunctional”, as neoliberal logic might consider them to be. They are moments of resistance, and Ahmed develops a theory of affect as a force of institutional misalignment. She argues that emotions are not just individual experiences, but *orientation devices* – ways in which bodies align (or do not align) with the dominant norms of social life²⁵. In this sense, affect not only expresses but also regulates the relationships between social bodies and institutional temporalities. Emotions such as shame, sadness or anger do not appear in isolation, but in the context of a failed alignment – they become

²³ Gilles Deleuze (1977). *Dialogues*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 129.

²⁴ Sara Ahmed (2004). *Affective Economies*, in “Social Text”, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 117-139.

²⁵ Sara Ahmed (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Duke University Press, Durham.

indications that something is misaligned. Thus, affect is not passive: it can break synchronisation, generate deviation, propose a different rhythm. Feminist sadness or *queer* anger thus become not only expressions, but ways of breaking the affective alignment of the subject with the institution, with the rule, with the dominant temporality.

Berlant²⁶ observes that these states not only slow down, but create durations. Slow *death* is a form of disaffiliated temporality, in which the body can no longer participate in the narrative of progress. It lives on the sidelines, in delay, in what cannot be represented by performance graphs. Affective time becomes a form of silent chronopolitics: a drain of duration that can no longer be quantified.

3.3. Suspension, obstruction, reverie: aesthetics of temporal disruption

Where affect cannot be absorbed by the economy, aesthetics begins. Art that works with slow affects produces more than representations – it creates rhythms. In installations that demand patience, in films of irregular duration, in performative works marked by silence or stagnation, affect becomes compound time. The audience is invited not to understand, but to fall into a certain state. This state is often a blockage – an unspoken pause, a suspended time.

This suspension is productive: it gives shape to an affective reality that cannot be rushed. In long-duration performances, in slow art or in the aesthetics of the sick body – as described by the project *Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time*²⁷ – time is negotiated with fragility. Rhythm is unpredictable, affective, alive.

These artistic forms do not merely “reflect” affect. They create affect through rhythm. In this sense, affect becomes a compositional force: a dynamic that folds time, makes it hesitate, contort. This is the temporal distortion that art can cultivate – a time that no longer follows the commanded line, but transpires through skin, gaze and memory.

3.4. Affect as counter-temporality

In a regime that pushes for constant affective performance, affects that slow down become counter-temporal, as they do not fit into the chronology of success, in fact disrupting those *happiness scripts*, as Sara Ahmed calls them, which announce to the individual when they should be satisfied and when they should smile. Stepping outside these scripts involves precisely a different movement through time: staying longer, leaving earlier, not showing up at all,

²⁶ Lauren Berlant (2007). *Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)*, in “Critical Inquiry”, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 754-80.

²⁷ Taraneh Fazeli (2017). *Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying*, Artists Space, New York.

and Mircea Suci and Dumitru Gorzo compose their works precisely with these alterities.

Affect thus becomes a temporal agent, a shaper of rhythm, duration, sequence. The rupture with algorithmic time – a time of automatic anticipation, prediction and reaction – is not merely a dysfunction, but a possibility: it opens up a space for affective imagination. In the sense formulated by Arjun Appadurai, imagination is not an aesthetic fantasy, but a “staging ground for action”²⁸ – a stage in which affective subjectivity exercises its capacity to prefigure other ways of life. When the body breaks out of its algorithmic rhythm, when it stops, when it gets stuck in a slow or unproductive affect, it does not cease to be political – on the contrary, it takes on another vector: that of affective becoming, or perhaps re-becoming, namely a kind of rewriting of Ahmed's *in place*. In this sense, affect functions not only as a distortion of time, but as a force of collective reimagination. In the gaps produced by sadness, reverie, anger or exhaustion, micro-temporalities open up that are imperceptible to platforms, but essential for resistance.

The article's proposal thus takes shape: that affective dislocation of attention – what Claire Bishop has called *disordered attention* – is not a failure of participation, but the beginning of a counter-politics of time. The art that supports this dislocation does not require quantification, but a presence outside the norm. It invites another affective organisation of perception – one that, through rupture, opens the field to a politics of affective imagination. Affect thus becomes a temporal agent: not just an experience, but a force that shapes rhythm, duration, sequence. Affect does not just disturb time – it reclaims it.

4. Art as affective rhythm and temporal resistance

4.1. Art doesn't demand attention, it unsettles it

In the regime of totalising attention, in which every perceptual gesture is subject to quantification, art can no longer be received in the key of classical contemplation, of former focus or strict understanding, but through affective availability. Today's works take us out of rhythm, art crossing the status of object towards a form of affective rhythm – a pulsation in time that disrupts our synchronisation with the world. Contemporary art, in its slow, repetitive, performative or almost impossible to decode forms, produces not only content, but this temporal gap. It creates those 'chrononormativities' described by Freeman above: areas where normative time is suspended and the body is retrained to feel duration differently²⁹. It is no longer a question of narrative, although it seems to integrate it as a support – at least in the case of the two Romanian artists – but of an intensity that disturbs our inner chronology.

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

²⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, *op. cit.*

4.2. Aesthetics of slowing down

The emergence of an aesthetic of slowing down is not new – *slow art*, *durational performance*, *crip time*. These artistic forms oppose accelerated and industrial temporality through a micro-politics of rhythm, that is, through precise interventions in the perceptual regime of everyday life. Slowing down is not just a formal strategy, but a counter-politics of feeling and temporality that contradicts the norms imposed by the logic of technological and economic efficiency.

As Jonathan Crary notes, continuous capitalism “erodes forms of community and political expression, damaging the fabric of everyday life”³⁰. Against this backdrop, art that demands time – or rather, that *gives* time – becomes once again a space for collective experimentation on ways of being together. Arden Reed states that “slow art triggers the contemplative experience once solicited by sacred images and texts”³¹, suggesting that slow artistic perception does not produce clarity, but reverie and misalignment, and the contemplative is no longer (necessarily) associated with depth, but is combined with this imaginative dislocation that offers, in exchange, even a new location – that of the common imaginative artistic space. In other words, a possible relational imagination with artistic reality.

Lauren Berlant develops the idea of an affective temporality of the impasse – a state in which the present extends without direction, suspending normative narratives of progress. “The impasse is a holding station that doesn't hold securely: a sense of the world that is not entire, and yet it provides the affective atmosphere of the present”³². Here, slowed-down time becomes a zone of diffuse intensity – a “durational affect” that keeps open the possibility of another becoming.

Byung-Chul Han warns, in turn, that contemporary aesthetics is often subject to the same pressure to perform as work: “The compulsion of achievement turns even play into labour”³³. In this context, art that slows down is not a retreat, but a deliberate interruption of the compulsive obsession with success – a space where affect is not anchored in performance, but in suspension.

4.3. Misaligned times: art, affect, becoming

When art fractures time, it offers a rare opportunity: rediscovering time as a space for becoming, not as an obligation. Thus, from *disordered attention* – initially seen as a pathology of the digital age – we observe, in fact, the definition of an aesthetic of temporal distortion. Art does not correct attention, but derails

³⁰ Jonathan Crary, *op. cit.*

³¹ Arden Reed (2017). *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell*. University of California Press, California p. 14.

³² Lauren Berlant (2011). *Cruel Optimism*, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 199.

³³ Byung-Chul Han (2015). *The Burnout Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 31.

it. These misaligned times cannot be taken over by algorithms because they do not function in fixed metrics. They appear between frames, between gestures, between emotions that do not crystallise into new language, because it is precisely the fracture that makes possible a re-semantisation of the world in the sense that Ahmed described, that now “new” *in place*. In this sense, art can be a minor infrastructure of resistance, a space where deviation becomes possible. And necessary.

4.4. Between *Stimmung* and affect: the crisis of temporal alignment

In Martin Heidegger's phenomenological tradition, affective tonality (*Stimmung*) plays an essential role in the constitution of being-in-the-world. It is not an inner emotion, but a way of opening up the world as a whole. In the well-known example of anxiety (*Angst*), the world reveals itself as lacking support, as nothing: “The thing relative to which anxiety arises is totally indeterminate. This indeterminacy not only leaves it factually undecided *which* intramundane being threatens, but it also means that the intramundane being is generally not 'relevant'. The thing that causes anxiety is the very fact of *being-in-the-world*.”³⁴ This disposition does not make us feel *anything* in particular, but places us before the existential void – of finitude and being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). In this sense, *Stimmung* is ontological: it not only colours the world, but makes it possible as a world.

Contemporary theories of affect, however, distance themselves from this ontological framework in order to explore the relational, social and political dimensions of experience. As we have seen, Brian Massumi defines affect as a pre-individual intensity, a bodily transition between states that escapes emotional codification: “a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another”³⁵. Affect does not open up a metaphysical world, but a tension of rhythms: between body and institution, between present and expectation, between feeling and responding.

Sara Ahmed³⁶, on the other hand, delves into affect as a force of (dis)alignment. Emotions, she says, are not inner experiences, but social orientations: they align us with a space, a community, a norm. But when we feel “wrong”, it is not just an emotional dysfunction, it is a crisis of positioning. Affect is not revelation, but a trigger for friction: it makes us feel out of step with the world, out of sync with the dominant rhythm.

This affective crisis of alignment is profoundly temporal. The contemporary individual no longer feels in tune with the programme, with the institutional norm, remaining in place, hesitating, delaying. If *Stimmung*

³⁴ Martin Heidegger (2003). *Ființă și timp* [Being and time], translated by Gabriel Liiceanu, Humanitas, București, pp. 252-253.

³⁵ Brian Massumi (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³⁶ Sara Ahmed (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

revealed an emptied world, contemporary affect signals a world that no longer fits. A world of hyperattention, reaction, affective efficiency. In this landscape, affect does not just express a rupture – it becomes this possible non-rhythm of resistance.

In an artistic context, this difference becomes palpable. Art no longer functions as ontological revelation, but as a space of affective dislocation. In works that provoke *disordered attention*, there is no longer an understanding of the world as a whole, but a loss of affective alignment, a delay in front of the image, a hesitation in front of meaning. Here, affect does not make us *understand* something, but feel that something is wrong. And from this gap, another chronology can be constructed.

Thus, a fertile rupture opens up between *Stimmung* and affect: the former reveals the world in being, the latter questions it through the body. In this sense, affect is the force that breaks the dominant chronology and prepares the ground for another politics of perception and rhythm – one that, through disordered attention, makes room for the possible.

When art makes us waste time, it offers us a rare chance: to rediscover time as a space of becoming, not as an obligation, and the artists mentioned – Mircea Suciuc and Dumitru Gorzo – treat this distinction mainly pictorially, the article proposing it rather towards the viewer's own perception, as its purpose is outlined around the idea of facilitating this affective availability towards an individual imaginary understanding.

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Interdisciplinary approaches in historiographical curatorial practice

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Abstract: This paper examines historiographical curatorial practices and theories of decolonialism in contemporary art, focusing on the exhibition in the Brazilian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Art Biennale. The curatorial approach in the pavilion re-examines and reconfigures historical, social, and political events through a critical lens, with the aim of documenting the situation of indigenous communities in Brazil. Through the use of multimedia installations and collaborative artistic practices, the curatorial team proposes a complex discourse on memory, ecology, and spirituality. This curatorial method functions as a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue while promoting a model of resistance and social justice through art. Relevant case studies will detail how curatorial discourse offers new perspectives on cultural identity and contributes to the transformation of exhibition spaces into places of critical reflection and cultural exchange.

Keywords: historiography, curatorial practices, cultural memory, decolonialism, curatorial discourse.

Introduction

Contemporary curatorship has become an essential tool for the critical re-examination of history, managing to overcome the limits imposed by established practices and the dominant narratives perpetuated by them. In essence, historiographical curatorial practices not only interrogate the past, but also reconfigure collective memory through an interdisciplinary lens, integrating diverse perspectives, especially those marginalized or excluded from official discourses. This type of approach is not limited to the exhibition of objects or events from the past, but becomes a cultural and political act that challenges hegemonic structures and promotes inclusion.

A relevant example of this methodology in curatorial practice is the Brazilian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Art Biennale, entitled “Ka’a Püera – We Are Walking Birds”¹. The exhibition explores the histories and cosmologies of

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¹ “Ka’a Püera – We Are Walking Birds” is an expression that combines terms from the Guarani language (an indigenous language of South America, spoken mainly in Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina) with a poetic phrase in English. Ka’a Püera: In Guarani, “Ka’a” means “forest” or “vegetation” (associated with nature), and “Püera” can mean “what was” or “what is gone” (there

Brazil's indigenous peoples, challenging the colonial frameworks that have dominated global cultural narratives. Through a mix of collaborative practices, multimedia installations, and site-specific methods, the Pavilion's curators have transformed the exhibition space into a platform for critical dialogue and cultural redress.

This initiative exemplifies how contemporary curatorship can function as a form of interdisciplinary research, where oral histories, visual art, and technology converge to create an immersive and transformative experience. Moreover, the Brazilian Pavilion highlights the potential of curatorial practices to contribute to the process of decolonization, providing a visible platform for indigenous voices and their unique perspectives on the world. In this sense, the article aims to analyse the impact of these methodologies on global artistic discourse and on the transformation of exhibition spaces into sites of cultural resistance and collective memory. Thus, curatorship becomes an active act of historical rewriting and a means of creating inclusive and representative narratives.

Historiography, as defined by Michel de Certeau², is not simply the factual recording of historical events, but an active and dynamic process by which history is constructed, reinterpreted, and reshaped in the light of political, economic, and cultural factors. This vision fundamentally changes the way exhibitions are conceptualized, with curators transforming themselves into critical agents who rewrite history from alternative perspectives and challenge dominant narratives. In this sense, exhibitions become platforms through which the power structures implicit in the way the past is represented can be questioned.

Claire Bishop emphasizes the importance of democratizing exhibition spaces, transforming them into places where marginalized voices gain central visibility³. By emphasizing alternative narratives, these spaces contribute to a better understanding of cultural and social complexity. Okwui Enwezor, through ground-breaking projects such as "Documenta 11"⁴ of 2002, redefined how exhibitions can function as critical tools for decolonizing art, integrating

is a connection to loss or transition). Together, the expression could be translated as "The Forest That Was" or "The Lost Forest". "We Are Walking Birds" is a poetic metaphor, suggesting the freedom, mobility and fragility of humans, likened to walking birds. It can imply a deep connection with nature or a sense of constant migration and adaptation (according to www.e-flux.com accessed on 28.11.2024).

² Michel Certeau (1988). *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 32.

³ Claire Bishop (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso Books, London, p. 18.

⁴ It was a revolutionary event in the history of art exhibitions, focusing on themes such as postcolonialism, globalization, and social justice. Structured into five "platforms" that included conferences, debates, and publications, this edition redefined the way international exhibitions could address complex political and social issues.

marginalized perspectives from the Global South⁵. Through such initiatives, Enwezor not only challenged the hegemony of Western narratives, but also created a model of exhibition that values epistemological and cultural diversity. In this context, the concept of “epistemic disobedience” developed by Walter Dignolo becomes a key tool for curators who seek to decolonize knowledge systems. This theory proposes the rejection of hegemonic paradigms and the recognition of the plurality of forms of knowledge, including indigenous or marginalized ones⁶. Together, these theories provide a solid theoretical framework for contemporary curatorial practices, transforming exhibitions into spaces of critical dialogue, inclusion, and cultural resistance, where polyphonic diversity is not only tolerated but celebrated.

The 2024 Brazil Pavilion exhibition, entitled “Ka’a Pûera – We are walking birds”⁷ represents an emblematic example of historiographical curatorial practices applied in a decolonial context. It reconfigures dominant historical narratives through a critical lens that prioritizes the voices and perspectives of indigenous peoples in Brazil. The exhibition’s title, “Ka’a Pûera,” has a profound meaning, evoking the idea of regenerative space and connectivity—a concept that reflects not only physical migration, but also the spiritual and ecological resilience of indigenous communities in the face of colonialism and exploitation.

By emphasizing ecological and spiritual connections, the exhibition aims to re-contextualize historical narratives, placing indigenous cosmologies, oral histories, and cultural traditions at the centre. This approach challenges traditional colonial frameworks that have marginalized or distorted these perspectives and instead provides a platform for cultural re-claiming. The exhibition’s central narrative reflects not only a local history but also a global interconnectedness, highlighting the relevance of these perspectives in understanding current issues of ecology, migration, and identity.

A central element of the exhibition is the integration of collaborative practices and interdisciplinary methods. Collaboration with indigenous artists, such as Denilson Baniwa⁸, has allowed the curators to create an authentic

⁵ The phrase “Global South” used in the context of the exhibition “Documenta 11” curated by Okwui Enwezor, refers to a geopolitical and socio-economic category that describes countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, in contrast with the “Global North” (Europe, North America and other industrialised countries). This indicates not only a geographical position, but also a historical and economic relationship, derived from colonialism, imperialism, and global systemic inequalities.

⁶ Walter Dignolo (2009). *Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom*, Theory, Culture & Society, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 159-181.

⁷ The artists are Glicéria Tupinambá, Olinda Tupinambá, and Ziel Karapotó, and the exhibition was curated by Arissana Pataxó, Denilson Baniwa, and Gustavo Caboco Wapichana.

⁸ Denilson Baniwa is an indigenous artist and activist from the Baniwa people, recognized for his contributions to contemporary art and for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples. In the exhibition that is the case study of this article, Denilson Baniwa is the curator.

discourse that reflects the realities and cosmologies of indigenous communities. The use of multimedia installations and immersive technologies also contributes to transforming the exhibition space into a dynamic place of reflection and interaction.

“Ka’a Pûera” not only challenges existing historical narratives, but also promotes an empathetic and critical understanding of the history of these communities. The exhibition thus becomes a space of cultural resistance and a living example of how history can be rewritten to include perspectives excluded from the dominant discourse. It illustrates the power of art to function as a vehicle for social justice and decolonization.

The curators of the “Ka’a Pûera” exhibition have taken an innovative approach, foregrounding indigenous epistemologies as valid and essential sources of knowledge. Rather than following the Western paradigm, which often marginalizes or ignores these perspectives, the curators have centred the cosmologies and oral histories of indigenous communities as defining elements of the curatorial discourse. This approach represents a form of cultural redress, demonstrating that these epistemologies are not only relevant but also fundamental to understanding a comprehensive and more equitable history.

Collaboration with indigenous artists/curators, such as Denilson Baniwa, was an essential aspect of the curatorial process, guaranteeing the authenticity and integrity of the cultural representation.

By directly involving these artists, the exhibition not only gives visibility to the traditions and stories of indigenous communities, but also critiques traditional hierarchies in the field of art, promoting a decentralized, participatory and collaborative model. This method represents a concrete example of decolonizing curatorial practices, redistributing narrative authority and including perspectives that might otherwise be excluded.

A central feature of the exhibition is Daiara Tukano’s “Walking Birds” installation, a work that completely transforms the exhibition space into an immersive environment. The installation juxtaposes natural elements, such as rainforest sounds and organic materials, with spiritual and symbolic dimensions of indigenous culture.

The audience is invited to actively participate in this multisensory experience, which transcends the traditional boundaries of art exhibitions. Thus, the space becomes a living place, dedicated not only to passive contemplation, but also to critical reflection on the connection between nature, spirituality and history. Through these elements, the curators manage to transform the exhibition into an experience that challenges colonial frameworks and promotes a deep cultural dialogue. “Walking Birds” becomes more than a work of art; it is a bridge to understanding indigenous identities, a manifestation of cultural resistance and an invitation to empathy.

The impact of interdisciplinarity on contemporary curatorial practices transforms the exhibition space into a meeting place for different forms of knowledge and cultural expression. By integrating ethnographic research, oral histories, and multimedia technologies, a discourse is configured that goes beyond the limits of linear paradigms of Western history. This interdisciplinary method allows for the reconfiguration of dominant narratives and proposes a more nuanced and inclusive perspective on history and collective memory.

A key aspect of the exhibition is the use of indigenous sounds and digital projections, which add a multisensory dimension to the visitor experience. Ambient sounds, inspired by the rainforest and the rituals of indigenous communities, create a deep connection with nature and their spiritual traditions. Digital projections, on the other hand, provide a dynamic visual representation of indigenous cosmologies, allowing the audience to see and feel history as a living and interactive phenomenon. This combination of sound and image transforms the way visitors perceive history, moving from a static interpretation to a fluid, immersive and personalized one.

Moreover, the exhibition's interdisciplinary approach emphasizes the interconnectedness between past and present, highlighting the continued relevance of indigenous narratives in understanding contemporary challenges, such as environmental protection or the decolonization of knowledge. Through ethnographic research, the artists and curators have managed to integrate real stories and experiences of indigenous communities, offering an authentic alternative to historical narratives dominated by colonial perspectives.

"Ka'a Pûera" thus demonstrates how interdisciplinarity can be used to create exhibitions that not only inform but also transform, thus becoming a remarkable example of curatorial practice that succeeds in contributing to the decolonization of art spaces. By prioritizing indigenous epistemologies and rejecting traditional colonial paradigms, the curators transformed the Brazilian Pavilion into a space of cultural resistance, providing a platform for marginalized voices. This approach emphasizes the role of curators not only as cultural mediators, but also as active agents of change, capable of redefining power structures in the art world.

Another relevant project with a historiographical curatorial practice is "Hello World: Revising a Collection" (2018), curated by Udo Kittelmann at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin⁹. This exhibition critiqued the Eurocentric perspective on modern art history and highlighted cross-cultural interactions, similar to the approach in "Ka'a Pûera". Both projects illustrate how curatorship can function as an act of cultural justice, challenging cultural hegemony and promoting epistemological diversity.

⁹ This exhibition critically explored Eurocentric perspectives in museum collections, bringing into dialogue modern and contemporary works from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

In a global context marked by growing inequalities and ecological and social crises, “Ka’a Pûera” demonstrates how art can serve as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue. The exhibition not only provides a space for the representation of indigenous cultures, but also encourages the public to critically reflect on the colonial past and its implications for the present.

Historiographical curatorial practices constitute an innovative field of contemporary art, with the potential to profoundly transform the way history is interpreted and presented to the public.

They challenge dominant narratives, emphasizing marginalized voices and epistemological diversity. Exhibitions thus become more than exhibition spaces – they function as platforms for intercultural dialogue, critical reflection, and the construction of a more inclusive collective memory. “Ka’a Pûera” demonstrates how the integration of indigenous epistemologies, oral histories, and interdisciplinary methodologies can create a fluid and immersive curatorial discourse.

Compared to other similar initiatives, such as “Documenta 11” or “Hello World,” the Brazilian Pavilion exhibition highlights the defining characteristics of historiographical curatorial practices: the deconstruction of hegemonic historical narratives, the collaborative integration of epistemological diversity, and the use of art as a vehicle for social justice. These features underscore the importance of curatorship as a form of critical inquiry and cultural act, capable of contributing to the redefinition of the relationship between art, history, and the public.

Furthermore, historiographical curatorial practices highlight a fundamental shift in the role of exhibitions. They become not only places for archiving the past, but also active platforms for cultural redress and social resistance.

They transform collective memory, connecting history with contemporary issues, such as decolonization, the ecological crisis, and the protection of threatened cultural identities. Thus, exhibitions position themselves at the intersection of art and activism, inviting the public to participate in a profound process of reflection and change.

Historiographic curatorship, therefore, becomes a form of intellectual and artistic activism, capable of rewriting history from an equitable, empathetic and transparent perspective. In a world marked by cultural polarization and social inequalities, these practices offer a viable alternative for constructing a collective memory that reflects the complexity and diversity of human experiences.

The Brazilian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Art Biennale remains an eloquent example of the profound impact that these practices can have on contemporary art and society as a whole.



Photos from the 2024 Brazil Pavilion exhibition, called “Ka’a Pûera – we are walking birds”

Conclusion

The Brazilian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Art Biennale illustrates how contemporary curatorial practice can combine historiographical analysis with decolonial theory to challenge dominant narratives. By foregrounding indigenous perspectives through multimedia and collaborative strategies, the exhibition transforms the pavilion into a space of critical reflection and dialogue. Ultimately, it demonstrates how curatorial discourse can function as a tool for social justice, cultural exchange, and the redefinition of exhibition spaces as sites of ethical and political engagement.

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The relationship between artistic research and the urban environment in the context of global urbanism

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Abstract: The notion of “global urbanism” proposes a dynamic vision of cities, which are perceived as a network formed by multiple spaces that are influenced by political, economic, cultural and ecological factors at a trans-local and planetary level. Studies in the field of global urbanism explore themes such as social inequality, environmental problems, possible alternatives to the urban, etc. Contemporary artistic thinking and practices have the potential to offer new perspectives on the relationship between everyday, urban, and global experience. If the specialized literature draws attention to the fact that global urbanism often focuses on the relationship between the Global North and the Global South, leaving the Global East in the background, the present work aims to identify the ways in which artistic research relates to the urban environment, following a series of examples related to the territory of Eastern Europe.

Keywords: artist-as-researcher, urban environment, public space, Global East.

Introduction

Referring to the cities of the modern world in the Western space, theorist Malcolm Miles stated in the second half of the 1990s that “the disciplines of the built environment – urban planning, architecture, design and art – are currently faced with the choice between continuing to build urban wastelands [...], or developing a new ecologically and socially responsible urbanism, a model of the city that values its diversity and does not seek to impose monolithic perfection.”¹ The author also believes that the role of art in a sustainable vision of the city could have two complementary trajectories: on the one hand, Miles refers to applied art, which he sees as an integrated aspect of urban design, and, on the other hand, he recalls art understood “as a social process, which resists oppression, intervenes in the public interest.”² Through these statements, Miles captures two important aspects that will shape the evolution of the relationship between the visual arts and the urban environment in the coming decades. The first is represented by the strong anchoring of activist, critical and socially engaged artistic practices in the socio-political context of the present. The second is represented by the need to understand the city not as a unitary construct, but

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¹ Malcolm Miles (2005). *Art, Space and the City* [1997], Routledge, London and New York, p. 113.

² *Ibidem*, p. 114.

as a heterogeneous space, in which a multitude of cultural, social, historical, political, etc. instances interact.

The structure of this paper will follow these two aspects identified by Malcolm Miles so that, in the first phase, it will focus on the various ways in which artists choose to intervene in the urban environment, seeking to identify, interrogate and often improve existing conditions, be they social, political, ecological, cultural or economic. A series of roles in which such artists project themselves will be distinguished in order to establish a common denominator that underlies their actions. Thus, if social inequities are emerging as a defining feature of the urban environment, this fact is also visibly translated into artistic projects that target urban public space.

The second part of the paper focuses on how the perception of the city has evolved from the 1990s to the present. Beyond the built environment and public spheres that define the basis of urban public space, cities are beginning to be recognized as complex structures interconnected by trans-local and global networks of flows. Articulating itself as an emerging field, global urbanism proposes the need for practical and theoretical investigation of new methods to combat existing hierarchical relationships and to (re)create sustainable contexts in order to shape new urban futures. In this context, current artistic research has the potential to offer new ways of understanding the urban, articulating inclusive and sustainable perspectives, beyond the limits of current Western models.

In the third part of the paper, due to the wide range of themes and approaches that can result from exploring the relationship between artistic research and the urban environment in the context of global urbanism, it is necessary to structure this relationship with the help of an open theoretical tool. This will aim to capture the way in which artistic research relates to the urban environment, which it approaches in order to create an initial theoretical framework on the basis of which the specific intentions and strategies of these approaches can be identified and analysed.

Artistic intervention understood as a reflection on the condition of urban public space

Since 1990 and up to the present, referring to both the West and Eastern Europe, it can be considered that the relationship between art in the urban environment and the public spheres that make up society is articulated through initiatives that aim to identify, represent and mediate conflicts, interrogate and challenge dominant discourses, social inequities and explore issues related to global or cross-border crisis situations. Thus, the character of artistic interventions in urban socio-spatial configurations is becoming increasingly diverse, evolving organically and encompassing manifestations that vary from the duration of the intervention to the number and type of actors involved and the thematic areas they address. Likewise, the concrete media through which

visual art has been articulated and expressed in the last two and a half decades have been multiple, ranging from traditional techniques related to crafts to the gesturality and presence of the human body and to works belonging to hybrid disciplines that incorporate elements from various scientific fields, such as biology, mathematics, architecture or that of new technologies. Moreover, and perhaps this is the most important factor shaping the relationship between visual arts and the urban environment, multiple hypostases or roles are gradually taking shape in which artists project themselves, consciously or not, through the interventions they propose in the urban environment in which they choose to operate.

They can become disruptive agents in the context of everyday life, often through seemingly jovial and spontaneous interventions that hide complex motivations. An example in this sense can be the project “366 Liberation Rituals” (2008-2009) carried out by Igor Grubić. It materialized in the form of several “micro-political actions and interventions”³ carried out in Croatian public space through which the artist aimed to confront the passivity of individuals in the urban environment and to infiltrate a “virus into the existing order of things”⁴. Grubić stated that his attempt to address the problems of the society in which he lives directly in the public space, beyond the protected environment of the artistic sphere, was met with responses that ranged from attitudes of solidarity and support to disapproving remarks and threats⁵. From the perspective of the political and social theory of “agonism” formulated by Chantal Mouffe, if there is a conflict-type consensus between the involved actors⁶, such interventions in the public space have the potential to lay the foundations for debate-focused approaches that create new opportunities for the development and evolution of society's public spheres.

Other artists are turning to social work initiatives, such as the art group WochenKlausur. For example, through their work “Shelter for Women suffering from Drug Addiction”, they were able to facilitate the establishment of a shelter for sex workers addicted to psychoactive substances in Zurich. The project included the organization of informal dialogues, held during a series of boat trips on Lake Zurich, in which the artists and women targeted by the intervention participated, along with almost 60 representatives from the public administration, local communities of journalists and activists, police chiefs and

³ Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, “Disobedient”, in Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača (editors) (2009). *Igor Grubić: 366 liberation rituals*, DeLVe | Institute for Duration, Location and Variables and Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, p. 25.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Igor Grubić, *366 Reasons*, in Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača (Eds.) (2009), *Igor Grubić: 366 liberation rituals*, DeLVe | Institute for Duration, Location and Variables and Galerija Miroslav Kraljević Zagreb, p. 41.

⁶ Chantal Mouffe (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, Verso, London and New York, p. XII.

medical experts⁷. As a result of these efforts, the shelter was funded by public funds and was able to operate until 2001. For artists such as those in the WochenKlausur collective, the creative act materializes through socio-political relations and the new contexts they manage to generate⁸. Based on dialogic and collaborative artistic practices, such initiatives developed in an ascending hierarchical system can determine and support changes in the existing social fabric.

There are initiatives through which artists investigate and interrogate certain fragments of the existing urban image, which reflect various phenomena that influence or characterize the condition of a society, such as the crime rate, discrimination, social inequalities, pollution, uncontrolled expansion of the built environment, consumerism, etc. Within the interdisciplinary project "Moszkva Tér (Gravitacio) / Moscow Square (Gravitation)" carried out in Budapest in 2003, the artist Ágnes Eperjesi aimed to reflect on the way in which the urban environment becomes a support for the aggression of advertising images through the work "Advertisement-Free Zone". As part of it, all the billboards in Moszkva Square were supposed to be completely covered, turning into monochromatic surfaces. However, due to limited funds, Eperjesi reconfigured the format of the artistic intervention, choosing to draw the attention of the receiving public to the fact that they themselves become advertising agents in the urban space by the simple fact that they often use bags and satchels bearing the logos of various companies. The artist, together with her assistants, asked passers-by in Moszkva Square questions such as: "How much commission do you receive for displaying a bag with the logo of this company?"⁹ and offered them the opportunity to "hide" the advertising messages they carried with them in monochromatic blue nets. Without aiming to decisively change the attitude of an entire society, Eperjesi aimed to highlight the fact that those who wear such logos in the urban environment become unpaid employees of the companies they involuntarily promote¹⁰.

Some artists choose to bring projects that explore urban memory into public space and address the possibility of identifying and mediating counter-histories. Within the project "Public Space Bucharest/Public Art Bucharest" 2007, coordinated by Raluca Voinea and curated by Marius Babias and Sabine

⁷ Wochen Klausur, *Shelter for Women suffering from Drug Addiction*, in *WochenKlausur*, URL: <https://wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4> (accessed on 21.10.2024).

⁸ Grant H. Kester (2004). *Conversation Pieces*, University of California, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, pp. 1-3.

⁹ Hedvig Turai (2003). *Special Section Focus: Public Art in Hungary*, in "Artmargins", no page numbers. URL: <https://artmargins.com/special-section-focus-public-art-in-hungary/> (accessed on 18.10.2024).

¹⁰ Ágnes Eperjesi (2003). *Advertisement-Free Zone*, no page numbers. URL: <http://www.eperjesi.hu/protest/reklammentes-ovezet-advertisement-free-zone?id=11> (accessed on 18.10.2024).

Hentzsch, artist Dan Perjovschi proposes the performance intervention “Monument (History/Hysteria 2)”, through which, over the course of a week, for a few hours each day, he evokes the mining riots of the early 1990s in Bucharest. Thus, a miner and a “hooligan” (intellectual/student) remain next to each other in University Square in various positions that evoke attitudes ranging from confrontation to consensus. The intervention materializes as “an allegory of the present social body, trapped in its recent history as in purgatory and awaiting the writing of this history from an impartial perspective”¹¹.

Sociologist Saara Liinamaa proposes the concept of “artist as urban researcher”, understood as a rhetorical figure that can both bring together the various roles that artists have assumed in practices targeting the urban environment, and propose “alternative models for approaching the complexity of urban life.”¹² As the theorist states, one of the common elements underlying these artistic actions in public space is represented by “the recognition that urbanization represents a dramatic concentration of everyday inequalities. This is, ultimately, the urban problem.”¹³ From this point of view, a complementary perspective emerges as important, which focuses not only on how the artistic environment has developed in relation to the urban environment in the last thirty-five years, but also on how, in the same time interval, the perception of urban space has evolved.

The structure of the urban environment in the context of global urbanism

During the 1990s, once Jürgen Habermas's “Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit” was translated into English, the propagation of the notion of “public sphere” had a significant impact on the public art sector in the American and Western European space. From Habermas’s perspective, the phrase designates a space of social life in which individuals can meet to exchange opinions and ideas in order to identify societal problems. Through free debates, they can reach a common agreement and have influence on the steps in the political environment. Even if the public sphere proposed by Habermas is utopian in nature, the debates that his work has determined have allowed the exploration of this notion and the development of notions such as “counter-

¹¹ Raluca Voinea (2011). *Punctul zero al sferei publice în București* [Point zero of the public sphere in Bucharest], “ARTA”, no. 1, p. 24.

¹² Saara Liinamaa (2014). *The Artist as Urban Researcher*, in Michael Darroch and Janine Marchessault (Eds.), *Cartographies of Place. Navigating the Urban*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, London, p. 92.

¹³ Saara Liinamaa (2014). *Contemporary Art’s ‘Urban Question’ and Practices of Experimentation*, in “Third Text”, vol. 28, no. 6, p. 536.

publics”¹⁴, “counter-discourse”¹⁵ or “counter-public sphere”¹⁶. This new semantic field, along with the notion of built urban framework, is at the basis of the concept of public space, perceived as an organic form of physical and discursive manifestation of society in a democratic environment.

Beyond this fundamental bipartite structure of urban public space, made up of the built environment of the city and its multiple public spheres, the city also develops on other levels. Especially with the transition to the new millennium, these begin to be identified and explored theoretically and practically by specialists in fields such as urban planning, geography, anthropology, sociology, architecture, visual arts, etc. In this context, the city is no longer read as a singular territory, but begins to be described as part of trans-local or planetary networks, whose influences are superimposed on the particular local context.

Such a perspective is developed by theorist Ash Amin, who describes five new spaces that are crystallizing and developing at the urban level. These are represented by the “spatial radiation”, which includes virtual and non-virtual communication networks, the “intensification of the global circulation of goods and people”, which includes various supply chains, migration, tourism or asylum, the “world of affects and attachment”, created by global cultural influences and diasporic connections that exceed the limits of spatial proximity, the “continuous flow of viral, digital, animal and plant life”, understood as a transhuman force spreading everywhere and “new political spaces”, such as virtual public spheres, international organizations, global social movements, or planetary policies¹⁷. The superimposition of these different spatialities of the city over the already existing fabric of the built environment and public spheres, outlines, on the one hand, a trans-human image of urban sociology and, on the other hand, reconfigures the urban everyday as “a place of intersection between topological networks and territorial legacies”¹⁸.

Similarly, theorist Nicholas Whybrow argued in 2011 that “cities should be recognized as a ‘complex of places’, a circulatory nervous system of trans-local flows in which conventional lines of demarcation relating, for example, to nation or ethnicity dissipate or become permeable”¹⁹, thus bringing into discussion diasporic or migrant communities that become part of new ethnic and historical spaces, distinct from their native ones.

¹⁴ Michael Warner (2002). *Publics and Counterpublics*, “Public Culture”, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 73.

¹⁵ Nancy Fraser (1990). *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, “Social Text”, no. 25/26, p. 67.

¹⁶ Rita Felski (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 155.

¹⁷ Ash Amin (2007). *Re-thinking the Urban Social*, “City”, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 102-103.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

¹⁹ Nicholas Whybrow (2010). *Art and the City*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, pp. 33-34.

Erich Sheppard, Helga Leitner and Anant Maringanti draw attention to the fact that cities are interconnected by various flows (people, capital, ideas, goods and policies) that often generate hierarchical relationships that “privilege some places and norms to the detriment of others – (re)producing unequal socio-spatial positionings”²⁰, advocating for an alternative approach to planetary urbanism, beyond the theoretical and practical models developed to date in the Western space.

Such perspectives can be correlated with the current notion of “global urbanism”, which proposes an open and dynamic vision of the various urban configurations currently existing in the world. The political, economic, cultural and ecological coordinates of the urban, beyond trans-local relations, are influenced and often depend on factors that have a global dimension. Studies in the field of global urbanism bring to the forefront theoretical and practical approaches that focus on the urban and its ways of manifestation at a planetary level. Still in the process of formation, they aim to outline concepts and reflections that aim at the (re)production of knowledge in order to address issues such as everyday experience, social inequality, environmental problems, future alternatives of the urban, etc.

Studies associated with this loosely structured field also turn their attention to contemporary artistic thought and practices, and artistic research could offer new perspectives on the relationship between the urban and the global. The discursive potential, roles and typologies of contemporary public art in urban space explore, often in an interdisciplinary manner, both pragmatic themes, such as social inequities or democratic access to culture, and concepts such as the social, economic and political imaginary as alternative ways of creating new realities. Similar themes and desiderata are also found in the field of global urban studies, which emphasize the ability of the urban to be shaped trans-locally and to be continuously (re)activated in the local context, and, implicitly, in its capacity to support a sustainable form of existence beyond the dangers associated with exploitation, repression and climate change²¹.

Ways to relate artistic research to the urban environment

The dynamic relationships that are established between artistic research and urban public space suggest the possibility of developing a still open theoretical tool, through which they can be structured and explored, taking into account the context described by the new ways of understanding cities as relational elements in continuous formation. Thus, starting from the tripartite

²⁰ Eric Sheppard, Helga Leitner and Anant Maringanti (2013). *Provincializing Global Urbanism: A Manifesto*, “Urban Geography”, vol. 34, no. 7, p. 896.

²¹ Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane, *Navigating the Global Urban*, in Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane (editors) (2021). *Global Urbanism. Knowledge, Power and the City*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 10.

structure proposed by Henk Borgdorff to identify the perspectives through which artistic research is carried out (*on, for or in/through art*)²² and taking into account the emerging context of studies in the field of global urbanism, the following structure can be proposed (Fig. 1), which suggests that artistic research can be conducted *about* the city, *by means of* the city, or *for* the city.

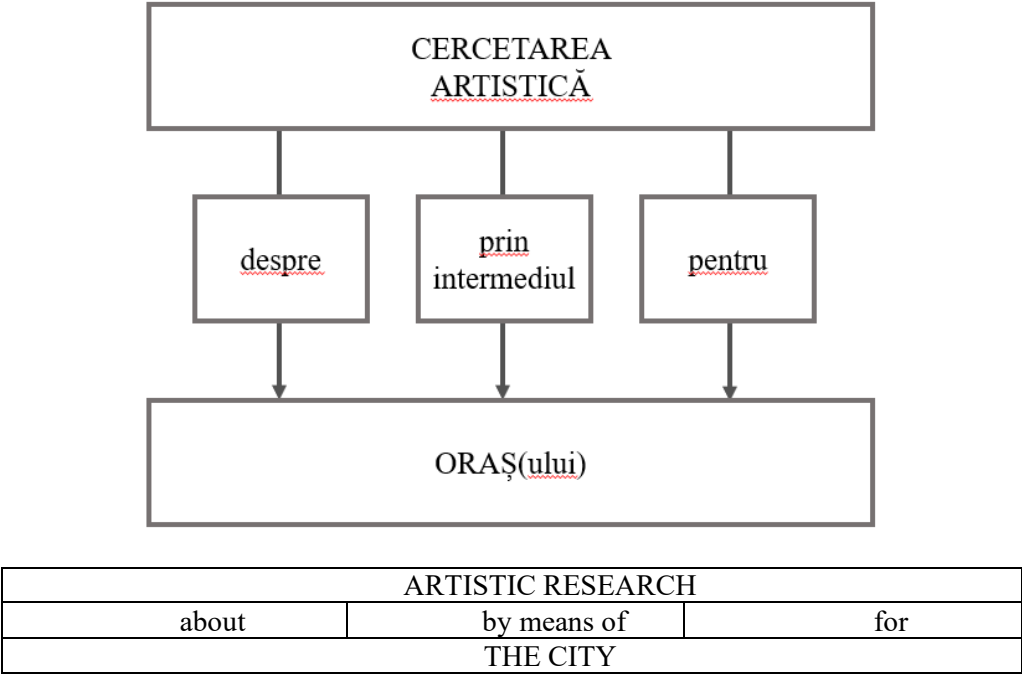


Fig. 1 Structural diagram of the relationship between artistic research and the urban environment

In order to illustrate these relationships, reference will be made to a series of examples related to the territory of Eastern Europe. The motivation for this choice is based on a series of observations by some theorists who signal the need to draw alternative perspectives on the historical, cultural, social, political and economic narratives associated with these territories after 1989, through the prism of how they relate to both the trans-local and the global environment. For example, Martin Müller states that the cities of the Global East (the Middle East, East Asia and the post-socialist East) are reduced to mere footnotes in the field of contemporary global urbanism, both literally and metaphorically, when their

²² Henk Borgdorff (2012). *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*, Leiden University Press, Leiden, pp. 37-39.

existence is only mentioned for the sake of exhaustiveness²³. Müller also suggests that the notion of “Global Easts” can refer to multiple urban spaces considered interstitial or invisible worldwide²⁴, who are marked by a double exclusion – they do not fully belong to either the privileged North or the marginalized South²⁵. The notion of “Global East” should not be understood as a new “label” to describe geographically or historically the “post-socialist” area, even if, at the moment, the former Eastern Bloc seems to be the dominant space described by this phrase²⁶.

Liviu Chelcea, Slavomíra Ferenčuhová and Gruia Bădescu draw attention to the fact that Soviet socialism also had effects on the urbanization of areas outside the Soviet Bloc, so that the urban experience of post-socialism, studied at a local level mainly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, is relevant at the level of global urbanism research²⁷. To support this claim, the authors provide the example of the United States, where federal support for the suburbanization of industry and urban centres in the 1950s was conceived as a civil defence strategy driven by the fear of nuclear attacks²⁸. The authors also draw attention to the way in which “knowledge and theories about socialist and post-socialist cities were produced under specific historical conditions – those of the bipolar world of the Cold War era and through the post-1989 project of transition to liberal democracy and the capitalist market”²⁹, thus suggesting the need to identify and consolidate new perspectives on the recent history of this territory.

Taking into account that the notion of “Global Easts” designates spaces that are both interstitial and relevant in the context of global urbanism and pursuing the opportunity to identify new perspectives and narrative instances related to Eastern Europe, this paper proposes a series of examples related to this territory through which it illustrates the three relationships between artistic research and the urban environment previously identified.

Thus, referring to the artistic research carried out on the city, we will take into account the example of the doctoral research carried out by Tiberiu Teodor-Stanciu at the “George Enescu” National Arts University of Iași, under the coordination of Professor Dr. Monica Pop. Called “Conceptualization and

²³ Martin Müller (2021). *Footnote urbanism: The missing East in (not so) global urbanism*, in Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane (Eds.), *Global Urbanism. Knowledge, Power and the City*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 89

²⁴ Martin Müller (2020). *In search of the Global East: Thinking between North and South*, “Geopolitics”, vol. 25, no. 3, p. 735.

²⁵ Martin Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 738.

²⁶ Liviu Chelcea, Slavomíra Ferenčuhová și Gruia Bădescu (2021). *Globalizing Postsocialist Urbanism*, in Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane (Eds.), *Global Urbanism. Knowledge, Power and the City*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 73.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

implementation of signage systems”, the work was presented in 2020 and focused on signage as a process of urban clarification. In the fifth chapter of the work, the city of Iași is presented as a case study from the perspective of creating and implementing an urban signage strategy. Part of the steps taken in this regard focus on the involvement of “Atelier Spre”, whose founder is Tiberiu Teodor-Stanciu, in a series of initiatives aimed at improving the image of the urban environment. One of these is the "INTERFACES" project, through which the seven thematic tourist routes proposed by the "Iași.travel" team, made up of professors and students of the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of Architecture in the city of Iași, were implemented in the city. It developed on several levels, encompassing a series of concrete interventions in the urban environment, such as the creation of street and information panels, brochures, fixed and mobile advertising roll-ups, flyers, which are associated with the publication of an urban exploration manual and the creation of an interactive map that translates important information about the routes into the online environment. In this example, artistic research about the city is manifested through an approach distributed on several levels that relate to each other, but which are coordinated by research and documentation carried out in the academic environment on the concept of urban signage.

Another example that can illustrate the particularities of artistic research *about* the city can be found in the Serbian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale, curated by Ksenija Samardžija. Artist Aleksandar Denić builds “Exposition Coloniale” in the form of a three-dimensional collage that can be associated both with the fragmented urban image of post-socialist cities and with the anxieties of the related societies. From this point of view, the exhibition evokes neo-colonial and/or auto-colonial attitudes associated with the post-1989 transition period of the Eastern European countries. Through this second example, attention is drawn to the fact that artistic research on the city can also include subjective histories or affective pasts.

The second type of report refers to artistic research carried out *by means of* the city. In this case, the urban environment becomes the framework that supports the research, but the process focuses on artistic gestures or thinking. The secondary plan that the city describes in this context can be social, economic, political, physically built, it can be represented by one or more of the spatialities proposed by Ash Amin and described previously, or by any combination of these elements.

The project “Replaced-Brno” created by Barbora Klímová in 2006 can be seen as an eloquent example of this relationship between artistic research and the city. Klímová reinterprets a series of actions made before 1990 by five Czech artists: Vladimír Havlík, Jiří Kovanda, Karel Miler, Jan Mlčoch, and Petr Štembera. All the performances reinterpreted by Klímová were made in the public space of Czechoslovakia. “Replaced-Brno” has two major directions of

development. The first part of Klímová's approach focused on the reinterpretation of performances as a way of living and experiencing in situ the works that influenced her artistic practice, which she knew only from the materials that documented them³⁰. Thus, the focus is on how the artist perceives the act of reiterating performative gestures made in the past, placing them in a context that has changed over time, both in terms of architecture and urban planning, as well as in terms of socio-political and economic transformations of the Czech space. The second part of the project includes interviews conducted by Klímová with the artists whose performances she chose to reinterpret. Within these, the focus is on analysing and understanding "the intention of these artists and the social and political environment that shaped and defined them"³¹. Through this approach, Klímová states that she aimed to understand not only the motivations behind these interventions, but also how the artists experienced them³². Following the interviews, it became clear that each artist perceived the performative act differently, both through the prism of their own subjectivities and through the reactions of the receiving audience.

A second example illustrating the artistic research carried out *by means of* the city can be found in the International Biennial of Contemporary Art "Periferic 7: Focussing Iași", organized by the Vector Association in 2006. The event took the form of an artistic approach focused on everyday reality, addressing themes related to the socio-political, cultural and historical context of the city. Exploring the relationships that can be established between language, ideology, representation, and public sphere/space, the event mapped the processes of formation and definition of the particular Iași context, addressing, first and foremost, a local audience, thus managing to establish a bridge of contact between the community and the contemporary artistic area³³. "Periferic 7: Focussing Iași" was structured in three different sections: "Social Processes", curated by Marius Babias and Angelika Nollert, "Learning Strategies", curated by Florence Derieux, and "Why Children?" curated by Attila Tordai-S. Within the "Social Processes" section, theorist and philosopher Boris Buden, together with author and filmmaker Hito Steyerl, proposed the work "Mathematics of a

³⁰ Tomáš Pospiszyl (2006). *A replica does not represent merely a copy but part of a dialogue*, in Barbora Klímová (ed.), *Replaced-Brno*, p. 73. URL: <http://animal.ffa.vutbr.cz/~qvklimovab/replacedcat.pdf> (accessed on 10.10.2024)

³¹ Jennifer Helia DeFelice (2018). *Performative meditation and interpretation: Between manual and documentation, between script and record*, dissertation paper, Brno University of Technology, Brno, p. 99.

³² Barbora Klímová, *Barbora Klímová*, in Barbora Klímová (ed.) (2006). *Replaced-Brno*, p. 73. URL: <http://animal.ffa.vutbr.cz/~qvklimovab/replacedcat.pdf> (accessed on 10.10.2024).

³³ Alina Șerban (2006). „A întrupă Iașul. Spații alternative de cunoaștere” (“Embodying Iași. Alternative knowledge spaces”), in Matei Bejenaru, Cătălin Gheorghe (editors, coordinators) and Alexandru Bounegru, Vlad Morariu and Cristian Nae (editors), *Vector – artă și cultură în context* (*Vector – art and culture in context*), no. 2, Vector Association, Iași, pp. 39-40.

Monument”, by means of which they bring to the fore the connections between political power and cultural representation in public space, framing the image offered by the Independence Monument in the park with the same name in Iași in a new context³⁴. The words “Independence is the sum of our historical life. (Mihai Eminescu)” decorate the monument's plinth, and the artists urge the public to meditate on the significance of this message beyond (often subjective) historical narratives, through the prism of the geo-political and economic situation of the present. By associating photographic representations of the Independence Monument with a series of textual elements, through a co-authorial artistic act, Buden and Steyerl interrogate the significance of the idea of individual and country independence, the myths of national identity, and the “autonomous” condition of women in the East European socio-economic context.

The third report proposed in this work is represented by the artistic research carried out *for* the city. In this case, the research focuses from a critical or regenerative perspective on the identification of gaps in the urban environment and pays increased attention to the way in which their representation and/or mediation in public space is managed. As appropriate, the research may aim to propose and even implement different strategies to solve the identified problems.

In the Romanian public space, an approach through which the reclaiming of urban public space is sought through strategies for the reframing of Soviet monuments can be considered as the one initiated by the artist and curator Ioana Ciocan, called “Project 1990”, through which 20 works of contemporary art occupied, one after the other, the pedestal originally dedicated to the statue of Lenin in the Free Press Square in Bucharest. Through this project, which took place between 2010 and 2014, the pedestal was given a new identity, by exploring the theme of “the artist's relationship with totalitarianism and political pressure, of the artistic product meant to support false causes”³⁵, which ends up mediating political messages in certain historical contexts. The first artistic intervention placed on this pedestal was “Ciocan vs. Ulyanov” by Ioana Ciocan, the work being inaugurated on January 26, 2010. A deliberately naive copy of Lenin, executed on a smaller scale, it was made of polystyrene and wire mesh and had the role of drawing attention to the numerous monuments from the communist period that were dismantled and/or completely destroyed. The second work in “Project 1990” was “Replacing Lenin”, made by Andrei Ciubotaru. Reinterpreting the consecrated function of the monument to pay

³⁴ Marius Babias și Angelika Nollert (2006). *Procese sociale* [Social processes], in Marius Babias and Angelika Nollert (eds.), catalogue *Periferic 7: Focussing Iași / Social Processes*, Polirom, Iași, p. 13.

³⁵ Ioana Ciocan (2012). *Proiect 1990*. URL: <https://revistaartaveche.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/proiect-1990/> (accessed on 14.10.2024).

homage or commemorate a person or an event, the artist's proposal places a living monument on Lenin's former pedestal, which aims to create a bridge between the public and contemporary art. This role was taken up by musicians Alexandru Tomescu, Răzvan Suma and Horia Mihail, who together form the "Romanian Piano Trio". Their intervention in public space had a dynamic character, falling within the realm of performative arts, so that the pedestal becomes a stage, and the historical narrative usually proposed by the static monument becomes an active representation in the consciousness of the participants. Also, some of the works of the artists involved in "Project 1990" had critical and ironic attitudes towards the political class of the time ("Hydra", Costin Ioniță; "Red Sharks", Mihai Balko) and towards the bureaucracy specific to public institutions ("a patru", Cristian Răduță). Moreover, some projects choose to treat the period of the communist regime and the one after 1989 comparatively, either from the point of view of the gaps of the capitalist system ("Fresca Eroului Muncitor Capitalist" ("A fresco of the capitalist worker"), Emanuel Borcescu), or from the perspective of collective memory ("Melting", Judith Balko).

The projects "HandGun" by Bogdan Rață and "Where are we?" by Ionuț Barbu bring to the public's attention the dual condition of Romanian society, in search of its own identity, precariously swinging between the post-communist and neoliberal contexts, between the local character and the trends of globalization, between the centre and the periphery. The installation-object "Lenin's Sleep", created by the artist Mihai Zgondoiu, represents a 1:1 scale replica of the monumental statue of Lenin, made of wood, OSB boards and polyplane. The copy mirrors the architectural gesture through which the House of the Free Press (formerly the "House of the Spark") represents, in turn, a replica of the Lomonosov University in Moscow. Zgondoiu states that his artistic gesture lies in the desire to relate to the public, to observe their reactions to Lenin's replica³⁶, now placed next to the base in a horizontal position, with the face painted pink and facing the ground.

Through the "Project 1990" initiative, the artist Ioana Ciocan turns the pedestal of the former Lenin statue from a physical trace of a difficult and painful past into a place dedicated to the interaction between the field of contemporary art and urban public space, implementing a concrete strategy through which collective memory is not forgotten, but reframed and reoriented towards the socio-political context of the present.

³⁶ Mihai Zgondoiu (2011). *Proiect 1990/Somnul lui Lenin/Mihai Zgondoiu (Project 1990/Lenin's sleep/Mihai Zgondoiu)*, interview by Claudia Zidaru, Radio România Actualități, 2011.

URL: https://soundcloud.com/ioana-ciocan/proiect-1990-somnul-lui-lenin?fbclid=IwAR10haKjeWhOmG_1Er5VoVHurH8mZd-haBUc53D4woCV82Un1n4h5LQxvgc (accessed on 14.05.2023).

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, the relationship between visual arts and the urban environment has evolved at a dynamic pace across Europe, encompassing a wide variety of manifestations that address the specific issues of urban public space. Such artistic practices aim to mediate conflicts, challenge dominant discourses and investigate crisis situations, whether global or cross-border. The notion of “artist as urban researcher”, proposed by Saara Liinamaa, materializes as an umbrella term that encompasses the various roles that artists assume when intervening in urban public space, and the point that their approaches seem to have in common is the recognition of the city as a space of social inequities.

In order to establish a starting point in the attempt to better understand the complex nature of the relationships that are formed between the field of visual arts and the urban environment, it was considered necessary to outline a general perspective on how the perception of the urban has evolved from 1990 to the present. Thus, we observe that the urban is today understood as a planetary phenomenon, in which the city becomes a nodal point in a series of political, economic, social and ecological connections on a global scale. Moreover, the city itself is perceived as a sum of multiple spatialities, in which various levels overlap: the built environment, the public spheres, virtual and non-virtual communication networks, global circulation, transhuman flows and new political spaces.

Current artistic practices associated with urban public space are in a continuous process of evolution, (self-)evaluation and restructuring, adapting to the social, economic, (geo)political and environmental context in which they are carried out, while taking into account both the constraints and opportunities dictated by the physical conformation of the public domain, as well as the specific features of the various public spheres of the community to which they are addressed. For this reason, studies in the field of global urbanism are also directed towards artistic research in an attempt to identify new strategies to address the (re)production of knowledge necessary to articulate future alternatives of the urban.

In this new context, the present paper proposes the development of a theoretical tool through which the relationship between urban-focused artistic research and the way it relates to the city can be structured and analysed. Thus, following a series of examples related to the Eastern European space, it is illustrated that artistic research can be carried out about the city, through it, or for the city. This structure is still open and does not claim to be universal. In the course of future efforts, which should take into account the transformations that occur over time in the relationship between artistic research and the urban environment in the dynamic context of global urbanism, it will be possible to establish whether its current form needs to be re-conceived or supplemented.

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Aesthetic dissonances in the local urban context – eclectic spaces and street advertising

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Abstract: This article presents a critical analysis of the contemporary urban visual landscape, focusing on the aesthetic dissonances generated by chaotic eclecticism, invasive advertising, and the stylistic fragmentation of the built environment. Drawing from an artistic research approach based on the *dérive* method, the text explores how urban imagery shapes the everyday perception of the city and contributes to the construction of a collective imaginary. The case study centres on the city of Iași, viewed through the lens of a local resident who maps frequently travelled routes, observing recurring elements that define the visual character of the spaces encountered. These visual dissonances are interpreted not merely as the result of negligent urban planning but as symptoms of complex historical, economic, and cultural processes. They are discussed in relation to the phenomenon of urban kitsch, without being entirely reduced to it, as they also exhibit features tied to a specific morphology inherent to post-communist urban spaces. Street advertising, commercial clichés, and fragmented forms of aestheticisation become markers of an urban aesthetic dominated by simulacra, visual oversaturation, and a constant competition for attention. In this context, the city no longer functions as a coherent and authentic space, but rather as a visual collage in which architectural and cultural landmarks are often overshadowed by aggressive commercial messaging. The article argues for the necessity of an urban development strategy that is more attuned to local identity and visual coherence, highlighting the importance of exploring the urban space as a critical and transformative act – one capable of shaping perception, behaviour, and the emotional connection to a place.

Keywords: visual eclecticism, urban aesthetics, kitsch, street advertising, spatial fragmentation.

1. Introduction

The visual fragmentations of the city are more than just aesthetic shortcomings – they reveal the lack of a coherent vision of urban development. These dissonances are the product of a complex interaction between economic, cultural and political factors, which shape both the organization and the perception of urban space. Moreover, the visual elements that constitute these aesthetic dissonances contribute to the impression of a fragmented, incoherent, eclectic, oversaturated, artificial and, at times, kitsch environment. From a

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subjective perspective, these dissonances could be included in the category of kitsch, but the same degree of subjectivity does not allow for a strict labelling, since they do not fully reflect the characteristics of kitsch, but can be part of the natural morphology of urban space. For this reason, they are analysed as a distinct category, with their own mechanisms of manifestation and influence on urban space.

Invasive advertising, urban clichés and uncontrolled eclecticism not only fragment the aesthetic coherence of the space, but also influence the way in which residents and visitors relate to it. As these dissonances accumulate, they are no longer perceived as exceptions, but become an integral part of the urban landscape. Thus, the identity of the city begins to be associated with these standardized elements that often do not reflect the authentic character of the place, but rather trends imposed by economic factors or superficial urban decisions.

Thus, eclecticism, street advertising and urban clichés become subjects of analysis, as these are the most obvious types of aesthetic dissonance on the route I travel most often in my experience as a city dweller. This observation is not just a subjective study of a personal route, but a relevant example for the entire city and, by extension, for other cities in Romania and even the world.

Inspired by the *derivé* method¹, I believe that this kind of exploration can become a method for the artistic research of space, closely connected to urban psychogeography². The *derivé* allows for direct observation of how visual elements in a city influence the individual's path and perception of public space, and this aspect determines “the importance of exploring space as a critical and transformative act.”³ Urban images, whether harmonious or fragmented, play a significant role in the way we relate to the city, involuntarily orienting our daily experience and the way we interact with the built environment.

Although the *derivé* involves a spontaneous exploration of space, without a pre-established route, we started from the premise that the perception of a place influences not only the spontaneity of the route, but also our psychological and emotional state and attitude towards that space. The city is not just a physical setting that we walk through, but also a set of recurring images that shape our spatial memory and the way we identify and classify places. The dominant visual

¹ *Dérive* (from the French “drifting”) is a concept developed by Guy Debord and the Situationist International in the 1950s that designates a technique of urban exploration through spontaneous movement, without a fixed route, guided by the attractions and ambiance of the space. The purpose of drift is to analyse the influence of the urban environment on behavior and emotions (psychogeography), to challenge the perceptions imposed by the modern city. The practice of drift involves exploring and documenting experiences through subjective maps.

² Psychogeography is the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (organized or not, consciously) on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

³ Dan Acostioaei (2024). *Atitudini performative în arta site-specific* [Performative attitudes in site-specific art], Printheus, Iași, p. 73.

elements in a given space – be they architectural, graphic or related to urban artistic interventions – become landmarks that not only physically guide us, but also contribute to building a collective imaginary of the city. Thus, the urban experience is not neutral, but deeply subjective, conditioned by the repeated encounter with the same images, textures and structures that come to define the way we relate to a place, whether it is familiar or unknown.

That is why I started from a pre-established route, the one I travel most often. Thanks to the Google account's timeline options, which automatically save location history (with the user's consent), I was able to observe, overall, which part of the city I cross most frequently and how this repetition of the route influences me. Thus, I analysed over the course of a year the areas I visited repeatedly, managing to illustrate, with approximation, the weight of these visits and the way I relate to the city from the perspective of my experience as a resident of Iași.

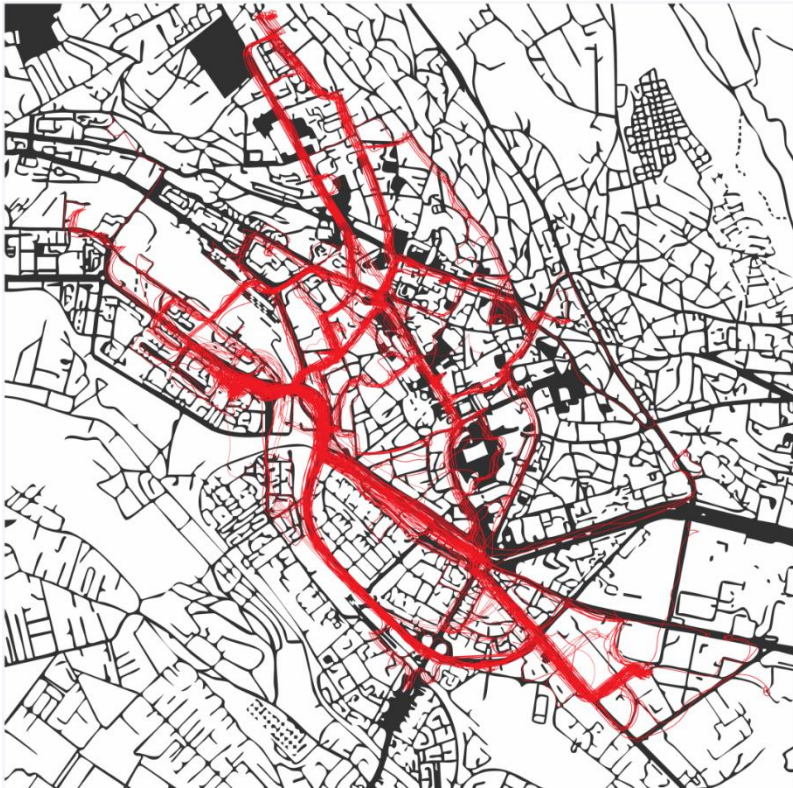


Fig. 1 The route illustrated according to the Google Maps History for 12 months

Based on these observations, I set out to intentionally walk this route, transforming it into a conscious exploration of urban space. The goal was to observe what aesthetic aspects predominate in these areas, how they influence the

perception of the city, and what type of visual images define the everyday space of those who cross it daily. In this process, I focused on both architectural elements and artistic interventions, as well as ephemeral visual elements, such as the urban orientation system, advertisements, the type of commercial spaces and the image associated with them.

So, after the first walk through the space, I noticed a prevalence of eclecticism in the overall image, referring both to the architecture and to the uneven chromatic palette of the blocks and to the crowding of advertising images that influence the appearance of the space not only visually, but also psychologically and ideologically. The contrast between the architectural elements and the uncontrolled overlapping of advertisements contribute to a fragmented perception of the urban landscape, in which the aesthetics seem to be dominated by a chaotic mix of styles and messages.

This analysis of the urban visual landscape cannot be separated from the historical and economic context that has shaped cities in their distinctive ways. While the exploration of advertising messages reveals subtle structures of influence on collective perception, the architectural and social legacy that has led to the current urban aesthetic must also be taken into account. Thus, the eclectic appearance of Eastern European cities is not only the result of recent trends, but also of a complex historical process, marked by economic transitions, ideological changes and successive reinterpretations of public space.

Although the trend towards universalizing urban images prevails in contemporary cities, there is, however, a local specificity that remains evident in the comparison between Eastern and Western Europe. Thus, the kitsch of Western cities, largely influenced and propagated by tourism, is different from the kitsch of the East, which, due to the historical context and accumulated economic gaps, has a special specificity.

Cultural, geographical and economic factors underlie this aesthetic differentiation, but the emphasis on individualization, characteristic of capitalism remains the same and is determined by acceleration, exaggeration, hedonism and simulacrum, perpetuating the condition of the “pressed individual”. This fact forms a very sharp contrast between the desires of the individual and the urban environment. The desires of the individual are synchronized with the globalized culture due to the compression of distances through the means of communication. In contrast, the local urban space fails to keep up with these trends, which leads to fragmented development, because local regulations are not sufficiently innovative nor adapted to the needs of communities, the values promoted at a global level not being uniformly absorbed from an aesthetic point of view.

This contrast is observed due to the historical legacy and the lack of adaptation to current needs. In Romania, the irregularities in urban space have their origin in the past, when the enthusiasm of the communist authority for socialist constructions prevailed, which modified the appearance of cities through the

“main piece” - the apartment block - multiplied endlessly⁴. Initially, the construction of apartment buildings was limited to the outskirts of the city, and then spread to historic urban centres.

The need for reconstruction after the 1977 earthquake encouraged the authorities to completely change the urban image of both the capital (the first architectural project being materialized in the People's House)⁵, and other cities throughout the country.⁶ The urban phenomenon was also amplified by forced urbanization, for the economic benefit of the country, but to the detriment of the identity of the spaces, since it was envisaged to settle people in "semi-urban" localities with the same dominant constructivist aesthetic. The abolition of villages was a sufficient reason to trigger international concerns that this action would mean a violation of civil and political rights⁷ and would cause irreparable damage to aspects of the cultural heritage that European countries share in common.

Thus, urban aesthetics came to promote “socialist realist” values, materialized in “blocks of sinister buildings, uniform in their greyness”⁸, which have become deeply anachronistic in relation to contemporary life.

It is a natural process that values valid for some generations are no longer current for future generations, but if these are viewed through the prism of denial and not through the prism of historical values, then the problem of the anachronistic factor comes in. The subjectivity towards this phenomenon lies in the degree of nostalgia of the collective memory.

⁴ Lucian Boia (2016). *Strania Istorie a comunismului românesc (și nefericitele ei consecințe)* [The strange history of Romanian Communism (and its unfortunate consequences)], Editura Humanitas, București, passim.

⁵ “The trigger for the widespread demolitions was the 1977 earthquake, which devastated many cities, primarily the capital, and especially its central area. A thought struck Ceaușescu: if we're going to rebuild, then let's do it all the way. Let's build a new Bucharest in place of the old one!... First of all, a new Center had to be built. For this purpose, the choice fell on the most picturesque area of old Bucharest, the only one with a somewhat more accidental relief (Arsenal Hill), dotted with traditional houses in the most diverse styles, with gardens, churches and monasteries... Over 9,000 buildings were razed, on an area of 450 hectares. What's more, the hills and the irregularities of the relief disappeared: everything was flattened! In the middle rose the gigantic People's House (now the Palace of Parliament)...” *Ibidem*, p. 150.

⁶ Dinu C. Giurescu (2016), documented this phenomenon, noting that “29 cities were demolished to a proportion of 85-90% and rebuilt with standard buildings (a few before 1977, but the vast majority after that year) and another 37 cities, starting with Bucharest, were affected to a somewhat smaller extent, but large enough to disfigure them.”, *apud* Lucian Boia (2016), *Strania istorie a comunismului românesc și nefericitele ei consecințe* [The strange history of Romanian Communism (and its unfortunate consequences)], Editura Humanitas, București, p. 57.

⁷ “The British Government fears that the destruction of half of the existing villages in Romania and the forcible relocation of their inhabitants, as envisaged, will lead to serious violations of fundamental human rights” (letter from Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to his Romanian counterpart). *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁸ Titu Popescu (2013). *Estetica urbană* [Urban Aesthetics], Editura Ecou Transilvan, Cluj Napoca, p. 6.

When things are devalued as soon as they are taken out of historical context, then the problem of kitsch comes in. Herman Istvan mentions that “Historically, authentic values are not devalued at all, only conventional values, namely those based on conventional lies.”⁹ The anachronistic phenomenon of the inherited communist urban image in relation to contemporary values and trends is represented by the eclecticism that occurs at the level of urban planning and aestheticisation¹⁰.

Urban eclecticism, in this context, has a pejorative connotation, being the result of unsystematic and stylistically incoherent interventions that lead to visual fragmentation and loss of spatial harmony. This type of eclecticism is distinct from intentional architectural eclecticism, which became a style in its own right in the 19th century, along with academic trends in architecture.

Intentional architectural eclecticism involved the controlled selection and combination of elements from various historical styles (Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, etc.), with the aim of creating a unified and refined aesthetic, subordinated to rigorous compositional principles. This phenomenon manifested itself not only in architecture, but also in other artistic fields, such as decorative art, interior design and even painting, where eclecticism was used to harmonize diverse influences into a coherent whole.

Unlike this directed eclecticism, the one encountered in the contemporary urban landscape of former communist countries is chaotic, marked by overlapping styles, materials and colours without a guiding principle. The result is an aesthetic amalgam in which the coexistence of old and new elements is not achieved through harmonious integration, but through an accidental juxtaposition, determined by economic factors, the lack of a coherent urban vision and unstructured consumer trends. In this sense, eclecticism becomes a symptom of the visual and identity degradation of urban space, losing the aesthetic and conceptual values it had in the past.

However, eclecticism in the pejorative sense does not automatically overlap with the phenomenon of kitsch, but rather generates an incoherent overall image, which creates the sensation of kitsch or imposes a perception on it. The lack of visual unity and fragmentary aestheticisation produce an artificial atmosphere, which can be perceived as kitsch, but this aspect remains subjective and

⁹ Herman Istvan (1973). *Kitsch-ul, fenomen al pseudoartei* [Kitch, a phenomenon of pseudoart], Editura Politică, București, p. 77.

¹⁰ The aspect of eclecticism in urban aestheticisation oscillates between the concepts discussed by Jean Baudrillard in “The System of Objects”, namely “arrangement” and “decoration”. Although these two concepts refer to the interior space, the meaning of “decoration”, which represents that excess of significance of the surrounding objects, can be adapted to the urban space and would translate into artificial decorations for consumption and tourism, being aesthetic symbols lacking a real function. Likewise, the concept of “arrangement”, which is based on order and reason, reflecting a functional order, adapted to the urban environment, can be interpreted as a functional logic that responds to the needs of the inhabitants.

interpretable. On the one hand, there is a democratic position towards its inevitability, which claims that contemporary urban eclecticism is an inevitable reality of the process of development and diversification of cities, an expression of stylistic freedom¹¹. On the other hand, there is a radical position, such as that expressed by Gustavo Giovannoni, who considers chaotic eclecticism to be a degrading factor for urban identity, advocating for a clear and unitary intervention in the aestheticisation of the city¹².

Thus, urban eclecticism, with its many facets, becomes a bridge between the deliberate expressions of the past and modern interventions to compensate for urban monotony.

This transition from an intentional to a chaotic aesthetic highlights the paradox in which interventions in public spaces not only reflect cultural and historical influences, but can also create a perception of *kitsch*. Specifically, sequential interventions in the East fit into this framework, but without reducing the complexity of cultural and historical phenomena to a simple generalization.

This phenomenon is explained by the sequential interventions in public spaces in Eastern European cities, to compensate for the grey monotony of the cities, and this practice does nothing but continue the tradition of *kitsch*¹³.



Fig. 2 Aesthetic dissonances caused by the fragmented renovation of residential buildings

¹¹ “Beyond the generalized aesthetics of historical imitation, eclecticism paradoxically hides an inventiveness and freedom of creation, becoming the most consistent and systematic expression of modernity.” M. Criticos (2018), *Modernitatea arhitecturală și modelul istoric* [Architectural modernity and the historical model], in *Confluente arhitecturale* [Architectural confluences], Ozalid, București, p. 91.

¹² “If one persists in making the core of the old city center the new center of the city, it is condemned to destruction, immediately or slowly. Although immediate destruction seems to be a harsh solution, it would at least respond to the logic of modernization; on the other hand, the slow death and gradual substitution of the old streets and buildings brings with it, by breaking up the stages of realization, such an inorganicity of the routes and the implementation of the urban program that it makes it ineffective, never being able to result in a truly modern urban system.”, Gustavo Giovannoni (2016), *Chestiunea centrelor vechi* [The issue of old centres], in *Orașele vechi și noul urbanism* [Old cities and new urban planning], Gemma, București, p. 165.

¹³ Liviu Alexa, *Marele kitsch al orașelor meschine* [The great kitch of mean cities], 2014, retrieved from: <https://ziardecluj.ro/marele-kitsch-al-meschinelor-orase/>

Kitsch, especially urban *kitsch*, is a consequence of these geographically contextualized historical dynamics. A good example is the small towns of Eastern Europe, which are strewn with urban clichés (benches in all the parks, colourful pansies, Christmas decorations present even in summer, etc.), due to errors in the system responsible for planning and territorial development. The fact that the post-communist period was marked by urban chaos determined by the re-actualization of values and ideological reorientation, the fact that the field of urban planning did not benefit from the same experiences of innovation as in the West, the fact that the nostalgia of the collective memory for the "beauty" of the past is still alive and the fact that the degree of culture in terms of aesthetic "taste" is different have kept the specificity of the urban image at a limited level. Basically, the visual clutter created by the distinct elements, which do not necessarily have the *kitsch* label, is what creates the sensation of a "*kitsch* space", and the eclectic disharmony of the city amplifies the experience of urban chaos.

The lack of clear urban control mechanisms and the absence of an integrated vision for the development of public space have led to a fragmented accumulation of styles, materials and functions that coexist without an ordering principle. Thus, *kitschification* is no longer just a stage of exploration, but becomes an endemic phenomenon, transforming the urban landscape into a dissonant collage, where architectural and advertising elements come into visual conflict.

Aggressive illuminated signs coexist with deteriorated historic facades, modernist structures are squeezed between chaotically constructed buildings, and urban furniture reflects an accumulation of improvised solutions rather than an urban design thought out for the community. In this context, urban *kitsch* becomes not only a symptom of transition, but a new visual norm, marked by aesthetic dissonances and a fragmentation that reflects, in turn, the social and economic contradictions of the local space. Blocks of flats renovated in a diverse range of colors do not respect a chromatic coherence, thus emphasizing the feeling of visual disorder. Each individual intervention on the facades, from asymmetrically closed balconies to the chaotic replacement of windows and the fragmented painting of the block, by which you can identify the recently renovated apartments, contributes to a lack of uniformity that makes the city seem like an unstructured collage of styles and materials.

In the absence of clear regulations and an urban strategy that prioritizes visual harmony, the dominant principle of urban planning becomes the idea of "standing out". This phenomenon is not specific only to housing, but also extends to office buildings, where extravagant geometries are brutally juxtaposed with historical architecture, without a natural transition between old and new. The urban landscape thus becomes a field of visual competition, where each architectural or commercial element tries to attract attention, without considering the coherence of the ensemble.



Fig. 3 Eclectic urban area caused by architectural interventions

The same logic applies to small commercial spaces – kiosks and makeshift shops, each with its own aesthetic that ignores any effort to integrate into the general urban landscape. These are often painted in garish colours, dressed in oversized billboards, or covered in chaotically pasted posters, which intensifies the feeling of visual suffocation.

Urban advertising further exacerbates this visual chaos. Banners, LED screens and oversized billboards not only invade public space, but also compete aggressively with architecture, cancelling out any possibility of aesthetic balance. This agglomeration of visual messages superimposed on an already fragmented urban landscape causes the city to lose its unitary identity, becoming a mosaic of disparate styles and contradictory visual stimuli.

Thus, without a coherent urban development strategy, the city's aesthetics are abandoned in favour of an uncontrolled eclecticism, in which each intervention – be it architectural, commercial or advertising – is guided more by the desire to capture immediate attention than by the need for harmonious integration into the urban landscape.

This lack of coherence is amplified by the effects of globalization, which introduce standardized architectural and aesthetic models, often without a filter adapted to the local specifics. Instead of favouring a dialogue between old and new, between traditional and modern, these external influences chaotically overlap the existing urban structure, emphasizing visual fragmentation and the blurring of

local identity. Instead of a coherent integration of global influences, cities become a mixture of disparate architectural styles, in which local identity is eroded by imported and standardized aesthetics.

At the same time, “copy-paste” urbanism accentuates the sense of discontinuity. In the rush to modernization, many Eastern European cities adopt architectural models and aesthetics without critical filtering, applying solutions designed for other geographical and cultural contexts. Thus, the city develops through disparate additions, without a clear direction, which creates a fragmented image, where styles enter into competition instead of dialogue.

Another dimension of globalization is visual consumerism, reflected in the chaotic aesthetics of commercial spaces. International retail chains and shopping malls impose their own visual language, breaking any connection with the pre-existing urban aesthetic. Instead of commercial spaces being integrated into a coherent framework, they become islands of globalization, where the only rule is to attract attention through garish colours, exaggerated shapes and aggressive branding.

Globalized tourism adds another pressure on the city, causing superficial aesthetic remodelling. Historic areas are transformed into commercial settings, where old facades are artificially restored, and public spaces are adapted for visitors rather than for city residents. This process generates a simulated urban image, where authenticity is replaced by well-packaged kitsch for tourist consumption.

In this context, kitsch imposed by the authorities becomes a form of aesthetics that not only ignores diversity, but can also suppress the authenticity of the urban experience. It is no longer just a matter of “bad taste,” but a choice that can limit the expressiveness and life of the community, reducing public space to a uniform and impersonal form.

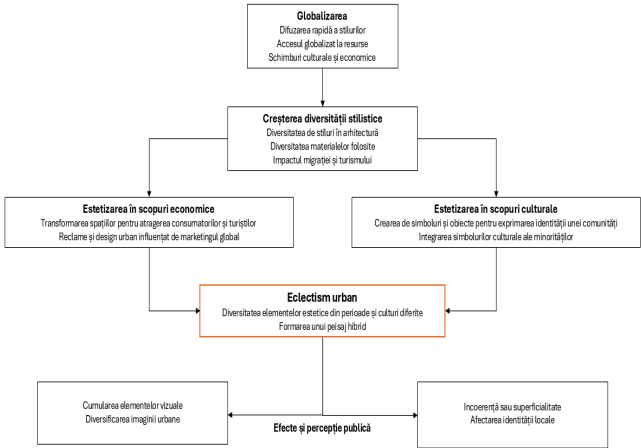


Fig. 4 The scheme represents the impact of globalization on urban stylistic diversification, highlighting how aestheticization for economic and cultural purposes generates an urban eclecticism marked by visual contrast and aesthetic fragmentation.

	Globalisation Quick diffusion of styles Globalised access to resources Cultural and economic exchange	
	An increase in stylistic diversity Diversity of styles in architecture Diversity of materials used Impact of migration and tourism	
Aestheticisation for economic purposes Transforming spaces in order to attract consumers and tourists Ads and urban design influenced by global marketing		Aestheticisation for cultural purposes Creating symbols and objects to express a community's identity Integrating cultural symbols of minorities
	Urban eclecticism A diversity of aesthetic elements from various periods and cultures The formation of a hybrid landscape	
The accumulation of visual elements The diversification of the urban image	Effects and public perception:	Incoherence or superficiality The local identity being affected

Fig. 4 bis The scheme represents the impact of globalization on urban stylistic diversification, highlighting how aestheticization for economic and cultural purposes generates an urban eclecticism marked by visual contrast and aesthetic fragmentation.

Herman Istvan emphasises that what was understood as “old kitsch” was representative of urban culture, shaped by local ideologies and characterized by intense patriotism, in which external influences were limited to a few “exotic” elements intended to introduce fragments of foreign culture¹⁴.

¹⁴ “Older *kitsch* exploited the real requirement of the appropriation of a new culture, offering instead an accelerated pseudo-appropriation “by the minute”. This was true of urban culture, because of which *kitsch* acquired a somewhat local patriotic character. From "Budapest, Budapest how wonderful you are" to the glorification of the Victorian era, the narrow local patriotic character of *kitsch* had been disturbed at most by exoticism.” Herman Istvan (1973). *Kitsch-ul, fenomen al pseudoartei* [Kitch, a phenomenon of pseudoart], Editura Politică, București, p. 227.

In contrast, the contemporary individual, constantly exposed to the global offer and accustomed to it, exceeds the “limits of local patriotism”¹⁵ and adopts universal aesthetic standards. Thus, it subordinates itself to the trends dictated by global fashion, which define its lifestyle, ephemeral values and visual preferences. In this way, local consumer culture is no longer an organic process, but is rapidly aligning itself to the universal scale, gradually eliminating regional particularities and the authenticity of urban spaces.

In the contemporary urban landscape, visual competition is an inevitable reality. Every architectural, commercial or cultural element fights to attract attention and impose itself in the dynamics of the city. This competition, however, is exponentially amplified by omnipresent advertising, which not only intensifies the sensation of visual chaos, but also profoundly redefines the way in which residents perceive and experience urban space.

Billboards, digital screens and large-scale advertisements overlap the city's architectural identity, transforming the streets into a fragmented visual spectacle dominated by commercial imperatives¹⁶. Thus, urban aesthetics are shaped not only by the functional requirements of the city, but also by aggressive marketing strategies, which transform public space into a battlefield for visibility “through quantity and competition of ‘who has the biggest mesh’”¹⁷.

Through semiosis, street advertisements exploit cultural symbols, colours, and recognizable images, instantly capturing the attention of viewers. Moreover, advertising representation is not limited to simply reflecting reality, but shapes it, inducing associations between products and idealized lifestyles. The physical, social, and psychological context in which advertising messages are placed influences their meaning and impact¹⁸, consolidating their status as mechanisms of influence and manipulation of consumption. Thus, the city becomes not only a place of social interaction, but also an environment saturated with commercial stimuli, in which the boundaries between necessity and desire are often dictated by advertising discourse.

Although street advertising is designed to attract attention and stimulate consumption, its effects on urban aesthetics are often invasive and chaotic, contributing to the degradation of the city's visual image. Billboards, oversized banners, haphazardly pasted posters and large-scale illuminated screens create a

¹⁵ Herman Istvan (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁶ “The city has become a temple of consumerism, reduced to the role of support for the great ‘icons’ interceding between our pockets and those who sell us illusions and objects.” Augustin Ioan, *Publicitatea în oraș* [Advertising in the city], in *Inquest for Igloo* by Viorica Buică, November, 2005, retrieved from: <https://www.igloo.ro/publicitatea-in-oras/>

¹⁷ Mihai Ghyka (2005). *Publicitatea în oraș* [Advertising in the city], in *Inquest for Igloo* by Viorica Buică, November; retrieved from: <https://www.igloo.ro/publicitatea-in-oras/>

¹⁸ Thomas A. Sebeok (2002). *Semnele: o introducere în semiotică* [*Signs: an introduction to semiotics*], translated by Sorin Mărculescu, Editura Humanitas, București, passim.

fragmented and overloaded visual landscape, in which architectural balance and urban identity are often sacrificed in favour of aggressive commercial display¹⁹.

	FORMAL ADVERTISING	INFORMAL ADVERTISING	UNCONVENTIONAL ADVERTISING
	(LED ads, oversaturated billboards)	(Low aesthetic quality posters, copies of ads)	(Guerrilla marketing, sponsored graffiti and stencil work)
Iconic image	Oversaturated visual hyper-reality; strong colours and intermittent images to draw attention	Improvised visual fragments created without any aesthetic preoccupation; it turns urban furniture and walls into poster areas for low level economy	Aggressive, contrasting or ironic images; they appear in the urban landscape under the pretext of art; instruments of marketing in disguise
Context sign (index)	Placed in busy areas; creates a chaotic landscape; reflects the financial status of the area; encourages consumerism and monopolises the attention of the public.	Its massive presence in bus stops and building entrance areas signals the lack of city planning regulations; contributes to a disorganised, ephemeral aesthetics.	Its placement in unexpected areas causes a shock reaction or the involuntary acceptance of the disguised commercial message.
Conventional sign (symbol)	Creates an idealised city image; leads to a forced homogenisation of the public space.	Indicates a precarious urban landscape; the economic survival and informality is more important than the city aesthetics.	Visually reinterprets urban culture; indicates a commercial branding tool.

Fig. 5 Semiotic classification of advertising in the public space

One of the most obvious negative effects of street advertising is visual overcrowding. Streets, buildings and urban infrastructure are covered with advertisements that do not respect stylistic coherence, generating a chaotic and suffocating visual environment. In many cases, large-scale advertising hides historic facades, alters the perspective of the built space and eliminates architectural landmarks, reducing the city to a succession of aggressive commercial messages. A city suffocated by aggressive advertising can become

¹⁹ “Massive sculptural ensembles, ideologically imprinted mural art with more or less happy aesthetic achievements have today been replaced by a huge amount of advertising.” Marilena Preda Sânc, Ioan Stendl, *Arta în spațiul public* [Art in the public space], Cetatea de Scaun, București, 2007, p. 24.

an indistinct terrain, devoid of personality, in which the defining elements of the urban landscape are blurred by the excessive overlap of commercial messages.

Another negative effect is the symbolic privatization of public space, becoming an environment dominated by commercial interests. Instead of the city being a place of authentic social interactions, art and cultural identity, it is transformed into a battlefield for commercial visibility. Instead of community messages or artistic interventions that humanize the space, building facades and transit spaces are monopolized by advertisements that impose a one-way discourse based on consumption.

But referring to the local reality, I notice that the advertising in the urban space of Iași does not just represent an additional visual layer to the urban landscape, an aesthetic dissonance in its context, but functions as a semiotic code that reflects the socio-economic structure of the city.

Street advertising can be viewed beyond its decorative “quality”²⁰ and psychologically, it contributes to shaping the collective perception of public space, generating a fragmented landscape, where the contrast between consumerist messages and the daily realities of local communities becomes evident. Through a semiotic analysis, it can be observed how advertising not only encourages certain consumption patterns, but also influences the way residents interact with the city, determining an urban experience dominated by commercial stimuli.

Trying to understand this impact on a visual, behavioural and psychological level, I analysed urban space through the lens of the drift method, mapping areas with excessive advertising and how they influenced my perception and experience of living in the city. In this process of subjectively mapping the space, I was influenced by the message displayed by Google Maps regarding saving the timeline, which emphasizes that user paths can influence estimates of the impact of ads²¹. This detail led me to look at the city not just as an ensemble of routes and points of interest, but as a territory encoded by commercial messages, where the perception of places is inevitably shaped by advertising discourse.

²⁰ “How can I say that a mesh is terrible when it's spread out over an even more terrible building? At least the mesh has some bright colors that, possibly, liven up the grayness of the dormitory neighborhoods.” Costi Rogozanu (2005). *Publicitatea în oraș (Advertising in the city)*, in *Inquest for Igloo* by Viorica Buică, November, retrieved from: <https://www.igloo.ro/publicitatea-in-oras/>

²¹ “Users who use History and visit businesses can influence their estimates of the impact of their ads based on history data” (text from the message displayed in the Google Maps app when saving history is enabled, informing users about how their data may influence ad impact estimates.).

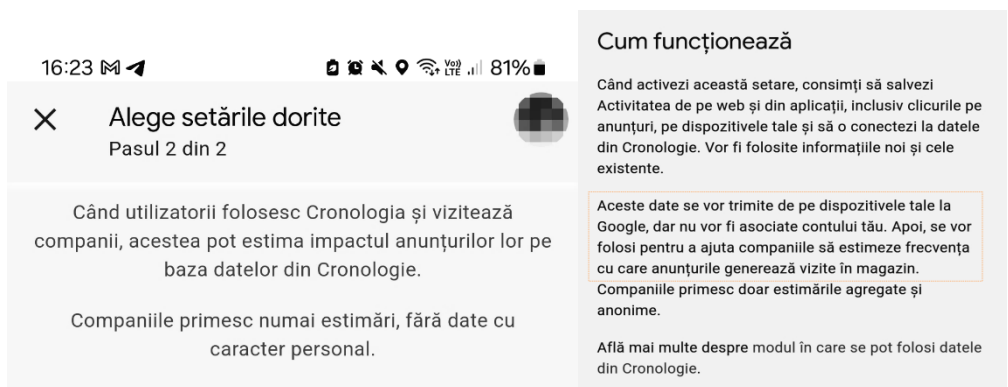


Fig. 6 Message displayed in the Google Maps app when saving history is enabled, informing users about how their data may influence ad impact estimates

Thus, I tried to synthesize the dominant concepts in each area based on advertising, observing how certain types of advertisements and commercial images are repeated according to the specifics of the space. In particular, I noted the recurrence of a commercial pattern on the ground floor of the blocks, structured around a repetitive succession of pharmacies, pawnshops and gambling halls, with occasional variations given by cafes or barbershops. This uniform distribution of commercial functions in the peripheral neighbourhoods not only reflects a specific economic reality, but also contributes to a standardized perception of the city, influencing the interaction of residents with the built environment and urban dynamics. Moreover, it accentuates the contrast of the urban image between the central and peripheral areas of the city.

COMMERCIAL SPACES	Iconic image	Context sign (index)	Conventional sign (symbol)
Commercial advertising in neighbourhood on the edge of town	A repetitive succession of pharmacies, pawn shops, and gambling halls	The way in which these commercial spaces are grouped together reflects the economic precariousness of the area	It suggests a financially vulnerable community, where survival is more important than aspirational consumption
Commercial advertising in neighbourhood in the centre	A variety of premium ads, including international brands, restaurants, coffee shops, cultural events, luxury shops	The way these spaces are placed creates a sophisticated urban landscape, associated with modern lifestyles and an exclusive consumption	It sends a message of prosperity and cosmopolitan life, suggesting that people belong to a higher social stratum and have access to refined consumption experiences

Fig. 7 Semiotic perspective on the advertising contrast between central and peripheral neighborhoods

This suffocating chain of commercial functions, where pharmacies, pawn shops and gambling halls are obsessively repeated, reflects not only a lack of urban diversity, but also a local economy focused on the social vulnerabilities of the community. In many neighbourhoods, these commercial spaces are not the result of a planning thought out for the needs of the inhabitants, but rather a consequence of a demand dictated by financial precariousness and dependency.

The chaotic distribution of commercial functions not only highlights the economic differences between the city areas, but also deeply affects the aesthetic coherence of the urban space. In the central districts of Iași, an attempt at visual unification is observed by using a neutral chromaticity – the commercial ground floors being predominantly black. This strategy seems, at first glance, logical for protecting the architectural image of the central area. Through such a regulation, the aim is for the commercial spaces on the ground floors of historical buildings not to compete visually with the period details and to create a coherent ensemble, subordinate to the heritage. In theory, this measure should discipline the visual chaos, temper the aggressiveness of street advertising and provide a discreet elegance to the urban centre.

However, in practice, this strategy proves insufficient and ineffective and fails to maintain a coherent visual order. The diversity of shop windows, the differences in height of the commercial spaces, the variations in the materials used and the multitude of typographic styles compete visually in a fragmented urban landscape. In addition, this so-called aestheticisation is disrupted by the green shop windows of the pharmacies, which break the chromatic monotony, and by the excessive presence of individual advertisements, each brand trying to visually dominate the space to the detriment of a harmonious whole. Instead of the spontaneous diversity, characteristic of a city in constant motion, an artificial contrast has been created between the forced sobriety of the facades and the uncontrolled exuberance of the advertisements. The lack of strict application of the rules and the absence of coherent control over the materials used, the dimensions and the positioning of the advertising elements transform this attempt at visual ordering into a superficial convention, without the desired effect.

In the peripheral neighbourhoods, the urban aesthetic is further assaulted by a chromatic explosion and a suffocating visual redundancy. Here, the ground floors of the blocks are dominated by red, yellow and green – the typical colours of pawnshops, gambling halls and pharmacies, each trying to attract attention through strident contrasts. This visual invasion is amplified by the practice of hyper-repetition of the store name, which appears four or five times on the same window, so that it is visible from every angle. Instead of contributing to a coherent landscape, this overlay of aggressive graphic elements creates an effect of visual overload, where each commercial unit competes for visibility to the detriment of an urban harmony.

Unlike central commercial spaces, where visual identity control is attempted, the urban periphery becomes a terrain of chromatic and typographic chaos, reflecting not only the absence of a coherent urban vision, but also an economy of survival, in which aesthetics are sacrificed in favour of immediate commercial visibility. This phenomenon of excessive branding is repeated both inside and outside public transport or on the entire facade of the building²².

This increasingly common phenomenon in the contemporary urban landscape – wrapping buildings in advertising – is a practice that has become almost a commercial tradition in cities like Iași. Whether it is old blocks of flats at busy intersections or the facades of buildings undergoing renovation, these surfaces are transformed into gigantic billboards, where commercial messages completely cover the architecture, canceling out any trace of visual identity of the city (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 Buildings covered in huge ads

²² “You ride the bus like you're inside a plastic bag and you can't see anything because it's completely wrapped in the advertisement for a beer, two beers. You can't see anything from the apartment either, because the facade of the interwar block of flats is entirely covered by the thighs of the perfect diva retouched in Photoshop. You can't even see the red dot that says that the block of flats and the advertisement will fall at the first earthquake, so everything is fine, people can live in peace further on. The people of Bucharest no longer see Bucharest.” Dan Perjovschi, *Publicitatea în oraș* [Advertising in the city], in *Inquest for Igloo* by Viorica Buică, November, 2005; retrieved from: <https://www.igloo.ro/publicitatea-in-oras/>

This trend deeply affects the urban image, contributing to the aesthetic disorganization of public space. First of all, the architectural identity of the city is completely erased, the buildings becoming simple supports for oversized advertisements. The architectural details, which could define the urban character, disappear under the layer of advertising meshes, and the city becomes a transient environment, in which the commercial function takes precedence over the aesthetic one (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 Buildings covered in huge ads

The hugeness of commercial messages produces an aggressive visual competition, in which each advertisement tries to dominate the urban landscape, modifying the visual hierarchy of the city, covering architectural landmarks and eliminating any aesthetic coherence. Unlike a city where architecture and public space are defining elements, cities suffocated by advertising become chaotic visual agglomerations, where urban perception is dominated by omnipresent commercial stimuli.

This visual fragmentation is accentuated by the lack of coherent regulations imposing limits on the size and placement of advertisements on buildings. In many cases, these huge banners are placed on dilapidated buildings, under the pretext of masking facades in an advanced state of deterioration. However, instead of this solution being temporary, it becomes permanent, as owners prefer to continue the economic exploitation of the facades by renting the space for advertising. Thus, the buildings are not renovated, so instead of contributing to the aestheticisation of the city, this phenomenon reinforces the image of a disorganized and transient urban landscape.

From an economic point of view, this practice is supported by the high profitability of outdoor advertising. In the absence of clear restrictions, facades become exploitable commercial resources, and building owners – be they tenants' associations, private companies or real estate developers – rent them out for considerable sums. Thus, immediate economic interest prevails over a long-term urban vision, and the aesthetics of the city are sacrificed in favour of commercial visibility.

Another reason for the perpetuation of this phenomenon is the social acceptance of invasive advertising. As this type of advertising has become ubiquitous, city dwellers have become accustomed to it, perceiving it as a “normal” part of the urban landscape. This habit reduces public pressure on the administration to implement strict regulations and, implicitly, allows the phenomenon to continue without significant opposition.

Finally, the impact on the perception of public space is profound. Instead of having a direct visual relationship with the city's architecture, passers-by are forced to interact with an environment dominated by commercial “over-messages”, in which advertising becomes more important than the built space. The city is reduced to a commercial support, and people become passive spectators of an artificial landscape, lacking aesthetic coherence.

In this context, the connection between the phenomenon of invasive street advertising and the phenomenon of *kitsch* is made by the profound aesthetic impact on the urban image, as the advertising chaos actively participates in the *kitschification* of the city. From the oversaturated shop windows in the suburbs, to the buildings completely covered in advertisements and the fragmented commercial landscape, the city becomes a chaotic visual collage, where each element competes for the attention of passers-by, without an aesthetic or functional logic.

Kitsch, by definition, represents a visual excess, an overload of stimuli that, instead of creating a harmonious whole, generates dissonance and artificiality. The same thing happens in the urban space affected by the aggressive nature of advertising. Thus, we can register urban oversaturation, artificiality or the aesthetics of the simulacrum, by imitating Western aesthetic models without a coherent integration²³. This makes the urban aesthetic, as a whole, become fragmented, artificial and redundant, sacrificing the city's identity in favour of a ubiquitous *kitsch*.

Conclusion

Ultimately, contemporary urban aesthetics remains marked by visual fragmentation, invasive advertising and chaotic eclecticism, reflecting a

²³ The attempt to impose a “refined” image through the black floors of central shops, inspired by the aesthetics of Western retail, but disrupted by architectural differences, uneven storefronts and discordant visual inserts.

profound crisis of identity and coherence in the organization of public space. The city is increasingly becoming an unbalanced visual collage, in which architectural, commercial and symbolic elements coexist without a common guiding thread. In the absence of an integrated urban vision, urban kitsch is no longer a simple expression of “bad taste”, but a consequence of the social, economic and cultural dynamics of transition. These dissonances affect not only the image of the city, but also the emotional and perceptual relationship of the inhabitants with the space they cross daily. The analysis of these phenomena, through subjective methods such as drift, highlights the need for critical reflection on the way we build, aestheticize and experience the city. In a context in which the urban landscape is becoming increasingly artificial and standardized, the revaluation of coherence, local identity and authentic expressiveness becomes an aesthetic and social urgency.

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The bazaar as an unconventional exhibition space. A case study

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the bazaar as an unconventional exhibition space and to analyse its artistic and cultural potential, starting from a concrete instance, that of the Iași Flea Market. The research is based on the theory of design research developed by Christopher Frayling and uses visual methodologies, such as documentary photography, art installation and semi-structured interviews to investigate how informal spaces such as bazaars can be artistically reinterpreted and integrated into contemporary discourses about collective memory and cultural identities. Drawing on the works of theorists and artists such as Ernst Van Alphen, Nicolas Bourriaud and Walter Benjamin, it will be analysed how the bazaar functions as a living archive, in which objects circulate not only in economic logic, but also in cultural and affective ones. The sociological background of the case study also demonstrates how these spaces reflect and challenge social norms and hierarchies, while the concept of kitsch is examined in the context of class dynamics. The research results highlight the bazaar as a space of spontaneous interaction, of negotiation of aesthetic and affective values, proposing new ways of artistic presentation and archiving outside formal institutions. The article thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the bazaar as a complex cultural and artistic phenomenon and suggests innovative directions for interdisciplinary artistic practices, relevant both for academic research and for contemporary exhibition practice.

Keywords: bazaar, documentary photography, archive, collective memory, unconventional exhibition space.

Introduction

This research explores the bazaar as an unconventional exhibition space, starting from the particular case of the Iași flea market. Starting from a long personal experience with this space, the work analyses how the bazaar transcends its commercial function, becoming a complex artistic and cultural environment. In the midst of the visual chaos and seemingly banal objects, dynamic social relations and valuable fragments of collective memory crystallize that deserve to be documented and artistically reinterpreted. The “Memories Fair” project was a starting point for this visual and conceptual exploration, and this doctoral research aims to extend this approach through an

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interdisciplinary methodology that combines documentary photography, semi-structured interviews and artistic installations.

The research uses a theoretical framework that integrates concepts from cultural memory, archiving theory and relational aesthetics to re-evaluate spaces considered marginal from an artistic and exhibition point of view. Thus, the bazaar becomes a living archive, a laboratory of social and artistic experimentation, in which the spontaneous interaction between people and objects offers innovative perspectives on contemporary social and cultural dynamics. Through this approach, the work contributes to the development of new exhibition and methodological models, highlighting the potential of art to transform and use everyday spaces in contexts of reflection and creation.

Review / topic contextualisation

Following my participation in the conference *Culture and Creation. Doctoral Research as a Cultural Act*, held within the Doctoral School of the “George Enescu” National University of Arts in Iași, 2024, I presented the directions of my doctoral research, which investigates the ways in which contemporary artistic practices can transform an informal space like the bazaar into a place of cultural reflection and visual expression. The main theme consists of exploring the bazaar and especially flea markets in terms of a living archive of collective memory, a hybrid territory where objects, people and their stories meet in a continuous aesthetic and affective flow, not just as a place where commercial transactions take place.

My research approach aims to document this type of space through documentary photography, artistic installation and visual methods that activate cultural memory. The idea of working with objects and their stories – in the context of a bazaar – emerged after several personal visits and projects, but also from direct contact with this living social and cultural phenomenon. In contrast to institutionalised exhibition spaces (museums, galleries), the bazaar offers a spontaneous, chaotic, but deeply human medium of expression, in which affective and aesthetic values are constantly negotiated. This article starts from the premise that such spaces deserve not only to be documented, but also to be artistically reinterpreted, becoming sources of contemporary creation and reflection.

The bazaar as an artistic space: Unconventional exhibition forms and photographic practices of documentation and archiving

The bazaar as a cultural element.

The present research is based on a set of concepts and theories that provide a framework for understanding the bazaar not only as a commercial space, but especially as a field of cultural and artistic manifestation. The bazaar therefore becomes not only a commercial space, but also a complex cultural phenomenon

that reflects and influences the identities and social dynamics of the communities in which it is integrated. In this sense, the bazaar is understood as a microcosm of cultural activity, a space in which various social, economic and cultural practices intersect and mutually influence each other.

Defining the concept of bazaar from anthropological and cultural perspectives, I emphasize not only its economic role, but also its social and cultural importance. Bazaars are described as spaces of cultural exchange, where cultural and social diversity is expressed. They represent meeting points between the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, the local and the global, creating a unique environment in which cultural identities and influences are negotiated and reinterpreted. They also function as dynamic mirrors of society, adapting to changing times and highlighting the interactions between sellers and buyers, the negotiation of prices and exchanges, as well as the way in which these interactions reflect and reinforce cultural and social norms, including hierarchies related to class, gender or ethnicity. Thus, the bazaar recodes social dynamics in a visible and palpable form, becoming a scene of daily processes of asserting and contesting power.

A collective archive

Similar to the collective archive, the bazaar collects different objects, each of which is accompanied by a unique story and cultural imprint. Unlike a traditional archive, which is based on a formal structure and a process of preserving materials according to strict rules, the bazaar describes itself as an alternative, proposing an ephemeral and formally unstructured exhibition, thus allowing for the formation of direct and fluid interactions between people and objects. The logic of the bazaar therefore facilitates a transfer of knowledge and memory in a more organic and unconventional manner.

Ernst Van Alphen, in his book *Productive Archiving*, argues that archiving is not only a form of storage, but also an activity of collecting and recalling knowledge, independent of institutions. He identifies three major problems in archival science: decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion from the archive, the loss of uniqueness of archived materials, and the tendency of archiving to become a restrictive form of cataloguing. The notion of “archive” can be understood literally, as an institution of preservation, or figuratively, influenced by Michel Foucault, as a set of practices and rules that determine what knowledge is retained or omitted. The archive not only preserves information, but also defines what is worthy of preservation and what is excluded, thus establishing the boundaries of accepted knowledge¹.

¹ Ernst van Alphen (2003). *“Productive Archiving” Artistic Strategies, Future Memories, and Fluid Identities*, Valiz, Amsterdam.

A sociology case study

The bazaar is a vital space of economic and social interaction, essential for sociological studies. Different from modern markets and uniformed shopping centers, the bazaar stands out as a dynamic social ecosystem. Here, not only goods are exchanged, but also stories, cultural practices, and identities are transferred. The bazaar serves as a meeting point between tradition and modernity, reflecting and challenging social norms and structures. It provides an ideal setting for analysing social dynamics, power relations, and the formation of cultural identities.

From an anthropological and sociological perspective, Michel de Certeau's theories² about everyday practices provides a useful framework for understanding how seemingly banal spaces are activated through anonymous use and gestures. Thus, in the bazaar, every interaction – negotiation, gaze, touch – participates in the continuous rewriting of space.

The sociological study of the bazaar highlights the interaction between the informal economy and local culture. In contrast to the formal economy, which is governed by strict regulations and standardized codes, the informal economy of the bazaar is based on networks of trust, reciprocity, and local knowledge. This not only demonstrates the economic resilience of the bazaar, but also illustrates how it preserves traditions and culturally resists imposed globalization and modernity³. Thus, the bazaar is not just a place of trade, but also a space of cultural continuity and change, where the past and the present meet in a distinctive way.

The bazaar, therefore, emerges as a valuable resource for the study of contemporary sociological phenomena, offering a dynamic perspective on the interaction between cultural and economic spaces and the way in which they shape social and cultural identities. Due to its inclusive and fluid character, the bazaar facilitates the observation of the negotiation and redefinition of identities, power relations and the formation of collective memory, thus offering deep insights into the social complexities of everyday life.

Social class and kitsch

Within the bazaar, the concept of “kitsch” intersects with social class structures and becomes a cultural and aesthetic symbol. It often reflects the preferences, aspirations, and identities of different social groups. Kitsch is frequently described as an object or art form seen as tasteless or overly ornate, and is associated with the efforts of the middle and lower classes to imitate the styles of the elite. Within the bazaar, kitsch objects are widespread and function

² Michel de Certeau (1984). *The practice of everyday life*, University of California Press, California.

³ Aleida Assmann (2011). *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

as means through which different social groups manifest their belonging, aspirations, and cultural flexibility.

For many groups present in the bazaar, kitsch serves as an accessible means of simulating and embodying, at least symbolically, the tastes and styles associated with the upper classes. Kitsch objects, such as colourful souvenirs, exaggerated decorations, or replicas of luxury items, are used by buyers to simulate a higher social status. This preference for objects of questionable cultural or aesthetic value, as Pierre Bourdieu indicates, can be seen as a strategy by which the middle and lower classes negotiate their social positions and identities in a context in which access to “cultivated taste” is restricted. In the bazaar, kitsch objects are used by individuals and groups to construct their identities and assert their position in the social hierarchy. Buyers choose these objects not only for their aesthetic value, but also for the symbolic meanings they confer, thus manifesting aspirations for social mobility. These selections not only reflect personal tastes, but also collective strategies to position themselves in the social structure and differentiate themselves from other groups.

Kitsch in the bazaar can serve as a social differentiator. Those who reject it on the grounds of its lack of refinement or quality often position themselves as having superior tastes, associated with the dominant cultural class. Thus, the bazaar becomes a symbolic terrain of dispute, where social groups reaffirm and contest their status through the objects traded or purchased. According to Bourdieu, aesthetic tastes are not simple individual preferences, but reflect learned social practices and predispositions, linked to the social position of individuals. In this context, for the working class and emerging middle classes, kitsch can represent an authentic expression of identity and community belonging, while for cultural elites, it is often seen as an indicator of a lack of refinement and aesthetic education.

The bazaar space as a space for the cultural circulation of objects

The bazaar is a vital space of cultural circulation, where not only physical goods are exchanged, but also ideas, symbols and identities. Unlike modern commercial markets, which are rigidly organized and standardized, the bazaar functions as an open, fluid and inclusive space, where objects are subject to multiple cultural uses and interpretations. These objects are not only commercial goods, but also bearers of history, memory and cultural meaning, being part of a process of cultural reinterpretation and reintegration. Nicolas Bourriaud considers the flea market as a “formal model” of contemporary artistic practices due to its capacity to culturally recycle objects, recontextualising them and transforming them into artefacts with new meanings. Thus, the bazaar becomes a space of cultural transformation, where the meanings of objects are constantly negotiated and re-evaluated. This dynamic makes the bazaar an essential place for exploring the relationships between consumption, identity and cultural

memory. The objects in the bazaar, signs of cultural diversity, connect different traditions and identities, creating a cultural dialogue that reflects the dynamics of globalization and the process of mutual cultural enrichment.

The bazaar can be considered an example of “relational aesthetics”, a place where human interactions and cultural exchanges are aesthetically appreciated. It is not only a space for economic transaction, but also a field of cultural experimentation, where artists and visitors actively participate in re-signifying objects and creating new forms of cultural relating. Thus, the bazaar becomes a laboratory for artistic and social experimentation, in a way similar to Nicolas Bourriaud’s description of the flea market, where the boundaries between art and everyday life are often fluid and blurred⁴.

At the same time, when we discuss the physical goods traded, the fascination of the antique collector is a complex phenomenon that illustrates the desire to recover and preserve fragments of the past, giving them new life and meaning. Walter Benjamin explores in his essay *On the Concept of History* the ways in which old objects can function as portals to other eras, establishing an intimate connection between the collector and material history. Walter Benjamin believed that these objects possess a unique “aura” that charges them with aesthetic and emotional value that goes beyond their usefulness. Collecting, in his vision, becomes an act of recovering history and restoring cultural memory. Collectors are drawn to objects not only for their connection to the past, but also for the sensory and intellectual experience they offer, contrary to the rapidity of the modern world. In the bazaar, collectors transform items into personal relics, each piece having the potential to reveal forgotten stories and inspire reflections on the past. Thus, the bazaar becomes a living archive of material history, where collectors contribute to the formation of a collective cultural identity and the preservation of social memory.

From the perspective of trading physical goods, the presence of a phenomenon of the fascination of the antique collector is highlighted, which illustrates the desire to recover and preserve fragments of the past. Walter Benjamin, in the same essay *On the Concept of History*, describes the function of old objects to create links with other eras and how they, through their unique “aura”, go beyond simple utility, contributing to the recovery of history and the restoration of cultural memory⁵.

Thus, the bazaar, as a space of cultural circulation of objects, represents a unique setting for social and cultural interaction. Objects here are constantly recontextualised and reinterpreted within a process of cultural negotiation. This dynamic makes it a crucial place for the study of cultural circulation in the

⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud (2007). *Estetica relaționară și Postproducție (Relational aesthetics and postproduction)*, Translated by Cristian Nae, Idea Design & Print, Cluj-Napoca.

⁵ Benjamin Walter (1999). *Excavating and Memory*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

contemporary global context, highlighting the importance of diversity and the exchange of ideas and objects in cultural and social interactions.

Methodologies of the project

The methodology of this research is visual, artistic and reflexive, built on direct interaction with the space, objects and people who give life to the bazaar. Starting from an in-depth visual documentation, the approach proposes an understanding of the bazaar not through statistical data or impersonal observations, but also through a direct and participatory involvement, in which the artist researcher becomes at the same time observer, collector, archivist and curator.

Contemporary artistic research requires continuous transformation, and the creative process must go beyond simple technical execution or the spontaneous expression of ideas. Any significant artistic project involves a rigorous research process that includes analysing the subject from historical, social, and cultural perspectives, using analytical and experimental methods. The artist, in his role as researcher, must explore and test various methods of representing and conceptualizing his theme, in order to ensure a clear and innovative approach.

Henk Borgdorff⁶ argues that artistic research supports the creative process, while also contributing to the expansion of knowledge in the field of the arts, offering new perspectives on the transformation of experiences into relevant visual forms. Research thus becomes essential for any large-scale artistic project, creating a framework for critical reflection and a deeper understanding of the interactions between artist, audience and cultural context. Without this process of investigation and analysis, the risk of producing a superficial or irrelevant artistic work increases considerably.

The central method of the project is documentary photography, used not only as a form of representation, but as a means of visual reflection on the spontaneous aesthetics and micro-narratives of the bazaar space. This is complemented by semi-structured interviews with vendors, collectors and visitors, which contribute to building an archive of voices and stories. Such artistic practice not only reflects reality, but also creates new ways of understanding the world, and this fact is described in studies in the field of artistic research, which conclude that creative exploration can lead to the development of methodological alternatives that would not have been accessible strictly through traditional research. According to the specialized literature, artistic research “helps to articulate our capacity to discover new ways of shaping

⁶ Henk Borgdorff (2012). *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Leiden University Press, Leiden.

consciousness and to design alternative research methods capable of generating economic, cultural and social capital”⁷.

Another important element is the collection of objects with affective, symbolic or formal value, which are subsequently recontextualised within an artistic installation. This becomes the space where memory, affect and aesthetics meet in the form of an ephemeral, accessible and participatory museum.

Archiving and documentation are now central elements in contemporary artistic practices, underlining an increased attention paid to memory, history and identity. Contemporary artists do not limit themselves to collecting and preserving materials, but reinterpret and recontextualise them, thus offering new perspectives on the past and the present. This approach metamorphoses archives from simple storage places into essential environments for the analysis and rediscovery of cultural memory. Sara Callahan⁸ highlights the idea that the phenomenon of archival art transforms archives into fluid and versatile structures, influencing historical and social discourses.

In the context of a bazaar, this aestheticisation of archives can take the form of an artistic installation that presents found objects in a way that highlights their visual and tactile qualities. An artist could arrange these objects in an exhibition, emphasizing how they function as fragments of collective memory and reflect the social interactions in this space. Thus, the bazaar becomes not only a place of economic exchange, but also a living exhibition space, where the past and the present intersect through art.

Many artists have used archives and objects as a source of inspiration, and among them Fred Wilson stands out, who exhibited his work “Mining the Museum” at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in 1992⁹ – a work that represented a turning point in the world of art and museology. By reinterpreting existing collections, Wilson highlighted the marginalized stories of African-American and Indigenous communities, using subtle arrangements and provocative labels to highlight the absence or distorted representation of these groups in official history. This exhibition provoked a profound reassessment of the role of museums, showing that they do not have a neutral position towards historical narratives, but reflect dominant perspectives and dynamics. Through his innovative approach, Wilson paved the way for a more conscious cultural critique, questioning how history is presented and who controls it.

⁷ Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt (2007). *Practice as Research – Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, London.

⁸ Sara Callahan (2022). *Art + Archive: Understanding the Archival Turn in Contemporary Art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

⁹ Wilson Fred (2017). *BmoreArt*, retrieved from: <https://bmoreart.com/2017/05/how-mining-the-museum-changed-the-art-world.html> (accessed on 20 March 2025).

Another important artist to mention is Christian Boltanski, with the installation called “Personnes”¹⁰, exhibited at the Grand Palais in Paris in 2010 – a profound meditation on memory, death and the fragility of human existence. The work consists of a vast arrangement of old clothes, laid out on the ground and illuminated by bright lights, which evoke images of victims of the Holocaust or other human tragedies. The sounds of heartbeats, a recurring element in Boltanski’s work, add an emotional and intimate dimension, transforming the space into a collective memorial. By using everyday objects such as clothes, the artist emphasizes the universality of loss and how each object can become a relic of an individual life, forgotten or neglected.

Conclusion

The proposed research seeks to ultimately achieve an artistic and conceptual re-evaluation of the bazaar as a space for visual reflection, affective circulation and alternative exposure. Through this project, I wish to demonstrate that the bazaar is not just a place of economic transactions, but a hybrid territory where collective memory, material culture and social dynamics intersect in a form of living archive. Through photographic documentation, object collection, interviews and artistic installation, I seek to explore the potential of these spaces to become participatory environments, in which the public is a co-author in the activation of memory and meaning.

I seek for this project to be part of a contemporary dialogue with current theoretical directions and artistic practices based on artistic archiving, relational aesthetics and visual anthropology, proposing a critical approach to memory in informal spaces. Treated as an ephemeral museum, the bazaar becomes a terrain for the reconstruction of personal and collective narratives and for the reassessment of how memory can be exhibited, transmitted and contested outside of official institutions.

In conclusion, this artistic research will seek to demonstrate that marginal spaces such as the bazaar can become sources of critical reflection and creative expression, offering new exhibition, documentation and relational models. Finally, the contribution proposes new visual-artistic methodologies applicable both to other cultural contexts and in demonstrating that the artistic process can itself become a form of research, capable of generating knowledge, investigating cultural themes and offering new perspectives on reality through visual means.

¹⁰ Sanyal K. Sunanda (2023). *Christian Boltanski, Personnes*, in “Smarthistory”, retrieved from: <https://smarthistory.org/christian-boltanski-personnes-2010/> (accessed on 20 March 2025)

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The anti-user: between author and user

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Abstract: The dependency that artistic productions have on one form or another of technology can be argued, especially in recent times, under the hypothesis that, because visual arts no longer necessitate the use of exclusively dedicated technologies, the author of artistic productions can present themselves as an anti-user. By borrowing different technologies, but not necessarily adhering to their original functions, the author can, through their manipulation, unveil the mechanics of the technologies used for their own new aesthetic and conceptual purposes, creating what we commonly known today as new media.

Keywords: artefication, interface, technology, mediator, user, new media.

Introduction

To begin with, we could say that artistic production is a process dependent on some form of technology. Whether we are talking about the improvised bone tubes used to spray paint in the Cueva de las Manos, or the latest generation of compressed air paint guns, in artistic production we would find two things necessary: technology, that is, knowledge of the processes and methods of possible processing (“technology”¹), and the instruments within it (the apparatus necessary to execute the aforementioned processes). Of course, it is important to note that there are artistic practices that do not have an object-type finality², although they can (but not necessarily) acquire a certain materiality through the objects of their documentation. Even if we abstract from the materiality of documentation and look at an artistic practice that is as material as possible, which would use, for example, spoken language, we can argue, as it has been argued before, that even language is a technology³, an organic technology that uses the tools of one's own anatomy (vocal cords, throat, mouth and nasal cavities).

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¹ Ion Coteanu and Lucreția Mareș (2009). *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* [The Romanian language dictionary], Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București.

² In this case, we are talking not so much about *processes of artistic production* as about the *production of artistic processes*.

³ Because it would involve the knowledge of the processes and methods of processing sound.

However, returning to artistic practices whose objective purpose is not secondary, but constitutes the author's intention, we can introduce the relatively recent issue of the so-called commodification, or de-professionalization, of artistic production processes. If in traditional practices the production of the art object was conditioned by accessible mechanical-manual technologies known to their few initiated owners, starting with the industrial revolution, the accessibility of the techniques and materials necessary for artistic production acquired a quasi-democratic dimension. For example, the metal paint tube, which replaced the cave methods of storing oil-based paints, facilitated the production, transportation and large-scale marketing of prefabricated paints. This democratization of the materials and knowledge necessary for their processing can be said to have subsequently led to a commodification of art, or, more precisely, of production processes with artistic ambitions.

A concrete example that can present both this de-professionalization and a criticism of it could be the “Do It Yourself” series signed by Andy Warhol⁴. Basically, in this series, Warhol reconstructed on canvas, on a larger scale, a series of pictorial images taken from commercial paint-by-number kits. The final form of the works in the series does not represent the terminus of the recreational exercise invited by the original kits, as the respective processes are symbolically arrested and thus have the potential to betray the amateurism, mechanical character and accessibility of this new type of pictorial process. At the same time, it would be difficult to say that Warhol used a technology in a different way; it would be more appropriate to consider that Warhol reproduced the image of the respective technology, in his own terms.

This would be the point where we could introduce the two opposing identities announced in the title, namely, the identity of the user and that of the author, or artist. In order not to dissipate the arguments of this article in a direction that would target marketing strategies, let's look at the proposed terms as a whole. The term “user” has become indispensable in the information and communication technology industry, but it is also used in material industries, such as product design⁵. At the same time, there is a whole science to building

⁴ When we talk about the adoption of new technologies in artistic production processes, Warhol can be considered a technologist in the true sense of the word.

⁵ “In product design, the term *user*, and other abbreviations and extensions of it, have been fundamental in defining the relationship between people and tech. The former uses. The latter is used.” Adam Lefton (2024). *As a Designer, I Refuse to Call People Users*, “Medium”, 15 January (accessed January 2024), retrieved from: <https://medium.com/s/user-friendly/why-im-done-saying-user-user-experience-and-ux-in-2019-4fd6c6b7de23>. At the same time, it is curious that due to the large number of industries that have moved partially or entirely into the digital space, the term *user* almost overlaps with a previously fetishized term, namely *consumer* (moving from a consumerist to a user-ist society). A possible explanation for this change could be that the use of certain products or services (usually digital) does not necessarily imply their complete consumption, as they have a potential, for lack of a better word, immeasurable.

the most optimal user experience⁶. In fact, one of the many definitions of the previous term states: “All aspects of how people use an interactive product: how it feels in their hands, how well they understand how it works, how they feel while using it, how well it serves its purposes, and how well it integrates into the overall context in which they use it.”⁷

The latter term may have its origins in “... the ancient science of ergonomics (*ἐργον*, meaning work, and *νόμος*, meaning natural laws) - which attempted to establish a set of principles that made work more efficient and convenient...”⁸ Today, we are talking about products that make their use more efficient and intuitive, not necessarily for work purposes, often having a recreational purpose. Returning to Warhol's series, if we look at the function of the well-known paint-by-number kits, it becomes quite obvious that their (commercial) purpose was to facilitate any user's experience of (assisted) pictorial processes by offering an organized, logical and intuitive system. Each number had a corresponding colour, and the space in which it had to be applied was already predetermined by the delimiting outline. This can be compared to what is called today an “interface” when we talk about operating systems. In the case of both pictorial processes and personal computers, before contemporary interfaces, a more than minimal knowledge of the *modus operandi* was required, the necessary operative language not being accessible only by the force of intuition⁹. Whether we are talking about knowledge of the chromatic circle (and the plastic theories derived from it) along with the ability to apply that knowledge in a pictorial process, or whether we are talking about knowledge of programming language and the ability to use it to delegate certain specific commands to a computer, the relatively recent appearance of interfaces has paradoxically eliminated the operating mediators between the user and the technology by building a new distance, occupied by a new intuitive mediator. Strictly speaking, in the case of computers, we are talking about interactive graphic systems, also called graphical user interfaces, and Johanna Drucker argues that these are a border space in which we interact with a series of computational abstractions, manipulating what is hidden (processors, chips,

⁶ The term *user experience* is often abbreviated as *U-X*.

⁷ Lauralee Alben (1996). *Quality of Experience: defining the criteria of effective interaction design*, “Interactions”, Vol. 3, Issue 3, John Rheinfrank (Ed.), p. 12.

⁸ Marcin Treder (2014). *The History of User Experience Design*, “Medium”, 11 February. (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://medium.com/@marcintreder/the-history-of-user-experience-design-5d87d1f81f5a>.

⁹ “In the 1960s and 1970s, only the command line interface was available. It was not easy to operate and required specialized knowledge, such as the ability to understand the intricacies of an operating system and interact with it through instructions encoded in lines of text on the screen...” Johanna Drucker (2013). *Reading Interface*, “Publications of the Modern Language Association” (PMLA), pp. 128-214.

circuits, etc.) through metaphorical graphic representations that provide visual clues to their functionality¹⁰.

A user would thus have the identity of a delegator, but a delegator who can only delegate the (automated and pre-programmed) processes that are made available to him. The interface rules allow a limited number of commands¹¹, usually also to avoid accidental damage to the technological device used by the user who operates only through the interface. This can be compared, again, to paint-by-number kits. Having at their disposal the clear pre-established delimitations of the spaces in which certain prefabricated colours will be applied by their numerical counterpart, going beyond the contour or mixing the colours would result in an image different from the reference one.

Next, the difference between user and author could be viewed through the lens of the series “Wall Drawings (exclusive)” signed by Sol LeWitt. By delegating a series of graphic productions with the help of textual instructions, LeWitt confirmed his role as author (in the same way that an architect or a composer would), the identity of user returning to the one who, based on the understanding of the technology of language, and the knowledge of the minimal graphic processes required, would transpose, within the pre-established parameters, the textual instructions into a graphic visual space, materializing them. However, given that textual instructions do not have an operative function (independent of other agents), we can turn to a more recent project, which would confirm Sol LeWitt’s authorship (as it was viewed by the author¹²), through the very artistic process of delegating, in a more automated, operative and objective way, LeWitt’s instructions. This is the project descriptively titled Sol LeWitt “Translator #118” (Mitchell F. Chan, Studio F Minus, 2013), a project in which Chan translated LeWitt’s textual instructions into what we might call commands¹³ dedicated to a technological agent. Strictly speaking, by using a

¹⁰ Johanna Drucker (2013). *Reading Interface*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128- 216.

Basically, “With such a display [interactive graphics system], one could delete a file not by typing the delete command, but by pointing [a metaphorical digital arrow] at a graphical representation of a recycle bin.” Denning, Peter J., and Brown, Robert L. (1984). *Operating Systems*, “Scientific American”, Vol. 251, Issue 3, p. 96.

¹¹ Paul Krzyzanowski (2022). “Current operating systems support two modes of operation: user and kernel. Kernel mode has full privileges, while user mode has restricted privileges”, *Access Control: Thinking about Security*, “Computer Security”, 31 January (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://people.cs.rutgers.edu/~pxk/419/notes/access.html>.

¹² Sol LeWitt (1967). *Paragraphs on conceptual art*, “Artforum”, “When working in a conceptual spirit, it must be assumed that all planning and decisions are established before their execution, this latter exercise being an indifferent activity, the generating idea becoming a machine that produces art.”, p. 80.

¹³ Of course, even the presence of this term, and not the term instruction, in the programming language, may betray the obligation to perform specific actions by the technological agent, given the fact that “A command (.CMD) is a specific action assigned to a program in order to perform a specific requirement.” Rouse (2023). paragr. 1.

programming language, LeWitt's (somewhat optional)¹⁴ original instructions were delegated (by a new author) to a technological agent, an agent that, based on the commands entered, created a wide range of possible graphic variants. Of course, including these commands are possible thanks to an interface, being a command line interface, but this type of interface is not dedicated to the common user, but to the authors of programs that, as a rule, aim at the functionality of interfaces dedicated to the common user.



Fig. 1 Pierre Vivant, "Traffic Light Tree", 1998 (web source: wikipedia commons)

However, unlike agents professionalized in programming languages, the author of artistic productions would consider using those languages (or any other operating language of other technologies) not for the commercial purpose of creating an intuitive and competitive product (to compare with the user experience mentioned above), but for a purpose of his own, with an intentionality motivated aesthetically and conceptually. Of course, we cannot deny that the author of artistic productions can also build, in turn, a kind of interface, not necessarily interactive in the sense that we would use in the case of digital technologies, but in a sense closer to cinematographic practice, re-contextualizing and re-using the original, or commonly known, functions and meanings of the technologies. Thus, there are cases in which an author exposes the very nature of the technological environment used, revealing the known limits of the technology, as Laura Marks describes the processes of exposing the qualities of the digital image environment by video artists, who by exposing pixelated, blurred or strongly textured images betray the environment used,

¹⁴ "The idea itself, even if not visually materialized, is a work of art just like any other finished product." Sol LeWitt (1967). *Paragraphs on conceptual art*, "Artforum", p. 82.

while also highlighting its material quality¹⁵. We could compare this to the case of post-impressionist painting, precisely because the brushstrokes of the pen were not hidden, becoming a form of visible recording of them, which created the necessary conditions for reconstructing the pictorial processes, and at the same time, highlighted the technology and tools used. Thus, a new interface is built, through which the author of the artistic production exposes to the user public the anatomy of the (representational) technology that he uses.

Next, we could propose an artistic project that exploits both a form of urban technology and its related instruments, and the chosen site, more precisely the location space. The technology in question would be the Road Code, and the instruments of this technology would be road signs. Pierre Vivant implemented, in the project “Traffic Light Tree” (1998), both the technology and the previously mentioned instruments by reproducing several traffic lights and placing them on the central island of a roundabout. From a formal point of view, Vivant therefore enters the role of an author, both the author of artistic production and the author of the aforementioned technological instruments¹⁶. However, through the structure of the installation, the (re)assembly of traffic lights, in the chosen form, cancels their function from within, each traffic light corrupting the one adjacent to it. To a certain extent, we could say that Vivant cancelled the very function of that technology, making it symbolically impossible to use the roundabout if the indications of the installed traffic lights were respected.



Fig. 2 One of Wolfgang Staehle's photos which documented the attacks on 11 September 2001 (web source: hyperallergic.com)

¹⁵ Laura U. Marks (2000). *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Duke University Press, London, p. XI.

¹⁶ Of course, according to the author, he also borrowed from the adjacent organic space, claiming that “(...) his sculpture imitates the adjacent landscape of the London Plane trees, while at the same time reflecting the continuous rhythm of the surrounding commercial, financial and domestic activities through the play of light.” Ellie McKinnell (2021). *This is The Reason There's a “Traffic Light Tree” in The Centre of London*, “My London”, March (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://www.mylondon.news/news/zone-1-news/reason-theres-traffic-light-tree-18836541>

Before we can draw a conclusion, let us look at two more artistic projects that have the potential to help our hypotheses. In the first of them, we can observe how an existing technology was (re-)used, with a clear and apparently intrinsic function. This is Wolfgang Staehle, an author who used a technology almost dedicated to the television and news industries, namely the technology of live broadcasts. It is important to note that Staehle did not use the technology in its original way, but wanted the opposite of the intended function, not focusing on a specific event, but seeking the exposure of a visual correspondence of several spaces, in real time, in a single (exhibition) space, through the act of “(...) transmitting an experience of stillness, despite the fact that it is more or less live, and brilliantly questions the difference between live images and the static image, along with broader issues related to time and representation”¹⁷.

The last project we will attach can be about both the re-use of an existing technology and about systems that at first glance we would not consider technologies. If technology is “the set of processes, methods and operations used to obtain a certain product”¹⁸ (“technology”), we could include, based on this definition, also institutions or organizations, whose related instruments are human agents who put into practice or activate the respective knowledge. Let us take the example of the British Board of Film Censors, a non-governmental organization that has been responsible, since 1912, for the national classification and censorship of films exhibited in cinemas and of video works (television programs, campaigns, public information, etc.) released in the United Kingdom¹⁹. Given the obligation to submit any production (in physical format) for classification to the said board in order to distribute it in cinemas in the UK by its author, an independent film producer, Charlie Shackleton, managed to use the agents of the British Board of Film Censors for his own, metaphorical and subversive purposes, launching a fundraising campaign on a dedicated online platform in order to cover the costs necessary for the (potential) mandatory classification and censorship by the said board, raising approximately six thousand pounds, the equivalent of twelve hours of filming (considering that analysing one minute of filming cost around one hundred pounds). Described by the author as a documentary/horror, the actual production consisted of filming a still frame, at 4K resolution (approximately eight million pixels) for ten hours

¹⁷ Charlie Gere (2009). *Digital Culture*, 2nd edition, Reaktion Books Ltd, London, p. 28.

Of course, by a tragic coincidence, his project also acquired the original function of the technology used, becoming the first photographic documentation of the 9/11 attack.

¹⁸ Ion Coteanu and Lucreția Mareș (2009). *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* [The Romanian language dictionary], Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București.

¹⁹ Adam Boulton (2015). *Film-maker plots to force the British Board of Film Classification to watch 14 hours of paint drying*, “The Telegraph”, 20 November (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221123045410/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopping/howaboutthat/12007626/Film-maker-plots-to-force-the-British-Board-of-Film-Classification-to-watch-14-hours-of-paint-drying.html>.

(resulting in a thirty-gigabyte file size) of the drying process of freshly applied white paint (by the author) on a wall. The board's delegated agents divided the viewing of the material over two days, and subsequently gave it a U (universal) rating, indicating that no sequence could offend or harm the audience of the material²⁰.

We could say that Shackleton did not use the services of that board, especially since his purpose was not to send a material for classification in order to later distribute it in cinemas, the intended audience of the material was dedicated, for Shackleton, we could say – his production was dedicated to the agents who classify and censor (where applicable) audio-visual productions.

Before drawing any conclusions, let us consider the following ideas. The way in which an author, an artist, would use technologies that are not (conventionally speaking) dedicated to his practice could be compared to what, originally in chess, was known as “computer moves”²¹. Subsequently being applied in several fields in which artificial intelligence operates, a computer movement involves a counterintuitive choice in order to obtain a result, a bizarre choice, apparently illogical and impossible to anticipate for a human agent²². However, it would be a choice that works efficiently within the specific parameters required. The inability of the human agent to understand certain operations of artificial intelligence algorithms later led to the development of a type of explainable artificial intelligence²³, which “...enhances the transparency, trust, fairness and accountability of artificial intelligence systems”²⁴. Returning to computer movements, that is, the use of technology in ways that a user would not think of using it, we could observe a symmetry between artificial intelligence, its unpredictability for the common user, and the author of artistic productions, who also uses technology in unintended ways.

²⁰ Adam Boulton (2015). *Film-maker plots to force the British Board of Film Classification to watch 14 hours of paint drying*, “The Telegraph”, 20 November (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221123045410/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstudies/how-about-that/12007626/Film-maker-plots-to-force-the-British-Board-of-Film-Classification-to-watch-14-hours-of-paint-drying.html>.

²¹ *Computer Moves* is the original term.

²² “The computer algorithm operated by performing an indiscriminate deep search through the tree of possibilities, a less elegant procedure known as brute-force search. Advances in chip architecture and parallel processing made this process fast enough to beat Kasparov, but, as Noam Chomsky has said, this was about as interesting as the fact that a bulldozer can lift more than a weightlifter.” Andrew Blevins (2017). *Computer Moves: How Intelligent Machines Can Teach Us The Necessary Skill of Losing*, “Reallifemag”, 3 April (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://reallifemag.com/computer-moves/>.

²³ *Explainable A.I.* is the original term.

²⁴ Ajitesh Kumar (2022). *What is Explainable AI? Concepts & Examples*, “Data Analytics”, March (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://vitalflux.com/what-is-explainable-ai-concepts-examples/>.

Looking at the condition of the artist, as an author, or even of research through art, we could consider that the assumption of technologies that are not originally dedicated to artistic practice places the author of artistic productions in the role of a technologist rather than a scientific researcher²⁵. In fact, in recent artistic practices, we could observe a constant borrowing, both of technologies and of theories that do not originally address an artistic dimension, whether we are talking about replacing the pen with the brush (as in the case of Pierre Soulages)²⁶ or replacing the sculptural representation with the subject of the representation (*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, D. Hirst, 1991). Thus, the author of artistic productions would present himself as an anti-user, not using possible technologies only as an end for a means, but seeking aesthetic and conceptual solutions to calibrate technology or theories that are not dedicated to art, for their own purpose, through methods of materializing or translating information and processes into their own allegorical spaces, or, in fewer words, building new (artistic) environments by appropriating almost any already existing technologies and theories that belong to other fields.

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²⁵ Mario Bunge notes that "...The success of the scientist lies in his ability to separate himself from his object of study, particularly when the object happens to be a psychological subject, through his capacity for detachment, the ability of the technologist lies in placing himself inside the targeted system, at its head." Bunge, Mario (1996). *Technology as Applied Science*, "Technology and Culture" (The John Hopkins University Press și Society for the History of Technology) 7 (3).

²⁶ From our own history, we could mention the two categories of the 19th century – the *heavy painters* and the *light painters*, the latter being painters of art – Stănescu, Radu D. (2014). "Când pictorii erau numiți «zugravi de subțire»." ["When artistic painters were called, 'light painters'"], "Ziarul Financiar", 28 February (accessed 30 January 2024), retrieved from: <https://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/cand-pictorii-erau-numiti-zugravi-de-subtire-de-dan-radu-stanescu-galerie-foto-12154242>.

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From concept to algorithm – self-reflections on the personal artistic practice

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Abstract: The article proposes reflection on the practical and theoretical investigation characteristic of generative and interactive art, exploring the relationship between corporeality, technology and creative processes. Through a series of critical reflections and case studies focused on the installations *Neural Eye*, *Frequency* and *Echos*, it aims to analyse how biological data, unconscious signals or body movements can be translated into visual and sound expressions with the help of digital systems. The article brings into discussion contributions from media theory, philosophy of perception and interactive aesthetics to outline a perspective in which the artist becomes the architect of an algorithmic process, and the work develops in real time through the dialogue between body and system. More than a presentation of works, the text offers a conceptual framework for understanding generative art as a form of knowledge, in which artistic intuition is mediated, extended and reconfigured by technology.

Keywords: generative art, interactive art, corporeality, algorithmic processes, biological data, media theory, real-time interaction.

1. Introduction

The machine as a creative tool. Who or what is the creator?

Starting with the 1960s, with the introduction of the television in the gallery, undergoing analogical modifications, a way was proposed to combat and criticize the way of propagating mass information. Later, with the appearance of the computer in the gallery, with the exploration of the first forms of algorithmic art, art critics asked themselves the question of whether or not it was art and who (or what) was the creator. Galleries also asked themselves the question of selling these works, which contained the components of the computer as objects, to the extent that the computer was already a mass-produced object.

We can speculate that the transition from the analogue to the digital approach of generative art is marked by the year 1965, when three engineers, without knowing each other, exhibited computer-generated experiments: George Ness (exhibiting in Stuttgart, Germany), Michael Noll (exhibiting in New York), and Frieder Nake (exhibiting at another gallery in Stuttgart). The experiments of the three mathematicians had a common element, which was the polygon – a geometric figure formed by a finite number of connected line segments.

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It is important to mention the effort of the three artists to transform a mechanism configured for calculations into an artistic instrument, while still being limited to generating straight lines between two points. We can observe in the activities of these artists the technological constraints in the context of the period, but also their creative transcendence. From this point of view, we can look much more creatively at the process, configuration and use of the computer than the result itself. In other words, how to draw when your instrument is not made for drawing?

In the case of analogue modifications of television circuits that distort or modify the image, as addressed by artists such as Nam June Paik, the artist's creative intention manifests itself at the end of the technological process. In other words, video artists could not control the input of information (the live broadcast), but rather the result. In the case of algorithmic art, similar to generative art, artists create the infrastructure for making the image, without having direct control over the final result. Although Ness, Noll and Nake had the polygon as a common object of work, the generation models are approached in different ways. For example, George Ness describes the pseudo-code that dictates to the computer what to generate: "Start anywhere inside the given square format of the figure and draw a polygon made up of 23 straight line segments. Alternate between horizontal and vertical lines of random lengths. Horizontally, go either left or right (choose randomly), and vertically, go up or down (also random). To finish, connect the start and end points with a slanted straight line"¹.

Although the question "the artist or the computer, who is the creator?" is still common today, naturally, when the first experiments in algorithmic art appeared, galleries and art critics began to dispute where the creative centre of the process is located – at the level of man, code or machine. Because the device is the element that is introduced into the artist-work equation, raising questions, we can create a parallel with the moment when Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the first authors to use the typewriter as a writing device, noted that our tools participate in writing our ideas². We can see this idea from two perspectives, the first, in the literal sense, that without the use of a pencil or a typewriter in the process of translating ideas into a visible form on paper, the writer's efforts are in vain. The second perspective is an observation that the thinking and attitude towards the writing process and, therefore, the content are influenced by the tool you use. Even if the writing changes, not only mechanically, but also mentally, the human remains as the author of the work, because the tool does not write anything by itself. It should be specified that, in this case, the computer is not a tool, like a pen or a brush, but a device designed to automate some calculations, and the thing that the two have in common is that they

¹ John McCormack (2012). *Computers and Creativity*, Springer, London, p. 69.

² Frieder Nake (2012). *Construction and Intuition: Creativity in Early Computer Art*, "Computers and Creativity", Jon McCormack, Mark d'Inverno, Springer, p. 72.

are part of the process of creating a work. Returning to the idea above, Nietzsche's statement that the use of the typewriter (an important technological advance at the time) influences thinking remains completely valid. It's just that the transformation of the process of writing cursively letter by letter is reduced to pressing buttons, writing becomes typing. As in the case of art, this transition from digital to analogue occurs, without cancelling each other out, but as an additional practice, with different results – from using the magnet to alter the image in the case of Paik to using lines of code to generate images in the case of Ness. Digital has the advantage of precision, but also of standardizing the work process. If drawing a line by hand from one point to another on a sheet of paper requires a certain process such as “from here to here”, to achieve the same thing on the computer the process will use “precisely these coordinates”. The activity changes, the artist is no longer the immediate generator of the line, but becomes a mediator of the conditions that the computer must respect when generating the line. Frieder Nake describes this difference in process as “drawing with the brain instead of drawing with the hand”.

The body as a source of data – instrumentalisation and interpretation

In contemporary art we can draw a diagonal between corporeality and technology, exploring the complexity of the relationship between human and algorithmic processes, taking as an example Frieder Nake, who formulates an analysis of this relationship, emphasizing that although the human body can be considered a generative system, it does not automatically identify with the nature of algorithmic systems used in art. We can recognize the human body as a generative system due to its capacity to produce movements, emotions, ideas and reactions, and this intrinsic generative character is influenced by internal factors, such as emotions, perceptions and intuition, as well as external factors, such as the social and cultural context. However, Nake argues that this form of generativity is fundamentally different from that specific to algorithmic systems.

Unlike the body, algorithmic systems are governed by strict rules and programmed autonomy, with the option of being operated independently by the artist after the initial parameters are defined, which gives them a predictability that the human body lacks. In this context, we can view creativity as a process in which the artist becomes a process designer rather than a direct creator of the artwork. This aspect is essential in generative art, where the artist creates a set of rules or a framework for the algorithms that generate the final work, and therefore the relationship between the artist and the creation becomes indirect, process-driven and mediated by technology. This approach is substantially different from traditional art, where the artist was perceived as the sole author of his creation. New notions have been introduced into the contemporary technological framework, such as that of emergence, in which creative results are more than the sum of the parts involved in the process, from which the idea emerges that technology extends creative capacity and fundamentally transforms

it, opening up new ways of exploiting the relationship between the body and the artistic environment.

Marshall McLuhan, in his work “Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man”, explores the concept of the extension of the human body through technology, from which we can take as references some of the theories in order to argue and understand the role of systems within generative art. He argues that technologies are not just external tools, but extensions of our sensory systems, transforming the way we perceive the world and the nature of human creativity. McLuhan introduces the idea that every technology is an extension of the human body, whether it is the wheel that extends mobility or digital media that extends the central nervous system. “Today, after more than a century of electrical technology, we have expanded our central nervous system into a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned.”³

New media art uses these technological extensions to explore new ways of interacting between the body, technology, and artistic space, where interactivity integrates the body into technological systems, transforming the viewer into an active participant – a process that reflects McLuhan’s idea that technology not only extends sensory functions, but also influences socio-cultural relations. The use of algorithms and mathematical rules to generate autonomous artworks becomes a collaborative process between artist and system, implementing technological advances as an active partner. For example, in generative artworks, the body can be integrated into the creative process through sensors that monitor the movements or biological signals of the artist or viewer. Thus, the body becomes part of the algorithmic process, and the final result reflects the direct influences of bodily interaction integrated into the rules of the system. These technologies have also transformed spatial and temporal perception, offering new forms of immersion for the viewer: “the electric speed of bringing together all social and political functions in a sudden implosion has heightened the human consciousness of responsibility to an intense level”. This idea highlights the fact that in the case of works that are part of the digital arts, especially immersive ones, the user overcomes his condition of passive observer and becomes an active actor in a redefined artistic space.

* * *

The work “Neural Eye”, which is part of a trilogy of installations designed by me, aims to explore the concept through which the viewer's mind becomes the main generative factor of visual creation. In this sense, the project represents an interactive video installation that transposes the viewer's cerebral activity into an animated graphic construction in continuous transformation.

³ Marshall McLuhan (1994). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 259.

The installation functions as a symbolic extension of the brain, projecting outward the dynamics of the user’s mental states, in a process of visual self-reflexivity. Thus, the viewer contemplates what their own brain generates, this act directly influencing their inner state. “Neural Eye” thus becomes a “mental eye” whose culmination is introspection on their own presence and cognitive activities.

In contrast to the work created in a first version – where the installation acted as an external catalyst for evoking memories – the work “Neural Eye” proposes an inversion of the relationship: the viewer’s thinking is what produces the visual image, marking a transition from the outside to the inside as a source of artistic expression.

From a technical point of view, the data stream from brain waves is used as a set of variables in the generation of visual content. The development process of the work had a significant experimental component. The first versions of the installation were characterized by a random visual expression, lacking perceptible coherence. Later, the need for a clear “reading key” emerged, so that the abstraction of biological data would become intelligible and accessible to the public.

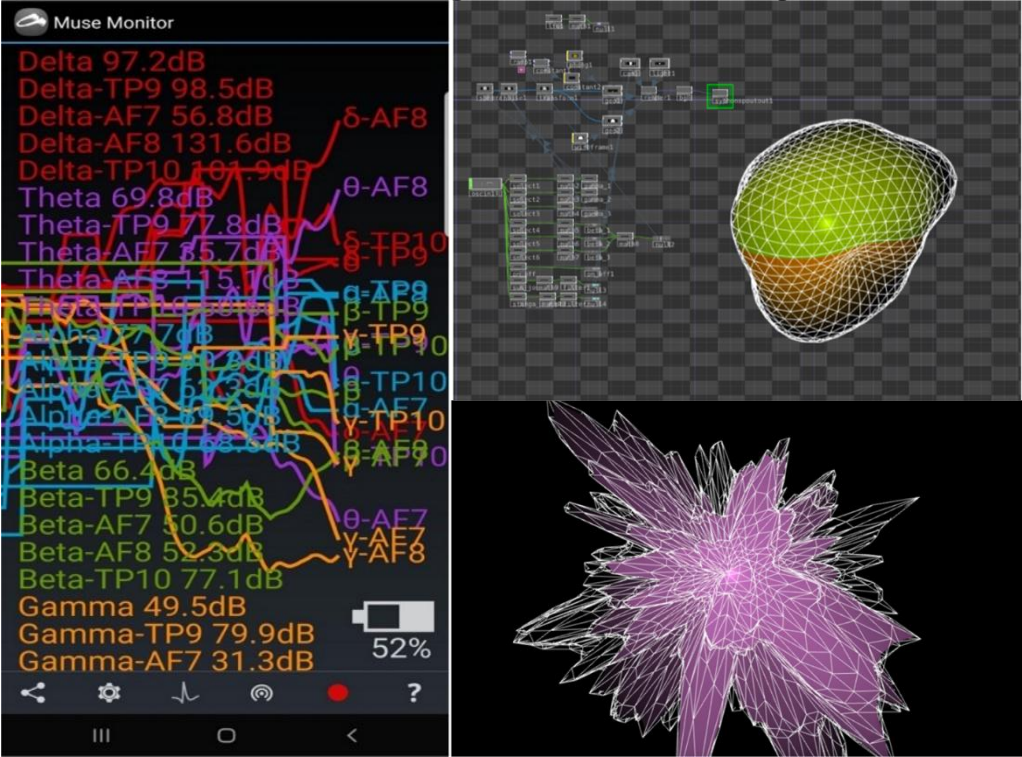


Fig. 1, 2 Screenshots of the operating processes of the facility. On the left, the data flow of the celebration waves received by the EEG sensor, on the right, the process of transforming and interpreting the data into visual instances

From a technical point of view, the installation uses a communication system between an EEG sensor, positioned on the participant's head, and a visual programming environment, through the OSC (Open Sound Control) protocol. This technological framework allows the conversion of neurophysiological data into variables that determine the generation of visual instances in real time. The EEG sensor monitors the activity of different brain regions, allowing the interpretation of the intensity of the user's cognitive processes. Thus, the installation can reproduce two extreme cognitive states: in the case of a state of deep meditation, brain activity is minimal, which leads to a simplified visual representation; on the contrary, during an intense mental activity, such as solving a complex problem, a sophisticated and densely structured visual image is generated.

The three-dimensional object generated within the installation is defined by three essential attributes, each corresponding to a dimension of brain activity:

1. Complexity – refers to the number of polygons that make up the three-dimensional shape. Low brain activity results in a low number of polygons, resulting in a simple shape; conversely, high activity leads to an increased number of polygons and the emergence of an elaborate and complex visual structure.

2. Movement – indicates the fluidity of the development of forms. In a state of cognitive relaxation, the movement of the object is smooth and continuous, while increased brain activity causes discontinuous movement, generating sharp, tense visual forms.

3. Colour – functions as a gradient that reflects the level of neuronal activity. The colour palette is organized so that the transition of colours (red – yellow – blue – purple) signals the transition from a state of relaxation to intense cognitive activation.



Fig. 3 QR code for the video presenting Neural Eye

A significant theoretical contribution to the understanding of the contemporary artistic context is provided by Ahmedien's research, entitled

Analysing Bio-Art Epistemic Landscape: From Metaphoric to Post-Metaphoric Structure. In this work, the author analyses metaphor as an essential cognitive mechanism for conceptualizing and understanding complex phenomena. Metaphor is defined as a tool of cognitive translation, which can be expressed both linguistically and visually, allowing the articulation of an abstract concept through a figurative association with a concrete concept.

Ahmedien describes this relationship in terms of a “target domain” – representing the abstract idea – and a “source domain” – a concrete and well-defined reference that facilitates understanding. The projection of the characteristics of the source domain onto the target domain is called the “mapping process”. This process provides a cognitive framework through which a systematic correspondence is drawn between the two domains, making it possible to understand the abstract domain through the prism of a concrete model.

The importance of this theory lies in the fact that metaphor does not operate by simply identifying formal similarities, but by establishing structural and functional correlations between the two domains involved. Therefore, metaphor becomes a rigorous methodological tool, which presupposes the existence of a systematic relationship between the elements of the source domain and those of the target domain. The impact of this translation lies in its capacity to reconstruct the meaning of a primary (abstract) system in terms of a secondary (concrete) system.

The mapping process is achieved by relating the biological system (source domain) to the visual representation system (target domain). This relationship aims to highlight, through artistic means, the processes and conclusions generated within scientific research. Thus, art becomes an intermediary space for the translation and interpretation of biological data, contributing to a form of interdisciplinary knowledge in which science and artistic expression intersect⁴.

* * *

The second installation, entitled “Frequency”, explores the unconscious dimension of the viewer through the heart rate, which it transposes into visual and sound spatial coordinates. The work proposes an immersive experience in which the heartbeat becomes the generating element of the perceptual space, and the viewer is invited to become the inhabitant of his own heart.

Conceived as a metaphorical simulation of a cardiac chamber, the installation transforms the biometric pulse into a source of activation of the surrounding environment. The projection of an aorta, located on the ceiling of the exhibition space, is animated in real time by the participant’s heart rate. Thus,

⁴ Ahmedien, D.A.M. (2023). *Analysing bio-art’s epistemic landscape: from metaphoric to post-metaphoric structure*, “BioSocieties”, 18, pp. 308-334.

the visual and sound space are triggered and shaped by this biological impulse, offering a dynamic representation of an intimate interaction between the body and the environment.

Throughout the experience, the viewer witnesses perceptual fragments of reality, filtered through this symbolic representation of the circulatory system. The installation transforms the physical space into a living entity, whose inner rhythm reflects the physiological state of the user, generating a framework of deep introspection, artistically mediated.

Therefore, “Frequency” functions as a platform for reflecting inner experiences in outer space, configuring a conceptual camera obscura in which the heart becomes both a signal source and a metaphor for bodily consciousness. This reconfiguration of the sound and visual space transforms the installation context into an approach of self-observation.

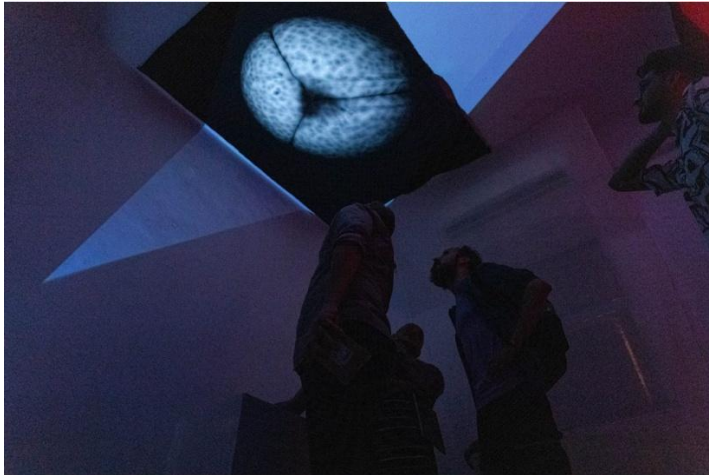


Fig. 4 Radu Marțin, “Frequency”, documentary photography for the presentation of the thesis, Aparte Gallery, 2023

* * *

Unlike the installations “Neural Eye” and “Frequency”, which harness biological data from unconscious processes, the work “Echos” relies on the viewer’s conscious bodily movement as a generative factor of the visual image. Using a Kinect sensor, capable of detecting and mapping body shapes in three-dimensional space through infrared frequencies, the installation transforms real-time movement into an interactive visual flow.

“Echos” questions the relationship between the present and the spatiotemporal dimensions, placing the relationship between the body, action and consequences at the centre of the artistic approach. Each movement of the viewer generates an ephemeral visual moment, and the resulting image becomes

an echo of his action — a delayed projection, a fleeting imprint of presence. In this way, the work proposes a meditation on the ephemeral character of time, in contrast to the accelerated rhythm and pragmatism of the present. Conceptually, the installation offers the viewer a platform for introspection on memory, perception and their temporal condition. The visual elements transform space into a fluid entity, devoid of fixed physical boundaries, configuring a virtual world in which time is reimagined as a sensory consequence and space becomes a construct in perpetual reconfiguration. Thus, “Echos” becomes an artistic territory in which bodily presence leaves traces, and memory is visualized in real time.



Fig. 5 Screenshot from Echos

The three installations – “Neural Eye”, “Frequency” and “Echos” – make up the project entitled “Trinom”, which proposes an exploration of how generative art can articulate an aesthetic of incompleteness and corporeality within generative installations. Although the resulting forms may seem purely formal or decorative in their abstract character, they are expressions of conceptually structured algorithmic processes, the generativity of visual forms being thus guided by a series of parameters that determine a certain type of sensory-ness and way of perceiving space, in constant interaction between the virtual and the physical.

In this context, generative art cannot be understood as a completely predictable process, but as a reconfigurable flow, in which the artist intervenes on the variables and conditions of production. Even if the result is not controllable in detail, its direction is configured by the artistic intentionality and the semiotic direction of the process. Therefore, generative art acquires conceptual valences, becoming an emergent form of expression in which the unpredictable becomes an integral part of the aesthetic discourse.



Fig. 6 QR code for the video presenting the three installations

Conceptualizing corporeality in relation to technology

Mark Hansen suggests that technology is “a constitutive dimension of human corporeality”⁵, arguing that the relationship between the body and technology is not an additional one, but a fundamental one. This point of view is based on the concept of the “body schema”, a theory developed by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty with the aim of presenting the idea of perception of the world as being closely linked to corporeality. From this perspective, the body is not just a physical object, but the very condition of the possibility of having a world. The body schema functions as a preconscious structure that allows the body to integrate and actively respond to the environment. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that this relationship is not a purely cognitive one, but a deeply sensory and motor one: “the body is the zero point of perception, the place from which all perspectives open and all meanings arise”⁶. For the French philosopher, perception is embodied, unlike the traditional perspective that separates the mind from the body. He argues that human subjectivity is inseparable from corporeality, and our perceptual experiences, be they visual, tactile or auditory, are filtered through the body. In this sense, the body goes beyond the condition of passive receptor, becoming an active “incorporation machine”, which transforms sensations into meanings.

From this perspective, he provides an illustrative example of the idea through the metaphor of the cane which, for a blind person, is more than a simple external tool and becomes an extension of his own body. Through the cane, the blind person perceives the world beyond the physical limits of his skin. Fifty years later, Hansen, in his book “Bodies in Code”, anticipates this idea and states that digital technology is seen as a constitutive element of our way of perceiving and interacting with reality. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty explores the notion of “flesh”, a concept developed in his later work. For him, the body designates the

⁵ Mark Hansen (2006). *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*, Routledge, London, p. 65.

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, p. 70.

profound interconnection between the body and the world, a field of reciprocal relations in which subject and object are interchangeable⁷.

Hansen admits that new media art has had a fundamental role in clarifying the connection between technology and corporeality, and the works of contemporary artists have succeeded in “introducing technical dimensions of corporeality”⁸ that were unimaginable for Merleau-Ponty or other 20th century philosophers. This is due to the ability of new media art to function as an aesthetic mediation of digital technologies, providing a context in which the two become interdependent. Hansen explores the concept of transduction (the transfer of genetic information from one cell to another) between the technical and the corporeal, demonstrating how algorithmic processes can transform the experience of corporeality, given the immersive and interactive properties of new media arts, which allow the human body to be reconfigured and extended, eliminating traditional distinctions between the material body and digital media.

Conclusions

The article sought to articulate a reflexive framework in which personal artistic practice, based on interactivity and generativity, is theoretically contextualized through a series of critical concepts and perspectives from the fields of art, philosophy and technology. The approach did not exclusively aim at describing works, but sought to investigate the ways in which new forms of digital art reconfigure traditional relationships between artist, tool and result. By combining personal practice and theoretical resources, it was possible to analyse generative art not only as a visual product, but also as a relational and dynamic process, governed by a complex ecology of factors – biological, cognitive, algorithmic and sensory. This approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of the artist within interactive systems, becoming a producer of forms and configurator of conditions for data flows translated into the form of experience.

At the heart of the investigation was the idea of interaction, transcending the status of simple reaction to stimuli, becoming a form of co-creation between the body and technology. Through this lens, generative art was approached as a territory for negotiating the boundaries between control and randomness, between result and creative process. What emerged from this journey is not just a series of interactive installations, but an attempt to think of artistic practice as a form of situated knowledge, in which artistic intuition meets algorithmic structure, and expression becomes mediated, but not diminished, by technology. From this perspective, the contribution of the works lies in articulating a dialogue

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968). *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Illinois, p.9.

⁸ Mark Hansen (2006). *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*, Routledge, London, p. 22.

between critical thinking and artistic experiment, between corporeality and code, between presence and abstraction.

Ultimately, what emerges is an open artistic practice, in a permanent conceptual reconfiguration, in which technology overcomes its condition as an environment of expression, becoming a partner in reflection on concepts.

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Forms of artistic transposition of philosophical ideas through conceptual re-staging

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Abstract: The exhibition “Under Constriction” by artist Radu Carnariu refers to the failure, but also to the constant challenge of the ideals of democracy in relation to the geopolitical game of resources. This article questions the artist’s way of creating artistic transpositions by expressing philosophical ideas in visual variants. The transposition proposed by the artist involves a visual-conceptual “staging”, the core of the entire exhibition project being an “allegorical” satire on consumption: an oversized straitjacket made of recycled political maps that dresses the “absence” of a human body, suspended in the vacuum of a cosmos guided by a financial constellation.

Keywords: artistic transposition, Iași artist, Romanian art, multidisciplinary in the visual arts.

Introduction

This article analyses the way in which the artistic transposition of philosophical ideas into contemporary artworks is configured through different types of medium. The case study on which the analysis is based is the exhibition called “Under Constriction” by the artist Radu Carnariu curated by Cristian Nae. This took place between September 19 and November 12, 2023 and was organized by the Artep Gallery Association, being co-financed by the National Cultural Fund Administration. The exhibition involved, in addition to the project of the artist from Iași, a series of artist talks with four invited artists, namely: Alexandra Ghioc, Mihai Zgondoi, Raluca Ilaria Demetrescu and Mircea Modreanu.

Known especially for his critical interventions on the imaginary and the system of signification specific to advertising, Radu Carnariu proposes this time a multimedia installation that is both playful and sarcastic, with elements that evoke the vocabulary of pop art and the semiotics of social criticism projects from the beginning of the current millennium. In the composition of the exhibition space, he combines graphic interventions with painting, object, sound works and short video interventions.

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Artistic transposition as a means of expression is configured in the present case study through a critical attitude towards the vision of democratic ideals, geopolitical games and natural resources. With reference to the failure and constant challenge of democratic ideals in the context of geo-economic competition for resources, a broad discussion is opened about the divergence between democratic aspirations and the geopolitical reality of today's world¹. This leads to a reflection on the attitude that can affect values and behaviours based on a predominant concern for profit, highlighting the importance of critical analysis.

In terms of artistic transposition, the visual “staging” at the core of the project represents a satirical form of overconsumption, highlighted by an oversized straitjacket made from recycled materials from political maps. This installation visually emphasizes the impact and exaggeration of consumer actions in an allegorical manner, highlighting the critique of overconsumption behavior in the context of a financial constellation. Thus, art offers a means through which complex themes can be expressed and explored, outlining a creative and provocative perspective on our contemporary world.



Fig. 1 “Freedom”, object, installation, variable dimensions, 2023

The exhibition project proposed by Radu Carnariu extends his long-standing interest in exploring the increasingly unequal distribution of the planet's wealth and resources under the impact of the extracting and colonial economic system on which globalization, in the form in which it was configured after 1990, continued to consolidate, contributing decisively to the current planetary climate crisis.

¹ Eric D. Beinhocker (2006). *The Origin of Wealth. Evolution, Complexity, and the Radical Remaking of Economics*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, p. 29.

“The discourse articulated in the Artep Gallery space extends a long-standing artistic research on the concept of necropolitics advanced by Achille Mbembe, which designates the use of political power to calculate the profitability of life and ‘dictate who can live and who must die’. It also artistically transposes T. J. Demos’ indications regarding the military-industrial complex (encapsulated by concepts such as «capitalocene / thanatocene») that determines planetary anthropogenic effects on the natural environment camouflaged under the much more familiar geological concept of «anthropocene».”²

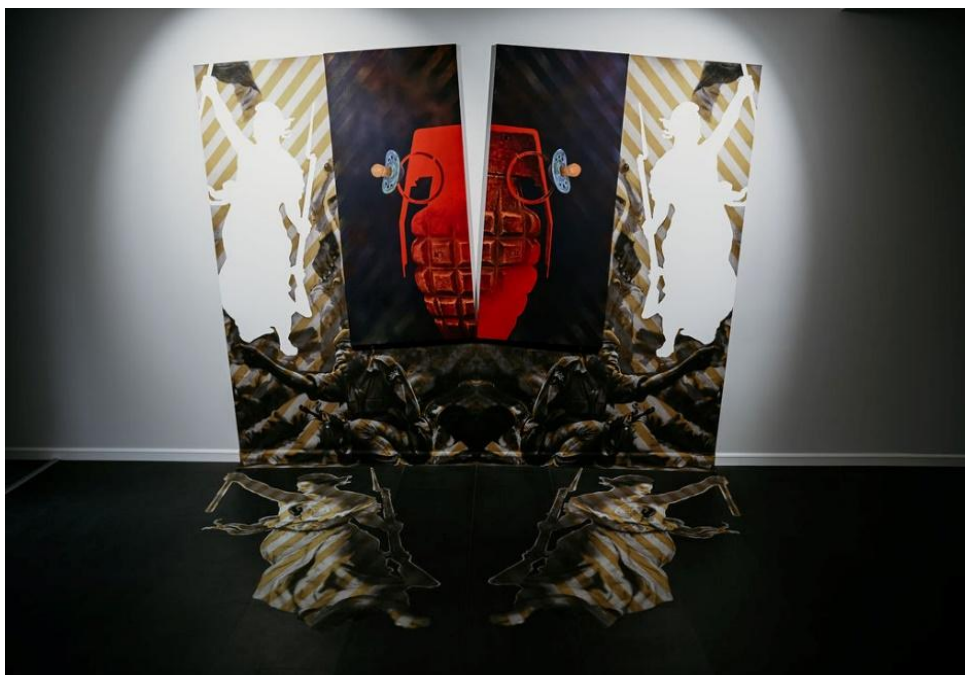


Fig. 2 “Unequal halves I”, acrylic, spray, canvas, 140/150/2.5cm, 2023

The pun in the title proposed by Radu Carnariu suggests both the perpetual procedural aspect and the inherent limitations of critical discourse in the context of the full assimilation of art into the entertainment and luxury industries, as well as the increasingly acute constraints that vitally affect life, especially in underdeveloped regions, but rich in natural resources, which are becoming areas of global conflict between the great powers in international politics³.

“Unequal Halves” I, II, and III form a series of three diptychs that form part of an installation that focuses on the superposition of two mirror images,

² Quote from the argument of curator Cristian Nae, according to artep.ro, accessed in December 2023.

³ Pierre Bourdieu (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 62.

manifesting an imperfect symmetry that results in a single divided surface at the top of the ensemble. The panelling method used highlights a duality of meanings: division-union, distance-approach, association-disassociation.

The cohesion of the meaning of the whole becomes evident as the imagistic content is probed, identifying a reference from art history that serves as a backdrop – “Liberty Leading the People” by French artist Eugene Delacroix, an emblematic image for the ideas of the French Revolution, in which the silhouette of Liberty is symbolically placed on the floor. Radu Carnariu intervened on the initial image by bringing additional references that explore identity and economic aspects of decolonization, compositionally including a Nigerian soldier from the Nigeria-Biafra conflict 1967-1970⁴ and the satellite image of a large copper mine in South Africa, Palabowra, in the chest area of the character depicting freedom.



Fig. 3 “Priceless”, object, 80/40/5 cm, 2023

“Unequal Halves I” is a frame that encompasses an image, painted and, at first glance, apparently unrelated to the initial suggestions. In it, the discourse leaves the historical context in favour of a re-semanticization: a grenade whose characteristics, through the similarity of shapes, are associated with a pacifier. Beyond the rhetoric of staging multiple historical references, the ironic ensemble called “Unequal Halves” alludes to the failure and constant challenge of the ideals of democracy in relation to the geopolitical game of resources.

⁴ The Nigerian Civil War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970), also known as the Nigeria–Biafra War or the Biafran War, was a civil war fought between Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state that declared independence from Nigeria in 1967.

“Priceless” represents a contrasting object or even an anti-object that criticizes and insinuates, through its composition, the existence of a luxury piece, an exaggeratedly large piece of jewelry, in the form of an enormous pendant that satirizes social disparity and the considerable distance between classes. This satire is highlighted by the association of diamonds, symbols of opulence and status inaccessible to most people, with a word at the opposite end of the spectrum – “Free”. At the same time, the work raises questions regarding inappropriate attitudes that can sometimes have the capacity to constrain value systems and support behaviors based exclusively on the “principle” of commercialization. To the same extent, the work emphasizes the fact that not everything is susceptible to being sold or marketed.



Fig. 4 “Float line”, object, 245/5/5 cm, 2023

“Two linear meters of barbed wire sectioned into ‘rhythmic modules’ and sequentially recomposed into black velvet jewellery boxes is one of the metaphors of status-based division. At the same time, in the opposite sense, it can be interpreted as a poetic ‘destruction’ of oppression, confinement, limitation and a symbolic reconversion of it into ‘jewellery’, ‘decoration’ or ‘artefact’.”⁵

On the other hand, the work “Promo sapiens” (I and II, animation, 4 second loop) is at the intersection of visual pun and the practice known as “subvertising”⁶. The GIF, which lasts a few seconds, proposes an examination of the audience's attention and visual memory by modifying a well-known logo into the inscription H2O. This image satirizes the contemplative and passive

⁵ Mentioned by artistul Radu Carnariu during an Artist Talk from the series that took place during the exhibition at the Artep Gallery.

⁶ *Subvertising* refers to the process of converting advertisements to modify, parody, satirize, and subvert the meaning of the messages found in advertising.

aspects associated with consuming products such as popcorn or nachos while watching movies, diverting expectations towards a forced contemplation of water as a fundamental resource and, simultaneously, as a primordial source of life.

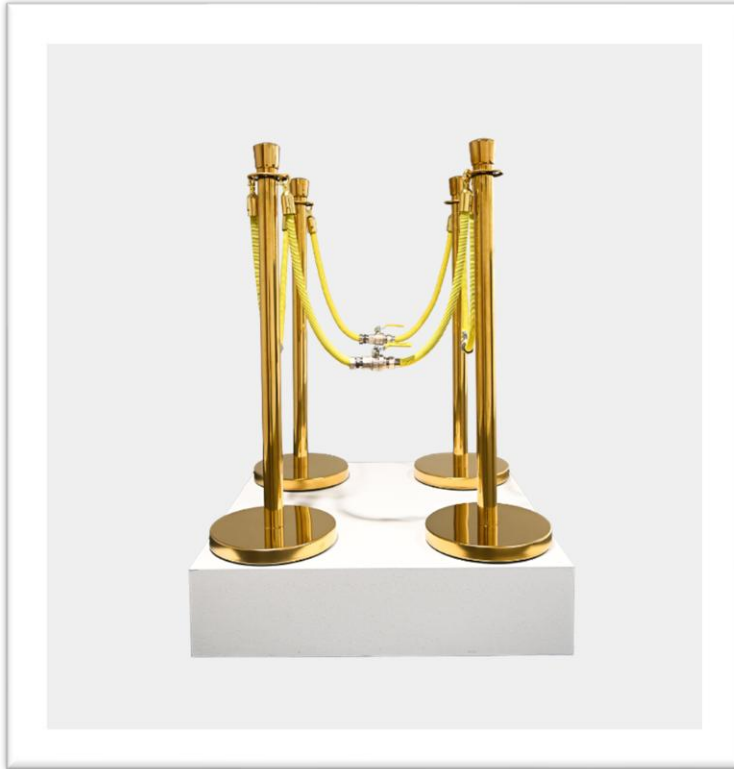


Fig. 5 “Under Constriction”, installation, variable dimensions, 2023

The installation “Under Constriction” is based on a semantic substitution of the velvet cord, which usually separates a special access perimeter with a gas connection. The small distance between the supporting pillars, which mark an empty and useless space in the centre of the base on which they are positioned, suggests the narrowing of the special perimeter, in which nothing is exhibited, the emphasis falling on the critical contemplation of the resources evoked by the gas connections. Beyond the social-political subtext, the ensemble proposes a space for reflection.

“Neon”, object, 67/45/4 cm, 2023, is a work that mimics the formal characteristics of museum or street light boxes, using hand-shaped candles instead of glass tubes. The piece also symbolizes a symbolic gesture that satirizes the perspective of the dystopian relationship with technology.

On the other hand, “Entropic Cartographies”, object, installation, 28/37/37cm, 2023 is a work that suggests the fragility of the concept of a map in relation to planetary resources and technology.

At the end of the analysis, as well as the visitor’s route through the exhibition, the audio “S.O.S”, sound, 5 sec (loop), 2023, can be heard against the darkened background of the gallery’s black-box. This is a short sound montage that mimics SOS (...---...) in Morse code using recordings of drops in plastic buckets of varying intensities. The sequence of six sounds ends with a coin jingling on a surface, thus creating a connection with the previous installation.

Under the guise of derision and cynicism, the exhibition invites a serious meditation on the slow violence, the effects of war on the climate and natural ecosystem, and the pressure for a fair redistribution of natural resources.

The exhibition entitled “Under Constriction” by artist Radu Carnariu is a medium for exploring the complex relationship between the failure and the permanent challenge of the ideals of democracy in the context of the geopolitical game of resources. Through this exhibition, the artist not only raises critical questions regarding these aspects, but also develops and illustrates a distinctive approach to the artistic transposition of philosophical ideas into a coherent and expressive visual language.

Radu Carnariu engages in a conceptual re-enactment of philosophical themes, using artistic forms to communicate subtly and powerfully. The exhibition thus becomes a territory where art and philosophy intersect, offering the viewer a profound and provocative aesthetic experience. Through his approach, the artist demonstrates a remarkable sensitivity in outlining the abstract aspects of philosophical thought and transforming them into an accessible and impactful visual language.

This example illustrates how the artist manages to create artistic transpositions, transposing philosophical ideas into powerfully evocative images. The exhibition not only serves as a place of reflection on the failure and challenges of democracy in relation to geopolitical dynamics, but, through its innovative artistic forms, also challenges the audience to re-evaluate perceptions and implicitly understanding of these fundamental themes.

Conclusion

“Under Constriction” articulates a critical visual reflection on the tension between democratic ideals and economic power. Through allegory and material symbolism, the exhibition transforms philosophical inquiry into a concise artistic commentary on consumption, control, and systemic absence.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1 “Freedom”, object, installation, variable dimensions, 2023.

Fig. 2 “Unequal halves I”, acrylic, spray, canvas, 140/150/2.5cm, 2023.

Fig. 3 “Priceless”, object, 80/40/5 cm, 2023.

Fig. 4 “Float line”, object, 245/5/5 cm, 2023.

Fig. 5 “Under Constriction”, installation, variable dimensions, 2023.

Can Real Artwork Be Created with Artificial Intelligence?

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence is one of the most popular topics today. Briefly called AI, the most advanced technology and a great revolution, has moved to very different dimensions with the internet age. We can see that AI reveals human potential. AI machines, robots and many tools that we use in our homes and workplaces in many parts of the world have become a part of our lives. Human beings can produce art, but can AI produce real art? Scientists who asked this question started to train AI. They developed computers that produced works of art by developing various methods. AI, which learns and analyzes many works of art with these methods, provides inspiration and creativity to artists. In this period when technology is rapidly becoming widespread, art also offers new meanings to the person and the individual's role in society. While the digital world defines new living conditions and art, people's economic relations have also changed. While companies invested heavily in this technology, AI started to produce its first works. The majority claim that AI produces real works of art and place a value on it. So, who are the real artists of these works? How natural are the works produced by artificial intelligence? Is it valuable enough to buy? Does it bring the viewer artistic satisfaction? Does it contribute to art and society in a cultural and economic context? Will artists take back their pens and brushes or will they use technology as a tool to produce original works?

Keywords: AI technology, Internet of Things, Machine learning.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence; it is an intelligence system which instantly makes plans and programs, evaluates all possibilities and makes the right decision, creates a strategy and weighs in the options. The skills of artificial intelligence include processing, analysis and problem solving, perception, learning and planning, and object orientation skills.



Fig. 1 Pao_studio/Shutterstock

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John McCarthy, a famous computer scientist, was born in the USA in 1927. He coined and introduced the term “artificial intelligence” at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956. This event marked the beginning of a new era in artificial intelligence research and development.



Fig. 2 McCarthy in Stanford University

McCarthy described artificial intelligence as the “science and engineering of intelligent machines making (Banafa, 2016)”¹.

Deep Learning and IoT

Machine learning gained popularity between 1980 and 2000. It is a method of data analysis that automates analytical model building and is a branch of artificial intelligence².

In AI, the “deep learning” subfield, which enmeshes data prediction, recognition and identification systems, operates akin to a network which uses image and sound recognition and editing. This system becomes more like our personal assistant through touch, face scan and gesture identification. Companies such as Apple, Google or Skype have contributed to the business world through this system. Face recognition, video analysis and under-vehicle

¹ Ahmed Banafa (2016). *How Artificial Intelligence Will Kickstart the Internet of Things?*, Semiwiki.com website (accessed November 18, 2018), retrieved from: <https://www.semiwiki.com/forum/content/5383-how-artificial-intelligence-will-kickstart-internet-things.html>

² Thomas H. Davenport (2018). *Machine Learning*, Sas Institute website from Analyst The Wall Street Journal, accessed November 15, 2018, retrieved from: https://www.sas.com/en_us/insights/analytics/machine-learning.html

imaging methods used as security systems in various countries control the entrance to government buildings.

The idea of adding sensors and intelligence to objects, called the “Internet of Things” (IoT), began in the 1980s. Sensors and the internet of things began to be used for the business sector and production as their costs decreased.

While the internet provides us with data, artificial intelligence processes it. All industrial machines, robots, unmanned aerial vehicles and computers don’t become functional without the internet. The internet network, which acts as a remote sensor, processes and evaluates information instantly.

Creativity and Computer Art

While we expect for the digital world, technology and machines to respond to humans and the world, the following question arises: can these machines be creative? Can artificial intelligence make art? How real is the art created by AI?

The concept of creativity is a complex structure in itself. It has abstract meanings such as “aesthetic”, “inspiration”, “foresight”. Knowledge and experience are needed to produce creative works. This knowledge and experiences must be combined with insight to create original works. Therefore, the first AI products are new visual works integrated with old information, ideas and images.

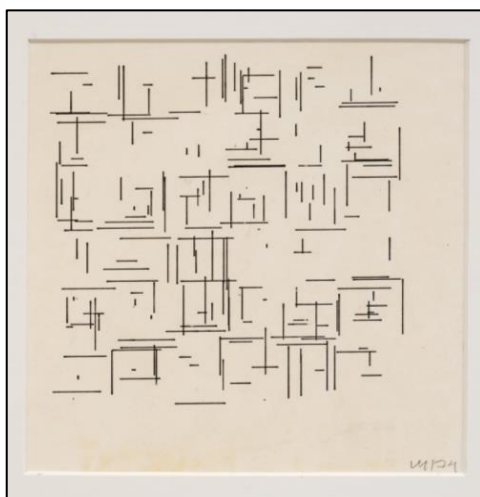


Fig. 3 Vera Molnár, “Untitled-an early example of computer art”, 1972

Since the 1960s, artists have investigated how computers can independently produce art. The birth of digital art also dates back to the discovery of the computer. “Computer art”, which emerged in the 1960s, also constitutes digital or algorithmic art.

When Frieder Nake opened a computer art exhibition in Stuttgart in 1965, he received criticism as to whether the works produced by the program which

produced geometric figures were real art. The same debate continues today. Nowadays, there are graphic design departments in art schools. Here, the works done with computer programs create an aesthetic appearance.

Some artists, such as Hungarian-born Vera Molnar, created the first code-based drawing programs (Image 3). She created non-representational paintings in the 1940-50s. In 1968, she began using computers to create her first algorithmic drawings.



Fig. 4 William Latham, Gazelli Art House

British computer artist William Latham produced 3D computer models of organic life forms using genetic algorithm-based techniques to transform basic forms into artistic creations (Image 4). Latham applied the principles that would “evolve” the forms of animated, organic sculpture in simulators, without human orientation in the simulators³. Computer science and AI system “deep learning” was evolving, but it was thought that computers could produce a real work of art.

In the world of music, another branch of art, generic music lists were created on the computer. Companies like Spotify have started making artificial art with “Peaceful Piano” and similar playlists. We also use ChatGPT in our daily life as an assistant author and academic researcher.

Artificial Intelligence and Art

The Art-net website, an important name in the art market, announced that a Parisian collector purchased a work created with artificial intelligence in 2018.

³ J.J. Charlesworth (2018). *Can AI produce pictures but can he create art for himself?*, “CNN Style”, September 10, retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/artificial-intelligence-ai-art/index.html>

He reported that this work was made using a computer program by Obvious, a French creative collective.



Fig. 5 $G \max D \mathbb{E}_x [\log D(x)] + \mathbb{E}_z [\log (1 - D(G(z)))]$,
“Edmond de Belamy Portrait”, 2018

The first portrait work signed by AI has been auctioned for the first time in Paris. This portrait of the fictional Belamy family was created as an artificial art through a series of algorithms⁴. It was created by a computer without any human intervention, using an AI system called Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN). Belamy portraits here were created by imitating paintings from the 14th to the 18th centuries⁵.

Professor Ahmed Elgammal from Rutgers University in New Jersey conducted a study similar to the Belamy family using data from 14th century paintings. Elgammal, who researches representations of moving objects, says the results of virtual intelligence are mostly abstract images.

The professor has trained its algorithm by feeding more than 80,000 digitized images of Western paintings from the 15th century to the 20th century. According to him, the machine has developed an aesthetic understanding. His algorithms produce art without human touch⁶.

Elgammal implemented a Turing test to compare computer-generated images with human-generated images. The subjects were unable to distinguish the difference between works produced by artificial intelligence and those

⁴ Eileen Kinsella (2018). *First AI manufacture portrait sold in auction is lowered expectations*, “Artnews”, October 25, (accessed November 22, 2018), retrieved from: <https://news.artnet.com/market/first-ever-artificial-intelligence-portrait-painting-sells-at-christies-1379902>

⁵ Naomi Rea (2018). *Why a collector has taken an artwork with artificial intelligence and is open to buy more*, “Artnews”, April 3 (accessed November 22, 2018), retrieved from: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-made-by-artificial-intelligence-1258745>

⁶ Rene Chun (2017). *Getting a Picture Difficult to Understand by Computer or Human*, “Artsy” website (accessed November 21, 2018), retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-hard-painting-made-computer-human>

produced by humans. They even found the art of AI more aesthetically appealing.

He founded the first art exhibition produced with artificial intelligence algorithm under the name AICAN. Using psychology-based and deep learning techniques, AICAN creates artistic images. Its algorithm seeks answers to the following question: “What if we can teach a machine how to recognize art and art style and then program it to create new images that don't follow the created styles?”⁷

American technology writer David Pogue (1963) asked Elgammal: “Well, who is the artist of one of these paintings? Are these programmers? Is the software?” Professor Elgammal replied: “I think I'm both. I see myself as an artist when I create the frame. If artificial intelligence is produced by un-manned machines, it is a fact.”⁸

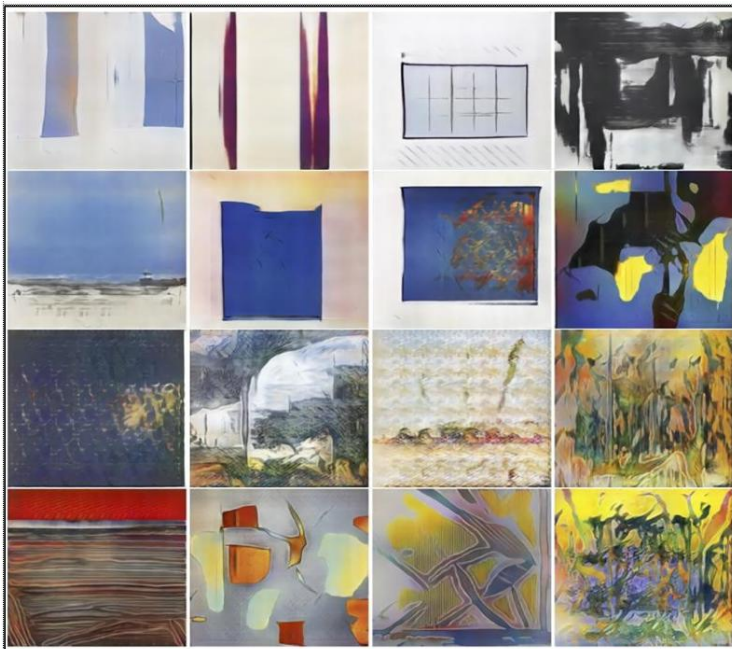


Fig. 6 AICAN Collection, Creative Adversarial Networks: Generating art by Learning about Art and Deviating from Style Norms, 2017

Mario Klingemann, a pioneer of AI working with GAN, says this model can create images that define the emerging and new type of AI, and that it is

⁷ Rutgers University website (accessed November 21, 2018 & September 2024), <https://sites.google.com/site/digihumanlab/research>

⁸ Unknown, *Art created by artificial intelligence*, CBS News, “Art and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory-Rutgers University website” (accessed November 21, 2018), retrieved from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/art-created-by-artificialintelligence/7/>

really just a tool. Klingemann: “Even if you don't have a deeper knowledge of how they work and how they can control, they create an instant gratification.”⁹

The Greek digital painter Theo Triantafyllidis says, “Even the most advanced AI today is somewhere between a really clumsy child and a really intelligent animal.”¹⁰

Essentially, artificial intelligence is a structure that creates new possibilities inspired by human creativity. When independent creativity is fully realized, the artificial intelligence artist will be separated from the human. As the artist Teo said, the art of AI, which is still crawling, aims to run fast. Looks like this will take some time.



Fig. 7 Theo Triantafyllidis, “Seamless”, 2017

Art of Robots

The first modern robots were created in the early 1950s. The revolutionary robot of the twentieth century was invented as an industrial product.



Fig. 8 Courtesy Design Museum, England, 2021

⁹ Tim Schneider and Naomi Rea (2018). *Has artificial intelligence given us the next great art movement? Experts say slow down, the field is in its infancy*, “Artnet News”, September 25 (accessed November 21, 2018), retrieved from: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ai-art-comes-to-market-is-it-worth-the-hype-1352011>

¹⁰ Naomi Rea (2018). *Why a collector has taken an artwork with artificial intelligence and is open to buy more*, “Artnet News”, April 3 (accessed November 22, 2018), retrieved from: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-made-by-artificial-intelligence-1258745>

Artificial intelligence is used extensively in finance, healthcare, production, education and service sectors. In fact, in China, AI is taught as compulsory subjects in primary and secondary schools.

Today, we can see that AI reveals human potential. Human is an emotional being and art contains emotion. Can artificial intelligence robots have emotions? Scientists who ask this question are training it more and more day by day and improving it to respond to emotions.

AI-Da, the first painter robot whose construction was completed in 2019, opened an exhibition in England in 2021 with portrait paintings she drew. The painter robot, produced through an agreement between gallerist Aidan Meller and Cornish, a robotics company, was developed at Oxford University. AI-Da paints portraits using graphics algorithms for drawing and painting, and can also draw with her hand what she sees with her artificial eyes.

Conclusion

Throughout history, artists have been in search of new things. Thus, they developed various techniques and styles. They created practical ways with new tools. New approaches emerged with many art movements from the Renaissance to contemporary art. In the past, only God was called a “creative” artist. Church painters were inspired by him. With humanism, man has moved to a creative position. In fact, according to quantum physics, the definition of God, the creator, has changed. Artificial intelligence machines are also inspired by humans. It produces works of art using the images taught to it and defined in the database.

In art education, we first start with imitation and make reproductions. Then, with knowledge and experience, we develop new techniques and create original works. Scientists and artists trained artificial intelligence and made it imitate humans. Although it is currently in its infancy, it has started to create partially original works. It is the artists and coders who drive it. Just as there is a trend from the realistic movement to contemporary art, artificial intelligence robots are also a contemporary creation. AI, the technology of our age, has brought a new perspective to art. AI machines offer new creative opportunities to artists and enhance imagination. We know that many traditional artists started to use computer to create new art forms and styles. Serigraphy, photography, computer software (Adobe, etc.), 3D printers, 3D modelling programmes (Blender etc.) are used to create sculpture, painting and digital arts.

Computer- and AI-generated art also contributes to abstract art. It is aimed to create striking works of art by adding more complex codes to artificial intelligence algorithms. Galleries also benefit from this technology, creating a new economic model for exhibiting original works and reaching more audiences. Artworks are exhibited in NLP galleries today and the artists use crypto signature to product their works and getting money.

AI can be a “tool” to produce art as part of the artistic process. Successful results were obtained in aesthetic experiments using this tool. Computer software is both a tool and a creative collaborator.

When the camera first appeared, it was not seen as an art tool. Photography was not an art form. Later, artists used it for their own purposes and began to produce art. Famous Turkish photographer Ara Güler says: „If the best camera took the best photographs, the person with the best typewriter would write the best novel.” In other words, the artist who gives soul to the work of art is the human being himself. Machines perform a mechanical action. Artificial intelligence is more practical than humans, learns quickly and produces results.

These machines are getting more advanced every day and are getting ready to inspire people with “super intelligence and talent”. Algorithmic images have gone beyond the stereotypes and become aesthetic. There are several kinds of intelligence. Art requires visual, mathematical, auditory and linguistic intelligence. AI has all of these, then it produces real works of art.

We can ask another question: “is it natural?” AI and machines imitate humans. So it is not natural but human to also imitate nature. Artists watch the nature, hear birdsongs, develop analytical processes in the face of the mathematics of nature and the music from nature. For instance, a landscape artist paints inspired by nature. They create art by interpreting it with various colours and forms, by creating new possibilities. But the reality itself is “nature”. We are imitators too. How natural is this? How much natural art do we make? We create artificial worlds and imitate nature. So, AI makes real art and the metaverse will become our reality.

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***Science fiction* dystopia – the influence of technology on views of the future**

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Abstract: Cyberpunk has transcended its speculative roots to become a critical discourse on technology, surveillance, and corporate hegemony. Beyond mere fiction, it intertwines art, architecture, and social theory, envisioning neon-drenched dystopias where innovation and control converge. More than an aesthetic, cyberpunk encapsulates the existential tension between human autonomy and algorithmic governance, offering a profound critique of our hyper-technologized reality.

Keywords: Cyberpunk, dystopia, science fiction, speculative fiction, visual arts.

Cyberpunk is a subgenre of *science fiction* that explores the complex relationship between technology and society in futuristic contexts marked by radical technological advances. The term was coined in 1982 by Bruce Bethke¹ and is derived from cybernetics and punk, suggesting a fusion between the science of replacing human functions with computerized systems and the rebellious and nihilistic spirit of youth in the 1970s and 1980s. The genre has its roots in the writings of authors such as Samuel R. Delany and William Gibson, who turned cyberpunk into a literary movement. *Cyberpunk* first gained prominence in the literature of the 1980s, being the first science fiction genre to distance itself from optimistic visions of the future and introduce a cynical, reflexive perspective on technological advancement.

Veronica Hollinger defines the cynicism of cyberpunk as a result of its postmodernist nature. She reflects on how cyberpunk deconstructs the traditional oppositions between natural and artificial, human and machine, rather than maintaining them in a way that privileges humanity².

Furthermore, through historical contextualization, we can argue that its influences derive from the expansion of capitalism, the rise of megacorporations, technological advancement, and fears of totalitarian surveillance. Thus, this genre reflects the pessimism induced by the economic, social, and technological

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¹ Bruce Bethke (1983). *Cyberpunk*, “Amazing Stories”, Nov. 1983, p. 94.

² Veronica Hollinger (1990). *Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism*, “Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature”, 23, nr. 2, p. 30.

transformations of the 20th century, establishing itself as a dystopian subgenre of science fiction.

In another type of analysis, Fredric Jameson puts into perspective a view of cyberpunk as a pastiche phenomenon. As a product of postmodern anxiety about the future, this genre constructs its aesthetics through a mixture of *high-tech* elements and images of urban decline, evoking an aesthetic that oscillates between futuristic nostalgia and a critique of hypercapitalism. In contemporary productions, this style is constantly recontextualized, becoming part of a bazaar of reusable artifacts. It is an aesthetic that not only reflects a dystopian urban reality, but also a recollection of the past, a reconstruction of a world that seems to have been lost in continuous chaos and dizzying technological change. Meson analyzes the genre in opposition to utopia and argues that cyberpunk reflects an inability to imagine a future outside the parameters set by a neoliberal order. This crisis leads to the constant repetition of the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism, and cyberpunk, as a genre, reflects precisely this impossibility of imagining radical change. In the *cyberpunk* universe, the future is not a *tabula rasa*, but a collage of historical, cultural, and technological elements, reused in a manner that simultaneously evokes the past and the future. In this sense, cyberpunk functions as a palimpsest, where each aesthetic layer is a sign of a future that never materialized³.

Drawing on a personal interpretation, I believe that the dystopian dimension of cyberpunk can benefit from further nuance through the theory of a recycled future, in which dystopias are not just nihilistic projections, but a form of social criticism that reflects the immediate problems of the present, serving to generate political and cultural awareness.

Starting from the premise that, in the late stage of capitalism, economic, social, and ecological challenges are becoming increasingly acute, it is to be expected that a system based on consumption and the continuous exploitation of resources will, in a logical projection, lead to their depletion, culminating in a global ecological disaster.

Thus, dystopias not only reflect the realities of a contemporary world under pressure from power structures and consumerism, but also serve as a warning about the effects of radical neoliberalism. In this context, recycling elements from the past and reinterpreting them in a futuristic setting is not mere nostalgia, but a method of reconstructing the past to highlight possible developments in the present. Thus, reintegrating historical images or themes into a dystopian future can be a valuable tool for understanding and critiquing the current socio-economic and ecological context. Likewise, a pre-apocalyptic scenario generated by the threat of climate crisis can cause fictional space to reconfigure itself to illustrate the system's inability to generate new elements.

³ Frederic Jameson (2005). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, London and New York.

Another particularly relevant interpretation is put forward by Kumiko Sato. She argues that technological progress is not a universal, homogeneous process, but one that manifests itself differently depending on the cultural and historical context of each society, citing as an example the way Japan has reshaped cyberpunk according to its unique cultural model⁴. In this perspective, we can also invoke Michio Kaku's argument that "Japan has integrated the cyborg into its society much more easily because of its Shinto spiritual roots. In the Shinto belief, inanimate objects are seen as places where spirits live"⁵. Proof of this interpretation can be found in the title of the anime film "Ghost in the Shell," which highlights the cyborg perspective in a *cyberpunk* universe.

Visually, the genre was established by Ridley Scott's film "Blade Runner" (1982), which imposed an emblematic aesthetic. Focusing on the visual universe created by cinematographer Jordan Cronenweth, we can analyze the ways in which *cyberpunk* aesthetic coding contributes to the narrative. It combines influences from film *noir* with dystopian urban landscapes: constant rain, pollution, neon lights, and monumental brutalist architecture. The settings are dense and layered, including giant commercial signs, holograms, multicultural markets, and advanced technologies integrated into degraded spaces, all suggesting a globalized but ultimately alienating future. This fictional universe achieves its complexity through meticulous details, such as the design of buildings, which evoke corporate domination. The presence of brutalism is revealed at the level of the power structures constituted by corporations. This use of architectural elements, which have concrete as their base material, is closely linked to their impersonal character.

The city has always been a symbol of progress, civilisation and human power over the environment. However, in dystopian literature and art, the metropolis becomes a space of alienation, surveillance and control, an architectural expression of anxieties about the future. From the industrial ziggurats in *Metropolis* (1927) to the hyper-technological and suffocating cities in *Blade Runner* (1982) or *Akira* (1984-1993), urban dystopias reflect fears of authoritarianism, social inequality, and depersonalization in an environment where the individual becomes a prisoner of their own habitat.

In his article, "The Aesthetics of Science Fiction. What does SciFi Look Like After Cyberpunk?", journalist Rick Liebling talks with analysts of the genre in order to identify some characteristic elements of the use of brutalism in the *Blade Runner* universe.

They identify brutalism as a symbol of influential institutions, associated with iconic buildings such as government offices, university libraries, cultural

⁵ Sato Kumiko (2004). *How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context*, "Comparative Literature Studies", vol. 41, no. 3, p. 335.

⁵ Michio Kaku (2012). *Physics of the Future: The Inventions That Will Transform Our Lives*, Penguin Books, London.

facilities, and office buildings from the mid-20th century. Over time, the brutalist architectural style has acquired a particular gravity and solemnity, becoming representative of institutional authority and respectability.

Blade Runner also uses this aesthetic to generate a sense of temporal and spatial confusion – a postmodern collage of architectural and technological styles that defies clear placement in time or space. Concrete, the basic material of brutalist architecture, is essential in terms of its lack of geographical belonging, an essential aspect for futuristic images that seek to dissociate themselves from a particular culture or location. In human perception, concrete is not warm or welcoming, especially when isolated as a material or combined with metal and glass. This austere materiality outlines a subtle critique of humanity's detachment from nature. The absence of artifacts, decor, or materials that could indicate a temporal context causes empty surfaces to eliminate time and place from the equation, contributing to the viewer's alienation.

Although contemporary design sometimes tends toward similar elements, there is still a significant disconnect between the everyday experience of the average viewer and these neutral spaces or materials, which are otherwise perceived as cold, distant, and almost inhuman; they symbolize, in fact, opposition to humanity. Being indifferent to the needs of the individual, they become, to some extent, boundless, accentuating alienation⁶.

What makes the *cyberpunk* genre special is that it has managed to transcend its contextual limitations, being a genre that is constantly reconfiguring itself, borrowing elements from each era. Science fiction imagination adopts this aesthetic on a broad level precisely for this reason. Also, its multicultural character encourages an intersectional perspective and can generate a complex narrative thread.

In this sense, a contemporary approach to *cyberpunk* aesthetics is revealed in the graphic novel *Square Eyes*⁷.

In an urban landscape transformed by augmented reality, where the boundaries between the physical and digital dimensions are becoming increasingly blurred, Anna Mill and Luke Jones initiate a long-term investigation into the profound implications of this technology on contemporary society. Their endeavor began in 2010, a time when augmented reality was still an emerging concept, materialized through rudimentary technological demonstrations accessible via webcams and mobile devices. Fascinated by the transformative potential of this digital environment, Mill and Jones leverage their architectural expertise to construct a complex narrative universe in which the physical city and the internet merge into a double layer of reality, challenging traditional notions of space, perception, and control.

⁶ Rick Liebling (2018). *The Aesthetics of Science Fiction. What Does SciFi Look Like After Cyberpunk?*, "Medium", retrieved from: <https://www.medium.com>

⁷ Anna Mill, Luke Jones (2018). *Square Eyes*, Jonathan Cape, London.

The graphic novel *Square Eyes* brings a vision in which digital reality is no longer just a tool for everyday interaction, but manifests itself as a sophisticated mechanism of influence and surveillance. Although the futuristic metropolis in the pages of the book seems advanced and brilliant, its substratum hides an altered reality, shaped by a system that manipulates individuals' perceptions.

Visually, the novel proposes a distinctive aesthetic, in which physical reality is rendered through a black-and-white filter, in contrast to the digital layers, represented by vibrant colors. This stylistic choice is not a simple visual artifice, but reflects a profound dissociation between the material world, characterized by fragility and ephemerality, and the virtual dimension, omnipresent and brilliant, which overlaps with perceptible reality. Through this approach, the authors facilitate a clear delimitation of the two ontological registers, especially considering that the entire novel is created using a manual illustration technique, including digital elements. In addition, *Square Eyes* introduces a new approach to cyberpunk, while retaining its referential nature. Cyberpunk, as an aesthetic and narrative genre, fits into the paradigm of "semiotic ghosts"⁸ described by William Gibson, as well as the phenomenon of archaeology of the future proposed by Fredric Jameson. As a product of postmodern anxiety about the future, this genre constructs its aesthetics through a mixture of *high-tech* elements and images of urban decline, evoking an aesthetic that oscillates between futuristic nostalgia and a critique of hypercapitalism. In contemporary productions, this style is constantly recontextualized, becoming part of a bazaar of reusable artifacts. It is an aesthetic that not only reflects a dystopian urban reality, but also a recollection of the past, a reconstruction of a world that seems to have been lost in continuous chaos and dizzying technological change. Thus, the city described in the novel becomes an amalgam of multicultural influences, a visual mosaic that refers to various stylistic codes from *science fiction*.

A significant conceptual decision in the construction of the diegetic universe is the omission of the explicit representation of the devices through which the characters access augmented reality. Instead of resorting to recognizable images of emerging technologies, such as smart glasses or integrated lenses, the authors normalize augmented perception as an intrinsic dimension of everyday life. This choice not only ensures narrative timelessness, preventing the text from being anchored in a perishable technological context, but also lends a dimension of verisimilitude to the fictional universe.

In terms of the design of the digital interfaces in *Square Eyes*, Mill and Jones opted for an aesthetic that transcends contemporary technological paradigms. Instead of imitating conventional models of digital programming,

⁸ William Gibson (1993). *Disneyland with the Death Penalty*, "Wired", 1 April, retrieved from: <https://www.wired.com/1993/04/gibson-2/>.

they drew inspiration from natural structures and clockwork mechanisms, outlining a visual system of interaction with augmented reality that evokes the organicity and fluidity of natural forms. Thus, the novel not only imagines a possible future of digital interaction, but also proposes a mediation between technology and aesthetics through a novel visual synthesis.

Although conceived at a time when augmented reality was still in its infancy, *Square Eyes* manages to maintain its relevance by exploring fundamental issues concerning the perception, control, and manipulation of reality in a digitized era. More than just a speculative exercise on technological evolution, the novel offers a critical reflection on how AR (*augmented reality*) could reconfigure the individual's perceptual and cognitive space.

A defining dimension of this artistic project lies in its conceptual proximity to what the authors call “paper architecture”⁹. This concept refers to a creative exploration of virtual spaces and structures without the constraints imposed by material feasibility. Through this approach, Mill and Jones had the freedom to imagine an augmented metropolis, free from the physical, economic, or social limitations of the real world. Anna Mill argues that architecture on paper is not fundamentally different from digital architecture, since even in the case of static representations, the author can mentally construct complex spaces and explore them in depth, similar to an interactive digital environment.

In this vein, Luke Jones emphasizes the critical function of the concept of paper architecture, which can take the form of an ironic dystopia or a speculative utopia. Thus, although some of the imagined interfaces are designed to be functional and aestheticized, the augmented city remains ambiguous, allowing for its interpretation both as a space of freedom and as an environment of surveillance and technological control. Such ambivalence highlights the complex dynamics between the emancipatory potential and the inherent risks of augmented technology.

Therefore, the graphic novel transcends the status of a visual experiment, becoming a framework for reflection on the interaction between the individual, technology, and space.

In conclusion, the analysis of *cyberpunk* aesthetics has highlighted the interaction between technology, architecture, and society in an intercultural urban context. The genre is not only a projection of a technologized future, but also a reflection of contemporary socio-cultural realities, with a versatile aesthetic that allows for reinterpretations and adaptations. By juxtaposing the contrasts between old and new, reality and virtuality, light and shadow, *cyberpunk* becomes a distinct visual code, in which transhumanism redefines

⁹ Kent Bye (2019). *Paper Architecture & Speculative Design of AR in the Graphic Novel 'Square Eyes'*, Voices of VR [Podcast], produced by Kent Bye, 26 August, retrieved from: <https://voicesofvr.com/802-paper-architecture-speculative-design-of-ar-in-the-graphic-novel-square-eyes/>

human identity and social relations in a complex urban context that becomes a character in itself.

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Aspects of the horror genre in graphic novels

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Abstract: The horror genre has undergone considerable evolution throughout history due to cultural and technological innovations, taking on a multitude of forms in literature, cinema and graphic novels. A defining aspect of horror stories, distinct from simple monster stories (such as myths), is the emotional response of positive human characters to these monsters. In fairy tales, for example, they represent normality, whereas in *horror* they are considered abnormal creatures. The concept of *art-horror* is introduced by Noël Carroll in his book *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of The Heart*. He considers the emotion that these works are meant to provoke in the audience. Therefore, he defines the *horror* genre, in part, by specifying art-horror, that is, works meant to provoke the emotion of horror¹. The *horror* graphic novel represents a fascinating synthesis between sequential art and horror literature, providing a narrative and visual platform through which humanity's deepest fears are explored. Through the combination of text and image, this medium manages to create a unique immersive experience, where narrative and visuals work together to generate suspense, tension and fear. The particularities of the *horror* genre, such as the frightening atmosphere, the grotesque and suspense, are amplified in the comic book medium through the use of illustrations and recognizable graphic symbols, which constitute the language of sequential art. In this article, I aim to identify and analyze the ways in which horror narrative unfolds in the graphic novel, exploring the complexity of this narrative medium.

Keywords: horror genre; art-horror; graphic novel; sequential art; visual narrative; emotion of horror; grotesque and suspense.

1. Introduction

The narrative structure of the graphic novel

The graphic novel uses the same form of sequential art as the classic comic book², but it engages the reader on multiple levels of interpretation. To understand how the narrative unfolds in a graphic novel, it is necessary to define the elements of its structure. The first has a straightforward title and is self-explanatory—the medium, meaning the work itself, the print or digital version

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¹ Noël Carroll (1990). *The Philosophy of Horror*, Routledge, New York, pp. 15-16.

² Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey (2016). *Comic Book History of Comics*, IDW Publishing, San Diego.

with all its components³. The appearance of the graphic novel, the cover, the structure and the layout of the pages contain a lot of information and the reader's presence determines how it is perceived.

The page is an essential framing device, known as a hyperframe, which establishes a complex relationship with the other panels and hyperframes around it⁴. In order to render and fix the dynamics of certain visual representations, such as characters or objects in the flow of the story, the narrative is divided into successive fragments, called panels or frames. These differ from cinematic frames, being more a part of a creative process than a technical unit of measurement⁵. Harvey defines frames as images arranged in series that delimit temporal sequences in the graphic novel. The process of dividing a narrative into such images (a process that necessarily involves both omission and inclusion) can be called *breakdown*, a term derived from *breakdowns*, an expression used in the field to refer to preliminary sketches made during the planning of a comic strip story⁶.

The reverse process, that of reading through these images and deducing connections between them, has been called *closure*, a term borrowed from Gestalt psychology by McCloud⁷. Closure takes place in the empty space between panels – the *gutter*. The gutter is where the human imagination connects separate images into a single idea⁸. In *horror* graphic novels, the gutter can be used to introduce mystery and amplify suspense. Graphic novels use closure differently from other forms of expression and communication. In this medium, the audience becomes an important and conscious collaborator in triggering the narrative. Even if nothing is between the panels, experience tells the reader that something must be happening there.

In fact, *breakdown* and *closure* are complementary terms, both describing the relationship between sequence and series. The author's task is to evoke an imaginary sequence by creating a breakdown of a visual series, while the reader's task is to translate the series provided into a narrative sequence, achieving closure⁹.

3 A. David Lewis (2010). *The Shape of Comic Book Reading*, Boston University Press, Boston, pp. 71-81.

4 Thierry Groensteen (2007). *The Systems of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Kindle edition.

5 Will Eisner (2022). *Comics and Sequential Art*, trans. M. Zaslavsky, Mann, Ivanov and Ferber, Moscow, p. 43.

6 R. C. Harvey (1994). *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, pp. 14-15.

7 Charles Hatfield (2009). *An Art of Tensions*, in *A Comics Studies Reader*, edited by Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, pp. 256-257.

8 Scott McCloud (1994). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Harper Perennial, New York, p. 66.

9 Charles Hatfield (2009). *op. cit.*

Frames play an essential role in rendering temporality and movement. By using them, artists can suggest the flow of time, but also the spatial location of events, emotional states, or ideas conveyed. Thus, the frame becomes a complex tool that simultaneously manages the elements of the visual alphabet and the reader's perceptions¹⁰. In the *horror* genre, the sequence of panels can amplify tension and prepare the reader for the terrifying moment. The entire page thus becomes a space for narrative manipulation, in which the artist can structure the visual order to guide the gaze and maintain suspense.

The tension between word and image is one of the distinctive features of this graphic narrative form¹¹. This results from the juxtaposition of symbols that function diegetically and those that function non-diegetically, that is, the mixture of symbols that “show” and those that “tell”. The symbols that “show” represent figures and objects from the fictional world of the narrative, constructing a universe recognizable to the reader, while the symbols that “tell” function as a meta-narrative commentary or provide a visual “soundtrack”, contributing to the overall atmosphere. Typically, diegetic symbols are represented by figurative drawings and non-diegetic symbols consist of text, speech bubbles and familiar icons (such as arrows, dotted lines, or other graphic symbols). However, the *horror* graphic novel offers significant opportunities to push this dynamic further, integrating figurative drawings as elements of “dialogue” and blurring the distinction between text and image. This creates a unique synergy between visual and verbal codes, expanding the graphic language of the genre. This collaboration and clash of different codes of meaning, whether they include written text or not, contributes to the narrative and stylistic complexity of the *horror* graphic novel. Importantly, the use of these visual and textual devices requires an informed reader, capable of deciphering and interpreting the multiple layers of meaning in the work¹².

Plot and Suspense

The main structure of the plot in a horror work, also known as “The Complex Discovery Plot”, is explained by Noël Carroll, who points out four basic elements: the debut, the discovery, the confirmation and the confrontation¹³.

The debut is the crucial moment when the monster is revealed to the audience, stirring up intrigue and anticipation. *Horror* narratives that follow this pattern can begin either as a *thriller*, immediately revealing the monster's identity

¹⁰ Will Eisner (2022). *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹¹ F. R. Ankersmit (2001). *Historical Representation: Cultural Memory in the Present*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 39.

¹² Charles Hatfield (2009). *An Art of Tensions*, in *A Comics Studies Reader*, Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Eds.), University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, p. 256.

¹³ Noël Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

to the audience, or as a mystery, presenting only the evil traces of its presence (death, destruction, strange behavior of the characters, etc.). In this case, the audience, like the characters, must gather clues to find out who or what is behind the terrifying events. The debut, in the sense of introducing the monster, can be immediate or gradual. Thus, it may be necessary for the viewer to witness several of the evil consequences or crimes of the negative character(s) in order to discover the true nature of the entity hiding in the shadows of events. Many horror works use a gradual approach to revealing the debut, allowing the audience to reconstruct events before the characters. The characters' identification of the monster is thus introduced gradually, after the audience has had the opportunity to gather information and develop preliminary hypotheses¹⁴.

The next stage, which Carroll calls “discovery”, marks the moment when an individual or group of characters becomes aware of the monster’s existence and begins to collect evidence to convince others. This stage can be triggered either by an unexpected revelation or by the conclusions of a careful investigation. Unlike the debut, which highlights the monsters first manifestations, discovery represents the point at which the characters obtain rational certainty that the identified monstrosity is the cause of recent problems¹⁵.

Confirmation is essential to validate the monster’s existence in the face of skeptics. This process involves presenting additional evidence to convince the other parties of the danger it poses. Thus, confirmation consists of the character(s) efforts to demonstrate the presence of danger, while confrontation represents the climax of the story, in which the discoverers directly confront the monsters and try to defeat them¹⁶.

The narrative structures of the plot allow for various variations, but the order of the phases must be respected, as Carroll points out. For example, if a story begins with the discovery phase, it can only be followed by confirmation or confrontation, but never by the debut. The reasoning behind this rule is that the phases are arranged in a logical, linear sequence, even if some of them can be omitted without compromising narrative coherence¹⁷.

One of the most powerful aesthetic tools of the *horror* genre is suspense, found in horror works regardless of their period or type. Tension and captivation through various artistic means keep the audience connected to the work of art through the slow but frightening revelation of events.

¹⁴ Noël Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 101-103.

¹⁷ Sophie Anne Caroline Herbergs (2013). *Horror Gore and Horror Tales: An Investigation of Noël Carroll's Narrative Logic of Horror and the Role of Spectacle in the Narrative*, Utrecht University Student Theses Repository, accessed on April 13, 2024, <https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/13540>.

Suspense is a crucial element in the narrative structure of horror. Narratives of this kind, which Noël Carroll has called “erotetic narratives” adopt a simplistic question-and-answer model. In the case of horror, the question is often asked at the beginning of the story and the answer is revealed along the way. It is an emotional state that persists until the possible alternative outcomes are clarified. The audience is captivated by the desire to find out what happens next, even if the subject is a monster that, theoretically speaking, should not exist. Curiosity and fascination, according to Carroll, are the fundamental attraction of horror and satisfaction is achieved by revealing previously unknown aspects of the monstrous phenomenon¹⁸.

Tomie, Junji Ito

Junji Ito is considered one of the most important authors of *horror* graphic novels. His stories are notable for their grotesque aesthetics and bizarre scenarios, which unfold in abnormal settings. His famous series include “Tomie” (1987-2000), “Uzumaki” (1998-1999) and “Gyo” (2001-2002)¹⁹. The artist justifies the dark nature of his works by transforming mundane elements of everyday life into terrifying images, combining the grotesque with the beautiful in an extreme way. However, his goal is not to create an atmosphere of horror, but to highlight the unusual aspects he discovers in everyday reality. In an interview, the artist emphasized that he seeks to convey the subtle feeling that “something is not right” rather than induce a direct sense of terror²⁰.

Body horror is the main component of Junji Ito's work. Graphic depictions of mutilation, alteration and other frightening metamorphoses, in addition to inducing fear, generate a profound reflection on human vulnerability and imperfection. The metamorphosis of the body is a crucial aspect of his artistic expression. The artist's style remains unique in the diversity and complexity of bodily representations in the contemporary environment.

“Tomie” is a *horror* manga series, published in 1987, depicting supernatural events. As the protagonist, Tomie, a beautiful young woman, exudes a deceptive charm, having the power to seduce men to death. Killed by her victims several times, she regenerates and replicates continuously throughout the series. The manga explores the theme of obsession and evil seduction, illustrating how Tomie manages to corrupt and destroy those who encounter her. The plot is presented through a series of interconnected stories, in which various characters discover Tomie's frightening nature and try, unsuccessfully, to escape her evil influence. “Tomie” is distinguished by its lack of a clear and logical resolution, with the characters condemned to face the horror of the unknown and

¹⁸ Noël Carroll, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-144.

¹⁹ Yu-en Su (1999). *Contagious Horror and Fear in Junji Ito's Uzumaki Series (Uzumaki: Spiral into Horror)*, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, 1999, p. 2

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

the inevitability of the protagonist's supernatural power, thus intensifying the feeling of fear and tension among readers. Based on Noël Carroll's theory, I will analyze the elements of the plot through which the narrative is constructed.

In the first chapter, Tomie inexplicably comes back to life after we learn from the narrator's words and the characters' dialogues (her classmates, teachers and law enforcement officers) how she was brutally murdered (Figure 1). This return marks the beginning of the monster's perception and creates anticipation. After this initial revelation, the discovery phase unfolds gradually as various heroes realize Tomie's existence and abnormal nature.



Fig. 1 Junji Ito, *Tomie*, 1987-2000, graphic novel, source: <https://tomie-manga.com/>

A good example of this is when a group of students try to reveal the truth about Tomie to their classmates, using photographs and testimonies (Figure 2). One of the major confrontations in the graphic novel is when the characters try to eliminate Tomie permanently by cutting her body into pieces, striving to destroy each part to prevent her regeneration, but without success, thus amplifying the terror and suspense.

As a manga character, Tomie challenges the Japanese concept of *kawaii* (cute). The *kawaii* culture presented in the fictional world of comics and anime establishes an unrealistic portrayal of women (with large breasts, big eyes, a small waist and long legs). Whether they are expected to look or behave in a *kawaii* manner, innocence is sexualized, while vulnerability is considered a defining feminine trait²¹. Although there are imperfections in the femme fatale character, Tomie's archetype becomes an important one in the representation of

²¹ Kathryn Hemman (2018). *Dangerous Women and Dangerous Stories: Gendered Narration*, in Kirino Natsuo's *Grotesque and Real World*, in *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano and James Welker (Eds.), University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, p. 173.

women as dominant figures. Therefore, Tomie successfully exemplifies traits rarely found in Japanese society. She stands out from the usual patterns, representing the opposite of the *kawaii* character, being neither innocent nor cute. Through his heroine, Junji Ito has managed to transcend the expected patterns for an ordinary Japanese woman through her strong features and deceptive beauty ²².



Fig. 2 Junji Ito, *Tomie*, 1987-2000, graphic novel, source: <https://tomie-manga.com/>

The role reversal suffered by the heroine, initially a victim, later a monster, triggers horror in the narrative, building a plot with a strong emotional impulse. Being repeatedly killed by the men she seduces, Tomie appears to be subjected to explicit violence, the violation of her bodily integrity further emphasizing the importance of physical appearance and the sinister atmosphere. Moreover, Tomie's body is categorized as abject through bloody representations, horrific deformities and elements inside the body (Figure 3). In this sense, we see the importance of the visual component in the construction of the work's narrative. Monochrome and expressive images stand out through the artist's distinctive style, which instills a feeling of contagious fear.

²² Kathy Wang (2020). *Postmodern Manga: Junji Ito's Tomie*, in "Journal of Visual & Critical Studies", p. 28.

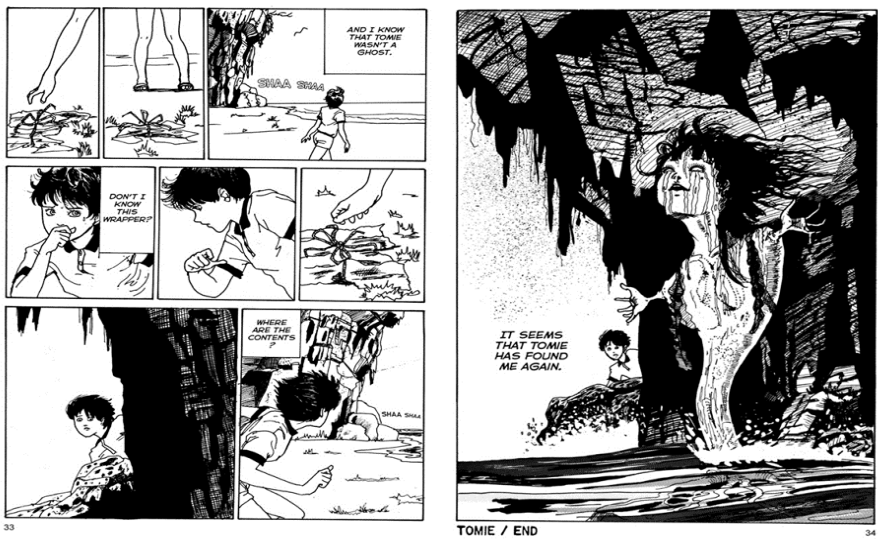


Fig. 3 Junji Ito, *Tomie*, 1987–2000, graphic novel, source: <https://tomie-manga.com/>

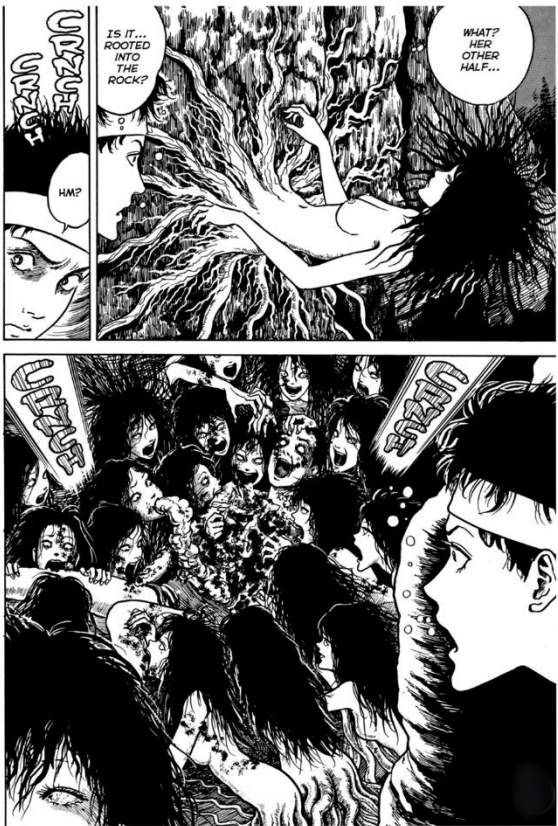


Fig. 4 Junji Ito, *Tomie*, 1987–2000, graphic novel, source: <https://tomie-manga.com/>

This feeling is deepened by the narrative rhythm achieved through various compositional mechanisms. Another technique is the illustration of horrific events on the following page. The sudden revelation of such scenes is Ito's preferred method of shocking the reader when turning the page. The consecutive presentation of details from one panel to another and the emphasis on certain elements in the foreground frames increase the tension at a moderate pace throughout the story.

According to the ideas analyzed above, the graphic novel stands out as a distinct medium, endowed with its own arsenal of means, innovations and traditions. This art form has a significant characteristic in its ability to evoke at least two or even more stories in parallel on a single page, in a unique symbiosis between illustrations and text. Horror graphic novels, regardless of their format, physical or digital, reflect humanity's fears and problems, exploring the limits of morality and human consciousness. Their themes are similar to those in other forms of *horror* art, but they add intensity through the combination of unique visual and narrative elements.

Conclusion

This study shows that the horror graphic novel functions as a complex narrative medium in which text and image work together to intensify the emotional experience of art-horror. By combining visual symbolism with narrative structure, the graphic novel amplifies key elements of the horror genre – such as fear, suspense, and the grotesque – while offering a distinctive way of engaging the reader. As a result, horror narratives in graphic novels reveal both the adaptability of the genre and the expressive potential of sequential art.

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A brief exploration of the history of book illustration in Europe

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Abstract: This article traces the historical development of book illustration, from prehistoric narrative cave art to contemporary digital practices. By defining illustration through its communicative function rather than material or technique, the study highlights key moments in which visual storytelling evolved alongside writing, printing technologies, and cultural change.

Keywords: book illustration; visual narration; prehistoric art; illuminated manuscripts; printmaking; digital illustration.

Introduction

In order to truly reach the origins of book illustration, we must first understand how illustration itself emerged and which defining moments shaped its evolution. However, identifying the exact period in which illustration arose as an artistic form is a difficult task, for unlike painting, which can be associated with the material used in its creation (paint), or engraving, which is characterized by its technical process (engraving and printing), illustration is not tied to a specific material or technique. Illustration is defined primarily by its purpose, and thus it is far more difficult to associate it with a particular time period.¹ We may say that painting was born with the use of the first pigments, photography arose with the invention of the camera, engraving appeared with the first printed wooden plates, yet there is no tangible object through which illustration can be dated. Nevertheless, if we were to assume that illustration is defined by its purpose, then that purpose could be summarized as the intention to communicate concrete or abstract ideas and information through a visual channel.

Continuing this line of reasoning, we looked for the earliest signs of humankind’s desire to leave behind tangible proof of its own existence and beliefs, whether individual or communal, and thus arrived at the hypothesis that the history of illustration begins with the first complex messages: stories. This leads us over 40,000 years into the past, to the moment when narrative cave art first emerged.²

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¹ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman (2019). *History of Illustration*, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, New York, p. 2.

² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

The oldest examples of prehistoric art originate in the Upper Paleolithic, a period in human history situated between 50,000 and 10,000 years ago.³ The first artists decorated cave walls with a wide range of signs and images, using natural pigments, most often of mineral origin. The paint, made from soil rich in elements that gave it specific coloration (e.g., iron oxide for reddish tones, charcoal for black, etc.), and often mixed with animal fat or blood, was applied directly by hand or with the aid of sticks.⁴ There is ongoing debate regarding the role these paintings served. It is possible that the illustrations had a purely decorative purpose, yet many theories point instead toward a ritualistic function. In most cases, the paintings are found in hard-to-reach areas deep within caves, far from any natural light. In some instances, typical signs of inhabited spaces are entirely absent in areas where paintings appear, indicating that the sites were reserved as sacred zones. The most widely accepted theory is that animals illustrated with extraordinary detail served to offer hunters some kind of magical advantage. The sharp contrast between the effort invested in depicting the animals, as opposed to the abstract, stylized form of human figures, suggests that the animals represented the central point of interest; thus, the more realistically an animal was portrayed, the more powerful its invocation likely was and the higher the chance of success in hunting.⁵

The recently discovered cave paintings in Indonesia are considered to be among the earliest human attempts to convey a story by means other than spoken language. Researchers involved in the discovery of these relics from the past estimate their age at approximately 44,000 years, several thousand years earlier than the first European cave paintings with comparable narrative qualities.⁶

The Indonesian paintings discovered in a cave in the southern area of the island of Sulawesi are currently considered the oldest form of narrative illustration found to date. Eight anthropomorphic creatures equipped with ropes and spears are depicted in a hunting scene, pursuing and capturing wild animals, including wild boars and buffaloes, species characteristic of the local fauna. These paintings also appear to possess a possible religious character. The eight figures are illustrated with several seemingly animalistic features, such as tails, beaks, or animal heads.⁷

It is not clear whether these animalistic traits were meant to describe chimeras imagined by the creator or by the communal culture, or whether they represent an attempt to depict camouflage techniques used by prehistoric hunters

³ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ Andrew G. Dixon (2013). *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, new edition, Dorling Kindersley (2018), London, p. 38, Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren (2013). *Art History*, fifth edition, Pearson Education, Boston, p. 11.

⁵ Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

⁶ Maxime Aubert, Rustan Lebe, Agug A. Oktaviana *et al.* (2019). *Earliest hunting scene in prehistoric art*, in "Nature", No. 576, DOI:10.1038/s41586-019-1806-y, p. 445.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 443, 445.

in their search for food. General opinion seems to lean toward the first hypothesis, especially given that the hunted animals are strongly oversized in relation to the humanoid figures⁸; however, this hypothesis is not supported by sufficient data to be universally accepted. Whatever the case, it appears evident that this scene, in its complexity of characters interacting with one another, is rich in narrative content. Thus, at least until new archaeological discoveries emerge, we may consider that narrative illustration first appeared, in its most rudimentary form, with these cave paintings, at least 44,000 years ago.

When humankind's primary occupation began to focus less on hunting and more on agriculture and animal husbandry, its way of life also underwent major changes. The cultivation and harvesting of grains and the domestication of animals made it possible to obtain a surplus of food that could be stored for long periods, making it no longer necessary to move from place to place in pursuit of animals and their migration patterns. Humans thus shifted from a nomadic existence to a sedentary, stable one, a shift that led to population growth and to the need to coordinate that population. Gradually, tribal settlements transformed into villages, villages became towns, and some towns became true metropolises of the ancient world⁹.

The first such metropolises emerged in Mesopotamia, a historical region located within the boundaries of present-day Iraq, bordered to the northeast by the Zagros Mountains and to the southeast by the Syrian Desert. Bearing its name since antiquity, the land "between two rivers"¹⁰, also known as the "Horn of Plenty," the "Fertile Crescent," and the "Cradle of Civilization," was the witness to the birth of human civilization and of civilized art.

The most renowned inhabitants of this region were likely the Sumerians. Among many other accomplishments, the Sumerians are recognized as the inventors of the plow, the wheel, cities, and not least, cuneiform writing.¹¹ If a tradition of painting on wood or canvas existed, it has long since disintegrated; thus, the only forms of illustration from this period must be observed through a more flexible interpretation of its definition. Although we traditionally consider illustration to be a two-dimensional artistic form, we will push the boundaries of this concept so as to include relief sculpture as well.

Possessing a distinct elegance and unique archaeological significance, the Warka Vase (ca. 3200 BCE) is one of the oldest legacies of illustration and civilized narrative art. "Carved from a single block of alabaster, this massive

⁸ Maxime Aubert, Rustan Lebe, Agug A. Oktaviana *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁹ Andrew G. Dixon (2018). *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, new edition, Dorling Kindersley, London, p. 42.

¹⁰ Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

¹¹ Andrew G. Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

vase is decorated with three relief-sculpted registers”¹² that encircle the object’s entire circumference.

The first register, beginning at the base, illustrates a sequence of plants and animals in an alternating rhythm, while the second register depicts a series of men bearing offerings. The third and most intriguing register depicts what appears to be one of the oldest visual records of an ancient ritual.¹³ “This scene is believed to be a reinterpretation of the ritual marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi, her consort – an office taken on by the priest-king – which took place during the New Year’s festivities to ensure the fertility of crops, animals, and people, and therefore the continuity of Uruk.”¹⁴

The idea of immortalizing aspects of a kingdom’s history through art is not limited to the region of Mesopotamia. While the city-states were emerging between the Tigris and the Euphrates, another civilization was taking root, this time on the banks of the Nile River. Egyptian civilization developed in the fertile Nile Valley, whose annual floods created rich soils favorable for agriculture, in contrast to the arid desert surrounding them. The art of ancient Egypt changed very little over the centuries. The Predynastic Period (ca. 5000-3000 BCE) left behind a variety of ceramic vessels and occasional small-scale sculptures and murals, but a true treasure of illustration materialized with the rise of the first dynastic pharaohs.¹⁵

In comparison with Mesopotamian leaders, the rulers of the Egyptian people appear to have taken a much greater interest in recording historical events in artistic form. The Narmer Palette (ca. 3000 BCE) is an object of art and history that represents one of the earliest examples in this sense, namely the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. The pharaoh, shown at one point wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt and later the red crown of Lower Egypt, symbolizes his victory over Lower Egypt and the unification of the two realms under his rule.¹⁶

The Mesopotamians have the distinction of being considered the inventors of writing, but the Egyptians were the first to popularize the combination of words and illustrations within the same compositional space. Beginning with tomb walls and later adapting mural art to portable surfaces such as coffins and papyrus, the Egyptians were those who invented book illustration before actual

¹² Larry Ball, Marshall Becker, Andrew Fitzpatrick (2009). *10,000 Years of Art*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, p. 6

¹³ Senta German (2022). *Warka Vase*, Smarthistory accessed on 25 August 2022, <https://smarthistory.org/warka-vase/>

¹⁴ Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ The First Egyptian Dynasty originated around 3000 BCE, beginning with Pharaoh Menes (Narmer). The final dynasty, the Ptolemaic Dynasty, ended in 30 BCE with Queen Cleopatra VII. Source: Marilyn Stokstad; Michael Cothren, *Art History*, fifth edition, Pearson Education, Boston, 2013, pp. 50, 79; *** *ART*, Parragon, Bath, 2011, p. 55; Andrew G. Dixon, *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, new edition, Dorling Kindersley, London, 2018, pp. 46-47.

¹⁶ Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.

books existed. Their ritual texts written on sheets of papyrus were almost always accompanied by vibrant illustrations. We observe this most often in the “Book of the Dead.” Although the Book of the Dead is not a book in the true sense of the word, but rather a collection of individual texts transcribed onto papyrus, it fulfilled the role of an illustrated guide, and setting aside its unconventional physical format, we may consider Egyptian papyri to be the precursors of illustrated books.

The first illustrated books, bound in the form of a codex as we know it today, appeared in Western Europe beginning around 400 CE, most often addressing subjects from scripture and Christian teachings. These were called “illuminated manuscripts” and represented, for a thousand years, Europe’s most valuable artistic achievement in book form. Illuminated manuscripts bore this name due to the gold and silver leaf or ink with which the text and illustrations were decorated. When rays of light passed over the enriched pages, the text and images reflected the light, shining with a truly divine appearance.¹⁷

The illustrations of illuminated manuscripts can be divided into three main groups: decorated initials, borders, and miniatures.¹⁸ The richly decorated initial letters represent perhaps the most characteristic element of these manuscripts and were used to mark the beginning of a paragraph. Their stylistic range varied from an oversized capital letter highlighted with one or two colors to complex artistic works richly colored and adorned with gold or silver. Sometimes the decoration of these initials was taken to the extreme, becoming almost a miniature in its own right.¹⁹ Beautifully decorated borders were also a typical element of illuminated volumes. The motifs most often found in their ornamentation were spirals, lace-like forms, geometric patterns, Celtic knots, as well as floral and animal representations. The miniatures, however, were the most interesting ornaments of the pages. Sometimes framed, other times free, miniatures often depicted religious scenes related to the text or important figures such as the Evangelists or the Virgin Mary.²⁰

¹⁷ Susan Doyle; Jaleen Grove; Whitney Sherman (2019). *History of Illustration*, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, New York, pp. 9-10; Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *illuminated manuscript*, Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed on 2 August 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/illuminated-manuscript>

¹⁸ ***, ART, Parragon, Bath, 2011, p. 171.

¹⁹ Elizabeth MacDonald, *Lighting the way - How illuminated initials guided medieval readers through books*, Europeana, accessed on 3 August 2022, <https://www.europeana.eu/en/stories/lighting-the-way-how-illuminated-initials-guided-medieval-readers-through-books>; Philip B. Meggs, Alston W. Purvis (2012), *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, fifth edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, pp. 48-49.

²⁰ *ILLUMINATED Manuscripts in the making*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, accessed on 2 August 2022, <https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/illuminated/manuscript/discover>; *Illuminated borders*, The Morgan Library & Museum, accessed on 2 August 2022, <https://www.themorgan.org/genres/illuminated-borders>

In the beginning, illuminated manuscripts were made entirely by monks in abbey workshops, but as these books became more popular, the centers of production began to move to large cities, where artisans executed and sold them. Although illuminated manuscripts indeed became commercial, few could afford them. The time and materials required to produce a single copy determined a cost beyond the reach of an ordinary person, so only the upper class of society enjoyed these luxury items.²¹

Until the eleventh century, paper was not used in Europe because it was considered un-Christian by the medieval Church – an invention of pagans from the East – so manuscripts were made using parchment. Vellum, the parchment obtained from calfskin, was preferred by European monks and thus became the standard support for a long period.²² The inks used were likewise the result of a complex process of grinding, mixing, and boiling organic and mineral materials, either local or imported. Often, the monks themselves were responsible for processing and preparing all necessary materials. They also handled every artistic aspect of the books. The creation process of a book began with cutting the vellum to the desired size. After preparing the support, lines were drawn for the text, and empty spaces were left where the illustration was to be created. Joshua J. Mark explains the continuation of this process:²³

“The text was written first in black ink (or gold or another appropriate color for the subject) between the ruled lines on the page and then would be given to another monk to proofread for errors; this second monk – or perhaps a third – would then add titles in blue or red ink and then pass the page on to the illuminator who would add images, color, and the requisite gold illumination.”²⁴

The most beautiful works were created between the seventh and sixteenth centuries CE, when the essential elements of illustration were mastered and perfected. Among these works, the best known is the Book of Kells, created around 800 CE and currently preserved at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland.²⁵ The book, written in Latin, contains the four Gospels of the New Testament along

²¹ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*

²² Regarded as un-Christian by the medieval Church, paper and papyrus were avoided, their use discouraged due to associations with pagan writers of the past and with “infidels” from the East. Paper was not widely accepted in Europe until the 11th century. Source: Joshua J. Mark, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, *World History Encyclopedia*, accessed on 2 August 2022, https://www.worldhistory.org/Illuminated_Manuscripts/

²³ Joshua J. Mark (2022). *Illuminated Manuscripts*, *World History Encyclopedia*, accessed on 2 August, https://www.worldhistory.org/Illuminated_Manuscripts/; Andrew G. Dixon (2018). *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, new edition, Dorling Kindersley, London, p. 71.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

with several other texts laid out across 680 vellum pages.²⁶ The illustrations display a wide range of colors. To obtain the pigments, various materials were used, both organic and inorganic. Among the organic sources were extracts from plants such as *Chrozophora tinctoria*, indigofera (the indigo plant), and dyer's woad, along with insects such as *Kermococcus vermilio*. The inorganic pigments included orpiment (arsenic sulfide), copper oxide, and even precious lapis lazuli.²⁷ The book's popularity is due in large part to the extravagance with which it was decorated, making it possibly the most admired Gospel of insular creation. Never completed and with an origin still unconfirmed, the book is nonetheless believed to have been begun on the island of Iona in Scotland and later moved to Kells, Ireland, by monks fleeing Viking raids.²⁸

By the beginning of the 1200s CE, most of the production of illuminated manuscripts had moved to developing urban centers, where universities exerted influence and the commercial market was centralized. The relocation of production did not greatly alter the process by which manuscripts were created, but it had a significant influence on the subjects addressed. No longer under the exclusive control of monasteries, manuscripts began to be used for secular topics as well. Religious literature was thus no longer the sole subject explored. Books continued to be produced manually until the invention of the printing press around 1440.²⁹ After the advent of printing, the effort invested in producing a manually illuminated manuscript gradually became unjustifiable, and this art form came to be executed less frequently, more often commissioned by wealthy clients than out of necessity. For a short period, a hybrid form of books continued to exist: the text was printed using the printing press, while the illustration and illumination were executed by hand, resulting in a product that combined the clarity and symmetry of printed text with the opulence of hand-made illustrations.³⁰

The first printed books, from the invention of the printing press until 1501, are known as *incunabula*.³¹ These books were of two types: printed books, produced using the printing press with movable type, and books made using the woodcut technique, which involved printing from a wooden block in which both the text and illustration were carved. Books printed using woodcut enjoyed a

²⁶ Martha Kearney (2022). *The Book of Kells: Medieval Europe's greatest treasure?*, BBC, accessed on 25 August, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160425-the-book-of-kells-medieval-europes-greatest-treasure>

²⁷ Bernard Meehan (1994). *The Book of Kells*, Thames and Hudson, London, p. 88.

²⁸ Andrew G. Dixon (2018). *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, new edition, Dorling Kindersley, London, p. 71.

²⁹ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

³¹ Incunabulum, from the Latin incunabulum ("cradle," "origin," "source"), refers to the meaning of "a book at its inception". Source: Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, *Incunabula*, Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed on 28 August 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/incunabula>

brief period of popularity in the second half of the fifteenth century, during the transition from manuscript to printed codex, and were contemporary with the latter. The woodcut process involved carving the text and image in reverse on a wooden plate, which was then inked. The image was transferred onto a sheet of paper placed over the wooden block. Subsequently, the illustration could be hand-colored to enhance its aesthetic value. The disadvantage of this technique was that only one side of a sheet could be printed, as the pressure of the transfer process created a relief on the back, preventing a second impression.³²

The woodcut process was quickly surpassed in efficiency by Gutenberg's movable-type printing press – a revolutionary invention that brought extraordinary advances in the field of printing. Woodcut artists began to lose dominance over the craft of printing, seeing typography as a serious threat to their livelihood, which led to tension between the two occupational branches. The solution to this conflict came from Albrecht Pfister, a printer from Bamberg, who had the inspired idea of combining the expertise of both trades in a single object.³³

Woodcut artists therefore specialized in the art of illustration, providing printers with the images necessary for the production of illustrated volumes, which complemented the printed text. This marked the beginning of a flourishing period for both typography and woodcut, and as a result, Augsburg and Ulm, two important German centers specializing in woodcut prints for playing cards and religious publications, became hubs for the production of book illustrations.³⁴

With the Typographic Revolution, it became possible to print thousands of pages in a single day. This caused the price of books to drop sufficiently to become accessible to an increasing number of people. Literacy was also on the rise, and the demand for books continued to grow.³⁵ The introduction of movable-type printing was, however, a difficult process that had to be carried out cautiously in a market previously dominated by scribes. Like the printing process itself, the book industry did not advance uniformly, being influenced by local practices and aesthetic trends.³⁶

Printed books did not immediately replace manuscripts and woodblock-printed books. It is self-evident that, once removed from the ecclesiastical context, books were no longer produced by a single, isolated group of workers. Whereas initially monks oversaw the entire process of creating a book, from preparing parchment to binding, later these tasks were divided among specialized guilds. Wood blocks remained, for a considerable period, the only

³² Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

³³ Philip B. Meggs; Alston W. Purvis (2012). *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, fifth edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, p. 81.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Marilyn Stokstad, Michael Cothren, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

³⁶ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

method for printing multiple copies of an illustration. Even after the development of other printmaking techniques, woodcut continued to be widely used for book illustration. By the end of the eighteenth century, wood engraving emerged – a technique that reproduced illustrations more easily and precisely than woodcut and was more enduring to repeated printings.³⁷

By the mid-sixteenth century, another technique for printing illustrations gained prominence in Europe – intaglio printing.³⁸ Engraving, whether chemical (using acids) or mechanical (using chisels), enabled the creation of clearer and more detailed works, and the need to transfer images using a different press led to the normalization of using an entire page specifically for illustration.³⁹

The progress of book illustration and typography in general continued relatively steadily. Presses were improved, fonts were added, printing firms employed a greater number of presses, and illustrations increased in quantity, quality, and diversity. Specific genres of books, such as scientific works, children's books, and atlases, began to be richly illustrated, while novels were occasionally enhanced with illustrations. Luxury copies of geography and natural history books, as well as some children's books, were printed and later hand-colored. Intaglio printing can thus be considered the last major typographic optimization before the Industrial Revolution.

Later, the lithographic process, discovered by Alois Senefelder in 1796, made a remarkable contribution both in terms of the greater flexibility of the technique itself, which allowed illustrations to be created directly on stone, and from the perspective of an expanding industrial economy. Lithography provided a simpler, faster, and more efficient way to produce a large number of prints. Subsequent developments of this technique allowed the incorporation of a wide range of colors.⁴⁰ Chromolithography brought a significant boost to the color printing industry. German printers were pioneers in the development of color lithography, and in 1837, the Frenchman Godefroy Engelmann patented chromolithography, a process involving the sequential printing of separate colors from different plates. The image was usually completed with a black plate that outlined the details. Printing illustrations using wood, metal, or stone continued to evolve, and these methods remained the primary means of visual expression within book covers until the digital revolution of the mid-twentieth century.⁴¹

With the development of electronic technology, typography has changed drastically. Today, the visual organization of a commercially intended book is carried out almost exclusively digitally. Thanks to new printing technologies,

³⁷ Martin Sailsbury (2004). *Illustrating Children's Books*, Barron's Educational Series Inc., New York, p. 9.

³⁸ Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, Whitney Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

⁴¹ Peter Hunt (ed.) (2004). *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Vol. I, second edition, Routledge, London, p. 329.

the creation of a book illustration is no longer limited by mass reproduction capacity; the illustrator is constrained only by their imagination. Techniques that seemed impossible to transpose to pages fifty years ago have now become routine practices, as long as the artistic object can be scanned, photographed, or digitally created.

To briefly conclude this article, we can observe that book illustration has undergone a considerable series of changes and improvements to reach the form we know today. Countless artists, most of them unknown, laid the foundations of this genre, which is highly relevant to contemporary society, and even now, new techniques and expressive possibilities continue to emerge, revolutionizing illustration and art year after year.

Conclusion

Book illustration emerged as a fundamental form of visual narration long before the appearance of the book itself. Its evolution reflects both technological innovation and enduring human needs for storytelling and visual communication, which continue to shape illustration in the digital age.

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Hybridisation of the Contemporary Self-Portrait

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Abstract: Contemporary self-portraiture proposes a transposition of the self while pursuing new trends, concepts and theories, which is why the current stage of my research is oriented towards the idea of corroborating the concept of self with the new technologies of the contemporary world. Thus, contemporary self-portraiture trends seek a dialogue between the individual and new means of communication, where the self-portrait becomes a document, *a selfie*, an anti-self-portrait or a form of hybridised self-portraiture. At the same time, the contemporary individual's dependence on certain technologies today is revealed in art forms that are themselves dependent on technology in order to exist and function. The process of hybridisation is not limited to traditional artistic techniques, but also makes use of quasi-medical approaches, biological knowledge, and even processes of digitising art, all with the aim of creating an artistic form that is not only self-representative but also self-referential. All of these address the concept of self and identity, emphasising the role and the relevance of exploring them in contemporary times.

Keywords: portraiture, self-portraiture, interdisciplinarity, contemporary art, self-documentation, biotechnology.

Trends in contemporary self-portraiture

The self-portraits presented below propose as a common form a process of self-documentation of various aspects related to the artist's self and identity. However, the approaches stand out not necessarily through the realism and physical resemblance of some faces, but through the uniqueness of their approaches.



Fig. 1 Laura Swanson, *Coat*, 2005

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Self-portrait as document

Despite the view that a document is traditionally constituted only by physical/digitised text or any other graphic, document theory demonstrates that an object, image or performance can also constitute forms of documentation and documents. In Suzanne Briet's 1951 manifesto, "Qu'est-ce que la documentation?"¹ she illustrates her theory by associating an animal with a document, namely that a living animal in its environment remains just a wild animal, while its remains brought into an institution such as a museum are considered evidence, information, and therefore a documentary object, and she calls this form a "self-document" because it informs about nothing other than itself. Compared to a text that can inform about anything, the object in question informs only about itself, through itself. Through this, we can emphasise that any form of self-portrait is a form of self-documentation and any self-documentation is a self-portrait.



Fig. 2 Ai Weiwei, *Ai Weiwei in the Elevator When Taken into Custody by the Police* 2009, 2017, Brooklyn Museum, New York

Self-portrait as a selfie

As for self-portraits as *selfies*, this practice brings together aspects of digital, artistic and socio-cultural technology. The acceptance of selfies as a form of art is still debated, with similarities and differences between a *selfie* and a self-portrait being established. Its importance is evident in the relevance of the practice in the contemporary era, being dubbed the second nature of contemporary man². Self-portraiture through *selfies* offers, in addition to traditional self-portraiture, a process of mirroring through the camera built into the phone, so that self-portraiture becomes a form of posthuman portraiture, achieved through the perspective of the digital. The avatarisation of the artist and the transposition into the digital and virtual world are also aspects explored in

¹ Michael Buckland (2017). *Document Theory*, in "ISKO Encyclopaedia of Knowledge Organisation", Vol. 45, No. 5, pp. 425-436.

² Brooke Wendt (2014). *The Allure of the Selfie. Instagram and the New Self-Portrait*, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, p. 40.

this artistic space. Today, the selfie ultimately constitutes an expressive and effective form of artistic documentation of the self.

From the point of view of contemporary man's dependence on current technology, I emphasise how a *selfie*, a practice so ubiquitous in an individual's daily life, cannot exist without the use of a mobile phone and therefore social networks. The practice of the selfie is also a primary form of self-documentation.

Anti-self-portrait

An interesting term associated with the research topic would be “anti-portrait”³, or “anti-self-portrait”. These can be understood as a representation that is contrary to the standard portrait or an extension of it, a complement or an alternative. If any form of expression can represent a self-portrait and any form of art can propose a form of documentation, the recording and archiving of



Fig. 3 Laura Swanson, *White*, 2007

various aspects of the self can take place through a multitude of representations.

The best example for introducing the term “anti-self-portrait” is the artist who coined the term in a series of photographs, anti-self-portraits, where Laura Swanson intentionally hides her face. The psychological game that takes place between her, the camera and the audience, targets various personal and sociological aspects.

At the same time, she seeks to show the audience the difficulties encountered by a person with dwarfism, but also to reverse the context in which she often finds herself, namely the target of uncomfortable and intense stares from the people around her. In her photographs, Swanson seeks to put the audience in her place and induce that state of unease, of being watched. The lack of a face is the main reason why they are called *anti*-self-portraits.

³ Fiona Johnstone and Kirstie Imber (2020). *Anti-Portraiture. Challenging the Limits of the Portrait*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London, p. 24.



Fig. 4 Tracey Emin, (*Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*), 1995

Returning to the previous idea of forms of self-documentation that take on the characteristics of a self-portrait, Emin Tracey creates, through her tent installation “Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995”, a collection of names documenting all the people with whom she has shared a bed, including romantic partners, family members, and friends. This form of self-documentation has a strong self-referential value, which makes the installation a self-portrait.

Interdisciplinary research

An important trend in the artistic field today is the process of inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary research. Through these, artists have the opportunity and advantage of transcending the boundaries of conventional art. These are characterised by a process of hybridisation of art with other disciplines, where there is an exchange of ideas and concepts and a diverse borrowing of methods and technologies. The subject of this research is artists who have approached a variant of self-portraiture that uses biological elements belonging to their own bodies, medical documents and even elements that literally make up, or were part of, the artist's body.

⁴Interdisciplinary art achieves multiple types of transfer between disciplines, crossing into other fields in order to borrow from their technology, science and concepts. The result is a form of art that can also be characterised by other forms of research, psychology, engineering, medicine, etc., and therefore challenges the rules of conventional art. Contemporary art today seems to be trying to include non-artistic fields, which only enriches the artistic field and expands creative freedom.

Robert Frodeman describes the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity as transcending the boundaries of a field, an exploration of otherness that can adopt new ways of thinking. However, among the characteristics attributed to the term

⁴ Adrian Stoleriu (2019). *Interferențe vizual-artistice. Artă și sacralitate în contemporaneitate* [Visual-Artistic Interferences. Art and Sacredness in Contemporary Times], Editura Artes, Iași, pp. 56-57.

is also the lack of clarity regarding the target audience, an observation that attests to its complexity and, at the same time, the difficulty of defining interdisciplinarity⁵. Given the accelerated pace at which new questions arise, interdisciplinary research offers the advantage of responding quickly precisely because it involves collaboration with several disciplines at the same time. Artists and researchers in this field therefore enjoy an expansion of the artistic field. Interdisciplinarity, like transdisciplinary and multi-disciplinarity, provides a close connection between disciplines and, as Basarab Nicolescu explains, can also give rise to new disciplines and subcategories⁶.

Robert Morris

One of the first such interdisciplinary artists is Robert Morris, who proposes an original self-portrait, appropriating a medical document as his representation. Using the bioelectric activity of his own brain, he offers a self-portrait. The process of introspection manifests itself through thought, which is in turn recorded by electroencephalogram technology. The resulting medical document symbolically represents a graph of the artist's thoughts, created by connecting electrodes. Brian Winkenweder interprets Morris's art as follows: “A mind-driven e drawing is like a private language that must be driven by a grammatical structure”⁷, which implies that the graph only reveals the presence of the artist's thoughts, like a secret language, where his thoughts remain unknown.

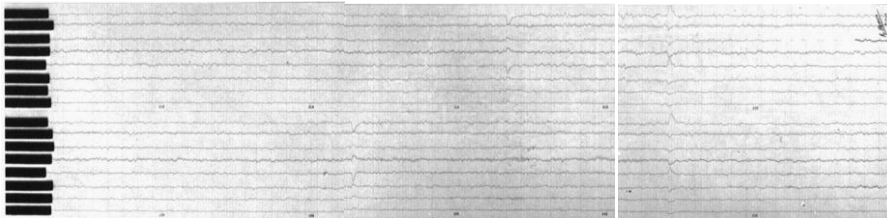


Fig. 5 Robert Morris, *Self-Portrait (E.E.G.)*, 1963, electroencephalogram, artist's collection

Michael Newman, describing Morris's work, recalls how he created a graph with a length equal to his height, and the fact that Morris thought about himself while recording his neural activity increasingly transforms the work into a self-portrait – “the portrait therefore parodies the idea of inner thought, which

⁵ Robert Frodeman (2014). *Sustainable Knowledge. A Theory of Interdisciplinarity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 35-36.

⁶ Basarab Nicolescu (2007). *Transdisciplinaritatea. Manifest* [Transdisciplinarity. Manifesto], Editura Junimea, Iași, p. 41.

⁷ Brian Winkenweder (2015). *Picturing Texts: Robert Morris “Beetle in a Box”*, in “Investigations: The Expanded Field of Writing in the Works of Robert Morris”, Katia Schneller and Noura Wedell (Eds.), ENS Éditions, Lyon, DOI:10.4000/books.enseditions.3826.

becomes a purely external recording of brain activity”⁸. The self-portrait emerges here from the artist's psychological and medical representation, physical, but especially in the form of a conceptual interpretation.

Works such as this propose fragments of the artist's existence and presence, despite the fact that they do not reveal representative elements of their physical appearance or physiognomy, the anti-portrait proposing a variant of the usual anti-portrait or an alternative to it, explains Newman. Therefore, such approaches seek to break with the conventions of standard portraiture and self-portraiture, adding uniqueness and diversity to the artistic field.

Susan Aldworth

Artist Susan Aldworth follows a similar line of thinking, with works that draw on the fields of psychology and medicine. Julia Beaumont-Jones describes how exposing patients to images showing the inside of their bodies can have a negative effect. These ultrasounds, recordings and scans of bones, organs or images of moments showing the middle of various operations, injuries, etc., can all greatly disturb the viewer. This awareness is expressed in the form of introspection and self-reflection by Aldworth. In a work such as “Reassembling the Self 7”, she brings together various ultrasounds and scans of the inside of her body, images that are both medical and intimate. As the title suggests, the work proposes an anatomical composition of herself, using these scans, but also a drawing of a nervous system that brings them all together.

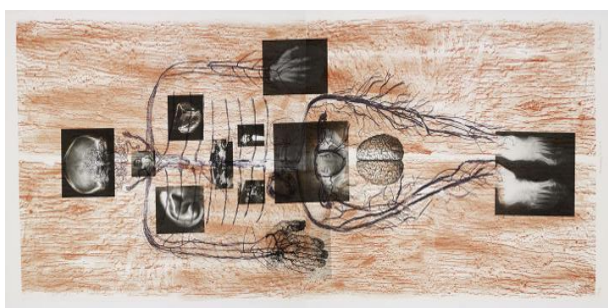


Fig. 6 Susan Aldworth, *Reassembling the Self 7*, 2012, London, Tag Fine Arts

BIO-ART

Next, a term necessary for this article is “bio-art”, first introduced by Eduardo Kac in a manifesto, but the term has been used by him since 1997. Kac argues: “Bio Art is art that literally works in the continuity of biomateriality,

⁸ Fiona Johnstone and Kirstie Imber (2020). *Anti-Portraiture. Challenging the Limits of the Portrait*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London, p. 55. [My own translation from English: “the portrait thus parodies the idea of interior thought, which becomes a purely external record of brain activity”].

from DNA, proteins, and cells to whole organisms”⁹. What Eduardo Kac sought to discover and develop is interdisciplinary research between art and science, where biological materials and even living organisms can be involved.



Fig. 7 Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Photosynthesis Portraits*, 2022, Sydney Biennale

Glesni Trefor Williams mentions that, although Kac contributed to the emergence and use of the term “bio-art,” he did not initiate the practice. Therefore, the practice of bio art existed long before him, dating back to the research of Alexander Fleming, who, in the process of studying penicillin, created small paintings using bacteria¹⁰. Bio art “plays” with natural and artificial elements, with the human and the non-human, all of which lie between art and science.

Marc Quinn

Arriving at the main interdisciplinary artist of the article, Marc Quinn, we already understand the capacity of interdisciplinary research to offer self-portraiture originality and freedom of expression. We have seen how contemporary artists have the freedom to engage in a complex process of introspection in order to formulate a unique form of self-reference, but also how, through various forms of doubling, artists can create something more than just representative.



Fig. 8 Marc Quinn, *Self*, 1991, sculpture

⁹ Eduardo Kac. *What Bio Art Is: A Manifesto*, available at https://ekac.org/manifesto_whatbioartis.html, accessed on 15 November 2024. [Author’s translation from English: “Bio Art is art that literally works in the continuum of biomateriality, from DNA, proteins, and cells to full organisms.”].

¹⁰ Glesni Trefor Williams (2022). *Bioart. The Discipline of Straddling Art and Science*, available at <https://www.soundoflife.com/blogs/design/bioart-art-science-bioartists>, accessed on 15 November 2024.

Marc Quinn approaches a new form of self-portraiture, producing, once every few years, a sculpture made from the artist's own blood. From 1991 to the present, his series of sculptures offers a unique approach to contemporary portraiture, straddling the boundaries between technology, installation, sculpture, conceptual art, and so on. To create a sculpture, the artist needs approximately 5.7 litres of blood. Due to the need for blood collection, Matthew Wilson calls the process of creating the sculpture “quasi-medical.” Quinn's procedure is as follows: the artist's blood is collected, and a mould of his skull, filled with blood, is used to create a sculpture of his face. The only way it can be exhibited is in a box that keeps the sculpture frozen at a temperature below zero degrees Celsius. Wilson compares this dependence of sculpture on contemporary technologies with man's dependence on contemporary medicine and the relationship between the two¹¹.

Wilson also describes how Quinn's methods of self-portrayal date back to Roman antiquity, when the Romans used these moulds to capture facial features, called funeral masks. The appearance of Quinn's sculptures fits the term funeral mask as it portrays the artist with his eyes closed and looking peaceful, as if in eternal sleep. Every detail of the artist's face is captured, from his eyelashes to his wrinkles and skin texture, compared to Morris and Aldworth, who used medical-type materials, Quinn used a unique material, his own blood, his own DNA.



Fig. 9 Marc Quinn, *Self*, 2011, sculpture

His sculptures shock and induce a state of unease in the viewer, denoting a strong determination on his part. The complexity of his works touches on numerous fields of research, from artistic to technical and medical, and thematically he explores the compelling relationship between life and death, technique and concept, etc.

The self-documentary value of the artist's works is also evident in their seriality: 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011 are the years in which Marc Quinn

¹¹ Matthew Wilson (2020). *A-level: Marc Quinn, Self*, available at <https://smarthistory.org/a-level-marc-quinn-self/>, accessed on 10 November 2024.

created this type of sculpture, through which traces, records the passage of time on his face¹².

Conclusions

In conclusion, this article seeks to briefly present some of the trends in contemporary art that use interdisciplinary research and have an impressive self-documentary character. The hybridisation of the self-portrait proposes art forms such as the digitisation and avatarisation of the self through *selfies*, self-documentary installations, anti-self-portraiture, bio-art and the inclusion of medical documents or even one's own DNA within self-portraits, intersections and connections that lend originality to the final artistic result.

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¹² Artist's website: <http://marcquinn.com/>

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The memory of communism in Romanian art after 1989

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Abstract: The memory of communism remains a persistent and influential presence in post-communist Romanian society and artistic practice. This article examines how the communist past is represented, reconstructed, and critically reinterpreted in contemporary Romanian art. Drawing on theoretical approaches to memory and recollection, the study explores the ways in which individual and collective memories are mediated through artistic expression. Focusing on the works of Ion Grigorescu, Șerban Savu, and Cristian Rusu, the article analyses how different generations of artists engage with the legacy of communism—ranging from direct testimonial practices to indirect, reflective reconstructions shaped by post-communist transition. Through film, painting, performance, and installation, these artists transform the memory of communism into a critical tool for understanding trauma, historical continuity, and the ongoing impact of totalitarian ideology on Romanian society.

Keywords: memory of communism; post-communist art; Romanian contemporary art; collective memory; trauma; Ion Grigorescu; Șerban Savu; Cristian Rusu.

Introduction

The memory of communism continues to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration, reflection and debate, even though 35 years have passed since the regime collapsed. This article aims to analyse how the memory of the communist period is represented and reinterpreted in Romanian art. The research focuses on a fundamental question: How is the memory of the communism illustrated in post-communist artworks?

The topic remains extremely relevant, as the painful and traumatic past continues to influence and permeate Romanian society. Through this research, I attempt to highlight the persistence of the memory of communism in post-communist artistic creations. Art that incorporates the memory of the communist period is not merely a simple recollection of the past, but highlights the profound impact that the communist period has on the present.

After the 1990s, interest in exploring memory and trauma in Romania grew significantly, which is no coincidence. The fall of the communist regime was followed by a gradual opening up of the archives of the former communist states,

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which allowed new information about the past to be discovered¹. The moment of change, which came after the manipulation of history, was shocking and confusing, bringing with it a need to re-evaluate the past.

To understand the complexity of the subject, it is important to define the concept of “memory” according to Jean Piaget. The psychologist described memory as a form of knowledge, more precisely “knowledge of the past”². According to psychologist Mielu Zlate, through memory, individuals “imprint, preserve and reuse”³ not only their own experiences, but also those around them. Based on research conducted by psychologist Septimiu Chelcea, these processes – imprinting, preserving and reusing – appear in most psychological definitions of memory, under the specific names of memorisation, storage and reactivation⁴.

However, memory is interdependent with the issue of recollection, defined by Maurice Halbwachs as “a reconstruction of the past with the help of present data ... many representations that are based, at least in the background, on testimonies and arguments”⁵. The author argues that a detailed reconstruction of an event from a closed personal perspective is not sufficient to produce a memory as a result. The information must correspond to that of other individuals and vice versa “because it is constantly transmitted from them to us and vice versa, which is only possible if we have all been and continue to be part of the same society”⁶.

Mihaela Moraru considers that memory “is nothing more than the process of recollection, of remembering, a process in which memory plays a primordial role, as it is the repository of memories”⁷. Memory is not stored only as flat information, but involves several processes, such as feelings, emotions, experiences, where the affective side of the individual is engaged. We access our memories through memory, and when we access them or when they are accessed, memories are brought into the present and serve as a source of self-knowledge, self-reflection, as well as knowledge of others and the surrounding world. From the point of view of author Ana-Maria Cornilă, when it comes to memory, it is not just “a simple repository where memories accumulate and memory is not a simple repetition of the past”⁸.

¹ *** (2016). *Art in Romania between 1945 and 2000: an analysis from the perspective of the present*, UNArte, București, pp. 242-243.

² Jean Piaget (1999). *Mémoire et intelligence*, 1970, apud Mielu Zlate, *Psihologia mecanismelor cognitive* [Psychology of cognitive mechanisms], Polirom, Iași, p. 345.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Septimiu Chelcea (2008). *Psychosociology. Theories, Research, Applications*, Polirom, Iași, p. 130.

⁵ Maurice Halbwachs (2007). *Collective Memory*, Institutul European, Iași, p. 117.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁷ Mihaela Moraru (2015). *The Cherry Orchard in a Romanian Adaptation (from Pintilie's 'Wheat Field' to Alexa's 'Jars')*, “Romanoslavica”, vol. LI, no. 2, Editura Universității București, București, p. 40.

⁸ Ana-Maria Cornilă (2008). *Literature – mnemonic art*, “AIC”, no. 22, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, p. 3.

This brief introduction to the role of memory and remembrance in the individual provides a general framework for understanding the mechanisms through which the memory of the communist period influences society. The totalitarian communist regime has, in a relatively short time, become a subject of historical study, but one that continues to have a significant impact on society. The collapse of the regime forced Eastern European countries to inevitably confront issues related to memory and forgetting, transforming these themes into central concerns for post-communist societies.

The communist period had a profound impact on culture and artistic practices. In most cases, these were subject to official propaganda, with many artists being forced to work within the limits imposed by the totalitarian regime. However, some of them found ways to criticise the system, creating works of art that addressed themes diametrically opposed to what the state accepted.

A relevant example, which incorporates memories of the communist period into his work, is the artist Ion Grigorescu (born 1945, Bucharest, Romania). In Eastern Europe during the communist period, experimental art, a movement to which Grigorescu belonged, represented a response against the state. This artistic practice symbolised a way for artists to resist the system, express their creative freedom and criticise totalitarianism through various artistic forms that alluded to the problems of the communist regime.

Ion Grigorescu is an artist who is difficult to characterise and decipher, his artistic career being extremely complex. Since the 1960s, a doubling of his artistic personality has been observed, notable for the contrasts he has used over time. As Aurora Király states in her significant work “Photography in Contemporary Romanian Art: Trends in Romania after 1989”, Ion Grigorescu oscillated between “exhibitionism” and “introversion”, towards “avant-garde experiments” and explorations with religious connotations⁹. The author adds an essential comment on the artist's works, namely that they can be seen as instruments “of analysis and exorcism”¹⁰ of the system to which he belonged. The works he created over time materialised through the use of themes and discussions anchored in the reality that surrounded him.

He is a versatile artist who has used a wide range of media, from painting, photography, drawing, photo collage, mural painting, *performance*, film, engraving and even icons. His works only became known to the general public after the 1990s because, during the regime, he explored various unconventional themes, such as sexuality, the human body, and the inadequacies of the communist regime, making it impossible to exhibit them publicly¹¹.

⁹ Aurora Király (2006). *Photography in Contemporary Romanian Art: Trends in Romania after 1989*, UNARTE, București, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ The Contemporaries. Ion Grigorescu, retrieved from: <https://www.contemporanii.org/artisti/ion-grigorescu>, accessed on 10 December 2024.

In this study, we will refer to two significant works by the artist, “Dialogue with President Ceaușescu” (1978) and “Post-mortem Dialogue with Ceaușescu” (2007). The works created highlight both the difficulties and dissatisfaction with the communist regime and the influence that the regime had on Romanian society.



Fig. 1 Ion Grigorescu, *Dialogue with President Ceaușescu*, film, 7:11 min., 1978,
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146172>

The first work captures an imaginary dialogue between the artist and himself, taking place in his studio, where he plays two opposing roles: on the one hand, he is the artist, and on the other, he is the former president of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu. In this film, lasting 7 minutes and 11 seconds, a contrast is created between the two roles: on the right, the artist appears dressed in ordinary clothes, and on the left, he is portrayed as a character wearing the dictator's distinctive clothes and a mask that faithfully reproduces his features¹².

The work highlights both the doubling of artists during the communist period and the restoration of a power relationship. This time, the artist is heard questioning the former president: “I tried to put myself in Ceaușescu's shoes and imagine how he would respond to the tough questions that no one in real life would have had the courage to ask him”¹³. The film ends with the quote: “If the people cannot rule, then at least let them criticise!”, a paradoxical call to action made in silence to Romanian society.

In the interview between Klara Kemp-Welch and Ion Grigorescu, the process of making the film is explained in detail. Ion Grigorescu states that the

¹² MoMA, *Ion Grigorescu. Dialogue with President Ceaușescu*, retrieved from: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146172>, accessed on 10 December 2024.

¹³ Klara Kemp-Welch (2013). *Impossible Interviews with Ceaușescu: Ion Grigorescu and the Dialogic Imagination*, in Șerban, Alina (2013). *Ion Grigorescu. The Man with a Single Camera*, Sternberg Press, London, p. 160.

work did not involve any complicated technique. The artist recorded the two scenes one after the other, and the sequences were then superimposed, thus creating the visual effect of an imaginary dialogue between the two characters. In addition, the artist used a specific method of typing the dialogue on thin “indigo” paper and then integrating it into the film¹⁴.



Fig. 2 Ion Grigorescu, *Post-mortem Dialogue with Ceașescu*, film, 22 min., 2007, <https://artmargins.com/reenactment-repetition-return/>

In her work “Post-mortem Dialogue with Ceașescu,” Klara Kemp-Welch points out that Ion Grigorescu reuses the concept from a new perspective, exploring the changes that have taken place in the post-communist period, with Romania's integration into the European Union¹⁵. Unlike the first version, the 2007 work is significantly longer, lasting 22 minutes.

The new dialogue was filmed inside the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, making a direct reference to the art created during the communist and post-communist periods, but also to the profound mark that the totalitarian regime left on society and culture. This time, the film is in colour, shot with a mobile camera that also captures some outdoor scenes, and features sound, unlike the previous version, which was silent. Another new feature of the 2007 version is the introduction of a new character, Elena Ceaușescu. The first sequences show Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu walking through the courtyard of the Palace of Parliament, the characters being played by Ion Grigorescu and his assistant, both wearing oversized masks. The film then presents a new interview between the artist, symbolising the ordinary man, and the former leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

¹⁴ Klara Kemp-Welch, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.



Fig. 3 Ion Grigorescu, *Post-mortem Dialogue with Ceaușescu*, film, 22 min., 2007,
<https://artmargins.com/reenactment-repetition-return/>

Through his work, Ion Grigorescu captures the memory of communism and how it can become an artistic tool for critical reflection, reconciliation with the past, and an attempt to offer strength. He not only offers a recollection of the past, but also an analysis of the impact of the communist regime on society.

The rupture caused by the events of 1989 led to a subsequent need to recover and reinterpret the symbols of the communist past, as evoking that period had a potentially healing effect. However, these gestures were situated between the legacy of the traumas of the communist period and nostalgia for that period. Nevertheless, the predominant artistic themes in the period after the fall of the regime did not focus on the social and political realities of that period. After 1989, there was a phenomenon of forgetting and repressing communism. Magda Radu states that it was only later that artists began to bring symbols from the communist period to the fore, with the post-2000 generation focusing on building a brand of communism¹⁶. After 2008, when the economic crisis profoundly amplified the general anxiety of society, this phenomenon intensified.

To offer a complementary perspective on how the memory of communism is addressed in Romanian art, I will highlight the vision offered by artists Șerban Savu (b. 1978, Sighișoara, Romania) and Cristian Rusu (b. 1972, Cluj-Napoca, Romania). Unlike Ion Grigorescu, these artists belong to the generation born towards the end of the communist regime, being influenced more by the echoes of the era and the effects of the post-communist transition by direct experience of the dictatorship. The collaborative work I will present highlights the difficulty of erasing the traces of history and the traumas that Romanian society went through during the communist period.

¹⁶ Magda Radu (2012). *Visual Optimism After 20 Years*, “Arta. Visual Arts Magazine”, Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici din România, no. 4-5, p. 51.

Artists of Șerban Savu and Cristian Rusu's generation often filter the past through collective memories transmitted by family, society and history. They try to understand and reinterpret the totalitarian regime through their work, approaching the past from various perspectives, reflecting on how historical memories and traumas are transmitted and felt in the present¹⁷.

Șerban Savu has distinguished himself through his "realistic" style and a technique often associated with the "paradocumentary"¹⁸. The scenes created by the artist offer a careful look at everyday life, addressing the subtleties of the post-communist transition and the lasting effects of communism on Romanian society. Cristina Beligăr delves into the artist's creative universe and asserts that after 2016, the scenes he creates and the themes he uses are no longer directly related to the post-communist transition, but focus on the architectural and social effects of communism¹⁹.

The characters in Șerban Savu's works are often treated in a way that makes them unrecognisable. Dawid Radziszewski's description of Șerban Savu's works is quite surprising, as he states that the creations are influenced by classical European painters such as "Leon Battista Alberti, the idyllic landscapes of Poussin and Lorrain, and finally representations of peasants by Pieter Bruegel and Jean-François Millet"²⁰.

Cristian Rusu explores ruin as a manifestation of the sublime, using abandoned spaces to evoke both their fragility and the traces of history. Through the various media he uses, from drawing, photography, video, installation and *performance*, the artist creates new connections between architecture and aesthetics, sensitivity, ideology and utopia²¹.

For the present research, I consider the approach of the joint work entitled "Reenactment. A Reconstruction for the Past" (2016). The work brings to the fore the mosaic from the former "Steagul Roșu" Factory in Brașov²², exploring how collective memory is reconstructed. The process of creating the work was complex and took place in several stages.

¹⁷ *Romanian contemporary art. Transition, Trauma And The Cluj Connection*, "Cordmagazine", retrieved from: <https://cordmagazine.com/art/romanian-contemporary-art-transition-trauma-and-the-cluj-connection/>, accessed 10 December 2024.

¹⁸ Dawid Radziszewski, Șerban Savu, retrieved from: <https://dawidradziszewski.com/artist/serban-savu/>, accessed 10 December 2024.

¹⁹ Cristina Beligăr, Șerban Savu: "I always imagined myself as a workaholic", in "Scena 9", retrieved from: <https://www.scena9.ro/article/serban-savu-interviu>, accessed 10 December 2024.

²⁰ Dawid Radziszewski, *op. cit.*

²¹ ArtEncounters, Cristian Rusu, retrieved from: <https://2017.artencounters.ro/ro/rusu-cristian-rusu/>, accessed 10 December 2024.

²² Institutul Cultural Român, Cristian Rusu and Șerban Savu. *Reenactment. A Reconstruction for the Past*, retrieved from: <https://www.icr.ro/pagini/cristian-rusu-si-serban-savu-reenactement-o-reconstructie-pentru-trecut>, 10 December 2024.



Fig. 4 Șerban Savu, Cristian Rusu, *Reenactment. A Reconstruction for the Past*, acrylic on plasterboard, 250 x 650 cm, 2016, <https://www.plan-b.ro/exhibition/2271/>

In the first phase, Șerban Savu recreated the mosaic from the former factory using acrylic on plasterboard, preserving the “character of the original work”²³. The second process took the form of a performance by Cristian Rusu, who destroyed the recreated mosaic, a symbolic and metaphorical act referring to the consequences of the communist regime.

The resulting fragments were kept by the artists like “ancient ruins,” thus referring to the Renaissance practice of preserving relics or to the symbolism of the Berlin Wall, as presented to us through Pier Paolo Pancotto's vision, where pieces of the wall became souvenirs laden with meaning²⁴. In the final stage, the destroyed fragments were reconstructed, like a puzzle²⁵, offering the viewer an overview of the rediscovered “artifact”²⁶.

Through this work, the two artists bring into discussion both the issue of iconography during the communist period and the process of degradation of its vestiges over time. By attempting to understand the communist period, the artists bring to light a forgotten mosaic, erased from collective memory, which they integrate into a new artistic discourse.

²³ Vetrobaji, Răzvan Anton & Miklósi Dénes, *Cristian Rusu & Șerban Savu, Mihai Șovăială*, retrieved from: <https://www.vetrobaji.net/2016/10/05/razvan-anton-miklosi-denes-cristian-rusu-serban-savu-mihai-sovaiala/>, accessed 10 December 2024.

²⁴ Pier Paolo, Pancotto, *Cristian Rusu and Șerban Savu. Reenactment. Ricostituire il passato*, Galleria d'arte Accademia di Romania in Roma, 2024, exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

²⁵ Vetrobaji, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Pier Paolo Pancotto, *op. cit.*, p. 7.



Fig. 5. Șerban Savu, Cristian Rusu, *Reenactment. A Reconstruction for the Past*, acrylic on plasterboard, 250 x 650 cm, 2016, <https://www.plan-b.ro/exhibition/2271/>

The memory of communism remains an important subject in post-communist Romanian art, continuing to influence society and culture even today. Through the information presented and the works analysed, the artists not only recall the past, but also highlight the impact of the communist regime on Romanian society. Through the works of the artists presented, the public can access new perspectives and ways of understanding the communist period. While Ion Grigorescu provides direct testimony about the regime, Șerban Savu and Cristian Rusu highlight the degradation of the communist period and its continuity in Romanian society.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that post-communist Romanian art does not merely recall the communist past but actively interrogates its lasting effects on society, culture, and collective consciousness. Through diverse artistic strategies, the examined works reveal memory as a dynamic and critical process, shaped by both personal experience and transmitted narratives. By revisiting, fragmenting, and reconstructing symbols of the communist era, Romanian artists contribute to a deeper understanding of historical trauma and its persistence in the present.

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Two forms of resistance: Ion Grigorescu and the KwieKulik duo

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Before the fall of communism, art in many Central and Eastern European countries existed under the more or less strict principles of the political regime, whose level of persecution varied in intensity from one country to another. Translating into local cultural and social conditions, there was therefore a predisposition towards instability that was more pronounced than in other parts of the world.

However, the rigid paradigms of socialist realism, the only official doctrine of art, were gradually weakened. Nevertheless, it took several years for more liberal policies to permeate all aspects of society, including the cultural sphere. However, at a general level, culture remained under state control.

Contact with Western art was limited, and efforts to organise experimental art exhibitions were largely rejected. Despite this, a complex network of alternative production and exhibition channels developed. The views of experimental art in Eastern Europe between 1950 and 1990 fluctuated and behaved in response to the political and social upheavals of the period.

Performance was frequently used as a form of social protest. However, during the communist period in Eastern Europe, this artistic act often took on a nuance of opposition to the political system of the time. Performative art in Eastern Europe between 1950 and 1990 was, in fact, a way for artists to express themselves through their bodies, based on a questioning of local history and culture.

Performances were rarely held in public spaces, but rather in private locations. These artistic endeavours often went against restrictions, especially those concerning freedom of expression and movement.

Ion Grigorescu is considered unique in Romanian contemporary art due to his experimental works focusing on the human body. Being to some extent connected to the changes in the international visual arts scene, Grigorescu approaches the artistic trends present in the 1960s and 1970s, when the artist's body became a suitable medium for works of art. In addition to performance art,

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Grigorescu has also used film and photography in his practice, these two media serving as objective witnesses to his artistic endeavours in terms of the experiments he has conducted with his own body¹.

Grigorescu's art develops in what could be called a dialectic of open anticipation. As with other conceptual artists, his performances are not necessarily captured on camera, but rather prepared and staged for the camera. Grigorescu seeks to give a specific meaning to intimacy and to the objects he finds around him, using the camera as a tool in his attempt to make them visible to another gaze. In most of his performances, the artist seems to convey a sense of isolation, yet he slips in coded references, thus creating a type of intimate communication between himself and the audience².

Starting in the late 1960s, Grigorescu placed the human body at the centre of his work. Thus, the individual human body became both a medium and an instrument through which the artist questioned various social and even political issues³.

Grigorescu's works rejected the canon of "realism" imposed by the paradigms of the time, with the artist producing creations that seem to have a more documentary-style realism. His works thus become documentaries of how people lived during the communist regime, with the artist presenting reality without mystifying or disguising it, documenting it per se⁴.

Some of Grigorescu's artistic actions in the early 1970s were dedicated to mundane, everyday acts, where their reality influenced art. In Grigorescu's conception, banality becomes a kind of theatre, in which the artist becomes an actor in his own life. In *Bucătăria* (The Kitchen), a performance created in 1976, the artist presents a fragment of his existence, within the confines of a block of flats' kitchen, performing various actions from ironing a shirt, cutting food and eating it, writing, to painting at an easel or playing the violin.

All these gestures take place in the confined space of the kitchen, suffocated by furniture and everyday objects. Thus, through this type of artistic expression, Grigorescu raises the question of an equivalence between life, with its banality, and the work of art.

¹ Zdenka Badovinac (1998). *Body and the East – From the 1960s to the Present*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana.

² Ovidiu Țichindeleanu (2024). *Ion Grigorescu: A Political Reinvention of the Socialist Man*, retrieved from: <https://www.afterall.org/article/ion-grigorescu-a-political-reinvention-of-the-socialist-man>, accessed on 12 January 2024.

³ Bogdan Ghiu and Maria Rus Bojan (2011). *Performing History*, "IDEA art+society", No. 38, Idea, Cluj.

⁴ Marina Alina Asavei (2011). *A theoretical excursus on the concept of political art in communism and its aftermath*, retrieved from: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/44653/ssoar-studiapolitica-2011-4-asavei-A_theoretical_excursus_on_the.pdf, accessed on 13 January 2024.

However, the banality of everyday life also takes on distressing connotations in Grigorescu's works⁵. The most eloquent example in this case is the 1974 work "Pyjamas" (fig. 1). This takes place in the artist's studio, emphasising the impression of rigidity through the use of a viewfinder that generates the image and, at the same time, the idea that the subject is being watched.



Fig. 1 Ion Grigorescu, *Pijamale*, 1974

The disappearance of private space and individual intimacy was characteristic of that period, but also an important stage for the political system in the construction of the "new man," a fearsome hybrid whose personal and collective memory had been annihilated. With the camera lens as his witness, Grigorescu's actions largely focused on interrogating the "stopped body," which in turn questioned a certain "spiritual geography." The period in which this artist proposed such types of performative manifestations was one in which the body was considered taboo in Romanian society.



Fig. 2 Ion Grigorescu, *Light Bath*, 1979

Grigorescu's interest also focuses on accurately recording his body, both as an expression of his intimacy and in relation to space. The artist also

⁵ Ileana Pintilie (2000). *Acțiunismul în România în timpul comunismului* [Actionism in Romania during Communism], Idea Design & Print, Cluj, p. 44.

concentrates on experimenting with different angles and positions for capturing the image⁶.

Baia cu lumină (The Bath of Light) (fig. 2), a performance created in 1979, reveals a figure in which the artist's body is both present and invisible. The long exposure of the photograph preserved the performative character of the artist's action. The work alludes to the daily living conditions of that time, namely the constant lack of electricity and water⁷.

Over time, performance art has allowed the artist to express both his position and his dissent. Thus, another feature of Grigorescu's performative artworks is that of resistance. We can therefore mention “Dialogue with President Ceaușescu”, created in 1978, a work that presents the artist both in his own skin and in the guise of Nicolae Ceaușescu (Grigorescu wore a mask in this case). The performance takes the form of an interview⁸. The artist recorded the supposed interview on a standard 8 mm camera. However, due to the double role played by Grigorescu, the film was shot twice. The film is silent, and the dialogue between the two appears only as text⁹.



Fig. 3 Ion Grigorescu, *Dialogue with Ceaușescu*, 1978

In dual, antithetical roles, Grigorescu wears everyday clothes, while Grigorescu portraying Ceaușescu wears a suit, tie and a mask with exaggerated features¹⁰. In *Dialogue with Ceaușescu*, Grigorescu criticises Ceaușescu's politics.

⁶ Ileana Pintilie (2024). *The Public and the Private Body in Contemporary Romanian Art*, retrieved from: <https://artmargins.com/the-public-and-the-private-body-in-contemporary-romanian-art/>, accessed on 13 January 2024.

⁷ Pomeranz Collection (2024). *Ion Grigorescu*, retrieved from: <https://pomeranz-collection.com/?q=node/76>, accessed on 14 January 2024.

⁸ Amy Bryzgel (2017). *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 226.

⁹ Ileana Pârvu (2018). *Reenactment, Repetition, Return. Ion Grigorescu's Two Dialogues with Ceaușescu*, retrieved from: <https://artmargins.com/reenactment-repetition-return/>, accessed on 17 January 2024.

¹⁰ Ion Grigorescu (1978). *Dialogue with President Ceaușescu 1978*, retrieved from: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146172>, accessed on 17 January 2024.

The artist points out how this had various effects on the living conditions of the Romanian people.

The questions the artist asks the other character take on the tone of an indictment. Through his questions, but also through his overall discourse, Grigorescu reflects on forced labour, the current value of people in the labour market, but also other problems of the system that Grigorescu considered to be consequences of Ceaușescu's belief in economic progress based on his decisions in this regard. To create Ceaușescu's responses, the artist uses various collages of quotes taken from texts used by the official press propaganda of that period¹¹.

The gestures made by both characters highlight a certain discrepancy between them. Thus, while Ceaușescu's character shows self-confidence and authority through his body language, Grigorescu seems flustered and agitated in the presence of the dictator. At one point, Ceaușescu takes off his mask, as if in a moment of self-reflection by the artist. The interview between the two ends with the phrase, "If people cannot lead, they should at least criticise."¹²

As for communication between the two in the 1978 performance, it is non-existent, although it should take place between the two protagonists. This is because Ion Grigorescu filmed the characters separately, so there is no perfect synchronisation between their gestures. This effect in terms of technical details may also suggest a reference to the impossibility of the ordinary, anonymous citizen to contact and communicate with Nicolae Ceaușescu and vice versa. Each character is in their designated space, but the two do not converge, so they become impossible to homogenise and unify. Therefore, this montage of the performance created by Ion Grigorescu captures the difficult-to-bridge gap between citizens and the president¹³.

If in the first performance, in 1978, the lack of communication and synchronisation between the two characters could be a subtle reference to the power relationship established between citizen and leader, now, in the 2007 re-enactment, Ceaușescu seems to be placed in the position of presenting his last words, through which he builds his defence, becoming vulnerable.

"I speak through art as a man who has understood his final judgement," Ceaușescu begins the dialogue of the 2007 performance (fig. 4). The "final

¹¹ Georg Schollhammer (2011). *The Double Body of the Artist. Ion Grigorescu's Reflections on the Public Sphere and Life in Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania*, in Marta Dzięwanska (Ed.), *In the Body of the Victim*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, p. 54.

¹² Klara Kemp-Welch (2013). *Impossible Interviews with Ceaușescu: Ion Grigorescu and the Dialogical Imagination*, in Alina Șerban (Ed.), *The Man with One Camera*, Asociația Pepluspatru, București.

¹³ Ileana Pârnu (2018). *Reenactment, Repetition, Return. Ion Grigorescu's Two Dialogues with Ceausescu*, retrieved from: <https://artmargins.com/reenactment-repetition-return/>, accessed on 17 January 2024.

judgement” evoked here could refer to the trial that led to his and his wife Elena's execution on 25 December 1989¹⁴.



Fig. 4 Ion Grigorescu, *Post-Mortem Dialogue with Ceaușescu*, 2007

The artist seems to have had a dual purpose: to depict Ceaușescu undergoing a posthumous trial and, at the same time, to try to show him what is happening in the present, years after the fall of communism.

In the Polish context, the 1970s were characterised as a period of liberalism in the sphere of life, which was also visible in an opening towards the West, creating a favourable environment for experimental art and performances.¹⁵

KwieKulik is an artistic duo consisting of Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, who were active between 1971 and 1987. From the early 1970s, these artists made works with a radical political character. They belonged to the first generation of Polish artists who, in the early 1970s, rejected traditional means of artistic expression and focused on *performance*.



Fig. 5 KwieKulik, *Monument Without a Passport*, 1978

¹⁴ Juliane Debeusscher (2023). *Living and dead bodies. Performing Ceaușescu, 1978-2007*, retrieved from: <https://esse.ca/en/living-and-dead-bodies-performing-ceausescu-1978-2007/>, accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁵ Zdenka Badovinac, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

KwieKulik continues to be a major reference for contemporary artists whose practice is aligned with social and political discourse¹⁶.

In 1978, the duo KwieKulik was invited to the Young Art Biennale in Sopot and, in the same year, to Arnhem, for the festival entitled “Behaviour Workshop”. The artists were convinced that they would go to Arnhem, but their passports were refused. Thus, they decided to participate in the Sopot Biennale. There, they presented a performance entitled “Monument Without a Passport” (fig. 5). This artistic endeavour was part of the series “Activities for the Head”. Kwiek placed Kulik's feet in plaster, forming a small pedestal. Once immobilised, her feet remained in this position for the duration of the event. Kulik then raised her hand, showing a folder with the words “Ideas for Arnhem” written on it. Kwiek cut a string tied around a roll of paper hanging on the wall. After the paper in the roll was unrolled, it revealed the following text: (“Monument without a passport”). Finally, Kwiek sat down on a chair next to Kulik, the pedestal incorporating the chair legs being adjacent to the one surrounding Kulik's legs. The two artists remained in this immobilised position for several minutes¹⁷. Thus, through the artists' gesture of immobilisation, we can consider that this *performance* makes a clear reference to the way in which the two artists were stuck in Poland, unable to travel.

As for the other parts of the “Activities for the Head” series, they took place in Lublin, also in 1978. Before entering the hall, the audience was given small red flags, which they were instructed to place behind their ears. The viewers sat down on chairs, except for two seats, through which the heads of the two artists protruded.

The audience watched the heads protruding from the chairs, as well as the stage where two curtains hung, one behind the other. After a few minutes, the first curtain was removed and the audience could see Zofia Kulik's head stuck in a sink. Kwiek poured water into the sink and began washing his hands, face and feet, then poured more water into the basin until Kulik's mouth was below the water level. Now Zofia Kulik could breathe, but she could not speak (fig. 6). Kwiek then held a knife to her neck and said, 'Say something, say something... you... you can't say anything, can you?' Later, for the last part of the series “Activities for the Head,” the two sat on chairs with empty buckets on their heads. People began to walk around them and fill the buckets with rubbish (fig. 7).¹⁸

¹⁶ KWIEKULIK, <https://artmuseum.pl/en/publikacje/red-lukasz-ronduda-georg-schollhammer-kwiekulik> accessed on 10 January 2024

¹⁷ KWIEKULIK, <https://www.personsprojects.com/artists/kwiekulik?x=works/works/kwiekulik35monumentpas-spbig-s> accessed on 12 November 2023

¹⁸ Walter Philips Gallery (1986). *Contemporary Art From Poland*, Apache Superior, Banff, Alberta, p. 33.

Therefore, this performative approach questions the status of artists in Poland, who, at that time, were denied the right to speak in the public sphere if their discourse could be considered vaguely political or offensive to the Polish state¹⁹.



Fig. 6 KwieKulik, *Activities for the Head*, 1978

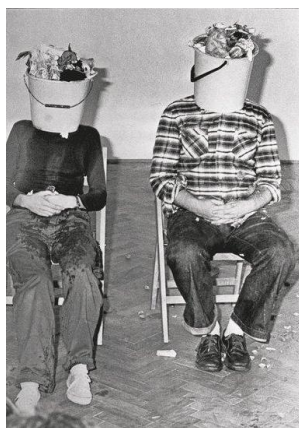


Fig. 7 KwieKulik, *Activities for the Head*, 1978

The performance “Bananas & Pomegranates” (Fig. 8) was staged in 1986 at Dziekanka (the Polish title is “Banan i Granat”, with “granat” meaning both “hand grenade” and “pomegranate”).

Their son, Maksymilian Dobromierz, opened and closed a white curtain throughout the performance. After each opening of the curtain, the audience was presented with a different arrangement of objects (these were either placed on buckets or in the artists' hands). In total, there were twelve such consecutive scenes. Some of them referred to personal experiences (e.g. passports, flags), others to more abstract concepts. However, they all created an endless chain of associations.

This *performance* reiterates, both visually and discursively, yet thus time in a different form, the same issue present in the 1978 performances from the series “Activities for the Head”, namely the status of artists in Poland at that time. They were denied the right to express themselves if what they had to say could be considered offensive to the Polish state.

Thus, through this type of artistic approach, artists encrypt various messages in the form of associations between *performance* and various objects that can take on different meanings²⁰.

¹⁹ Amy Bryzgel, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

²⁰ KWIEKULIK,

<https://www.personsprojects.com/artists/kwiekulik?x=works/works/kkbanana-and-pomegranade1986>, accessed on 18 November 2023.



Fig. 8 KwieKulik, *Banana & pome-grenade*, 1986

By allowing the artist not only to express their stance, but also to embody it in one way or another, performance offers unique opportunities in this regard, given the communist rule in Eastern Europe. Although the circulation of ideas was somewhat affected by the political regime in Eastern Europe between 1950 and 1990, the idea of resistance gained momentum in the experimental arts sphere in this region.

Thus, artists such as Ion Grigorescu and the KwieKulik duo, along with many others, created artistic productions that questioned the artist's relationship to the local political and social sphere, embodying true acts of critical resistance through their performances.

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Moldovan cultural values through the lens of the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphic Art”

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Abstract: On the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the founding of the National Museum of Art of Moldova (MNAM), the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics” was inaugurated between 26 November 2024 and 23 February 2025. The National Graphic Arts collection at the MNAM was started in 1945 and continues to grow today. The collection includes over 11,500 works of easel graphics, book illustrations, posters and stage design, all created between 1886 and 2021. Among them are works by Bessarabian artists who contributed to the development of exhibition activities and the training of new generations of visual artists. Their art was influenced by various European art trends and movements. The visual arts in the Moldavian SSR bore the marks and traditions of socialist realism. Some artists could not withstand the ideological pressures and were forced to leave the country (I. Bogdesco, etc.). Others abandoned graphic techniques completely or partially in favour of easel painting, as was the case with artists such as V. Cuzmenco, V. Cojocaru, E. Zavtur, E. Childescu, etc. The disappearance of the socialist paradigm generated a crisis of values, a period of transition marked by stylistic, aesthetic, plastic and ideological searches. The current exhibition presents the ensemble of “golden works” from the National Graphics Collection of the MNAM, by the most representative graphic artists (A. Baillayre, I. Bogdesco, T. Baillayre, E. Ivanovsky, I. Vieru, G. Vrabie, A. Colâbneac, R. Ocușco, T. Kiriaccoff, V. Ivanov, V. Covali, L. Grigorașenco, E. Childescu, Ș. Cogan, G. Fiurer, S. Tuhari, S. Zamșa, and others). The works of these masters reflect a wide range of themes (the peasant, women, family, work, the native village, etc.) addressed during the development of national graphic art over a period of more than a hundred years and encompassing several generations of artists.

Keywords: national graphic art, cultural values, national artistic heritage, metaphorical symbols, national value, peasant portrait, rural landscape, Moldovan village.

Introduction. The establishment of the national art school: prominent personalities and artistic processes.

Culture and tradition are inextricably linked, continuously perfecting the material and spiritual values of the people. Any artistic field as a phenomenon can be examined as a continuous interaction between tradition

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and innovative experimentation. The task of modern art and art schools is to promote national artistic heritage and pass on culture and tradition to other generations¹.

In Moldovan national art, we know many Moldovan artists who have addressed national themes and practised the field of graphic art: Auguste Baillayre², Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, Tania Baillayre, Moisey Gamburd, Alexandru Plămădeală, Pavel Șillingovski, Rostislav Ocușco, Theodor Kiriacoff, Elizabeth Ivanovsky, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Moisey Kogan, Șneer Cogan, Gheorghe Ceglocoff, Grigori Fiurer, and others. In the post-war period, graphic art stood out in the work of artists such as Ilie Bogdesco, Leonid Grigorașenco, Victor Ivanov, Leonid Beleaeu, Gheorghe Vrabie, Alexei Colăbneac, and others.

The evolution of national art in the field of Bessarabian graphics between 1887 and 1944 underwent rapid development. Many artists, descendants of Bessarabia, left the region and settled in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Bucharest, Paris, etc. Thus, in 1932, the Bessarabian painter Tania Baillayre stood out in the field of graphic art.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bessarabian graphic art was very modest (for example, the woodcuts signed by Gheorghe Ceglocoff (1904-1964), “Peasant from Rășinari. Sibiu” – 1940, etc.). The artistic and stylistic panorama during this period was varied. The Bessarabian national school evolved rapidly and abruptly, but it connected with the European styles of the time, simultaneously assimilating realistic and impressionistic trends.

The Baillayre family, who lived through a dramatic and contradictory era, produced an entire dynasty of artists (Auguste Baillayre³, Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, Tania Baillayre). In the second half of the 20th century, the woodcuts signed by Leonid Beleaeu, Grigore Fiurer, Leonid Grigorașenco, Victor Ivanov, Stepan Tuhari, Vasile Cojocaru, Ion Sfeclă, African Usov, Gheorghe Huzun, Ilie Bogdesco, Eudochia Zavtur, Simion Zamșa, Elena Karacentaev, and the drawings by Tania Baillayre, among others.

The Soviet period in Moldova was fruitful in terms of the emergence of new creative talents who enriched the artistic atmosphere and local cultural space through the use of traditional techniques and national themes. During this period, artists were particularly active in the field of graphic art: Gheorghe Vrabie, Igor Vieru, Stepan Tuhari, Ion Tabârță, Vasile Cojocaru, Valentin Coreachin, Gheorghe Guzun, Miriam Gamburd, Emil Childescu, Dumitru Savastin, Semion Solonari, Filimon Hămuraru, Boris Poleacov,

¹ Tatiana Comendant (2020). *National themes – a natural attribute in the art of engraving*, “Study of Arts and Culturology: History, Theory, Practice”, no. 1(36), pp. 170-175.

² Tudor Stavilă (2004). *Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century. Auguste Baillayre*, Editura Arc, Chișinău, p. 13.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-36

Alexei Colâbneac, African Usov, Vladimir Lavrentov, Ilie Bogdesco, and others.

The evolution of the artistic process⁴, the establishment of national graphic art and the continuity of Bessarabian art traditions in the post-war artistic environment were guaranteed by the work of artists with individual aesthetic concepts – Igor Vier⁵, Mihai Grecu, Rostislav Ocușco, Ilie Bogdesco, Gheorghe Vrabie, Alexei Colâbneac, Grigore Fiurer, Victor Ivanov, Liubomir Sobolevski, Boris Nesvedov, Moisei Gamburd, Ada Zevin, Emil Childescu, Victor Cuzmenco, etc.

The 1960s and 1970s stand out in the history of Moldovan visual arts as a prolific, rich and interesting period, highlighting the artistic level of graphic works, diverse both in terms of theme and in terms of the technical processes and means of expression used (L. Grigorașenco⁶, V. Ivanov, L. Beleaev, Gh. Huzun, Gh. Vrabie, A. Usov, St. Tuhari, V. Coreachin, I. Sfeclă, V. Cuzmenco, M. Gamburd, etc.).

The art of national graphics after the 1980s is complemented by new artists, who bring to the genre diverse subjects and approaches that have favoured experimentation with mixed technologies. Important representatives of this generation include E. Zavtur⁷, E. Childescu, S. Zamșa⁸, E. Caracentev, V. Zabulică, and others.

After the 1990s, innovative conceptual compositions and a pronounced orientation towards abstraction became prominent, with artists such as S. Zamșa, A. Colâbneac and others producing such works. The traditionalism of Bessarabian visual arts and their anchoring in the trends and styles of the 19th century determined their adherence to the specific form of realistic and impressionist art. The influences of the avant-garde spread throughout the artistic space, but failed to disrupt the traditional themes and exclusion of symbolism in the artists' creations. Thus, in graphic art, the dominant genres are portraiture, landscape, nude, thematic composition, still life, interior and animal art.

A substantial contribution to the development of portraiture in Bessarabian graphic art was made by the artist Eugenia Maleșevski⁹ (1863-1942). Graphic artist Șneer Cogan and sculptor Alexandru Plămădeală created many portraits using various techniques (etching, charcoal, chalk,

⁴ Liudmila Toma (2018). *The Artistic Process in the Republic of Moldova (1940-2000): Painting. Sculpture. Graphics*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Chișinău, pp. 151-152.

⁵ Iuliana Gherman (2023). *Igor Vieru – 100 years since his birth*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2022, 2023 editions”, Chișinău, pp. 130-138.

⁶ Elena Grigorașenco (2024). *Leonid Grigorașenco: painting, graphics: [exhibition catalogue]*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Editura Bons Offices, Chișinău, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Victoria Rocaciuc (2019). *Book graphics in the work of artist Eudochia Zavtur*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2018, 2019 editions”, Editura Bons Offices, Chișinău, pp. 136-141.

⁸ Simion Zamșa (2017). *Album. Simion Zamșa*, Centrul Cultural „George Apostu” Bacău.

⁹ Tudor Stăvilă (2005). *Eugenia Maleșevski. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău.

etc.). Theodor Kiriacoff created many costume sketches¹⁰, mainly in watercolour. During the Bessarabian and post-war periods, linocut was frequently used by artists such as Gheorghe Ceglocoff (*Portrait of an Old Man*, 1941), Tania Baillayre (*Portrait of a Peasant*, 1939; *Lotus*, 1967) and others.

The founding of the Moldovan National School had a beneficial impact on local artistic life, diversifying exhibition activities, stylistic approaches, plastic, technical and technological means, which contributed to the consolidation of the graphic arts field. The process of establishing Moldovan graphic art is due to a small number of artists who continuously promoted national graphic art throughout this period. The most significant works in the field of graphic art were created by artists Pavel Șillingovski¹¹, Șneer Cogan, Moissey Kogan, Gheorghe Ceglocoff, Theodor Kiriacoff, Grigore Fiurer, Rostislav Ocușco, Auguste Baillayre, Nicolae Gumalic, Alexandru Plămădeală, Moisey Gamburd and the artists Eugenia Gamburd, Miriam Gamburd, Eugenia Maleșevschi and others.

These artists, mostly painters and sculptors, use graphic language, exploring various techniques, which contributes to the evolution and further promotion of the field of graphics in the visual arts. Often, artists carried out commissions for publishing houses, participated in exhibitions with sketches and graphic book presentations¹².

Graphic artist Ilie Bogdesco (1923-2010), who left Moldova in 1992, was a full member of the Academy of Arts of the former USSR, an accomplished calligrapher and author of illustrations for about 100 books, which have become classics and are well known in European art. Thus, the artist left an important legacy for the Republic of Moldova – book graphics and calligraphy, defined by his own style and artistic vision, determined by the innovations of his works in the context of traditions and in the contemporary artistic spirit of the era.

The specificity of the painter's interpretation and the individual character of his work can be identified in his final year thesis at the Leningrad Academy of Art and Architecture (1952), when he illustrated Nicolai Gogol's "The Fair at Sorochinsk", an impressive work thanks to the faces and images created by the graphic artist. The scenes and portraits, executed daily on site in Sorochinsk, were included in the preparatory material for the thesis. In his prints, Ilie Bogdesco discovered the subtlety of Gogolian humour, the popular

¹⁰Tudor Stavilă (2004). *Theodor Kiriacoff. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău, pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Eleonora Brigalda-Barbas (2005). *Pavel Șillingovski. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău.

¹² Liudmila Toma, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.

character of the dialect and the Ukrainian colouring¹³. The painter rendered the image of everyday reality, being a master of psychological portraiture and genre scenes¹⁴.

The art of set designers is represented in the MNAM collection by set designs for films made at the Moldova Film studio. These include set designs for the films *Cântec de leagăn* (Lullaby), *Așteaptă-ne în zori* (Wait for Us at Dawn), *Ultimul freebooter* (The Last Freebooter), *Zece ierni pentru o vară* (Ten Winters for One Summer), *Poiana roșie* (The Red Glade), *Serghei Lazo*, *Riscul* (The Risk), etc. S. Bulgakov's graphic sketches are expressive and dynamic. Those by Aurelia Roman are decorative and colourful.

Set design is varied, both in terms of individual interpretation and thematic exposure. The most representative artists, professionals in stage design, are: Auguste Baillayre, Theodor Kiriakoff, Boris Nesvedov, Anton Mater, Anatolii Șubin, Konstantin Lodzeiski¹⁵, Nicolai Alentiev, Lazar Kaușanskii, Boris Piskun, Anatolii Jeludev, Petru Balan^{16,17} (Fig. 1), Constantin Balan, Adrian Suruceanu, Iurie Matei, Irina Gurin, Aurelia Roman, Stela Verebceanu, and others. The sketches presented by the artists at the exhibition are original, revealing the idea that decorations are indispensable elements in theatrical stage art¹⁸.



Fig. 1 Petru Balan, *The Death of Milescu-Spătaru*, Set design sketch for the play “Prolog” by V. Matei, 1987. Paper, gouache, 1987 (MNAM Collection)

¹³ Victoria Rocaciuc (2023). *Illustrations for sketches, short stories and novels in the work of artist Ilie Bogdesco*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2022, 2023 editions”, Chișinău, pp. 21-25.

¹⁴ National Museum of Art of Moldova (2023). *Ilie Bogdesco: graphics*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Chișinău, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Vitalie Malcoci (2022). *Set designer Constantin Lodzeiski – faithful promoter of theatrical art values*, “Art. Visual Arts”, New Series, Vol. XXXI, no. 1, Chișinău, pp. 83-87.

¹⁶ Petru Bălan (2021). *Set Design*, Editura Epigraf, Chișinău.

¹⁷ Vitalie Malcoci (2020). *P. Balan – new approaches and trends in stage design in the 1990s*, “Art. Visual Arts Series, Fine Arts, Architecture”, New Series, vol. XXX, no. 1, pp. 70-75.

¹⁸ MNAM (2021). *Scenographic Art: Exhibition dedicated to the centenary of the Mihai Eminescu National Theatre*, MNAM, Chișinău, pp. 5-9.

The theatre scenography collection of the National Museum of Art of Moldova includes works created by professional painters during the Bessarabian period¹⁹, post-war and contemporary periods (1921-2006). These are exhibited through set designs, costumes, theatre programmes, opera, ballet and music hall programmes. The theatre set design collection was formed between 1949 and 2006.

Twenty-eight sketches of sets and costumes, created between 1920 and 1932, were donated by Auguste Baillayre. They abound in styles (romanticism, impressionism, cubism, expressionism) and were executed during the harlequinade period (creative fantasies and original interpretations). Two set designs featuring Harlequins were created by E. Ivanovskaia and A. Baillayre. Among the costume sketches is Gheorghe Pojedaev's work of art, "Lady in a Kimono".

The collection of the National Museum of Art of Moldova also includes works by authors such as E. Ivanovskaia, N. Bragalia, M. Starcevskaia, V. Evers, N. Danilenco and others.

The works of these artists are graceful, laconic and expressive. Each work in the museum's collection representing the art of scenography in Moldova has its own individual value and is part of the universe whose name is theatre²⁰.

Examination of the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphics"

On the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the founding of the National Art Museum of Moldova, the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphics" was inaugurated (26 November 2024 – 23 February 2025).

The National Graphic Arts collection was established in 1945 and continues to be developed to this day²¹. The collection is estimated to contain over 11,500 works representing various fields and genres of art: easel graphics, book illustrations, posters, stage design, etc., created between 1886 and 2021.

The work of Bessarabian artists is reflected in the evolutionary process of the exhibition activity, which has contributed to the formation and training of new generations of local visual artists.

The examination and research of the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphic Art" involves a general analysis, carried out by describing the works created by the most representative graphic artists.

¹⁹ Vitalie Malcoci (2023). *Basarabian Stage Design*, Editura Generis, Chişinău.

²⁰ <https://mnam.md/colectia-arta-grafica-nationala?lang=en> (accessed: 07.06.2024).

²¹ Tatiana Raşchitor (2017). *Easel Graphics in the Visual Arts of the Republic of Moldova*, Doctoral Thesis, Chişinău.

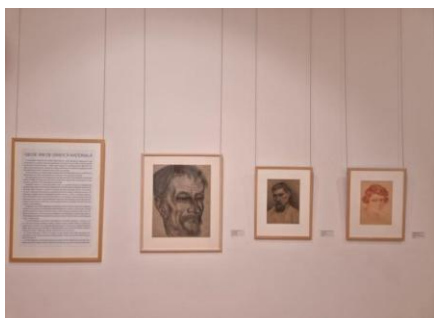


Fig. 2 Exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics”, MNAM, 2024-2025 (Photo: Iu.Gherman)



Fig. 3 Auguste Baillayre, *Portrait of a Man*, paper, charcoal, pastel, 1921 (MNAM Collection)

One of the most illustrative personalities, who laid the foundation for Bessarabian national art, was Auguste Baillayre. Born on 1 May 1879 in Vernet, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (died on 16 December 1961 in Bucharest, Romania), he was a professor at the School of Fine Arts in Chişinău and the first director of the MNAM. The artistic environment in which A. Baillayre evolved is worth outlining through his friendships and acquaintances in Russia and France (V. Mayakovsky, M. Larionov, N. Goncharova, M. Chagall, V. Tatlin, A. Lentulov, P. Picasso, A. Renoir, H. Matisse, etc.). He had remarkable achievements and managed to educate a brilliant group of artists, such as N. Bragalia, O. Hrşanovschi, E. Barlo, E. Ivanovsky, M. Gamburd, and others, who continued their specialised studies in European capitals – Paris, Dresden, and Brussels. The artist was married to the painter Lidia Arionescu, a prominent figure in Bessarabian artistic culture.

The work *Portrait of a Man* (Fig. 2-3), exhibited at the exhibition, presents a portrait of an elderly man, created in a realistic and very expressive style, with an emphasis on physiognomic features. The drawing was created using charcoal on paper, in brown and black tones, with white pastel, which gives the image a sober and profound appearance. The details of the face are highlighted by shadows and precise lines, placing emphasis on wrinkles, bone structure and skin texture, suggesting the passage of time, but also life experience. The man's gaze is slightly turned to one side, and his expression is rigid and strident, generating feelings of introspection, melancholy or even inner suffering. The contrast between light and shadow stands out, adding depth and emotion. The fact that the artist has rendered the imperfections and signs of age lends authenticity and extravagance to the portrait.

Tania Baillayre (1916-1991), daughter of the Baillayre artist couple and one of the most remarkable artists of the 20th century in Bessarabia, had a career marked by diversity and depth in her exploration of forms, colours and symbolism in art. Her

work *Lotus* (1967) (Fig. 4), donated to the museum²², fits into a broader context of her artistic evolution, being a clear example of her unique vision and profound sensitivity to human nature and divinity, combined with the influences of postmodernism. The context in which the graphic artist carried out her artistic activity is important, as she was influenced by the artistic movements of the time, but also by the socialist regime. Nevertheless, the artist had her own pursuits, with a very deep spiritual nuance. With specialised studies in the field and extensive experience, she integrated various cultural and aesthetic traditions, including European and Eastern ones, exploring several areas of plastic arts (sculpture, painting, *design*) with numerous graphic techniques.

The work *Lotus* presents an oriental-style landscape. In the foreground, the water mirror shines with three lotus flowers, and on the right, a dragonfly and palm trees. The background frames a round landing with four steps, on the pedestal of which a deity with closed legs is placed, and behind her, vegetation and human figures can be seen.

The work described reflects a unique symbolism, with references to the history of art and civilisations, as well as spiritual references (the lotus flower – the flower of Buddha and other deities).



Fig. 4 Tania Baillayre. *Lotus* 20.9 x 29.8 cm. 1967, (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 5 Tania Baillayre, *Portrait of a Peasant*, paper, linocut, 1939, (MNAM Collection)

With a modernist and symbolic approach, the work *Lotus* reinterprets an ancient Eastern symbol, signifying purity, inner enlightenment, life and rebirth.

The work *The Fairy of Dreams* (Fig. 6), signed by Elizabeth Ivanovsky, is a costume sketch that harmoniously combines various elements of clothing. It depicts a tall, slender lady dressed in blue, white and black, with red decorative elements. The headdress is crowned with a fan-shaped element. The long dress is covered with a transparent scarf. In her left hand she holds a decorative umbrella, a parasol accessory with references to Eastern culture.

²² The work was donated by Andrei Iliescu in 2005.



Fig. 6 Elizabeth Ivanovsky, *The Dream Fairy*, Costume sketch, paper, pencil, ink, watercolour, 1927 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 7 Theodor Kiriacooff, *Costume sketch*, for the play *Bluebeard* by M. Meaterlinck, paper, watercolour, 1922 (MNAM Collection)

The work *Greek Myth* by Miriam Gamburd presents a dynamic composition, consisting of a cluster of human figures imagined in a fascinating tense interaction. The composition is fluid, with sinuous lines that guide the gaze across the entire surface of the plastic space. The artist uses a free composition, based on intersections of diagonals and curved lines, which creates an organic rhythm, subordinated to the sensation of controlled chaos.

There is a certain drama, with expressions and influences of Renaissance-style graphics in the anatomical treatment of the characters. The colour palette is reduced, dominated by monochrome tones of ochre and sepia, which gives the work an archaic patina, evoking ancient frescoes.

Combining the refined technique of engraving with the tense pulsations of the composition, the artist creates an image that transcends classical mythology, transforming it into a contemporary visual expression of eternal ideas about life, death, sacrifice and transformation.

M. Gamburd is recognised for her contributions to the fields of graphic art and sculpture. Her works often explore intimate and provocative themes, offering an essential perspective on the human condition.

An important figure in Bessarabian culture, especially in the national visual arts, was the painter Rostislav Ocuşco. Born on 23 March 1887 in Saint Petersburg (died on 14 January 1966 in Chişinău), the painter completed his studies in 1922 at the School of Fine Arts in Chişinău and in 1934 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Iaşi. In 1944, he became a member of the Society of

Fine Arts of Bessarabia, and in 1963 he was awarded the title of Master Emeritus of Art of the Moldavian SSR.



Fig. 8 Rostislav Ocușco, *The Painter M. Petric*, paper, charcoal, 1939 (MNAM Collection)

The work *Portrait of the painter M. Petric*, exhibited at the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics”, is a portrait of a man with a melancholic, slightly pensive facial expression and an ephemeral sadness covering his gaze (Fig. 8). A wide-brimmed hat defines the subject's membership in the generous artistic elite.

We notice some differences in his practice, such as the application of the clear contour method for portraying characters or the precise expression of the silhouette to achieve the most visible expressiveness. Sometimes the lines and hatching are precise, other times they are thickened and overlap, transforming into a valuable stain of the silhouette. The silhouette, the properties of the chosen material, the vibration of the line, the variety of drawing techniques as a whole – all have a suggestive character and express the figure of interest to the artist beyond the individual features of the character.

We notice the artist's preference for using the broad side of the graphite or charcoal pencil, which allows him to achieve broad, transparent hatching. This highlights the texture of the paper, creating a vibration of tonal patches, which gives the drawing a painterly quality. Thus, we can associate the drawing with watercolour – transparent, fresh, with the instantaneous and diaphanous character of the strokes used. These techniques allow for the rapid modelling of the plastic form by expressing the relationship between shadow and light. One of the advantages of the technique proposed by the artist is the rapid execution of sketches.

The work *Costume Sketch* (1924), by Theodor Kiriaco, reflects the artistic refinement of the interwar period and the attention to detail in theatre

costume design (Fig. 7). This work illustrates a sketch of a costume, through which the aristocratic character and solemnity of the character are highlighted. Th. Kiriacoff, called the “magician of the stage,” worked as a set and costume *designer* in the first half of the 20th century, contributing significantly to the aesthetics of the entire Romanian theatre. The artist had a significant impact on the field of set design. Through his work, he managed to combine historical influences with modern trends, bringing a unique style to the set design of the time. He worked at theatres in Chişinău, Iaşi and Bucharest, distinguishing himself through his faithful representation of period costumes and stage sets.

The interwar period was one of the most dynamic in Romania from a cultural, historical and artistic point of view. The accelerated modernisation of society led to an unprecedented artistic effervescence, in which theatre, cinema and the visual arts developed considerably. Bucharest, nicknamed “Little Paris”, had become an important European cultural centre. In the first decades of the 20th century, theatre costumes evolved from the realistic simplicity of naturalist theatre to the opulence of avant-garde performances. Costume design became a key element in defining the characters and atmosphere of the play, emphasising the expressiveness of the actors and contributing to the overall aesthetics of the performance.

His artistic studies helped Th. Kiriacoff develop a distinct style, influenced by both international trends and local traditions. The graphic artist worked with important theatres of the time, creating costumes for historical plays and dramas. He managed to create spectacular costumes that highlighted the social status of the characters and contributed to the atmosphere on stage.

The work “Costume Sketch” (done in pencil and watercolour) reflects elements of 19th-century aristocratic fashion, combining tradition with modern influences. The costume was not just a simple decorative element; it was designed to accentuate the actor's expressiveness and suggest the character's high rank. The materials used (velvet, blockart) and the detailed accessories contribute to creating an impressive stage presence. Thus, Kiriacoff's contribution to set design was significant, having a valuable effect on the development of Romanian theatre costume, promoting the use of luxurious materials. Compared to other set designers of the time, Kiriacoff stood out for his attention to the authenticity of historical details and artistic refinement.

The work *Căsuţă din Corneşti* (1951) by Grigori Fiurer is a remarkable example of Moldovan visual art from the post-war period. This pencil drawing on paper reflects not only a special artistic sensitivity, but also a deep connection with traditional cultural values and the Moldovan rural landscape. Grigori Fiurer, born in 1886 and active until 1962, was an artist who constantly explored themes related to village life and created images that evoke the authenticity and simplicity of everyday life.

In the 1950s, Moldovan art was going through a period in which socialist realism had become the official style promoted by the authorities. During this

period, the emphasis was on depicting workers, peasants and landscapes in order to glorify the daily life of the people. However, *Căsuță din Cornești* differs from the clichés imposed by the ideology of the time, retaining an intimate and personal touch. This work is a testament to Fiurer's connection with the Moldovan village landscape, where traditions and nature intertwine harmoniously.

The village of Cornești, a typical locality in central Moldova, becomes a source of inspiration for the artist's work. The house with a thatched roof depicted in the drawing appears as a symbol of vernacular architecture in the local tradition. In a subtle way, Fiurer captures the atmosphere of the village through details such as the abundance of vegetation or the textures of the roofs, which suggest the passage of time and the durability of traditions.

The work is done in pencil, which gives it a special expressiveness. The contrast between light and dark tones creates visual depth, giving the viewer a sense of intimacy and tranquillity. The delicate lines and fine hatching highlight the structure of the house and the surrounding nature, emphasising the simplicity of rural architecture. The artist carefully renders every detail of the landscape, from the textures of the leaves to the way the light falls on the surface of the thatched roof.

The traditional house in the foreground dominates the main register, while the vegetation and trees in the background complete the frame in a natural way. This compositional arrangement suggests a harmonious relationship between man and nature, a theme often found in Moldovan art.

Căsuță din Cornești is more than just a representation of a rural landscape; it is an evocation of traditional values and cultural identity. Through this work, Fiurer manages to convey emotional messages, inviting the viewer to reflect on the beauty of simple things. In a period dominated by industrialisation and rapid social change, the artist turns his gaze to the past, to traditions, reminding us of the importance of preserving our roots and our connection with nature. This work is invaluable not only from an artistic point of view, but also as a visual document of the era. It reflects how Moldovan artists managed to preserve their authenticity in a complex political and cultural context. Through this work, the artist pays tribute to the Moldovan village, highlighting the beauty of folk architecture and the rural landscape. At the same time, the work demonstrates the author's dedication to the national cultural heritage.

A remarkable representative of contemporary art in Moldova, with a strong influence from Romanian cultural traditions, was Ion Tabârță (1930-2012), who studied at the Kiev Institute of Fine Arts in the class of the renowned professor V. Casian, under whose guidance he studied various graphic techniques: linocut, lithography, woodcut, etching, engraving on cardboard, etc.

The work *Dragoș Fighting the Aurochs* (1984), selected for the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphic Art," depicts the main heroes of Moldova's founding, according to legend. The work is executed in an expressive manner,

with a dynamic composition and a strong black-and-white contrast that emphasises the drama of the scene.

The composition of the work is well balanced, capturing a moment of maximum tension: the confrontation between Dragoș and the Aurochs. The image is organised in such a way as to suggest movement and conflict, and the two characters – man and beast – are placed centrally, in direct opposition, which amplifies the drama of the scene. The central element of the composition is the moment of attack, illustrated by Dragoș's firm gesture as he thrusts his spear into the powerful bison's body. The lines are energetic, emphasising the tension of the confrontation. There is a dynamic use of diagonals, which creates a visual effect of force and danger. Dragoș is shown in an attacking position, with his body leaning slightly forward, suggesting his determination to defeat the beast. The spear aimed at the aurochs becomes a central element in the narrative of the image, symbolising man's triumph over wild nature. The bison is depicted in an aggressive posture, with its head lowered, its horns pointed towards Dragoș, and its body tense, emphasising its struggle for survival. The background is stylised and reduced to the essential elements, so that the viewer's attention is focused exclusively on the scene of the fight.

The strong contrast between black and white contributes to the drama of the image, highlighting the shapes and dynamics of the scene. Black dominates the aurochs, suggesting danger, while white accentuates Dragoș's silhouette, signifying the light of victory and the power of civilisation. Thus, the composition conveys a symbolic struggle between man and nature, between order and chaos, between civilisation and the untamed forces of the world. The work is made using a technique specific to traditional graphics – linocut. The engraving technique allows for a strong play of chiaroscuro, which intensifies the drama of the composition. The lines are characterised and incised with precision and variation in thickness, creating an effect of rhythm and movement. The strong contrast between the shaded and light areas gives depth and relief to the image. Hatching is used strategically to suggest the texture of the bison's fur. The graphic expressiveness is amplified by the compact composition and the use of simplified but energetic forms, which give the work a special visual power. The technique of engraving on a flat surface allows for clear and strongly contoured details, which gives the work an almost sculptural character.

Through these major elements, the artist manages to create a dynamic, expressive and deeply symbolic work, highlighting the narrative power of graphic art. Thus, Ion Taburță's work is not only an artistic interpretation of a legend, but also a work with multiple meanings, which speaks of origins, power, confrontation and destiny. Ion Tăbârță's creation was appreciated for its ability to combine personal expressiveness with collective themes, making him a renowned artist within the artistic movement in Bessarabia.

The work *Reflections* (1998) by Karacentev Elena presents a work that explores the inner thoughts and feelings of the main character, with an

introspective and melancholic tone in a narrative style. Her work is an experiment with mixed techniques, combining classical engraving with computer technology, testing the limits of printmaking.

The artist experiments with textures, using materials such as wallpaper as a print, giving the sheet a varied and tactile texture. The graphic artist meticulously combines elements of abstract and figurative art, forming imaginary spaces and worlds between realism and surrealism, distant from the principles of linear perspective or volume.

Reflections depicts a landscape rendered predominantly in cool colours. At the top, we see an almost black stripe, interrupted below by a lighter shade representing the cloudy sky. Below this is a dark strip that ends at the bottom with a shade reflecting the ground/land. The focal point of the work is a patch of red, located on the left, between the sky and the earth. Examining the graphic artist's work, we can conclude that she will not cease to experiment with contemporary graphic techniques and will continue to preserve the particularities of her poetic vision of art.

The work *Peasant from Rășinari*, Sibiu by graphic artist Gheorghe Ceglocoff, an artist concerned with the authentic representation of the Romanian village and peasants, depicts an old peasant dressed in traditional clothes, with a penetrating gaze that conveys wisdom and tenderness.

The colours used by the artist are warm, dominated by shades of brown and ochre, suggesting the simplicity of village life. The background of the composition is minimalist, with a few elements reminiscent of the mountainous landscape of Transylvania. The old man's face is not just a simple interpretation of the portrait, a physical image of the peasant, but also a representation of his values: work, modesty, patriotism, love for his country, and a close connection with nature.

Gh. Ceglocoff managed to transform the simplicity of the message and traditional elements into a successful portrait that clearly reflects the national and cultural values that define us.

Stepan Tuhari (1928-1978) was represented at the exhibition with two graphic works: *Shepherd* and *Agachi Gheorghii*. This graphic artist was well known for his contributions to the field of graphic art in the post-war and contemporary periods. In the 1950s and 1960s, he produced a series of notable works such as *People are the wealth of Moldova* and *The rhythms of our life*.

The works *Shepherd* (Fig. 9) and *Agachi Gheorghii* (Fig. 10), from the series *People are the wealth of Moldova* (1961) reflect the main motif in the artist's work – the theme of representing peasants, workers, simple people from the countryside, with rural landscapes in Moldova, with rich harvests, highlighting national identity, cultural and traditional values.

The ripe, large melons in the linocut *Agachi Gheorghii* are held by the old man, pressed tightly to his chest, as a result of his hard work, symbolising both

his love of peasant life and hard work, as well as the pride, wisdom and spirituality of the Romanian peasant.

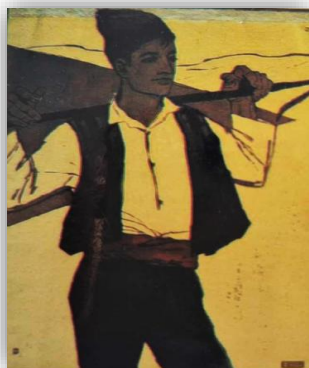


Fig. 9 Stepan Tuhari, *Shepherd*, the cycle *People – the wealth of Moldova*, colour linocut, 1961 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 10 Stepan Tuhari, *Agachi Gheorgh*, the cycle *People – the wealth of Moldova*, colour linocut, 1961 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 11 Leonid Grigorașenco, *The First Printers*, watercolour, paper, 1959 (MNAM Collection)

The watercolour painting *The First Printers in Moldova* (1959), created by the remarkable artist Leonid Grigorașenco (1924-1995), presents an image that depicts an important event in the history of Moldova. It depicts the first attempts to implement printing in Moldova (Fig. 11). The work shows a printing workshop where the characters are producing the first printed sheets. The importance of the work lies not only in its technical perspective, but also in its ideological one.

Shades of ochre, brown, burgundy and maroon dominate the colour scheme, contrasted by accents of blue and red in the clothing. It is a balanced,

two-dimensional composition, with diagonal lines guiding the viewer towards the centre of interest – the group of workers.

The architectural details and objects in the interior – books, tools, etc. – create a medieval atmosphere. The warm light that filters into the workshop highlights the textures of the surfaces and creates a play of soft shadows, emphasising the depth of the scene unfolding in the room.

The realistic and finely detailed rendering of tools and clothing contributes to an authentic atmosphere, as the elements themselves are characters in the visual narrative. This work can be read as a tribute to Moldova's cultural past, emphasising the role of print in preserving knowledge.

The work *Larma Boemiei Ion Rogaci* (1987) by artist Leonid Grigorașenco, created using watercolour, captures the vibrant and tumultuous atmosphere of bohemian life. Through his expressive technique, the artist manages to convey not only the image of an effervescent moment, but also the deep emotion that accompanies this artistic world. The use of watercolour allows for subtle transparencies and overlaps, which give an impression of movement and spontaneity.

The outlines of the characters are sometimes blurred, suggesting a dynamic environment, full of energy and intense interaction. In the context of the 1980s, when the work was created, it can also be interpreted as a reflection on the condition of the artist in a changing society. It may be a tribute to creative freedom, but also a commentary, a subtle protest against the difficulties faced by artists in a rigid and controlled system under Soviet pressure.

The work *Spring* (1980), created by graphic artist Vasile Cojocaru, presents a landscape with panoramic views of the Moldavian countryside. The entire surface of the painting is arranged with trees and hills with sinuous but rhythmically structured lines (Fig. 12). The sky maintains an abundance of clouds, grouped according to a certain cadence and profiled in pastel shades of white, blue and pink.



Fig. 12 Vasile Cojocaru, *Spring*, pastel, tempera, paper, 1980 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 13 Simion Zamșa, *Papamobil*, woodcut, 2008-2018 (MNAM Collection)

The work *Papamobil* (2008-2018) by Simion Zamșa is made using the woodcut technique. In this work, the artist addresses several subjects and themes, such as the impact of religion on contemporary society, mobility, spirituality, etc. At the centre of the composition is a vaguely outlined human silhouette, which appears to be seated in a vehicle (Fig. 13).

The compositional and chromatic organisation, together with the lines and textures used by the graphic artist, contribute to creating an effect of mystery and timelessness that provokes meditation, morality and other states of mind. The blurred background and neutral tones accentuate this atmosphere. The plasticity of the forms suggests the idea of an abyssal space, somewhere between reality and dream.

The sides of the work are marked by abstract structures, which can be interpreted either as figurative expressions or as architectural elements. These details suggest a broader context in the interpretation of the main message, through the contrast created between modernity and the past, offering the viewer a unique perspective on the relationship between the sacred and the profane.

Conclusions

Artistic creation is a suitable way to preserve, conserve and promote cultural values. Addressing national themes through engraving techniques remains relevant today because, by multiplying the image, these technical processes make it easier to understand and disseminate an artistic message. Here, engraving techniques, as educational and spiritual attributes, have a notable impact on the knowledge and promotion of national cultural heritage.

Despite the role and importance of national art and culture, the arts in Bessarabia at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century remain a little-known chapter to this day.

Insufficiently studied in the 1950s-1970s, being appreciated and labelled by Soviet officials as “bourgeois” and “formalist” art, interwar Bessarabian art was excluded from the cultural values of modern art for about 50 years. In reality, this era was a link between late medieval and contemporary art – A. Baillayre, Th. Kiriacoff and others continued their activities in the post-war period, which changed priorities and requirements in line with the needs of “socialist realism”.

After the occupation of Bessarabia in 1940 and 1944, the situation in the arts changed radically. Among the requirements imposed on artists, priority was given to the realistic art of the Russian “perdvijnici” of the mid-19th century, subjects and motifs dedicated to work, patriotism, the “new life”, collective farming, and the construction of communism. Among visual artists, even though they were forced to comply with “state orders” in the arts, many graphic artists (I. Vieru, A. David, etc.) remained true to their previous artistic positions, and their work constituted the true values of national art.

The 1960s and 1970s in Soviet Moldova were prolific in the emergence of new creative talents who substantially enriched the artistic atmosphere and local

cultural space. During this period, visual artists were particularly active in the field of graphic art. In this regard, applying traditional techniques with new approaches to national themes, the following graphic artists stand out: Gheorghe Vrabie, Igor Vieru, Stepan Tuhari, Ion Tabârță, Vasile Cojocaru, Valentin Coreachin, Gheorghe Guzun, Miriam Gamburd, Emil Childescu, Dumitru Savastin, Semion Solonari, Filimon Hămuraru, Boris Poleacov, Alexei Colâbneac, African Usov, Vladimir Lavrentov, Ilie Bogdesco, and others.

Thus, the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphic Art” with graphic works signed by prominent artists from Moldova who faced moral dilemmas under the totalitarian regime offers us an accurate picture of Moldovan visual art, especially national graphic art in a contemporary context. The graphic works by Pavel Șilingovscki, Alexandru Plămădeală, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Auguste Baillayre, Tania Baillayre, Moisei Gamburd, Miriam Gamburd, Șneer Cogan and others find their rightful place in the gallery of Moldovan national graphic art.

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We express our gratitude to MNAM.

Why can't we find goldsmiths alongside contemporary artists?

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With a remarkable history in the field of art, gold has always been a challenge for artists. Although we more easily associate it with ancient Egyptian and Byzantine art, with flamboyant royal Baroque or Tsarist interiors, the material surprises us with its versatility in contemporary art. It never ceases to renew itself in terms of discourse, aesthetics and symbolism. In many examples, gold supports the concept of creation even through its absence¹. But more often than not, it lays the foundation of the artistic concept, without which the message would not reach the public.

Over the last 30 years, the number of artists using gold has multiplied, and gilding techniques in secular art have diversified. Gold is also used in solid form through the technical process of casting. With the help of new discoveries in the field of chemistry and physics, it is applied to metal surfaces by means of electrolysis. However, in most cases, it is more cost-effective to use it in laminated form, in the form of sheets.

Willing to go beyond the realm of craftsmanship, artists who have gained experience in the field of gilding bring this *modus operandi* into their art, making it truly unique. Thanks to globalisation, the ease with which we can access information, travel and come into contact with the works of renowned artists of all times, although still with some reluctance, there are master gilders who have shared their experience. In the field of Byzantine sacred art, at least in the workshops of Mount Athos, gilding has always been done with bole (bolus), which is why this *modus operandi* has not been lost.

Like Gustav Klimt, in terms of the volume of their work and their preoccupations, we find many contemporary artists. Gold has become a constant element in the works of Yves Klein, Linda Benglis, James Lee Byars, Cristian Eckart, Jim Hodges, Giuseppe Penone, Barry X Ball, Willy Verginer, Gabriel Orozco, Damien Hirst, Yoan Capote, Brad Kunkle, Twany Chatmon, Simon Allen, Stephanie Rew, Michael Bergt, Bernard Delaval and others.

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¹ Piero Manzoni's work, *Artist's Shit*, is a good example in which gold, although not physically present, conceptually represented the currency of exchange for the contents of the can, with the intention of criticising consumerism.

The most difficult aspect of my doctoral research was identifying information about the people who gilded various works by more or less established artists. This led me to conclude that we are dealing with an ethical issue, because in most cases, the gilding is not done by the artist.

Finding a gilder is not as easy as it seems. While everyone knows a painter, sculptor, architect, doctor, etc., I challenge you to name a gilder or a gilding workshop. In Romania, there is one gilding workshop that performs chemical gilding through electrolysis, the Romanian Patriarchate Workshop, the only one accredited for gilding church objects. If there are other workshops, they are not well known because they are small and belong to jewellery shops. And yet, most priests are unaware that they can have locks or other religious objects gilded there. I have witnessed unintentional vandalism due to collaboration with amateurs in the field of gilding, who did not have sufficient technical knowledge about the types of gilding suitable for a particular material. Others have sent items to be gilded abroad, to Russia or Greece.

There is no institution that teaches gilding techniques, either in the country or abroad. No educational institution trains gilders in exchange for a diploma.

How is it then that this craft has not disappeared? First of all, the main reason is the continuous demand for gilded objects.

This type of training has been carried out for thousands of years under the guidance of practicing gilders, who do not and will not have a diploma certifying their skills. Finding someone willing to share their experience as a gilder is another challenge. As a researcher, I was not allowed access to the Patriarchate's workshops. Although I made all the necessary arrangements, I was only offered the opportunity to contact the chemical engineer for any questions I might have, but I was unable to attend the gilding process inside the workshops. Although the request came from the George Enescu National University of Arts, along with assurances that the purpose was scientific research, not creating competition, the answer remained the same.

In our country, if you want to find a gilder, the surest way is to look in the field of sacred art. But none of them were trained as gilders in educational institutions.

Therefore, gilders are rare and hard to find. So why is it that not only do artists forget to mention their collaborators, but journalists also fail to ask questions about gilding, especially when this stage is absolutely crucial to the final message the artist wants to convey?

In this paper, I do not intend to place art on the same level as gilding, or the artist on the same level as the gilder, but I want to point out that the public has the right to know that gilding does not appear on the surface of a work of art without effort; it is done by a person who, naturally, has an occupation. This person can be called a gilder, a gold leaf artist, a goldsmith or whatever you like,

because this occupation does not have an official name in the Romanian occupational code, although it is not among the newly-established professions.

Following my doctoral research, I have not discovered any names of gilders who have gone down in history, although evidence shows that there is a history of approximately 7,000 years of rolled gold.

I will therefore present two examples where, due to the fact that the works were re-created after the artists' deaths, their physical involvement in the gilding process seems almost impossible.

One of these is the work of Jannis Kounellis *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*. Jannis Kounellis (1936-2017), expressing himself within the *arte povera* movement, used this precious metal to transform mundane and anonymous objects into monuments to a person's life.

In order to be exhibited in different places, this work must simply be recreated, as the gilded wall is part of the gallery/museum building. For example, in order to be exhibited one year after the artist's death at the Harlem Gavin Brown's Enterprise gallery in New York, someone gilded the wall of that gallery, a former brewery. Coincidentally, Sarah Douglas, author of an article for ARTnews, caught the person who did this. This man was described as “an art installer”², climbing a tall ladder to apply gold leaf to a huge expanse of wall. This action is correctly defined in the article as the “finishing touch” to the work, continuing with the idea that the lighting of the brick walls would have been too dim compared to the light provided by the gold, a light that shines from within. So, recognising the importance of his action on Kounellis' work, this man is not even mentioned by name or profession. *Art installer* is not equivalent to the role of gilding technician.



Fig. 1 Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, 2018³

² Sarah Douglas (2018). *Ashes and Gold in First Substantial Jannis Kounellis Show Since Artist's Death*, published online on 3 November, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/ashes-gold-first-substantial-jannis-kounellis-show-since-artists-death-11274/>, accessed on 17 May 2023.

³ Jannis Kounellis (2018). *Untitled (Tragedia civile)*, gilded wall, coat, hat, photo: Thomas Muller, Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome, published on <https://sculpturemagazine.art/jannis-kounellis/>, accessed on 30 October 2023.

The author of the article creates the impression that any “art installer” could gild a wall using some unknown technique. There is no question of identifying the adhesive medium or even whether the laminated metal used in the version in Figure 1 is gold or slag metal⁴. The public is misled by the omission of this absolutely necessary information.



Fig. 2 Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, 1989⁵



Fig. 3 Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, 1986⁶

⁴ Slag metal is a substitute for gold, an alloy of copper and aluminium which, unlike real gold, reacts chemically to environmental factors, resulting in oxidation. Its appearance is kitschy, shinier than gold, which has a pearly sheen. Slagmetal sheets are much larger than gold sheets (I have not seen any gold sheets larger than 12x12 cm);

⁵ Jannis Kounellis (1988-1989). *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, view from the exhibition organised by Castello di Rivoli, Turin, 28 October-12 February, curated by Rudi Fuchs and Johannes Gachnang.

⁶ Jannis Kounellis (1986-1987). *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, view from the exhibition *A Retrospective in Five Locations*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 17 October-4 January, <https://www.gladstonegallery.com/artist/jannis-kounellis/work-detail/7490/em-civil-tragedy-em>, accessed on 30 October 2023.



Fig. 4 Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, 1975⁷



Fig. 5 Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, 2019⁸

If I publish a photograph of this installation without the consent of the person who took the photograph, not recreated the installation, I risk being accused under copyright laws. Comparing the time and effort involved in taking a digital photograph with gilding a wall, as a practitioner of both, I can say the difference in terms of effort is enormous.

None of the versions of this work mention the name of the person who carried out the most difficult and important part of this work. This is not an error, but a practice. This custom is common in modern and contemporary art.

⁷ Jannis Kounellis (1975). *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, view from the exhibition in Naples, Lucio Amelio Gallery, photo: Mimmo Jodice, published in <https://www.platocontemporary.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2021/09/JANNIS-KOUNELLIS-at-The-Numismatic-2023-Website-Presentation-.pdf>, accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁸ Jannis Kounellis (2019). *Untitled (Civil Tragedy)*, gilded wall, coat rack, coat, hat, lamp, Fondazione Prada-s Ca Corner della Regina, Venice, Photo: Agostino Osio, <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/09/artseen/Jannis-Kounellis>, accessed on 30 October 2023.

Another example is James Lee Byars' last and most voluminous work, created posthumously based on sketches he had conceived during his lifetime, *The Golden Tower*. James Lee Byars (1932-1992) used gold extensively in his art, for reasons related to its symbolism of spirituality.

In 2017, for the 57th edition of the Venice Art Biennale, this version was created. The sculpture, 21 meters high and 2.5 metres in diameter, with a surface area of approximately 170 square metres, is made entirely of gold-plated steel. It symbolizes a colossal lighthouse, the oracle that unifies heaven and earth⁹. Unlike Kounellis' work, we were able to find out who was responsible for the gilding process, but not easily. Gilded using the mixtion gilding technique, the work was carried out in 2017 by gilding technicians from the Reduzzi workshop¹⁰. How did I find this information? While browsing the website of the gold leaf supplier, Giusto Manetti Battiloro, I found a “gallery” section containing various works of art that have been gilded with gold from this supplier and references to the Reduzzi workshop. On the same website, there was a recording of the gilding process. Lino Reduzzi, the narrator, presented the entire process, although he did not mention the entire team. So, the question remains: what are the names of those who glued at least 26,520 sheets?

Even though gilding is an activity that falls more within the realm of craftsmanship and artisanship, this work would not have had the same appearance if it weren't for those gilding technicians. But Lino Reduzzi is not just a technician without artistic training. Before setting up his workshop, which does not deal exclusively with gilding, but also with glassware and mosaics, Lino Reduzzi graduated from the Carrara di Belle Arti Academy in Bergamo, so he is an academically accredited artist. Unfortunately, however, in the articles published on the website of the Michael Werner Gallery, the gallery that supported the creation of this work, as well as on the ARTnews website, where the subject of the “Golden Tower” was discussed, there is absolutely no reference or even allusion to the person(s) who carried out the gilding process. Only the Reduzzi workshop website provides technical information about the materials used.

So, is it ethical to give all the credit to Byars, even though he wasn't even there when it was made? While I'm not saying the Reduzzi workshop should take credit for the work, I think it's really important to give these gilders the credit they deserve, especially since the gilding is such a big part of Byars' concept. Without gold, we cannot discuss of the *Golden Tower*.

⁹ Uma Nair (2017). *Bridge between heaven and earth: James Byars' Golden Tower showcased at the 57th Venice Biennale is a modern day totem*, May, <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/bridge-heaven-earth-james-byars-golden-tower-showcased-57th-venice-biennale-modern-day-totem/>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

¹⁰ <http://www.studioireduzzi.com/en/portfolio/james-lee-byars-the-golden-tower/>, accessed on 14 January 2022.



Fig. 6 James Lee Byars, *Golden Tower*, steel gilded with 24 K gold, 21 m high, 2.5 m diameter, approx. 170 square meters of surface area, Venice, 2017¹¹

Unfortunately, I have encountered this approach to gilding very often, even though gilding is the final touch and perhaps the most important stage, both in terms of aesthetics and concept.

Extrapolating, I propose a different situation: if an artist receives a commission for a work and is given precise instructions regarding the subject, color scheme and form, whose work will it be? The person who had the idea but called on a specialist to give it form, or the person who executed it? But what if the person who commissioned the work has studied art and identifies as an artist? Can they take full ownership of the work, as is the case with the works of Damien Hirst, Niclas Castello or Jeff Koons? If Byars' sculpture had remained unplated, where would the “gilded machine to honor the gods”¹² have been? How would the “allusion to the symbol of the sun” have been made, and how would it have become a symbol of inner enlightenment, intellectual knowledge and spiritual experience? How would the concept of divinity have been conveyed?¹³

Another ethical issue is raised by the art of Hubert Duprat (b. 1957), a French artist who stands out for his totally unusual way of creating art using *Trichoptera* larvae from the *Rhyacophilidae* family, which he forces to build cocoons out of gold, pearls and precious stones.

These insects resemble moths or butterflies, which, in their larval stage, live in the aquatic environment of rivers. Until they reach the butterfly stage, in

¹¹ <http://www.studioereduzzi.com/en/portfolio/james-lee-byars-the-golden-tower/>, accessed on 14 January 2022.

¹² Alberto Salvatori – curator of the work, <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/bridge-heaven-earth-james-byars-golden-tower-showcased-57th-venice-biennale-modern-day-totem/>

¹³ *Idem*.

order to protect themselves from predators, they build “houses” similar to snails' shells - out of pebbles, sand, plant debris and silk (which they produce with the help of glands).

Hubert Duprat put these small and precious sculptures into realization after wondering what happened if any larva found a grain of gold in the river sand. Would it use it to create its aquatic cocoon? Thus, the idea of depriving them of any other material usually found in their natural habitat took shape, providing them only with gold flakes, pearls and precious stones to work with. The result was unexpectedly beautiful. Taken out of context, the tiny sculptures appear to have been crafted by a jeweler.



Fig. 7 Hubert Duprat, gold, pearls, precious stones, 1980-2000, approx. 0.5x1.9cm¹⁴

These paradoxical artefacts, halfway between the natural and the artificial, have raised ethical controversies. Who is their author? The insect, unaware of what it is doing, or the artist who left the right materials within reach of the larvae? Apparently, without doing anything, Duprat is the author of these small jewelry sculptures.

These insects are merely fulfilling a biological function in response to environmental conditions. However, their skill and innovative ability to weave solid casings, the way they randomly choose precious stones, gold or pearls, may lead us to wonder whether they also incorporate the visual element into the structures they build. Are these larvae creative?

¹⁴ <https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/28499410114257562/> accessed on 20 June 2023.

Critic Christian Besson¹⁵ states that the result, both natural and aesthetic, transforms the larva's shell, which is more than an assisted *ready-made* or a diversion, into an object with a dual scientific and artistic exposure. He also said that these creations can be both the work of the larvae and of Duprat, and that this overlap represents in many ways the role of art and science, which, although they may seem incompatible, often work together to create beautiful things. Duprat's contribution is based on his understanding of the biology of larvae, and the science by which these creatures build their shells is brought to light by the artist providing the necessary materials. The argument that exonerates Duprat from the ethical issues raised in the case of Kounellis or Byars' works is that Duprat states his degree of involvement and admits from the outset that these sculptures are made by larvae. The public knows without looking too hard that the “technicians” of these works are the larvae and not the artist.

Gold is a very slippery material. Its material or symbolic value has often surpassed sophisticated artistic concepts. Yves Klein, however, bordered on charlatanism, loving the color golden so much that it constituted 30% of the color palette he used. He sold the space in the exhibition “The Void” called “the zone of immaterial pictorial sensibility”¹⁶ for gold. In exchange for 20 grams or even 1000 grams, according to other sources¹⁷, collectors received a certificate of ownership of an invisible work. The final stage of this action took place on the River Seine, where some of these collectors agreed to burn the certificate together with the artist, who threw some of the gold in the form of flakes into the river.

Often, the public was blinded by its brilliance and it did not matter that the name of the artist who used it was well-established, as was the case with Maurizio Cattelan's “America” (2016), when the sculpture in the shape of a toilet was stolen from the exhibition, most likely not for the beauty of its shape or the practical necessity of the object, but because it was made of solid 18K gold.

Niclas Castello, aware that the numismatic value of his gold work, *The Castello Cube* (2022), exceeds its artistic value, exhibited a 24K gold cube weighing 186kg for several hours in New York's Central Park, protected by security. He declared the value to be \$11.7 million, and we can assume that he needed publicity because the news was about the cartage, the material value, the specially designed furnace to cast that shape in a city in Switzerland – without

¹⁵ Christian Besson, statement in the article *Underwater architects: The Caddisfly Art of Hubert Duprat*, <https://underwaterarchitects.weebly.com/about-the-artist.html>, accessed on 20 June 2023.

¹⁶ Piotr Policht (2016). *How Yves Klein Played with Gold*, 15 December, <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/yves-klein-played-gold/>, accessed on 8 May 2023.

¹⁷ Jonathon Keats (2014). *This Milan Exhibit Reveals How Yves Klein Transmuted Gold into Art*, 8 December, Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2014/12/08/this-milan-exhibit-reveals-how-yves-klein-transmuted-gold-into-art-and-how-lucio-fontana-made-paintings-of-nothing-at-all/>, accessed on 8 May 2023.

mentioning who cast the gold into the cubic shape. The artistic concept pales in comparison to the sparkle of gold.

Another example of gold dominating the artist was Billy Apple's "apples". The Golden Apple (1983) is Billy Apple's most expensive work, a gold apple weighing 103.599 ounces (2936.98 grams), bearing the Hallmark of the London Bullion Market Association, the hallmark of the bullion and the artist's signature¹⁸. It was a solid gold object, including the core, although the artist had originally wanted the edge of the apple to be no more than 5 millimeters thick. Advised by Ray Smith, director of the Auckland Coin and Bullion Exchange at the time, the artist agreed to make it solid and gave him the right to produce one work with his signature and 19 unsigned works for which he was to receive \$1,000 each. It appears this was a scheme to export gold in a form other than legitimate ingots, which would have been subject to specific customs procedures. However, if the gold was in the form of a work of art, it was no longer subject to these procedures. Thus, the gold left in the form of golden apples, i.e. works of art, for Hong Kong and never returned, the artist most likely being used. Billy Apple did nothing more than choose an apple from a greengrocer's for which he paid 25 cents.

This raises the question: is there such a thing as an ethically ideal artist who works with gold, has the practical skills of a goldsmith and does not need to collaborate with anyone, who is not caught up in technical demonstrations and completely outside the realm of craftsmanship? The presence of such an artist would further legitimize the claim that there is an ethical problem in this field and on this issue.

Is there an ideal artist who uses gold in order not to dazzle the public, but as a means of rendering the subject/ unique, without which the message could not reach the public?

Well, the artist who fits any ethical standard exists and his name is Simon Allen. This British artist, like Klimt, after graduating in Fine Arts, devoted part of his life to learning how to gild frames in the best frame gilding workshop in London. Later, having mastered the technique of bolus gilding, he opened his own gilding workshop in his city. Simon Allen could not resist the urge to create, and he took advantage of his experience as a gilder, using it to create true landscapes that are seemingly abstract, yet figurative, his art lying on the border between painting and sculpture, between figurative and abstract.

From a technical point of view, Simon Allen is the only one who touches every layer of his work, from creating the wooden volume, to preparing the primer, sanding it, applying layers of bolus, sanding them, and then gluing one or two rows of gold, depending on the effect he is seeking to achieve.

¹⁸ Apples and People (2022). *Who bit the apple, Billy? Billy Apple-s apples*, published on 24 November, <https://applesandpeople.org.uk/billy-apple/>, accessed on 20 May 2023.

Allen's works are beautiful and valuable in themselves, whether they are plated with silver, gold or platinum. The emotion and charge with which the audience leaves are purely contemplative in nature. The audience does not leave Allen's works remembering only the cartage and amount of gold glued to the work.



Fig. 8 Simon Allen in his studio, photographed while gilding a work¹⁹

This artist offers time and commitment, and in the end, all this effort imbues the works with warmth and craftsmanship. Not everyone can do what he does.

It is encouraging that there are artists who enjoy every stage of transforming a piece of wood into a work of art, although only a connoisseur can assess the amount of time this involves. It is ethically correct that the artist does not replace himself with an anonymous person when the work goes through the stages where the creative hands get dirty and work clothes must be worn. Allen's art is a positive example of the ethics of creation and execution that counterbalances and contrasts with the attitude and manner in which so many other artists use gold, both in terms of the symbolism and the way they work.

We find the same ethical attitude in other artists who use the bolus gilding technique. Only a practitioner of this gilding technique knows what can be achieved and how to prepare the stages. Knowing the technique, they know how to exploit certain technical flaws to achieve certain surfaces, as we see in the "Cloud study" series. Here, he was not interested in technical perfection, but in the unique visual effect that can only be created through a technical flaw, by means of the bolus technique. He is not interested in exhibiting gold as Maurizio Cattelan, Marc Quinn, Niclas Castello and many others do. The gold is merely the means by which the subject is presented to the public.

¹⁹ <https://www.baxterbradford.com/media/76bc6fa3-f998-41e8-9f59-f6ac1e046b75-simon-allen-sculptor-gilding-in-his-studio-near-penzance> accessed on 2 June 2023.



Fig. 9, 10, 11 Simon Allen, *Cloud study* no. 6, 14, 15, diameter 47.5 cm, 12 K white gold and 22 K yellow gold carved and primed wood, 2020²⁰

We live in a world where photographers who photograph Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* claim copyright for the image they have taken. If this is correct, then it is not right to ignore the importance of goldsmiths who collaborate with artists, implying that they do not even exist.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out who gilds the sculptures of Willy Verginer, Linda Benglis, James Lee Byars, Jim Hodges, Giuseppe Penone, Barry X Ball, Damien Hirst or the paintings of Gabriel Orozco, Yves Klein, Cristian Eckart, Yoan Capote and others.

Why don't we see gilders alongside contemporary artists? It's a rhetorical question, but at the same time, it is legit and totally fair.

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²⁰ <https://www.simonallensculptor.co.uk/artworks/categories/7/9518/> accessed on 2 June 2023.

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Reconfiguring artistic paradigms in contemporary jewellery: sustainable practices, upcycling and eco-ethical discourses

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Abstract: In the current ecological and socio-cultural context, artistic practices have become dependent on sustainable behaviours. The transition from the use of conventional materials to media with a neutral environmental footprint represents a new direction that we find in full development. Moreover, 21st-century jewellery, perceived from a perspective closer to that of the arts than to the term “functional object” for mass or luxury consumption, is the focus of a case study that seeks to identify ecological solutions in artistic endeavours, particularly in the field of contemporary jewellery. If popular materials are replaced by alternative media whose original function is changed through methods such as recycling or upcycling, does the artistic result lose its value or acquire a new set of values and a different meaning? At the same time, we may ask ourselves, what are the possible results of using unconventional materials and integrating eco-ethical behaviours into art? Artists concerned with this issue represent a starting point for this analysis, which focuses both on identifying ethical behaviours in artistic practice and on the aesthetic changes that contemporary jewellery is undergoing in this context.

Keywords: sustainability, contemporary jewellery, ecological art, *upcycling*, alternative materials.

Introduction

This article explores a series of sustainable behaviours in the art of jewellery. We have identified the 20th century as the zero moment of the transformation of jewellery from a luxury accessory to an autonomous art object. This moment occurs at the beginning of the century, within the Art Nouveau movement, when atypical materials are introduced in comparison to the jewellery of previous centuries. It is only in modernism that we can truly speak of a paradigm shift, as artists gradually managed to break away from the functional character of jewellery. The postmodernist period consolidated this area of interest.

Considering the theme of sustainability, it is important to establish its relationship with art and identify the manifestations of such behaviour. Later, we will find out how contemporary jewellery adapts to the theme of ecology by referring to the creative universe of artist Shinji Nakaba. He provides a context

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in which sustainable processes such as *upcycling* or *recycling* steer the sterile and precious space of jewellery in a new direction. Consequently, this research aims to provoke a series of reactions and questions regarding the effects that sustainability has on the art world, particularly in the field of jewellery.

Context

In order to understand the integration of sustainability into artistic jewellery, we must analyse its transformation into art¹. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Art Nouveau movement proposed a break with the Victorian style, introducing an abundance of anthropomorphic forms and unconventional materials such as glass and enamel.² This moment marks a re-evaluation of materiality in jewellery, a subtle transition from its decorative function to situations where pieces become artistic products. This trend continued in the interwar and post-war periods, when many European artists emigrated to the United States to leave behind the brutality of war. In this context, the *mélange* of artistic movements in New York had a profound impact on the evolution of jewellery. In 1946, the MoMA exhibition “Modern Handmade Jewellery” introduced the concept of *wearable art*, promoting jewellery as an artistic object in its own right. The concept proposed a departure from mass production, targeting decorative objects in particular³. The exhibition was only the first of many such events presenting an alternative image of jewellery. Avant-garde movements such as surrealism, cubism and abstract expressionism had a significant influence on artistic jewellery, as can be seen in the creations of artists such as Alexander Calder, M  ret Oppenheim, Salvador Dal   and Man Ray⁴. Alexander Calder introduced a sculptural approach to jewellery, with an emphasis on innovative forms⁵. Although not specifically an example of jewellery, his work entitled “Silver Bedhead” (Fig. 1) is an object that straddles the boundary between sculpture and adornment. The object stands out for its almost two-dimensional structure, but also for its materiality, being made entirely of silver. In this sense, the distinction between sculpture and adornment is blurred, as the piece can be mistaken for an oversized piece of jewellery. Calder manages to question the status of the object, proposing a solution in which sculpture and jewellery intertwine. In a sense, his work approaches the

¹ Charlotte Gere, Judy Rudoe (2010). *Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria: A Mirror to the World*, British Museum Press, London.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Ralph Turner (1996). *Jewellery in Europe and America: New Times, New Thinking*, Thames & Hudson, London.

⁴ Marbeth Schon (2004). *Modernist Jewellery 1930-1960: The Wearable Art Movement*, Schiffer Publishing, Pennsylvania.

⁵ Alba Cappellieri (2010). *Twentieth-Century Jewellery: From Art Nouveau to Contemporary Design in Europe and the United States*, Skira, Milan.

aforementioned concept of *wearable art*, but the size of the piece makes it impossible to use it as adornment.

Margaret De Patta, on the other hand, explored sculpturality (fig. 2) while also introducing an unconventional solution for late modernist jewellery. She uses beach stones to create structures visibly influenced by movements such as Bauhaus or Constructivism⁶. The combination of accessible materials and precious metals in the artist's creations sets a precedent for what sustainable practices in jewellery would later come to mean.



Fig. 1 Alexander Calder, *Silver Bedhead* (1943) made for Peggy Guggenheim, Photograph © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Photo Archivio Cameraphotoepoche.

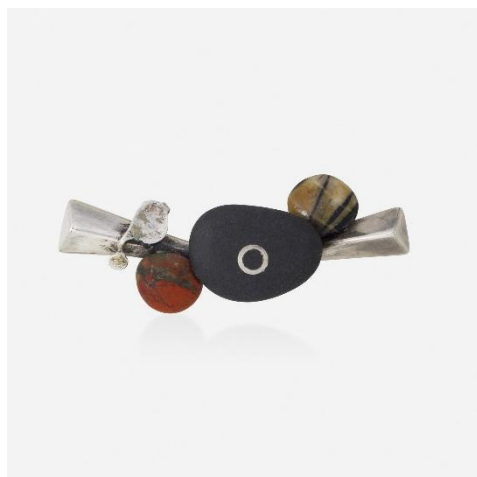


Fig. 2 Margaret De Patta, sterling silver, gold and pebble brooch (1950), artnet.com

The choice of materials is closely linked to the social context in which artists practise. While for Art Nouveau jewellery, the introduction of materials atypical of early 20th-century trends was a reaction to the industrialisation of jewellery production, modernism marks a subtle return to the intimacy of studio

⁶ Cathleen McCarth (2013). *Women Who Paved the Way: Margaret De Patta*, The Jewelry Loupe| A Celebration of Human Ornament, 18 June, <https://thejewelryloupe.com/margaret-de-patta-space-light-wearable-sculpture/>

practices through movements such as *studio jewellery*. Curator Kelly L'Ecuyer defines the movement as follows: "Studio jewellers are independent artists who handle their chosen materials directly to make one-of-a-kind or limited-production jewellery... The studio jeweller is both the designer and fabricator of each piece (although assistants or apprentices may help with technical tasks), and the work is created in a small, private studio, not a factory."⁷

We thus understand that *studio jewellery* is a kind of artistic resistance to the creative standards imposed by mass production practices. In this sense, we can observe a return to unique jewellery, in which the choice of materials and techniques is itself a tool for artistic exploration.

Sustainability and ecological art

Postmodernism consolidates a new perspective in art. Practices, techniques, or materials are chosen so that their impact on the environment is at least neutral. Sustainability appears in art as a response to major issues, such as the global climate crisis. Faced with vulnerable social situations, such as global warming, artists use ecological solutions, thus charting a new direction for the cultural space. Ecological art, for example, is an artistic expression that addresses environmental issues through creative and sustainable solutions. The late 1960s marked the beginning of ecological art, characterised by the relationship between cultural diversity and biodiversity, as defined by artists Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, pioneers of this movement: "We believe that in a well-functioning system, cultural diversity and biodiversity exist in a state of mutual interaction – the former self-conscious and able to intend and transform, and the latter the pattern of self-organisation from which we all spring and to which we all return, and which ultimately determines the possible."⁸

According to the two artists, it is human beings who can influence the environment in which they live through their relationship with biodiversity. The relationship that forms between the two subjects creates a complex system. They suggest that this co-dependency is based on a pattern that we are all part of and to which we inevitably return. From the perspective they propose, there is a departure from the idea of nature as a passive element and a reorientation towards nature as an active partner in the organisation of human life.

The context of eco-art proposes an alternative space in which environmental crises are addressed on a collective basis. The movement gained momentum when artists such as Bonnie Ora Sherk, Helen and Newton Harrison, Patricia Johanson, Alan Sonfist, Joseph Beuys, Nancy Holt, Mierle Ukeles and

⁷ Kelly H. L'Ecuyer *et al.* (2010). *Jewellery by Artists: In the Studio, 1940-2000*, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston.

⁸ Sacha Kagan (2014). *Art and Sustainability: Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*, Verlag, Berlin.

Agnes Denes clearly outlined the importance of ecology in the contemporary art landscape.

Moreover, in ecological art practice, the material becomes a channel for communicating environmental concerns and, in some cases, can be an ecological action in itself. In her article “Ecological Art: A Call for Visionary Intervention in a Time of Crisis,” artist Ruth Wallen analyses the concept of sustainability in art. As in the statements of the artists mentioned above, she observes the connection between human beings and the environment, arguing that: “The concept of sustainability potentially offers a robust perspective. It takes the crucial step of placing humans within ecosystems, instead of conceiving of 'natural environments' as outside of human domains and therefore not intrinsically of human concern.”⁹

For Ruth Wallen, ecosystems are not entities independent of humans, but systems in which human actions and decisions have a direct impact on ecological balances. Thus, it is essential to understand that ecological approaches in art are not limited to providing a visual response to climate issues by aestheticizing them, but are active commitments to recontextualising the relationship between human beings and the environment.

Sustainability in art is not based solely on the use of ecological materials or sustainable techniques, but also on a paradigm shift in which nature and culture are seen as two interconnected components. In this context, art becomes a form of creative intervention in the ecosystem, with the role of stimulating collective awareness of the impact of human activities on the environment and proposing alternative solutions.

Case study: Sustainable implications in the jewellery of artist Shinji Nakaba

Shinji Nakaba is a Japanese artist known for using unconventional materials in the artistic jewellery he creates. His work in the field of jewellery began in 1974, having already gained experience in related creative fields¹⁰.

His creations stand out for one aspect, which is also essential to this research, namely the use and seamless integration of sustainable solutions such as *recycling* and *upcycling*. From the description provided on his website, it appears that his sculptures are polarizations of materials, in which the preciousness of gold, stones and pearls is contrasted with the of ordinary materials such as aluminium, plastic, waste, but also organic elements. His visual language challenges the hierarchy of materials in jewellery. In this regard, the artist states: “I’m dealing [with] all the materials equally no matter how precious

⁹ Ruth Wallen (2012). *Ecological Art: A Call for Visionary Intervention in a Time of Crisis*, “Leonardo” 45, no. 3, pp. 234–42, https://doi.org/10.1162/leon_a_00365.

¹⁰ SHINJI NAKABA in “SHINJI NAKABA”, accessed 9 March 2025, <http://work.s-nakaba.com>

or not precious they are. Bring out their hidden talents and beauty, then being re-born as unknown treasures”¹¹.

His artistic approach defies aesthetic conventions, as well as the status of materiality and functionality in jewellery. Nakaba creates objects that lie at the intersection of art and ecology, redefining contemporary jewellery¹².

Shinji approaches his creative work with sensitivity. In an interview with French Jewellery Post, he talks about the source of the materials used in his creations. During his walks in the forest near his studio, he collects dry leaves and twigs, which he then places next to plastic and industrial metal objects. Initially contrasting, these materials are meticulously processed and framed in structures made of gold, silver or other metals, so as to form a harmonious whole¹³.

He creates aluminium ornaments whose grace gives this industrial material the status of a precious metal. It had the same status for a short period of time when the process of extracting it from aluminium oxide was still difficult to achieve, its value being close to that of silver. It was only at the end of the 19th century that it became accessible and, therefore, used in the production of tableware, in medicine, *design* and art¹⁴.



Fig. 3 Shinji Nakaba, *Chrysanthemum* brooch in aluminium cans, gold and steel, series of 6 (2023), www.reeditionmagazine.com

¹¹ SHINJI NAKABA, “SHINJI NAKABA”, accessed 9 March 2025, <http://work.s-nakaba.com>

¹² Sandrine Merle (2024). In Japan, in the *Workshop of Shinji Nakaba - The French Jewellery Post*, “The French Jewellery Post”, 22 April 2024, <https://www.thefrenchjewelrypost.com/en/style/shinji-nakaba-japan-jewelry-designer-workshop/>

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Sarah C. Nichols *et al.* (2000). *Aluminium by Design*, Abradale Press, New York.



Fig. 4 Shinji Nakaba, cameo, pearl,
lizard leg toy, Ring
© Shinji Nakaba



Fig. 5 Shinji Nakaba, steel, cubic zirconia
(2011)
© Shinji Nakaba

In Shinji Nakaba's practice, aluminium is recycled from beverage cans and carefully cut and joined to create massive necklaces and brooches in floral shapes. For example, his chrysanthemum-shaped brooches (fig. 3), meticulously constructed petal by petal, demonstrate remarkable technical skill and, at the same time, reflect his ability to transform everyday objects into works of art.

In addition to aluminium, Nakaba juxtaposes hard industrial materials with elements found in nature or *ready-made* objects. The “Ikebana” series of rings (fig. 4, fig. 5), for example, is based on the Japanese art of flower arranging. The stainless-steel structure of the rings serves as a support for flowers, leaves or *upcycled* objects¹⁵. His works raise fundamental questions about aesthetic value and functionality in contemporary jewellery.

Another significant direction in his practice is plastic recycling (fig. 6). Various plastic objects, kitchen utensils, pipes or containers are transformed into jewellery pieces¹⁶. His technical skill confirms that any material can become an artistic expression in this field. For Nakaba, recycling materials is a natural practice, organically integrated into his artistic process.

In his essay on plastic in *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes analyses the symbolism of this material and its paradoxical nature:

“So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; And it is this, in fact, which makes it a miraculous substance: a miracle is always a sudden transformation of nature. Plastic remains impregnated

¹⁵ SHINJI NAKABA in “SHINJI NAKABA”, accessed 9 March 2025, <http://work.s-nakaba.com>

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

throughout with this wonder: it is less a thing than the trace of a movement. And as the movement here is almost infinite, transforming the crystals into a multitude of more and more startling objects, plastic is, all told, a spectacle to be deciphered: the very spectacle of its end-products. At the sight of each terminal form (suitcase, brush, car-body, toy, fabric, tube, basin or paper), the mind does not cease from considering the original matter as an enigma. This is because the quick-change artistry of plastic is absolute: it can become buckets as well as jewels. Hence a perpetual amazement, the reverie of man at the sight of the proliferating forms of matter, and the connections he detects between the singular of the origin and the plural of the effects.”¹⁷

Roland Barthes' observation about plastic – a material that is not defined by its essence, but by its infinite capacity to transform – provides a theoretical framework for interpreting Shinji Nakaba's work. Similar to Barthes' vision of plastic, the materials used by Nakaba in his jewellery undergo a similar process, a metamorphosis of objects considered banal or worthless. If, as the philosopher states, plastic is “not so much a thing as the trace of a movement”¹⁸, then Nakaba's jewellery can be understood as expressions of the same dynamic.

Furthermore, Barthes emphasises that plastic, through its versatility, is a “spectacle to be deciphered”¹⁹.



Fig. 6 Shinji Nakaba, Ring (2010) PVC pipe, amethyst
© Peter Jacobs, artjewelryforum.org



Fig. 7 Shinji Nakaba, We Are So Precious, carved IKEA salad server, forged steel
© Peter Jacobs, artjewelryforum.org

This aspect is also found in Nakaba's creations, which challenge the viewer to re-evaluate the status of materials and discover their aesthetic qualities where they are not obvious. Like plastic, which Barthes says can be transformed into a

¹⁷ Roland Barthes (1991). *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, The Noonday Press, New York.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

bucket or a piece of jewellery, the materials processed by Nakaba transcend their usual status. Therefore, Shinji Nakaba's work confirms Roland Barthes' observation that material is not a fixed given, but an element in constant transformation.

Conclusion

Finally, we understand that artistic jewellery is a phenomenon in continuous development, deeply influenced by social, cultural and ecological changes. The precedent set by avant-garde movements for sustainability has led to the popularisation of the concept and, implicitly, to the finding of creative solutions. In the work of artist Shinji Nakaba, the integration of recycled materials and sustainable processes represents a reconfiguration of aesthetic values in jewellery. The analogy with Roland Barthes' analysis of plastic is relevant to understanding the dynamics of perception of materiality. In this sense, jewellery not only adopts sustainable practices, but also frames a new perspective on the aesthetic value of materials.

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Interactivity and creativity in design, through the lens of materiality

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The design process requires systematic methods, tools and data to support the creation and evaluation of a user-dedicated experience based on the desired message. Interaction in design is at the heart of the system of relating and perceiving a message or subject, being influenced by the informational and sensory quantum. Sensory and multisensory aspects are transposed into the creative and interaction process through new creative methods of representing the desired experiences using contemporary technologies such as sensors, robotics, augmented reality, virtual reality and 3D printing with new types of materials.

The contemporary user has moved away from the role of a passive recipient of products and services and has become an active participant in shaping the experiences intended for him. With the advent of “human-centred design”, the importance of empathizing with the user was recognized, thus appealing to understanding his needs and desires in the product development process. By experimenting with new and familiar materials, personalizing products and assimilating the diversity of user experiences, those who practice contemporary design discover and create new types of sensations by capitalizing on the user’s daily experiences. Following psychological research and analyses conducted through the lens of the sensory in the interaction between product and user, it was found that intuitive and unconscious/automatic memory guides the decision-making factor in the first stage of communication. The creative process is at the heart of the design of the project dedicated to the user and is guided by its sensory, informational and psychological data. By understanding the cultural, social and historical connotations of material diversity, as well as their physical properties and sensory characteristics, designers can use them to more effectively communicate the message evocative of emotions and meaning.

The analyses and creative processes dedicated to this project have as an area of interest the ways of perception and interaction between the human being and the visual arts.

Behavioural design addresses emotions such as pleasure or disgust based on assimilated experiences. Subsequently, we prefer the round shape for the

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wheel, as it is easier to use. Reflective design also requires more complex thinking: it involves self-image, personal satisfaction and associations. It is a determining factor in many brands and entities. A consumer buys a coffee from Starbucks based on his satisfaction with the product, previous positive experiences and personal identity related to the status that the brand's reputation confers. People prefer easy options. The user experiences a sense of stress when choosing an option. The less complicated the decision, the more comfortable we feel. Design that seems easy to use is more attractive to us than design that seems complicated. Light colours, such as red, blue and yellow, are less demanding on the viewer than a complex colour, such as olive green.



Fig. 1, 2 Chromatic interaction – environmental design¹

User memory plays a critical role in shaping user experience (UX) design. By understanding how users access information, we can create more intuitive, engaging, and memorable experiences. In this section, I will explore the importance of user memory in design and practical steps to harness memory to improve user experience. Design can use human memory as a guide to improve experience. By activating an abstract concept that is currently in the viewer's mind (for example, the steps needed to purchase something online), we can effectively manage expectations to streamline the relationship between the experience and the user.

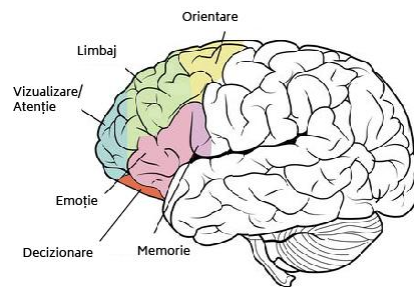


Fig 3 Chesley Bonestell, *Short term iconic memory*

¹ “Linea comfort botanic” – interior design, source: <https://cutt.ly/4wecRSVa>.

The areas of the brain highlighted in the image, from top to bottom: orientation, language, visualisation / attention, emotion, decision-making, memory.

Memory is a complex natural system for storing and processing data. It stores a lot of information throughout life and is even able to organize it according to the needs of the owner. Moreover, it assumes the responsibility of setting priorities and preserving certain details that could be remembered, while information that is not needed or has not been used for a long time is deleted. Human memory is one of the mechanisms that determine human interaction with the outside world.



Fig. 4, 5 Chesley Bonestell, *New York central building* ²

By experimenting with new and familiar materials, customizing products, and embracing the diversity of user experiences, contemporary designers are discovering and creating new types of sensations by capitalizing on the user's everyday experiences. The senses are the direct source of stimulation, pleasure, and pain, and are therefore inherently essential to the human body. Their importance fits perfectly into the wake of the cultural sphere, which in turn conveys specific feelings in terms of intensity, extension, form, and meaning.³ The senses play an important role in the practices and theory of the performing arts, music and visual arts, of which the branches of design are also part. The perception of the “guiding” or “dominant” functions uses the role of the visual, auditory and tactile senses in cultural experience, being noticeable when they are used individually but also in sensory groups. Of course, the proximal senses of taste and smell, although essential for general aspects of cultural life, for example, in the field of gastronomy and perfumery, have often been placed on

² Chesley Bonestell (1929). *New York central building*, source: <https://cutt.ly/owecYUsl>.

³ Ellen Lupton & Andrea Lipps (2018). *The Senses: Design Beyond Vision*, Princeton Architectural Press, p. 6.

the secondary level in the sensory hierarchy of European culture, now extending globally. The evolutionary impact of the informative discovery of the senses in the fields of history, anthropology and social culture has led to the hierarchy of the senses according to complexity and use (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory)⁴.



Fig. 6 Using the control set in VR (virtual reality)⁵

Proprioception, also called kinaesthesia, is the body's ability to sense its location, movements, and actions. This is why we can move freely without thinking about our environment. VR (virtual reality) experiences involving proprioception aim to integrate the sense of physical presence into a virtual environment. For example, the virtual reality game "Beat Saber" uses controllers to create the sensation of balance and movement while also interacting through the sense of hearing. This creates a sense of physical involvement by integrating the human being into a virtual environment that gives them freedom of movement.

The communication process in relation to the contemporary user experience is represented by sensory, functional and semantic connections with the aim of conveying the meaning of the desired message, which can influence the lifespan of a project in a constantly changing society.

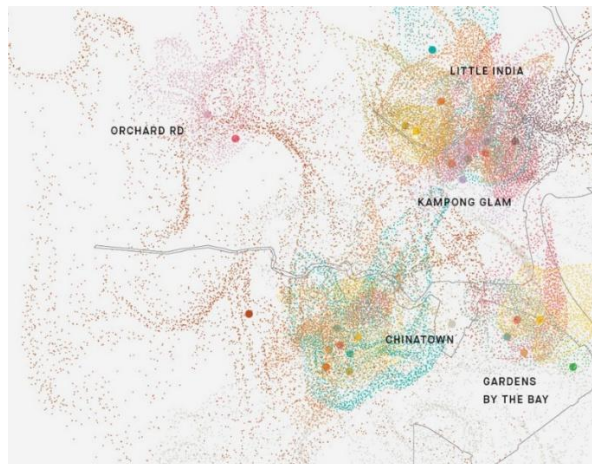


Fig. 7 Kate McLean, *Singapore sensory map*⁶

⁴ Russell Jones (2020). *Sense*, Welbeck, pp. 9-12.

⁵ Rachel Stewart (2017). *Whitney Biennial in New York*, source: <https://cutt.ly/d91O6ev>

⁶ Kate McLean (2015). *Sensory map of Singapore*, source: <https://cutt.ly/uweZeUzL>

By understanding the cultural, social, and historical connotations of material diversity, as well as their physical properties and sensory characteristics, designers can use them to effectively communicate messages that evoke emotions and meaning.



Fig. 8 Relationship between the physical world and the digital one⁷

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