

*Mihai Vasile*

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## Theatre is a place of memory, of remembrance

Interview by Virginia Soare with producer Mihai Vasile in 2009 about the Equinox Theatre from Ploiești and about the theatre as “*imago mundi*” (extracts)\*

**Virginia Soare:** *It is difficult for me to start, in other manner than it is usual, this dialogue with you. I imagined this beginning in various ways, but I believe the right thing would be to ask you directly and suddenly what it is, what does theatre mean to you?*

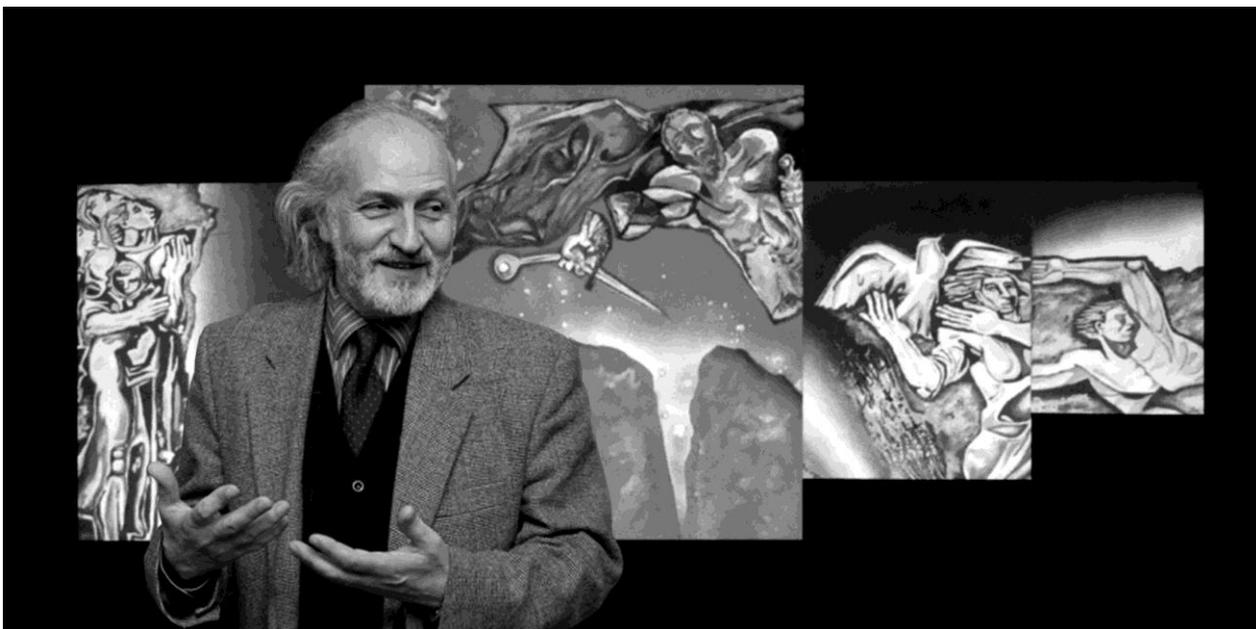
**Mihai Vasile:** For me the theatre is not an artificial space. It has the real value of the place I was born or of where my life had its moments of greatness or despair. At the same time, however, theatre is also a place of evasion. Theatre, poetry, song, prayer are escape techniques. Escape is part of the human nature. Arts, in general rely on this human component, and the theatre, by excellence, uses evasion, escaping the profane time, to render worlds that are at the intersection of the real and the imaginary. For this reason, theatre for me is not an artificial space.

*I reminded your propensity for Mircea Eliade. I know you said, in the mid-nineties, that in some of his writings there are also “recipes” to return to the origins of the theatre, or, as you said one time, “real thesis on theatre.” Are your considerations today still as “consistent” as in that moment?*

This obsession is much older. But it has some very clear marks. In the mid-eighties, rehearsals, stage studies, my exercises with the actors allowed, as witnesses, friends of mine or of the theatre.

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\* The translation of the text from page 81. Text translated by Alexandra Badea (Ploiești). Thanks to Dana Sînziana Constantin (Ploiești) for her help to the present form of this translation.

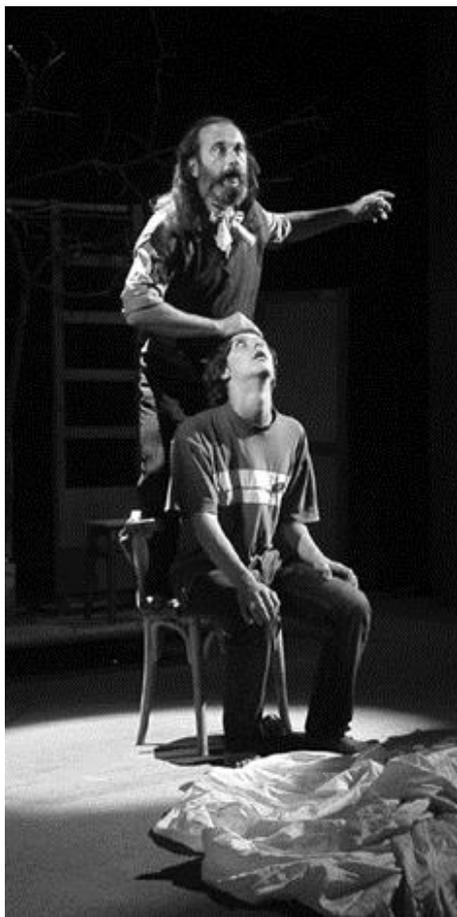


Among them there were poets, musicians, painters, playwrights, prose writers, younger directors etc. Frequently, after the lights on the stage faded over such an actor's study, which impressed through the magic of the image and provoked restlessness through the mystery of signs, ample discussions would start and we still remember them today wistfully... One of these friends of mine brought me, one day, in 1985, in secret, a book by Mircea Eliade. At that time, Eliade was present in our libraries only with a selection of short stories and no more. The book my friend brought me was called *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (*Nineteen Roses*) and he gave it to me whispering "You will find part of your theatre here." The book appeared at a publishing house that was unknown to me, in Paris, in Romanian language. Thirsty as I was for new information, I devoured it in one night. The book had troubled me very much but, at the end of it, I had not found, as I was hoping, explicit recipes or dissertations about theatre. Intrigued, I read the book a few times more, but I was still not clear about my friend's statement. Only in the nineties, reading more and more by and about Mircea Eliade, the meanings became clearer.

*And yet, back then, in the eighties, when you read it and reread it, did the book not exercise some influence on the theatre that you produced?*

It did, of course, but not as far as it had afterwards. Then, I was pleased to find that there, in the book, an idea that I was very fond of, namely that theatre could be magic and healing. Actually, living as the characters of the novel those days of communist dictatorship, the idea of resistance through theatre mainly “caught” me at the very beginning...

*This novel by Eliade became a subject of analysis and debate within the Romanian culture very late.*



Unfortunately, it did not become a topic of discussion in the world of theatre...

*Maybe we shall also address this topic in our dialogue.*

It would be interesting...

So, after I read the book a few more times, I began to discover ideas that I and my actors had been putting into practice for some time, starting from other artistic needs, from other theatrical theories or theatrical anthropology. The theme of Eliade's book was obvious: access to freedom. To inner freedom as absolute freedom. One of his characters even says at a certain point that “performance is the only chance to know absolute freedom.” And Eliade emphasizes even more this idea, stating that “absolute freedom” has nothing to do with social, economic or political freedom. Besides this, however, an idea that I was pondering upon a long time ago was beginning to come into shape, and here, in Eliade's book, it was fairly outlined: “theatre as an anamnesis”, as I entitled a consistent essay from one of the books which I have worked on during the recent years. So, theatre as an anamnesis... About anamnesis we know some things from medical sciences, except for the fact that here, the term was slightly distorted. Rather, what Socrates states in one of Plato's dialogues about an anamnesis can clarify

this theory. I quote from memory: “Since no part of nature is alien to the others, and the soul has known all of them, nothing prevents the one who remembers one thing, from discovering all the others... For all that we seek to know, and all we know is nothing but remembrance.” And Plato also gave the definition: “learning regarded as a recollection is called anamnesis.” And Eliade states in his book: “... anamnesis through gestures, through incantation, through performance... This is the purpose of all arts: to reveal the universal dimension, namely the spiritual significance of any object or gesture or happening, no matter how ordinary or common they may be”. There is a refined observation here, regarding the art of the stage. Eliade does not vehemently approach the return to the origins of the theatre, as Artaud does, for example. Eliade is not shouting in the public square.

*Why anamnesis? Why this forward-backward motion of memory? I realize the answer somehow, but I can't help not noticing that theories, especially your theatrical practice, often exceed those somewhat unseen boundaries of the art of theatre. Is there – here, I ask a third question – an obscure side of this performance-audience relationship?*

Everything seems obscure in this relationship. At least within the social model within the nowadays Romania. Maybe my remark is a bit rough, but as a man who is almost always in the “breathing” of the audience, I have my own observations and doubts. All the time and on any occasion I get, I say that it is useless that we, artists, lose sleep and peace for nothing, trying to perfect our art, defeating as much of the resistance of our own being in order to become better and better, if at the end of our effort there is no one, or there is someone who is not interested in art but only in entertainment, someone whose needs are not those of escaping from reality in the imaginary, someone whose beliefs only concern the immediate life. This is why the anamnesis I was talking about calls for something else from within the being of the possible receiver of art. But, before we speak of the spectator, we can say that the anamnesis manifests itself in the way the actors perform this theatre. They are the first ones who must understand this aspect. I am convinced that in each of us there is, as Socrates states, everything we know as a human species. And, if we admit the somehow scientific truth, that theatre has deep religious roots, we can say that anamnesis is a kind of return (in ourselves) to a natural relationship between man and divinity, but at the same time discovering the “instruments” of the game. For, however risky this statement would seem to be, theatre as game and play, as defined by sociologists (see here also Huizinga with his “Homo ludens”) is present at certain moments in the life of every man on earth.

So, if actors correctly perceive this mechanism of remembrance of what their being means, the art of theatre is no longer just a craft, but an existential way.

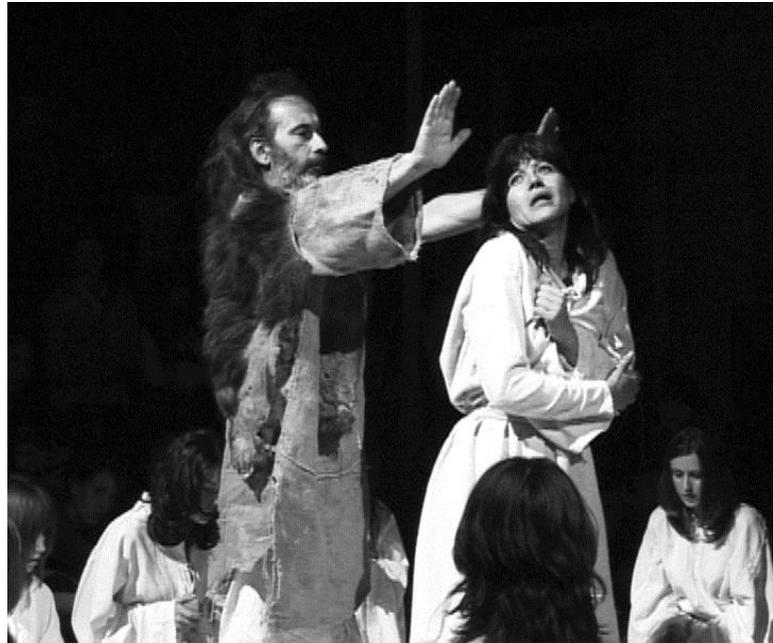
*In this context, how do you think the public needs to be approached? How do you think the two sides of the theatrical act can be “staged”: the show and the spectator?*

I have nothing against these new techniques of attracting the audience to stages, this “advertising” – forgive my expression! But just like reading a book, going to the theatre shall not cease to seduce, not necessarily for social needs, but for the inner tendencies that cannot be easily theorized. If we were to go back for a few moments to Eliade’s novel...

*We might do that again along this dialogue...*

It would be interesting to do it, because this book has a mysterious “what” of its own...

*As all great books do...*



So, if we were to browse other pages of this miraculous book, we would also find other statements of Eliade in the mouth of his characters. Here is, for example, what one of the key characters of the novel, Ieronim Thanase, says: “Dramatic art reverts to what it was, a magical art!”

*Sure, similar theories were conveyed throughout the 20th century. If it were just to recall Artaud’s revolt or the working techniques of the illustrious Brook or Grotowski. Even in relation to the response in Eliade’s book, I remember Artaud’s virulence: “theatre staging should not be*

*understood as a reflection of a written text and as projection of physical ‘duplicates’ that emanate from writing, but as a projection of everything that can be extracted from the objective consequences of a gesture, a word, a sound, a piece of music, and of the combinations of them.”*

Yes... Artaud’s splendid revolt, who said somewhere that theatre is not a field of psychology but a plastic and physical field, therefore strongly visual, as rituals or customs are intensely visual, regardless of kind, and from any place and in any form they would have been preserved until today.

*I cannot, in this context, go over a statement of a good friend of yours and of the Equinox Theatre, the French playwright Roland M nard, statement which we have already mentioned in one of our older dialogues. I allow myself to repeat it: “This common experience, involving both audiences and actors, makes me think about the practices in monasteries or within sacred rituals. I – he continues – am not a religious person at all...”*

This atheism specific to the French...

*... I am not at all a religious person - says Mr. Roland M nard - but I think that this approach of the theatre is interesting and concrete, especially because, often, as far as Mihai Vasile is concerned, it has manifested itself sensitively through passionate performances...”*

Yes, it is also interesting what he says in this interview of his, from which you have quoted, that an ascetic, idealistic and strongly spiritualized vision can always prove the vitality of the theatre.

*If we go back to the anamnesis, we should also point out the opposite, namely amnesia, the other side of this equation. It seems that, since the second half of the twentieth century, people have entered into a certain amnesic state, a state that has led to indifference, to solitude...*

Eliade considers amnesia as the capital punishment of a fallen being, incapable of remembering the meaning of the Fall... In fact, the whole subject of the novel *Nineteen Roses* unfolds around this amnesia-anamnesis relationship: a group of young actors attempt to resurrect the memory of the main character through theatrical play. And I think this is what theatre should do in any age and place. To produce remembrance. Especially today when, as you say, we are increasingly

prone to amnesia... Let us take another example: reading. What happens to us in the act of reading? This sublime and profoundly human act of imagination takes place. Sure, an imagination suggested by the text, but, let us not forget, an imagination that differs from individual to individual. The same thing happens in the theatre. The act of imagination is suggested by the visible and audible part of the show, but the imaginary goes beyond what they suggest, and the act of storage, so to speak, is extremely personal. No one can control this phenomenon. No one – and here I refer to us, those who produce the theatrical act – can imagine what is the image that the viewer takes home after seeing and hearing the show.

*Hence the mystery of the spectator-performance relationship...*

Exactly. We can only consider this relationship through the act of anamnesis. Sure, it is not enough, but it can be a way of reflecting on this relationship.

*Many of the themes you presented to your acting and directing classes, in which I participated myself in the mid-nineties, are still very fresh in my memory. Like my colleagues, I have vaguely heard about Peter Brook, Antonin Artaud, or Jerzy Grotowski before. On the other hand, the achievements of some great Romanian directors were just as little known, and I refer explicitly to Andrei Șerban, Liviu Ciulei, Radu Penciulescu or David Esrig... But out of all, the theories – if I can call them that – of Peter Brook’s essays remained deeply impressed in my memories. I know you have a real cult for Brook...*

Not necessarily a cult, but I rather liked, and I still like to think he was my master, and that I learned so much from him. In the seventies and eighties, my training years as an artist and intellectual, the access to his written work (his famous book *The empty space*), but especially the access to his concrete theatre, were practically inexistent. I was lucky with some translations made by George Banu and Mihaela Tonitza-Iordache from several works of some of the “parents” of the theatre, among which there were many passages from Peter Brook’s book. Of course, there was information coming through the occult channels, to say so, magazines or even books coming through different paths from the West, or from the Voice of America and Free Europe, radio stations that had many cultural programmes. Therefore, Peter Brook emanated for us, the young people of that time, even so, by indirect ways, a kind of awe that we could hardly curb. Then, after 1990, thanks to the friendships I had with artists from Western Europe, access to

this information was quick and consistent. That is how in 1993 I received a book by Peter Brook from Paris, which I translated in days and nights, I typed it, being helped by my wife, multiplied it and gave it to my actors. Thus, I could use the ideas in the book for the subjects of the courses.



*The important thing to us was that your theatre performances and the rehearsals – especially the rehearsals – the ones we had access to, confirmed much of these theories in the theatrical practice here. Out of all, the idea of “theatrical place” stood out. Could we talk more about this concept? I’d like this also because, one way or another, you are the creator of this theatrical place that is, today, the Equinox Theatre.*

The theme was old in my research. Since I was very young I was fascinated by the rituals, customs, traditions of the rural space and – above all – their glamour. Being the child of a peasant, I used to spend my holidays with relatives from this area, where I enjoyed watching these performances. Later on, all these

observations stored in my affective and active memory led to important conclusions and decisions for my artistic destiny. I realized, for example, that the ritual was, at the same time, a form of communication and of communion. People were together at that moment of magical communication with a divinity; a divinity that was not very well defined, but very present in their acts. The ritual is a cultural system built on symbolic communication. Distinctive for the ritual is not what it says or symbolizes, but the fact that, above all, it does things: the ritual is always a matter of performing certain gestures and manipulating objects. As a result, ritualization is, at the

same time, avoiding explicit speech, as well as explicit narration... It has been argued many times, that within the ritual act, the words themselves are deeds that do things.

*Words that attract facts along, like Nichita Stănescu used to say ...*

Indeed...

*But how did the idea of theatrical space come into shape?*

From here, from the manner in which the ritual was “administered”, there was no more than one step to what I considered a theatrical place to be. I first considered it an “anthropological place”, namely a place for performing human acts. I imagined the anthropological place as a concrete and symbolic construction of the space, capable of mirroring the vicissitudes and contradictions of social life, and to which everybody who is being given a place by the social life relate to, no matter how modest and humble that place it may be. I then continued to analyse the theatrical space in relation to the Christian religious space, in this case, the Orthodox one, and the results were extremely relevant. A church, as in the case of a stage, has two important spaces: the one of act and the one of receiving the act. In both, the ratio between the two spaces is approximately the same: a quarter belongs to the act and the other three quarters to the receiving of the act, more correctly said, in the case of the church ritual, the altar is the mysterious part of the religious act, which occupies about a quarter of the surface of the church, having a rich decorated iconostasis from which priests and officiants of the cult emerge, and there are three quarters of the surface of the church occupied by parishioners and the recipients of the religious act. The same thing and with about the same meanings is also happening in the case of the performance. A quarter of this space is occupied by the scene, which generally has a curtain (like an iconostasis) that makes the scene visible or not, namely the mysterious space of the theatrical act, and in front of it there are the other three quarters of space that belong to the audience. This is the case for “Italian box” theatres. We can find religious correspondences in the other cases of theatrical spaces, too. They are all emphasized in the book I am still writing... Even though today, in modern society, the ritual seems to have nothing to do with the sacred anymore, being heavily disregarded, its purpose continues to be that of removing the individual from the desacralized daily routine and its transposition into a more or less conscious ritualistic state. Thus, the contact with the group is achieved, implicitly establishing a communication that can only be considered ritualistic, since it

manifests itself in a modified context, separated from the daily routine. So the theatre-ritual relationship can also be explained today through architectural similarities.

*Has it always been this way?*

Obviously, no. Because, in the beginning, the ritual itself was a form of theatre. Then the theatre broke away from religion; it became profane, but it retained, for hundreds of years, its links with the mysterious world of the divine. Ever since its origins, the theatre “has been written on the sand” of the performance space in Greek antiquity. It only installed its space (*hic* - here) as long as the representation (*nunc* - now) lasted. Also, since its origins, before it was a form of entertainment and a literary genre, theatre was a collective necessity. Here, a society came to the surface and asked questions about its myths and its structures in relative independence from the real world. Here, this society could express its fundamental dramas without compromising its own existence, since it was nothing but a game. There are similarities between theatre and religion, similarities lost over the last few hundred years, approximately from the medieval theatre, which, in turn, was religiously forced. This is, of course, another story...

*Is there a strict relation between the space and the theatrical act?*

There have been two moments in the history of the European theatre in which the symbiosis was total between the theatrical act and the architecture of the theatrical place. We talk about the ancient Greece (5th century BC) and England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. These Greek and Elizabethan theatres encompassed the stage and the auditorium in a unique space open to the clear sky in the simplest expression of the place of the dramatic event. In these two cases the theatre still retains unseen connections with the natural of the beginnings.

*Even when playing inside a building specially designed for the performance, theatre goes beyond the walls. I believe that the theatrical space has a real resonance rather only when projected into another, diffuse and uncontrolled space, which is the imaginary of the receptors.*

Exactly. What appears relevant to me is that the similarity between the theatrical and the religious space today is striking, as I was saying earlier, in the case of the “Italian box”, a theatrical space that introduces the “rupture” between the stage and the auditorium and which, despite all the

crises it provokes, still survives today. It is strange that it does not appear in countries with strong theatrical roots, such as Shakespeare's England, Calderon's Spain, or Corneille or Molière's France, but in a country – Italy – without a remarkable dramatic literature and dramatic movement (we are referring to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), politically enshrined and lacking freedom of expression, but in which, indeed, some time ago, a unique and non-recurring theatrical form was invented, namely *commedia dell'arte*. To conclude with this chapter and as an additional explanation for the similarity we were talking about, it should not be forgotten that Italy was, at that time, as it is today, in fact, the capital of a strong and widespread religion – Catholicism...

*This journey through the memory of the theatre is fascinating. In the case of the theatre you perform, it has been talked about a too emphatic “corporeality”. As we were discussing earlier, you have always emphasized the body's representation through the most diverse stage studies meant to push the actor to “fight”, as Grotowski said, against “body resistances”.*

I always tell my actors that the body is nothing more than a house. But like any house, it must be cared for, tidied up, so as to be comfortably “inhabited”. Hence the idea that from a “messy house” no coherent signs can be emitted to the world. We are speaking here about the actor and not the character, because in the case of the character we have seen the extent it came to, through the deeply profound explorations of Samuel Beckett. Therefore, an intemperate body cannot pronounce correctly, it cannot appear correctly, and by correctly I understand the actor's engagement in the process of discovering the character. And this actor-character relationship is a unique case of self-creation in the arts field. Because, we sometimes wonder, what do we see on the stage? An actor or a character? As I wrote in an essay I published several times in a few magazines and that was entitled “Theatre as a re-materialization”, the spectator perceives, in turns, a non-real character and a non-realized actor, so the spectator sees, at one point, the power of the character, and, at another point, the actor's performances. The actor's flesh and bones body suffers, in turns, an imaginary de-fleshing and re-embodiment. This transgression, translation, or how you want to call it...

*... translation...*

... exactly, the translation of an abstract character, a “paper” character, as I also call it, written in a book or on paper, in a living character, is a miraculous thing which, I think, led, in one way or another, to the modern languages of the theatre.



*To what extent does the theatrical modernity, which again puts the "representation" into question, rethink the status of the body on the stage?*

Antonin Artaud was undoubtedly the one who placed this issue at the centre of a whole reformulation and refoundation of the 20th century theatre. Because his criticism regarding the

theatrical illusion participates in the re-evaluation of the body, a body that the theatrical tradition before his time instrumentalized it, almost exclusively, for the profit of the word. This rethinking of corporeality participates in the reconsideration of the scene and the conventional separation between reality and image, typical of the bourgeois theatre that keeps everyone in their place and paralyzes the transgressive effects of fiction. In the same time, Artaud wants to turn the illusion into truth, into reality, in order to provoke an audience, who is usually passive. Theatrical “representation”, its way of “imprisoning” fiction, must move to the background in order to free the energies of the audience. Artaud wishes for a contamination through performance and describes this flow of corporality that should not leave anyone indifferent. The stage is no longer a place where bodies re-present themselves. It is a space of circulation and activation of pulsion. Artaud believes in a “body language” that expresses the primitive truth of the bodies. To justify this rupture from tradition, Artaud seeks (as other moderns also do) an extra-Western model. His unobtrusive admiration for the Balinese dance, discovered at a colonial exhibition, organized in Paris in 1934, provides him with dramaturgical arguments. He sees here, in this exotic show (for the Western bourgeoisie), both total art, which brings together music, dance and history, as well as the valorisation of “active” gestures. Obviously, Artaud was wrong when he was theorizing about the Balinese dance. Because in the oriental performance, the movements and gestures are strongly coded, but from this “misunderstanding”, to put it this way, Artaud radicalized the idea of scenic body representation...

*Hence Brook’s and Grotowski’s undisguised admiration for Artaud...*

Peter Brook “turned” Artaud’s fury into the actor’s acting and freedom of creation, while Jerzy Grotowski tried to create an actor of the ritual, an actor to “self-penetrate”, to quote him exactly, an actor who will suffer, *hic et nunc*, all the avatars of the character. In fact, what do they always talk about in the theatre? They talk about how an actor “puts himself in the character’s skin”. An ugly expression. And inaccurate. As if the character were a kind of snake that ran out of its skin... Nothing more inaccurate! Because, in that case, no one would have to play theatre, because “we have a Hamlet. The one played by Laurence Olivier, for example, or by Ștefan Iordache. That’s it! We have someone in the skin of the character!” I believe that people perform because when, in that astral moment of their lives, they meet, I emphasize “they meet” a character with which they resonate, which provokes them, well, then, those people who perform give to this character everything that make up their life: from their body made of flesh, bones, blood etc. to their life

experiences, their culture, their emotions and their feelings. Otherwise, as Peter Brook said, you put a technique there, instead of a feeling, and that's it! you have them fooled...

*The theatre, not only as writing but also as a performance, means fiction, means transcendence to imaginary worlds. To what extent does fiction have a role in people's everyday life?*



Literature readers continue to read, despite being aware that the text they read is fiction. The same thing happens to the theatre or film viewer. The fact that we need this “ecstatic state”, caught and yet detached from our own reality, derives from our inability to be present towards ourselves. Samuel Beckett, through his character, Malone, says: “Live or invent”. Because we do not know what is going to be lived, we must invent that which escapes from immediate perception. Plato reproached the poets that they were lying and he exiled them from his ideal republic. Sir Philip Sidney, a perfect poet, one of Shakespeare's most interesting contemporaries,

said that “the poet... does not state anything, so he never lied”, because he is not talking about what it is, but about what should be, and this form of overlapping is different from lie... Fiction and fictionalism presuppose a duality, the liar must conceal the truth, but the truth is potentially present in the masks that hide it. In literary fiction, the existing worlds are overlapped, and although they can be individually recognized, they are placed in a context that de-familiarize them. Thus, both lies and literature contain two worlds: in the case of lies, the truth but also the purpose for which it must be hidden are embodied; and in the case of literary fiction, an identifiable reality is embedded, which is subjected to unpredictable alteration. Theatre, as a performance, cannot escape this... “reality”, so to speak, this principle of fictionalization. The show does not “lie” to the audience, because within scenic fiction there is also the reality that the fiction refers to...

*In a way, this is what you said earlier in the case of the actor-character case. The actor, as a living and real being, embodies, gives body to... fiction.*

Exactly. I, therefore, strongly believe that theatre as a show is a place of fiction by excellence, because it operates with very recognizable elements of the reality: the bodies of the actors, the sets and the very place of performance of the dramatic action. All these are real. Based on and with their help, fiction is created. At the same time, this “ballet” between reality and fiction becomes a dangerous game, with the most dramatic consequences. I wrote somewhere about a confession of Eugen Ionescu, who, being a child, lived the show as a more truthful truth than nature itself. But when he discovered what was behind the show, all this scenery-technique, the actors’ corporeality, the brutal material nature of the decor, his disappointment was total. He also stated that theatre seemed to him as being essentially impure. That theatrical fiction is mixed with elements that are strange to it, that theatrical fiction is an imperfect fiction...

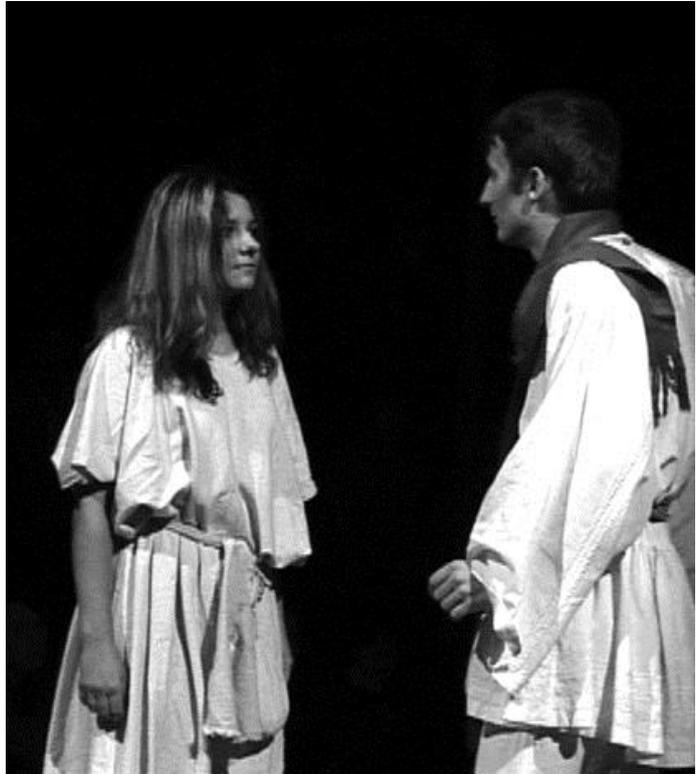
*It rather seems to be one of Borges’ theories...*

It seems that this feeling of impurity made Eugen Ionescu write the theatre that he wrote.

*We have been, for some time now, around this essential element in the theatre, namely, the actor. With all his amount of mindfulness, with all his seduction techniques, with all his culture, etc. I*

*know you have a cult for the actor, for what he means in the economy of the performance and not only...*

The actor is everything. There are various things that can be heard in the theatre world, such as a good text played badly is a disaster, but also that a good actor can save a bad text... I confess I did not go through any of the above variations. I only believe that the actor is, to quote Haig Acterian from my memory, “that flesh that has to withstand the tensions of ideas, heroic passions and transcendental rhythms that can not receive the spirit of divine art unless it is prepared.” Since almost three decades ago, when I decided to make a theatre of mine where I could set my phantasms free, I decided that first of all I must “build” the actors who should inhabit these phantasms. In other words, to make them understand what happens to the human being at the magic moment of the embodiment. And then I imposed some principles (sometimes, like any principles, rigid). The first and most important thing was the one that referred to the study. Study of any kind, but especially the study of the body, placing it into relation with itself and then with the world around. Throughout the existence of our theatre, important and unforgettable were not the performances in a special way, but rather the studies of any kind. Especially those of motion were the ones that remained in our memory...



*Meaning the part that the audience is not aware of....*

And they do not even have to know it. At least that much we could keep for ourselves. Because at the moment of meeting with the eyes and the breath of the audience, everything that an actor does on stage no longer belongs to him, he becomes, so to speak, a public good...

*Theatre is thus transformed into a kind of laboratory. As in the case of Grotowski or Brook.*

It is amazing that in the mid-seventies, when I came to these conclusions about the theatre, I did not know much about the two, as I did not know much about Western theatre in general. I did not, as I said before, have access to this kind of information. Everything came to me from inner needs. It was like a revelation. I first made experiences on myself. Then I started to challenge others. We were young. We had nothing to lose. Ahead of us was a life that we were trying to fill with these new experiences. Why not? Then came the moment of magic, when together with some friends, artists from various fields, we gathered, as by chance, at the autumn equinox of 1980 and we set up some sort of interdisciplinary artistic studio, where theatre was of great importance and where I was able to explore freely, with my young colleagues at the time, this new manner of doing theatre. From that moment, everything became, as it is now, history...

*I do not believe, nevertheless, that it was simple...*

I did not say that it was.

*A theatre has to be organized, it has a program, it has projects, it is, as you have just said, a public good...*

Even though it was just the joy of the game at the beginning, the difficult part was to follow... It is too much to talk about... To quote Steinhardt: "Via Crucis is rather a rocky barren field, rich in weeds and filth, a heavy climb".

*What was your theatrical creation based on? What was the thing that provoked another way of thinking about the theatre?*

Well, I do not know if there is another way of thinking theatre...

*I rephrase...*

It is not the case... I understand what you mean. But I did not want to do anything other than other theatres did or were doing. I wanted, like any other artist, to be myself. I believe, however, that there was something, something else... Since the time of my directorial beginnings, people began to lose (and today, they are almost fearfully or contemptuously discussing this aspect) their pathetic expression, the skill, so to speak, of being pathetic. Well, thanks to the American films we watch every day, it has even become a reproach... Anyway... So we began to lose, or rather to hide as good as possible, this attribute with which the Creator endowed us...

*This is also due to the “abuse” of pathetic expression, mediocrity, snobbery with which some of our fellow humans pigment their relationship with the world...*

It can be. Essentially, we do not know what that pathos really is, what the pathetic expression is... Well, the pathos, the pathetic has not died. Even when hidden very well, it can be activated at any time. That is what music can do very well. I remember a rhetorical question that Sergiu Celibidache was saying aloud, in 1971, when he returned to Romania and had to answer some stupid questions asked by a person of the television: “What is music !? – he wonders. It is nothing! It is something that becomes. And then leaves. So you cannot capture it on a static support such as a disc, photography or memory... Music knows a phenomenon that does not happen in other material sensations of our senses; music knows the octave phenomenon. Octave – namely the double of the infrared or ultraviolet frequencies no longer fall into the perceptible human sector. But the octave phenomenon is a cosmic referential phenomenon. There is nothing over the octave. There is something in music that touches the man where he can not be reached even by the deepest thought. And yet it is real...”

*Impressive. I mean, here is a scientific demonstration of a feeling, an emotion...*

Exactly. So people can hide their way of being pathetic, but they cannot refrain from being pathetic when pathos manifests. And theatre, by excellence, is a place of pathos, of that creative pathos... It is not for nothing that the ancient Greek theatre bet on *katharsis*, namely purification by pity and fear... Not for nothing, in over two thousand years of so-called authored theatre, happenings were written and told; happenings that created strong emotions and activated this

profoundly human feature that is the pathos. That is what I wanted from the beginning. Sure, you are prone to tricks, seduction techniques, etc. etc... But I wanted with all my strength my performances to be pathetic, to leave deep traces in the emotional memory of my contemporaries. Only God knows how much I have succeeded or whether I will ever succeed...

*There are many who, having seen the cinematographic performances and shows produced by the Equinox Theatre, had the power to say that something special was happening there, that it was a “phenomenon”...*



I have a good friend who, knowing a good part of these, told me unequivocally: “After all, what you do there is not just theatre, in the general sense of the word”.

*Now in the conclusion of this long dialogue, I have another perspective on this world of theatre. The relationship this old art has with the reality and the imaginary world makes it always a place of seduction, of mystery...*

For a long time, I have been struck, seduced even by a story I have not been able to forget since I learned it. We do not have much information about how theatre performances were performed in Greek antiquity, we do not know how the actors played, how they were preparing for the theatre show, but this story can tell us a lot. A male actor (because then, and long after that moment, only men were allowed to play theatre) played the character Antigone, the one who makes that gallant and risky gesture, at the same time, to sprinkle sod on her dead brother’s body condemned to become a prey for eagles. Antigone pays with her life for this beautiful gesture. Well, the actor who plays the role of Antigone is said to have played the entire play having his

dead brother's ashes (real!) with him. For him, the connection with this object, with this sign of the concrete relationship between him and his brother was very important. It gave him, I think, that force to create and re-create a drama that was his own, too. At that time, as it seems, the problem of the relationship between real/reality and anything else (any name it would have) was very vivid, very present in the theatrical act. I believe that these two great tendencies in the old or new history of the theatre, namely, on the one hand, the theatre that faithfully reproduces, more or less accurately, the reality, and on the other hand the theatre as an exercise of style, as a spiritual communication, have always existed, without excluding one other. I strongly believe that art has to confront, all the time, the age in which it manifests, in order to allow its perception to be made more clearly for the people. Because people have an instinctive need for art. Perhaps it is from here, from this need, that negative effects emerge, like art surrogates or the kitsch. For this reason, I am convinced that if art does not help us better understand the meaning of our existence, if it does not carry us beyond what we perceive immediately, superficially and in a hurry, it is just a free game, a pleasant but frivolous gesture...<sup>\*\*</sup>

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<sup>\*\*</sup> The entire dialogue can be read in *În căutarea armoniei pierdute* [Looking for the lost harmony], by Mihai Vasile, pages 64-94, published in Ploiești: Editura Karta Gaphic, 2016.