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Interview with the Greek theatre director

Géza Balázs

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Preface

“At the heart of the social dilemmas of our time lies the possibility to distinguish between individual and collective interest. If we give up the essence of the game, and our players do not strive for the best individual but for the highest overall collective score, then the social dilemma will also disappear.”¹

The collaboration and dedication exercised by national and international institutions, artists and researchers represent a primary condition for applying the potential of cooperation for the benefit of the public through scientific study of the creative arts. The second issue of *Uránia* represents an example of a “total win”. The journal takes an interdisciplinary approach to presenting a diverse and extensive range of educational and research activities at the University of Theatre and Film Arts and its partner institutions, simultaneously catering for educational and institutional needs and social “orders”.

Géza Balázs, in his study *The Ancient Genres of Verbal Art – Simple Forms and Instinctive Manifestations*, builds on linguistic foundations. This paper takes us back to the past of our tools of expression, to the world of ancient verbal gestures and archetypes. These ancient gestures, simple forms, primary genres and primal art forms unconsciously influence our everyday behaviour and shape our artistic expressions and our language of music, dance, film, and the stage.

In their study *Reception Studies in the Sociology of the Theatre – Directions and Possibilities of Research*, **Enikő Sepsi** and **Attila Szabó** present the state of Hungarian research in the Sociology of Theatre and Theatre Reception. They describe the STEP project (the Project on European Theatre Systems), an international study on the Sociology of Theatre, examining the differences in audience experiences and attitudes in four European countries, including an assessment of the personal and social relevance of the performances, in addition to describing the methodology and general results.

¹ Szabó György. 2012. „Az együttműködés természete.” In *Magyar Tudomány* 6, 642. Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó.

In his essay *The World of Theatre in a Time of Change – Before, During and After the Pandemic*, **Péter Szitás** focuses on the effects and challenges of the coronavirus pandemic by presenting the internal processes that characterise the operation of theatre institutions. The study draws conclusions on how the venues reacted to the forced closure, what measures they took to maintain their previous position, and whether they acquired knowledge at institutional level that may provide valuable and applicable solutions for cultural leaders in the long term.

Zsolt Antal, in his study *The National Character of Hungarian Culture – Challenges in the New Media Space*, draws attention to the complementary role of cultural institutions in providing public service information. The author's aim is to raise awareness and encourage cultural institutions to make better use of the opportunities offered by the new media space, in order to attract the same attention with internet-based digital platforms as they do with traditional media platforms.

The main objective of **András Pataki's** essay *Understanding Through Experiencing – Some Thoughts on Theatre Pedagogy* is to consider the possibilities and tasks of theatre and education. The author recommends rethinking the system of training and employment of professionals in the field of education, developing the necessary infrastructure and making school education more flexible. He does this with the intention of developing an effective and operational structure of theatre education in public education in the future.

Last but not least, a biographical interview was published with 77-year-old **Theodoros Terzopoulos**, a leading figure in Greek and international theatre, a theatre company director, an innovator of theatrical form and one of the founders of the International Theatre Olympics. The Greek master maintains that only by practising theatrical rites can we return to the spirit of the ancient tragedies. To achieve this, he developed and published his theatrical method, called *The Return of Dionysus*, which will soon be available in Hungarian and published by the University of Theatre and Film Arts.

Zsolt Antal
Editor-in-Chief

Géza Balázs

The Ancient Genres of Verbal Art

Simple Forms
and Instinctive Manifestations

Abstract

According to fundamental scientific principles, simple forms develop into complex ones, with the rare exception of regression. In metaphysics, however, evolution and involution are seen as being in unity, with complex forms developing into simple ones. At any rate (as far as we can see into the past), we might presume basic elementary, primary, simple, artistic, and linguistic typological forms that can be linked with basic cognitive forms. According to art theory, in the beginning there was ancient syncretism, which was dominated by undivided liquid ancient forms. Psychoanalysts and myth researchers speak of ancient language, ancient picture language. Folklorists list blessings, curses, and oaths, as well as work songs, among the primary genres. I present three basic genres as an example: cradle songs, dance words and laments. Their common characteristics are sung lyrics and speech-like melodies (*parlando*). Further instinctive behaviours that receive little attention include: outbursts, impulsive shouting, cursing, mumbling, sighing, pleading, and prayer, as well as sexual intercourse, giving birth, euphoric speech (under the influence of alcohol or narcotics), aphasia, and speech degraded by old age. Instinctiveness is clearly reflected by rhythmic counting or scribbling.

Key words: simple forms, ancient syncretism, ancient language, ancient picture language, formulae, cradle songs, dance words, lamentations, instinctive behaviours

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Simple forms

To discern the origins of these ancient forms, we should dig far back in the abyss of the past in which records are available, and then proceed by deduction. It is widely held that complex forms have evolved from simple ones. A variety of theories in cultural history, literary theory and folklore studies are aimed at defining and reconstructing simple (perhaps undifferentiated) forms or basic forms. It was in response to the idea of Jakob Grimm that Andre Jolles (1930/2006) elaborated his theory of simple forms, which he considered as sociocultural universal elements under which the forms (genres, text types) of folk poetry and literature can be derived from the specific operations of cognition and language, which came into being and developed instinctively and spontaneously "by themselves". Jolles identified nine "simple forms": the legend, the saga, the myth, the riddle, the proverb, the memorable, the fairy tale and the joke. These simple forms are therefore basic linguistic structures in which knowledge of the world, social experiences and value judgements are stored and passed down. They are not identical with literary forms, yet they have certain aesthetic attributes.

The theory of simple forms gained popularity primarily among folklorists, while it later also came to influence literature-semiotic research. In Hungary, one such example is Zoltán Kanyó (1985, 10-11), who argued that simple forms play a role in the shaping of social tradition, facilitating recollection and the preserving of memory. He also believes that the simple forms logically and pragmatically appear before all other literary forms. Although the examples put forth by Jolles received criticism, Erzsébet Fehér (2006, 39) came to his defence, referring to the tradition of rhetoric: "there are internal relationships between them: a) with the exception of the proverb each form is (or may be) a narrative structure; b) each one of them is related to the community's value perspectives. Accordingly, from Jolles's regarding simple forms as manifestations of the structuring capability of human cognition and tracing them back to the 'mental disposition', we can conclude that he assigns a special role in this to the narrative forms and the evaluating attitude [...]." Genre theories exploring the linguistic foundations of genres trace back the presumed basic genre forms partly to the elementary forms of language use and partly to mental structures. Still fertile texts that have been passed down for thousands of years

are linked to some basic cognitive forms. Several authors have made reference to the basic forms:¹

- simple forms (Jolles),
- primary, simple genre, speech genre (Bakhtin),
- architext (Genette),
- generic structure (Skwarczynska),
- genotext (Zoltán Kanyó).

Text linguistics' recommendations for typological basic forms (Fehér 2006: 40):

- storytelling, narrative patterns (Pléh),
- description, narration, argument (Beaugrande–Dressler),
- superstructure: narration, argument (van Dijk),
- shared invariants of superstructures: narration, argument, description, evaluation (János Balázs),
- text type: description, narration, information, argument instruction (Werlich),
- text pattern (Piroska Kocsány).

Hungarian scholarly literature has been influenced by the theory of simple forms, and Hungarian authors have studied two "simple" forms, namely, the proverb (Kocsány 2002) and storytelling (Pléh 1986, Andó 2006) in greater detail. Besides the proverb and storytelling, mention may be made of a number of other short and long genres, such as the drafting of short inscriptions and, in general, labelling, on which there is a growing body of Hungarian scholarly literature, including a summary (for example, Balázs 2000) for instance.

The issue of simple forms has come to be considerably more complicated by now. There clearly must be a simple → complicated direction of "progress", but there also is an opposite, complicated → simple, direction at the same time, involving the changing, perhaps disintegration, of texts (in folklore: "devolution", a degressive, destructive process, Zersingen, that is, singing to pieces²), and later perhaps even fragmentation, or replacement, of genres, or regression of genres. "Vague, disturbed and unartistic variants emerge at the time of the demise of folklore resembling for a while, even in their dishevelled state, certain genres of days gone by but as time passes they stop being

1 Fehér (2006, 38–41) provides an overview of the basic genre forms; further sources can also be found there.

2 Zersingen = singing apart (Ortutay 1981, 32).

the last reminders of a long gone folklore genre. At that moment they also cease to exist as works of art" (Voigt 1972, 42). Besides the changes stemming from genres' systemic functioning, Miko also refers to a "devolution" (2000, 87), which might, for example, be a result of the "aggressiveness" of another genre.

Hamvas provides the basic premise of the metaphysical approach, thus: "Development is, of course, out of the question" (1995, I/189). Involution is the same as evolution (1995, I/225). "That thinking which historic man, particularly modern man, calls science, tried to understand the big facts of existence with the individual Ego's intellect, instead of direct intuition of the universal man. Having started off in reverse, it was bound to reach a reverse result. This is how the concept that the origin of existence is down came into being; this is how the idea of progress or development from bottom up, evolved" (1995, I/343).

Undivided, liquid forms, ancient language, picture language

As to the origins of folk poetry, folklorists generally agree that in the world of ancient and rudimentary societies cognition was not separated from consciousness, that is, there was no distinction between science, art and practical activities (ancient syncretism), and consequently the boundaries between rite, myth and poetry are diffuse. Accordingly, I believe that ancient (initial) language must have been closely connected to the ancient forms of consciousness, including art. Dance, music, tune and text, being indivisible from one another, all exist as elements of community activity. This was undivided, initially not permanently fixed, total art, in the liquid state from all perspectives, which then continued to live on in well-solidified forms, providing yet another proof of the ancient connection between art and language.

The folklore of certain primitive peoples (today there are still isolated ethnic groups continuing to live in practically stone age conditions) and children has continued to resemble, for the most part, the primal condition, and uncontrolled, instinctive manifestations point back to the primal condition, and puns, plays, and poetry display the gesture of "creation". Hamvas states that "Picture language is the prehistoric language" (1995, II/159); "The power of the ancient

language has survived not in the folk language but in poetic language" (1995, II/160); "Poetry is the mother tongue of man" (1995, II/157).

Primary texts

The most elementary text types are considered to include blessing, cursing and the swearing of oaths, as well as magic spells (in the form of charms or incantations), followed by already passive but still ancient prayers referring to behaviour. The latter were almost entirely integrated into Christianity.

Hungarian incantations are of a listing and repetitive structure, being divided into parts, and some of them are characterised by sense-rhythm and alliteration. Some of the Hungarian curse formulas involve listings of an enhancing nature and live on in ballads and lyrical songs. Several Hungarian researchers believe that they have discovered remnants of ancient shamanic songs in some of our nursery rhymes or in the "*haj regő rejtem*" refrain of the carolling tradition of *regölés*, which represents the oldest Hungarian folk custom. Derisive songs, mocking rhymes, love songs of a personal nature, drinking and wine or festive songs, however, would not be so easily traced back to the primal condition.

An anthropologically typical and exclusively female genre, known all over the world, is that of lullaby. A lullaby is a softly-spoken, rhythmic text, emanating calm, evolved to drive a movement pattern (rocking and lulling) with the aim of calming down and helping a baby fall asleep. Earlier lullabies used to contain natural themes, while later ones, closer to our age, cover social ones. Child-rocking words appearing in Hungarian lullabies, such as the child language word "*csicsija*" and the word "*tente*", which are of onomatopoeic origins, can be regarded as ancient (after Katona 1992, 207–210).

Work songs, in which movement patterns regulated the rhythm of tune and text, may be considered as old and elementary. Péter Veres writes about beaters in his novel *Pályamunkások* (*Track workers*). (By way of explanation, a beater pick is a blunt headed pick axe that is used to beat and compact the crushed stone lying under railway sleepers.) This novel was adapted in a film of the same name, which was directed by István Gaál as a student work, and which depicts the hard physical work of rail laying (ballast compacting) that used to be performed by rail track workers.

Dirges, or mourning songs, also go back to the obscurity of the earliest times. Their improvised lyrics and melody demonstrate the most primitive signs of

organisation. They are characterised by solo singing without musical accompaniment, although on rare occasions they may be accompanied by a chorus. They comprise loosely structured and variable parts. The Hungarian dirge, which is fully subordinated to the text, is reminiscent of the moment of the separation of the tune from text.

In the linguistic description of primary texts, we may make reference to Walter Ong's concept of the relationship between orality and literacy (1982). He distinguishes three eras, namely, those of primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality.

By primary orality he means orality predating, and thus unaffected by, literacy, which of course lives on during the era of printing and that of electronic literacy. The description of primary orality gives us an insight into initial language use, which is close to the lifeworld, being emphatic, direct, situation dependent, competitive yet striving to achieve homeostasis, predominantly coordinative (not subordinative), accumulative (not analytical), and traditional (conservative), and which is also characterised by redundancy ("abundance") for mnemonics and the use of formulas (for example, meter and rhyming) (see Adamikné 2021, 218–219).

Art and the ancient genres of speech

In retrospect, we can see various genres in which we can explore the ancient connection between art and language. These should include archaic folk prayer, incantation and all types of magic spells. Child folklore is rich with archaic elements. At first, it may seem surprising that it is the very culture of the newborn, the new generation, which shows most saliently the most ancient human implications: elementary forms, playing, and re-creation (creativity), just in the way that a child progresses through the stages of the birth and development of a language, from impulsive sounds to structured speech. I will never forget the shocking discovery revealed to me by one of my college students in Eger: their child's first words and sentences sounded to them very similar to the Old Hungarian that they learned about at college. I believe that my student made a great discovery: as it develops, the child's language traverses the entire history

of the native language; in the case of a Hungarian child's language, the history of the Hungarian language. Yet this has escaped the attention of science.³

The deep evolutionary connection between language and folklore is indicated by the parallelism of the rhythm phenomena between intonation (that is, sentence melody) and creation. According to Lajos Vargyas: "All rhythm phenomena and all variants of the beats are closely related to the evolution and structuring of live speech. All Hungarian rhythm phenomena can be derived from the characteristics of Hungarian speech" (1966, 52). Illustrative examples include:

Magos a torony teteje
Magos a / torony / teteje

Sentence emphasis (that is, melody) is followed by literary work, including, for instance, folklore tales.

It was from studying folk poetry verse rhythm that Lajos Vargyas concluded that the dirge is our oldest genre of folk poetry: "not only its Old European tune, which has survived in archaic patches, in marginal areas at great distances from each other and not only the very traditionalist custom relating to death into which it is embedded but also its loose, improvised – though full of formulas – prosaic text which is the only representative of the pre-verse song test type in our folk poetry." Moreover, as Vargyas explains, "our child play and minstrel melodies, loosely repeating motives, beat pairs without closed forms." He continues: "many types of our rubato songs were still alive, in free performance, before the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian basin, and the same applies to the pigman dance form." In conclusion: it is also in accordance with the primitive → advanced line of development that Vargyas claims that "there was a development which led, from loose prose and free syllable number to fixed verse formulas. [...] Accordingly, the outlines of a regulation

³ Proof-reader's note: That a child passes through the stages of language development (as a side-note to the small child uttering Old Hungarian forms), let me present a few examples from my daughter when she was learning to speak: her first words were: *kunku*, meaning *könyv* (book), with the stem-end vowel shrinking, though without compensatory extension, and *paa*, meaning *fa* (tree), that is, she uttered the basic form first and achieved the pronunciation of *fa* passing through the regular course of sound development. Additionally, she uttered: *Bajó*, meaning *Balázs* (a Hungarian male name), and *Elek bátyám*, meaning *Elek bátyom* (my brother Elek), as well as *szájom*, meaning *szájam* (my mouth), and *hátom*, meaning *hátam* (my back).

process appear from a musical overview of the folk song in which less developed and unregulated forms are gradually replaced by increasingly regulated ones" (Vargyas 1966, 40–42).

In relation to three basic Hungarian folk poetry genres, which may well be regarded as ancient and archaic, I wish to prove that melody and text were born, developed, varied, and recited together, and that the genres are "above peoples", that is, that they are anthropological. The three basic genres are, indeed, elementary forms: the lullaby, the dance word, and the dirge. Little wonder that these genres are related to the three most significant events of a person's life, namely, birth, finding a partner, and death.

Lullaby

Based on a thorough analysis of lullabies and by comparing other peoples' lullabies, Imre Katona presents authentic examples for the interactive evolution of art and language: "Lullabies are, in fact, lyrical pre-forms, the beginnings of poetry, maternal instruments of instinctive-conscious (lyrical) influence, evidence of the unbroken continuity of successive generations and the perpetuation of tradition. Poetic illustrations of the connections between the greater and the smaller society, home and the outside world, present and future, which however, even go beyond poetry itself" (Katona 1992, 110). Lullabies were only sung when helping small children fall asleep, so a plot was indispensable for the song to work. The soothing rock-a-bye sounds, words, and expressions, were to help the baby become calm, rest, and finally fall asleep. A lullaby essentially comprises rock-a-bye sounds, repeating them in regular triplets: *a-a-a, ei-ei-ei, na-na-na*.

Most lullaby words imitate either movements or sounds, and are in most cases doubled. Words that have a soothing effect include: *csicsis, csicsija* (Hungarian), *csucsuj* (Carpatho-Ukrainian), *Bisch* (German), and *hush* (English). Movement detecting (movement imitating) words include: *tente* (Hungarian), *ninna-nanne* (Italian), *lilaj-lulaj* (Polish), *baj-baj* (Russian), and *sulla-rulla* (Norwegian). Notably distant similarities may be identified in the use of words in lullabies, rendering their ancient and universal nature even more evident (Imre Katona's examples, 1992, 101–102):

Examples in which the relationship among languages belonging to the same language families is self-evident.	Dutch ~ Norwegian: <i>suja, sulla</i>
Examples in which area-based relationships may be assumed in the case of neighbouring peoples.	Slovakian ~ Polish: <i>lilaj, lulaj</i> Hungarian ~ Slovakian: <i>beli</i> Hungarian ~ Slovakian: <i>buva(j)</i>
Examples of words spread across large geographical areas: the Mediterranean region, the Middle East, Caucasia, and India.	Spanish: <i>nana</i> ~ Italian: <i>ninna-nanne</i> , Slovenian: <i>nina-nana</i> , Serbian: <i>ninaj-nanaj</i> , Albanian-Bulgarian-Greek-Romanian: <i>nani</i> , Turkish: <i>nenni-ninni</i> , Arabic: <i>ninna</i> , Caucasian: <i>nana</i> , Indian: <i>nanna</i> , and Hungarian: <i>nánikálni</i> .
Examples of words spread across large geographical areas: the northern region.	Carpatho-Ukrainian: <i>lulaj</i> , Slovakian, Polish: <i>lulaj</i> , Norwegian: <i>lulla</i> , English: <i>lullaby</i>
Examples of words spread among peoples that are neither neighbouring nor related, in which similarities are explained, for now, by "coincidence".	Hungarian ~ French: <i>tente</i> ~ <i>tintoux</i> Hungarian ~ Mongolian: <i>buvey</i>

Table 1. Words used in lullabies

The movement imitating word "*tente*" is generally used in Hungarian speaking areas, "*csicsija*" in Transdanubia and "*beli*" in Transylvania.

Calling the child pet names and making references to natural phenomena are general features of lullabies. "Nearly all European peoples use the identification of children (and loved ones) with stars, the Sun, the Moon and other celestial bodies. Sardinian lullabies even sing about the Sun and the Moon having been the baby's godparents and animals coming to worship it like the magi do in the Bible" (Katona 1992, 105).

In children's folklore, including several lullabies, animals are much more humane; "one might talk of a nearly fabular coexistence, [...] there is hardly any difference between wild and domestic animals; perhaps the latter are mentioned more often. [...] Distinction of good ones from bad ones is prob-

ably a later stage of development” (Katona 1992, 106). The animals’ role lies in showing examples: examples to follow include the kitty cat who is a good sleeper, the bird settling on its nest, the sleeping bunny, the lamb who comes home. We can all observe the elementary influence of animals’ behaviour on small children, and its reflections in language illustrate this ancient relationship.

As well as soothing and helping the baby fall asleep, lullabies also serve an educational purpose: they show the child their direct natural and social environment and set their place in it. “Lullabies are mostly archaic but are capable of continuous renewal, they are international and to some extent national; they are a good example of how profound similarities can evolve in identical circumstances in spite of a presumably very small external impact” (Katona 1992, 110).

Dance words

Dance words are exclamations, which are often shrieked, to some degree spontaneously but in fixed forms, while dancing. The words used to describe them clearly reflect their functions: *kurjantás, rikkantás, ujjogató, csujogató (csujjogató), modzsikálás, verselés, and rikoltozás (exclaiming, shrieking, versing, shouting etc.)*. Dance words comprise seven or eight syllables, in mostly two but sometimes three or four lines, they are varied and they vary, and they are isorhythmic, that is, they are composed of the same rhythmic order. “During a dance, or a ball, everybody shouts out simultaneously, while in a wedding party the women and girls also assemble in groups to shout to the rhythm of the music and dance. Crying out always follows the rhythm of the music. In some villages in the Mezőség special melodies are reserved specifically for exclamations during wedding parties” (Kallós 1973, 107).

Marián Réthei Prikkel (1906, 14–15) categorised them in three groups:

- interjections: words (by now) without their own specific meaning,
- outcries: partly meaningful but elliptic (with omissions),
- dance exclamations: thoughts expressed in a full and correct form (with rhyme and verse).

Accordingly, the first category comprises interjections expressing encouragement and/or joy, (by today) without any specific meanings of their own, such as *uccu, iccu* (“words naturally expressing joy”), *hajrá, nosza, hopp, rajta; ejhaj, hejhaj, sejhaj, hajhahaj, hejehuja, hajaha, hej dinom-dánom, ihaj, tyuhaj,*

ihaja, tyuhaja, ihajla, tyuhajla, ijjuju, ujjuju, tyuhaj (csuhaj), tyuhaja, and tyuhajla. One characteristic feature of these forms is repetition or twinning (*hejhaj*) front-back pairs (*iccu ~ uccu, hejehuja*) and variant generation (*ejhaj, hejhaj, and sejhaj*). The second group comprises partly meaningful but still usually elliptic exclamations (with omissions): *uccu neki, uccu rajta; iccu neki, ne hadd magad; uccu lábam, ne hibázz; csak szivessen; ne kedvem, ne; édes eszem, ne hagyj el; ez az élet gyöngyélet; nyakamba, karomra; szorídd no; ne engedd, csülökre; hopp Sári sarokra; szembe szívem; busújjon a ló; tyuhaj, sohse halunk meg; ejhaj, táncra táncz; három a tánc; and kivilágos virradatig (kivirradtig).* The third groups of dance exclamations express feelings and thoughts in a full, proper form, rhyme, or verse: *lhaja, tyuhaja – libeg-lobog a haja; Haj cic tralárom, most élem világom; Haja haj, semmi baj; Haja hess, de feszes; ljuju, jujuju, a nadrágom kétágú; and Dinom-dánom nadrágom – a komámnak testálom.* This text-like composition comprises mostly two-line, seven- or eight-syllable rhyming exclamations. As Réthei Prikkel explains: “In terms of language shape they are highly varied: exclamatory, imperative, conditional, comparative, contrasting, concluding and other forms of expression appear among them, in surprising diversity. And they can also be enjoyed sometimes for the witty brevity, sometimes for the dramatic fragmentation and sometimes the proverbial completeness, of expression. They please the scrutiniser at times by amassing meaningful attributes and epithets, at other times with their ingenious similes and metaphors” (Réthei Prikkel 1906, 15).

These exclamations are concise: *Szembe szívem, ha szeretsz, ha nem szeretsz, elmehetsz; and Úgy szeretlek, majd megeszlek, megbecsüllek, ha elveszlek.*

Verses in the imperative, with a punch line, include: *Járd ki lábam, járd ki most, nem parancsol senki most; Féltre tőlem búbanat, búzát vágok, nem nádat; Szorítsd hozzád, nem anyád, ha szorítod, csókot ád; Járjad, járjad hajnallig, míg a szoknyád langallik; and Adj egy csókot holdvilágom, úgy sem adsz a másvilágon.*

Exclamatory forms with apt attributes include: *Óh de ügyes, óh de jó, óh de kedvemre való; and Ez a leány sokat ér, se fekete, se fejtér, se kövér, se ösztövé.*

Prikkel Réthei (1906, 16) also drew attention to oriental picture language: “Hungarians are known for their special liking for metaphorical speech, a trait indicative of an oriental origin. Nowhere else is it more eloquently proven than in our dance rhymes.” Examples include: *Édes a szád, mint a méz, perg a nyelved, mint a réz; Egyenes vagy, mint a nád, hozzám szabott az apád; Hugom asszony, kend csak úgy, én a kakas, kend a tyúk; A menyecske jámbor fecske, nem rúc, nem*

dőf, mint a kecske; Kiszáradt a füge fástul, elválunk rózsám egymástul; Levendula ágastul, ugorj egyet párostul; Száraz kóró, nem nedves, a vén asszony nem kedves; Kicsiny csupor hamar forr, a vén asszony puska, Keresztúri szitakéreg, ne futkározz, mint a féreg; Sárga rigó, köménymag, jaj be kevély legény vagy, Vékony cérna, kendermag, jaj be kevély leány vagy; and Szűrő, szita, tejeslábas, álljon félre, aki házas.

Besides being metaphorical, they are also powerful in expressing contrast: *Kicsiny legény, nagy puska, nagy a hágó, nem bírja;* and *Csöngő-böngő sarkantyú, nincs a pajtába bornyú.*

Dance words expressing conclusions include: *A házasság kaloda: ne tedd a lábad oda; Kicsiny nekem ez a ház, kirúgom az oldalát; and Kapud előtt mély árok: hozzád többet nem járok* (1906, 16).

Finally, Prikkel Réthei (1906, 17) notes how ancient dance exclamations are: “The unity and antiquity of our national dance is proven by the same dance exclamations being used in regions far apart from each other, whose populations are prevented from communicating with each other by great distances, and were even more completely separated from each other in the past. [...] The majority of dance exclamations are the same across the whole of the country, [...] these similarities can be detected in sources dating back to the days of yore.”

Dance words exude the joy of life: people going out of control, or unleashing pent-up erotic desires, sometimes in the form of undisguised obscene allusions. To the extent that a feeling of joy keeps one going, dance words represent an eternal genre of vitality and the joy of life, so it is no mere coincidence that from spontaneous vocal outbursts to an eruption of suppressed allusions to lyrical phrasing, they represent virtually the whole range of art and poetry.

Dirges

Particular attention is paid to dirges in both folk musicology and folklore studies alike. Zoltán Kodály describes the genre thus: “The importance of dirge as a musical genre in the Hungarian culture: the only example of prosaic recitative and the nearly only venue of improvising [...] musical prose, on the borderline between music and speech” (Kodály and Vargyas 1952, 38–39). Dirges ease tensions by displaying the pain and bitterness caused by loss, enkindling sympathy. The melody and text of a dirge should be studied together. The musical performance is characterised by cry-like pitches, with choking voices, uncer-

tain intonation turning into weeping, recitative and singing being interrupted by crying while the text is characterised by rhetorical questions, exclamations, and imperatives, as well as interjections. To a very great extent, dirges are characterised by syncretism, which is so typical of folklore songs. The mourners (usually women) claim that they do not prepare for the mourning. The most profound characteristics of a dirge are improvisation and variation, following a basic model. There are ready-made formulas, which the mourners vary. These formulas are used as a mnemonic instrument. Szenik states: "The collective term reciting (recitative) comprises all of the melodies that create a speech-like effect with the special means of music. [...] In an unfathomably distant past the recitative may have sprung from the intonation and rhythm of speech but then, transformed into music, it evolved on its own. Its decoupling from a specific language is proven by the evolution of various mostly 'supranational' styles within it" (1996, 26). Melody and text vary together in dirges, as Szenik explains: "the text gives an explanation in the music and vice versa. One proof of the relative autonomy is that both concordant and discordant relationships can be found in every single dirge [...] The melody is, by all means, more plastic than the text" (1996, 27).

melody	text
cry-like pitches, voices choking up, uncertain intonation turning into weeping, recitative and singing broken by crying	rhetoric questions, exclamations and imperatives, interjections
melody line	syntactic unit/verse line
musical phrase, rhythm formula (= prosody)	order of linguistic/metric emphases
musical phase	sentence sequences/verse
varies	varies
more plastic	more solid (more like formulas)

Table 2. Relationships between melody and text in a dirge (after Szenik 1996, 27)

As Ilona Szenik (1996, 37) maintains, "in the speech-like performance [of mourners] the basic pulse of the rhythm more or less follows the speed of

speech”, which means that music and text live and evolve in parallel. Our dirges are akin to the Lamentations of Mary, including the Old Hungarian Lamentation of Mary (circa 1300), which scholars consider to be the first one.

Instinctive linguistic manifestations

In addition to the existing, widely-known, and well-researched folklore genres, we can see the initial elementary forms being studied in further, contemporary phenomena. Sigmund Freud drew attention to slips of the tongue and jokes, to name but one example. I will now discuss the instinctive, spontaneous, unconscious, or barely conscious language functions that I have observed.

Spontaneous linguistic manifestations

The first ones to mention are the slips of the tongue that were studied so thoroughly by Freud. The psychoanalyst believed that they were not accidental. He claimed that they reflect and show something. As Móricz mentions: “There is a reason for a person’s uttering an unnecessary word. There’s something they do not wish to say” (1976, 34).

As a linguist, I would give first place to sudden impulsive exclamations and shouts. In terms of parts of speech, they are categorised as interjections, and in terms of genre they are, for instance, shouts, and more precisely dance words, as previously mentioned. Involuntary manifestations expressing state of mind or mood may belong to the category of impulsive manifestations, for example, mumbling (hm, uhm). Móricz illustrates this with an example: “Hm [...] This small sound frightened him; his wife sounded exactly like the girl... Men usually express this in a completely different way: Hm [...]” (1976, 49).

Furthermore, a low level of consciousness is also reflected by sighs, pleading, and, at a basic level, prayers. Vilmos Tánzos reports that Hungarians in Moldavia would spend their day in prayer. Prayer is an anthropological characteristic of mankind, and is common to all peoples. Prayer, as well as forms of mantra (for Christians, the rosary), is also observed in all societies. I have seen people praying in everyday situations all over the world. Father József Holczer writes in one of his memoirs that he saw a man on a crowded bus mumbling something back in the 1950s. The other passengers questioned him provokingly: What are you mumbling about? Is there any problem with the system? The man answered

them calmly: I am praying. The last sighs of people dying (for example, mortally wounded soldiers) have been observed by many. In *A farewell to arms*, Hemingway notes that dying soldiers call out to their mothers (*mamma mia*). Similar sentiments appear in a poetic form in Géza Gyóni's poem *Csak egy éjszakára...* (*For just one night*):

*Mikor a pokolnak égő torka tárul,
S vér csurog a földön, vér csurog a fáról
Mikor a rongy sátor nyöszörög a szélben
S haló honvéd sóhajt: fiam... feleségem...*

Their child's first words live on, in an almost magical way, in every parent. Linguists also study them but man's last words appear to be less interesting, despite the fact that the degradation of the language of people dying of old age, and their last words, are shockingly similar to baby talk. Examples for this include simplified (or rather, re-simplified) semantics and grammar. We were made from dust and to dust we shall return – as we also say in our language. The last words of the dying linger on in relatives' and nurses' memories as do a child's first words in the memories of parents. A hospice nurse claimed that the patients' last words are mostly the same; nearly all call for their mothers.⁴

There are also less conscious, indeed, rather unconscious linguistic manifestations. In addition to utterances such as "I want you" and the like, this kind of manifestation, with a limited vocabulary, focuses on encouragement. Milán Füst, inspired by psychoanalysis, writes about how frequently obscenities and desires burst out. It is in such situations that one calls out the name of their previous (or parallel) lover, in terms of endearments, which may be a potential source of serious conflict.

"[...] many a woman for instance, wants to hear the grossest terms for the act in which she is being engaged, what she is doing and what is being done to them, and also for the genitals, by which they are aroused to extreme measures, filled with luscious frenzy. (Indeed, even men like to insult their ladies in this way, finding joy in whispering, in intimate moments, in their ears which would have been scandalous before they came to be on intimate terms with each other.)" (Füst 1986, 110).

⁴ <https://www.filter.hu/cikkek/1022/mit-mondanak-a-halaluk-elott>

Uncontrolled speech uttered under the influence of alcohol or narcotics bears comparison to talking during sexual intercourse. It is widely recognised that certain language barriers are removed by the consumption of alcohol. Alcohol loosens articulation and makes communication more casual and relaxed.

It may even make speaking in foreign languages more fluent, which is why the habit of drinking a shot of hard alcohol before taking examinations has become commonplace among university students. Two different characteristics of the impact of alcohol on speech have been observed: some people become more garrulous and communicative, while others become more reticent. In other words, some become more assertive (violent), while others become gentler. These different states are influenced by basic personality traits. Words and text spoken in hypnosis (ecstasy) are somewhat different from those spoken when drunk. Similar phenomena may occur in the uncontrolled manifestations of women giving birth. This is also a popular topic on the World Wide Web.⁵ Midwives are reported as saying: "They keep shouting at us, they even threaten us. Mothers curse, scream during childbirth, keep calling us for trifles, demand a lot, but that's not the worst of it. It is even worse when women, indeed, their partners too, become aggressive, which happens more frequently than you might think."⁶

A similar phenomenon is that of impulsive manifestations, curses, and sayings, illustrated by the saying "It just slipped out."

The linguistic manifestations of people with aphasia, dementia, and other mental health issues may also be involuntary vocalisations. Linguistic manifestations in dreams, ranging from inarticulate sounds to meaningful sentences, which people cannot recall on being awakened or after waking up, are also fully uncontrolled. Some are even afraid that they might "blurt out" something when dreaming. My hypothesis is that a variety of languages come into play when people dream, one of which is without doubt an ancient one, a proto-language. For example, the *a-o-ú* outcry that is emitted in a state of panic reflects the most ancient sounds of fear, and perhaps even the very genesis of language.

5 pl. Szülés-ordítás. <https://nlc.hu/forum/?id=1057&fid=441&topicid=181736&step=1&page=5>

6 21 titok szülésznőktől (21 secrets from midwives). <https://www.szeretlekmagyarorszag.hu/eletstilus/21-titok-szuloszno-anyaszules-baba-gyerek-szuloszoba/>

Some archaic instinct may also be inherent in counting. Counting represents a kind of rhythm, an iteration. Who knows why people tend to count light poles along the railway, or people dressed in white, or just time, the minutes as they tick by? Béla Hamvas refers to the archaic nature of numbers: "The science of numbers, the number theory, the mysticism of numbers, or the metaphysics of numbers, were known to all prehistoric peoples" (1995, I/1939). We have lost this knowledge but some remnants linger on. "The archaic number relates to the number of historic man in the same way as does the prehistoric picture language to the conceptual or common language of historic man" (1995, I/194), that is, he traces the archaic number back to prehistoric picture language. "Sound was considered to have been the first material appearance of the number. The harmony and disharmony of sounds is based on numbers. Music – says Saint-Martin – is none other than counting and when the human soul is enjoying music, it does none other than follow the progressions of numbers. [...] [The] soul dances at such times on numbers because the basis of dance is number, as it is that of music, or of sculpture, architecture or poetry; or that of crystals, of the leaves of plants, of flowers and of colours. When dancing, the human body is making movements corresponding the ratios; it experiences and utters numbers" (1995, I/222). Rhyming is somewhat similar to counting. One involuntarily picks up a rhyme and keeps repeating and humming it without control. It is very common for people to find that a song (part of a melody, a musical motive) that was heard and imprinted in the past, or some rhythm occurring to them in any incomprehensible and inexplicable way, involuntarily appears in their minds and they continue to hum it. I heard the following anecdote in relation to Christmas in a village in the Érmellék area: "Everyone used to be singing at Christmas time in the old days."

Finally, the most frequently encountered form of involuntary language use is when people talk to themselves (out loud), which is, together with murmuring and the uttering of unusual sounds, an internalising behaviour problem.⁷ This includes humming, improvising tunes, making involuntary jokes, and muttering or chattering while working.

7 Dr. Homoki Andrea–Cs. Ferenczi Szilvia–Dr. Csákvári Judit: Konstruktív agresszió- és bullyingkezelés a gyermekvédelmi szakellátásban (Constructive aggression and bullying management in child protection). http://prekogalfa.hu/documents/efop/TF_KAB_Hallgatoi.pdf

What is the common element in involuntary linguistic manifestations? The common element is that they are linked to specific occasions or situations (as triggers), they are instinctive and they occur spontaneously, involuntarily. Nonetheless, they are often fixed, iterative, sometimes phraseme-like, likely archaic, or at least linked to a profound experience (in the life of the individual and in a way not even evident to them).

Involuntary doodling

Involuntary manifestations may include spontaneous unconscious doodling; in notebooks, or on page margins. Some of them may be linguistic manifestations. The communicative (expression carrying) role of movement is manifested not only in gestures, but also in movement pictures that are fixed in writing. It is of particular interest to examine the doodles of pre-literate children, as they have not yet been influenced by literacy and the skill of writing (unless indirectly, when the parent's drawing or writing is noticed by the child who then tries to imitate it). Reoccurring features have been observed in children's doodles, which then remained unchanged later in life. Some people doodle, while others do not. An early psychological study found that doodling is caused by unused energy and is one of the twiddling movements referred to by Szászi (1943, 3–4). The study of spontaneous doodles also opens a secret world: they often conceal general symbolic contents that are stored in mankind's collective subconscious. Individuals themselves do not specifically store their doodles; as they "flow through" the individual they undergo certain "distortion and modification" (Feuer 2002, 9). Bühler (1930) observed the following development path in children's drawings (cited by, Szászi 1943, 46): a jumble of lines, schematic ornamentation, layout drawing (with the presence of a system in the drawing), and realistic pictures.

In terms of form, spontaneous doodles, as described by Éva Szászi (1943, 5–6), may be of a drawing type and a writing type.

The drawing type includes: concrete representations (a person, a human head, a body part, an animal, a plant, clothes, food, a caricature, a transport vehicle, a symbolic drawing, a celestial body, a scene, a map); geographical forms (regular or distorted, a simple drawing or a technical drawing relating to a profession); framing (thickening, simple, ornamented, illustrative framing, crossing, shading); ornamenting (user instruction signs, combined in ornament-

ing forms, ornamenting motives, components of repetitive drawing); a system of lines (a maze, doodles showing irregular patterns when combined, straight or regularly curved lines); and irregular ut qua Steif doodles.

The writing type includes: names (initials); other words (such as addresses or dates), letters, and characters; digits, special signs (square roots, musical notes, shorthand, or chemical symbols); and formed ornamented signs and words (words in decorative letters: "calligraphy", words written in distorted letters, ornate letters, digits, or characters).

Szászi (1943, 8) identifies the circumstances (and motivation) in which doodles are produced: external association, a liking for drawing, a drawing situation, a wish to ornament, fulfilment of desires, emotional release, motional release, disguising, and repetition. She explains: "involuntary doodling is none other than fulfilling certain primitive artistic aspirations" (1943, 46). Feuer (2002, 26–27) additionally mentions dispelling boredom and releasing tension as well as escaping from the given situation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of these motivations are present in creative human activities, in everyday life and in the arts, and so their impressions are present in our primary spoken and secondary written language use alike. A profound analysis of the phenomena leads us to realise, and this conclusion has not yet been drawn by anyone else, that literacy is not necessarily a secondary form of language use, since motivation appears in doodling (at the age of about two) long before the individual masters the skill of writing, and it is only joined by literacy at a later stage (resulting in the adoption or transformation of conventional characters).

The semantics of doodling examines the meaning of doodles, including the symbols they comprise, the elements and components of which include: lines, combinations of lines, geometric forms, and figures (plants and animals, objects, or other forms). The frequently drawn tulip symbol, for instance, represents "A symbol of womanhood and love. The doodler is a noteworthy, impressive phenomenon. They like being in the focus of attention but will not go out of their way to achieve it. They mature their thoughts and ideas inside and share only the outcome with others. They like colours, brilliant, flashy things. They have good taste, aesthetic flair and artistic talents" (Feuer 2020, 172).

Szászi (1943, 45–46) sees playful and artistic imagination reflected by doodling; the playful side is aimed at the environment and existing (finished) things,

while the artistic side is driven by creative imagination. Artistic shaping and the stylising of things is illustrated by simplification and variation.

I have introduced my own evolutionary typology for a drawn or written doodle. Its underlying aspect is one of progress from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract (the development idea can be identified here too):

Drawing doodles

- simple (irregular) lines, curves, shading,
- formations, geometric figures,
- concrete representations (humans, animals, objects in their environment, along the concrete-abstract line),
- individual, creative ornamental motives,
- drawing, painting.

Written doodles

- letters, words,
- signatures (as self-representation),
- numbers, special symbols,
- ornamental symbols, calligraphy,
- writing: taking notes, drafting texts.

I have treated folklore studies-based and linguistic investigations of doodles in previous studies (for example, Balázs 1983, 1987, 1994).

Perception at the bottom of consciousness

Perceptual, artistic, and linguistic phenomena shed light on further exciting subconscious operations. A number of people possess the ability to associate other concepts, colours and numbers with letters, names, days, and months. I aim to explore this subject in another study, which is currently in progress.

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Enikő Sepsi – Attila Szabó

Reception Studies in the Sociology of the Theatre

Directions and Possibilities of Research

Abstract

The study briefly summarises the position of sociological research on theatre reception in Hungary and its findings to date, outlining the main research activities of the new Research Group on Theatre Education and the Sociology of the Theatre at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University. In the second section, we will present the report of an international questionnaire-based survey conducted on a large sample, which can serve as a methodological and theoretical basis for subsequent research. In 2005, the STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) international Sociology of the Theatre research group, a collaborative partnership between several European universities, recorded detailed performance evaluations of theatregoers in four European cities between 2010 and 2013, with the aim of mapping differences in audience experience and attitudes in countries with very different theatre systems (the Netherlands, the UK, Estonia, and Hungary). The survey included 156 performances, and a total of 7,121 respondents participated in it. In addition to presenting the research methodology and the general results, this paper will focus on the evaluation of the relevance (both personal and social) of the performances.

Key words: Sociology of the Theatre, audience research, research on reception, social and personal relevance, theatre systems

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Institutional framework, results to date

With regard to research in the field of Anthropology of the Theatre, we have reported on the work of our Research Group on Ritual, Theatre, and Literature at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University in our volume *Poetic Rituallity in Theatre and Literature* (Domokos and Sepsi, 2021), as well as in several individual publications (monographs and studies.¹ The publication of the encyclopaedic, theoretical and at the same time practical handbook on the Anthropology of the Theatre by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (*A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*) in the Károli Books series also represents an important milestone in this field. This publication was accompanied by personal meetings and public discussions. The results of the research were also incorporated into the theatre science training at Károli in the course of model curriculum reforms, through which we repaid several decades' worth of debt. The reason for our mentioning results garnered from the Anthropology of the Theatre in an article concerned with the Sociology of the Theatre is that we agree with the assertion of Patrice Pavis that Sociology is almost slipping into the uncharted domain of Anthropology, which may be due to the fact that researchers appear to be opting for a more universal, less social perspective rather than specific, local findings.

Perhaps also for the same reason, fewer results in the field of the Sociology of the Theatre have been achieved to date in Hungary. Of these, the most important theoretical results are undoubtedly found in the volume edited by Katalin Demcsák, Zoltán Imre and Péter P. Müller entitled *At the Border of Theatre and Sociology* (Demcsák et al., 2005), which includes Hungarian translations of studies by Maria Shevtsova and Claudio Meldolesi on disciplinary boundaries and interdisciplinary interactions, and Zoltán Imre's article on audience research, as well as a foreword by Katalin Demcsák. Maria Shevtsova, who was influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, has developed a questionnaire for the Anglo-Italian audience in Australia, in which she outlined the socio-cultural profile of the audience and which can be used, with various modifications, for student theses. This treats the following aspects:

¹ See the website of the research group: <http://www.kre.hu/portal/index.php/ritus-szinhaz-es-irodalom-ci-mu-kutatasi-projekt.html>

1. The social composition of the audience
(gender, age, ethnic group, education, occupation)
2. The viewer's relationship with Italy
(for bilingual English–Italian performances)
3. Knowledge of and relationship with Italo-Australian information sources
4. Cultural standards and knowledge of the arts
5. Other visited theatres
6. How two pieces interact and change
7. Suggested themes for the company's or group's next *mise en scène*
8. What audience is the company targeting?

Audience surveys, primarily but not exclusively commissioned by theatres, are being conducted more frequently across Europe, yet few large-sample questionnaire surveys have been conducted in the field of reception research, and the results of these small surveys with samples of up to fifty people are not always readily available. The newly established Károli University Research Group on Theatre Education and the Sociology of Theatre will write a summary of the methodology of this type of research and conduct questionnaire-based and focus group surveys with the participation of students working on their theses.²

Studies on reception are complex, since they usually involve the representatives of not one or two, but several disciplines. Our recent study with Noldus-

2 Besides its research on reception, the work of the research group also extends to the field of theatre education, which is led by Ádám Bethlenfalvy, who formulated the directions of research as follows: in 2013, a research study, which was unique on an international scale, was conducted in Hungary, mapping the situation of theatre education in Hungary, and, on the basis of its findings, provided terminology and an overview for both those working in the field and for scholars of culture and education. In 2023, a decade after the original study, it would be necessary to take another snapshot of the domestic situation, and to document it once more, and on the basis of this, to formulate recommendations, insights and directions for decision-makers, researchers and those working in the field. Theatre education has become important in the operation of independent theatres, and nowadays many permanent theatres successfully run such sections and groups. In the meantime, a number of professional (artistic and educational) good practices have been implemented in accordance with artistic and educational paradigms, which demonstrates that theatre education can be integrated into the operation of various types of theatre institutions. This research could significantly contribute to the awareness and development of theatre education in the professional medium of permanent theatres.

Contributing researchers from the faculty of Károli University: Ádám Bethlenfalvy, Enikő Sepsí, Attila Szabó, Gabriella Kiss, István Lannert, Gábor Körömi. Prominent researchers of the second generation of theatre education, graduates of the KRE Master of Theatre Studies: Anikó Fekete, Krisztina Bakonyvári, Eszter Vági, Edit Romankovics, Melinda Gemza. National and international experts participating in the research team: Ádám Cziboly (Western Norway University), Dániel Golden (SzFE).

Facereader8 on artistic experience (in terms of the six basic emotions) was published in two papers (Sepsi 2019, and Sepsi, Kasek and Lázár 2022).

The questionnaire that was developed by the earlier international STEP research did not focus on social (for example, demographic) data series, but on mapping the experiences of the audience.³ That is why we will be able to use it as a methodological compass for the work of students and researchers. We will present a number of these previous, hard-to-access research results (Szabó 2019) in the following sections of this study.

Outlines of an international comparative research study on reception

Between 2010 and 2013, the research of the STEP Theatre Sociology Research Group 'City Project' attempted to map theatre systems in several European countries and examine in detail the audience experience and the links between the said systems and the experiences. Some members of the research team have evaluated the results of the audience research in several individual and co-written papers, and are currently preparing an English-language volume, which will primarily present the methodological conclusions of the research. The STEP theatre sociology research group was established in 2005 with the aim of examining the theatre systems of several European countries by way of international comparison and exploring the various aspects of the role of theatre in society. Researchers from the Netherlands (the University of Groningen), Ireland (Trinity College Dublin), Denmark (Aarhus University), Slovenia (AGFRT Ljubljana), Switzerland (the University of Bern), Estonia (the University of Tartu) and Hungary (the University of Debrecen, OSZMI) have participated in this collaborative initiative. The first tangible result of the research team was the volume *Global Changes – Local Stages*, which was published in 2009, and which presents, through individual studies, the following specific characteristics of the theatre systems in the seven countries: the impact of social changes on theatre systems, the value system of theatre policy, the different practices of theatre funding, the reception of the values of theatregoing, and the relationship between systems and aesthetics

³ Summary studies of previous research are available here (Amfiteater, Ljubljana): https://slogi.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Amfiteater-_web.pdf.

(Van Maanen et al., 2009). The reception research of the City Project was presented in a special bilingual issue of the Slovenian journal *Amfiteater* (Šorli 2015). The research team's most recent academic publication is *The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy* (Edelman et al., 2016), but a number of papers and conference presentations have been produced as a result of their joint work.

In the STEP City Project research initiative, the aim of the work was to produce in-depth comparative studies on the functioning of the theatre systems in the participating countries, following a thorough collection of material with the same methodological background. The following cities participated in the descriptive part of the research: Aarhus (Denmark), Bern (Switzerland), Debrecen (Hungary), Groningen (the Netherlands), Maribor (Slovenia) and Tartu (Estonia). In addition to a comprehensive mapping of the theatrical and cultural offer in each city, audience surveys conducted by way of questionnaires were also possible in four of the cities.⁴ The possibility of comparability was an important aspect in the selection of the cities: the research group chose medium-sized university cities operating as regional centres, which, with the exception of Bern, are not capital cities. With respect to a local tender, we were also able to conduct a survey in Newcastle and the Tyne region in the North of England. The City Project data collectors used the same detailed questionnaire in each city, which, in addition to the motivations for going to the theatre, aspects of choice of play, frequency of theatre attendance and general demographic data, was primarily intended to explore the audience experience of the performance. Respondents were asked to rate most questions on a six-point scale, with 6 indicating total agreement and 1 representing total disagreement. The theoretical principles of the research are summarised in detail in Hans van Maanen's study on the Sociology of Art, which was published in 2009. The methodological and practical issues of audience research were developed jointly by the STEP research group, under the guidance of Sociology of Art researchers at the University of Groningen⁵.

4 The English version of the questionnaire can be found in the study *The Value of Theatre and Dance for Tyne-side's Audiences*, but the Hungarian version has not yet been published.

5 Due to the unique working method of the research team and the enormous resources required for the extensive empirical research, all publications related to the results of the City Project can only be understood as collective intellectual creations. Although the formal conventions of scientific publication render it less possible to intellectually honour this kind of joint creative work, at least in the form of a list, I would like to mention the names of the participants in the research: Magdolna Balkányi, Zsigmond Lakó, Zsófia Lelkes (Debrecen), Louise Ejgod Hansen (Aarhus), Andreas Kotte, Frank Gerber, Beate Schappach, Mathias P. Bremgartner, Frank Gerber (Bern), Hans van Maanen, Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen, Marine Lisette Wilders, Antine Zijlstra,

City	Population	Average age group of theatre-goers	Number of respondents	Percentage with tertiary education	Number of performances surveyed
Groningen (The Netherlands)	190.000	43	1,068	41.3%	49
Debrecen (Hungary)	207.308	33	722	46.2%	9
Tartu (Estonia)	98.449	36	847	57.7%	12
Newcastle upon Tyne (England)	279.100	42	1,533	43.6%	15

Table 1. Basic demographic data for the surveyed cities

When describing the theatre systems, not entirely unexpectedly, the research team was faced with significant differences between the Eastern and Western European systems. The theatrical offer of university centres of a similar size is significantly larger in England and the Netherlands, which is undoubtedly linked to the intrinsic way in which the systems operate: the touring system in the Netherlands and the predominance of en-suite theatre in England account for the greater variety, while in Hungary and Estonia the permanent company form of repertory theatre dominates the theatre offer in the cities studied. However, the disadvantage of touring systems is that a performance can only be seen two or three times in a given city, so it reaches fewer viewers overall. However, audiences in Eastern European cities are considerably younger and theatre plays a more important role in the education system than it does in Western cities. Season ticket schemes offered to school-children and university students are only common practice in eastern cities. Dutch and English theatre, on the other hand, is significantly more effective in reaching the retired age group.

Anne-Lotte Heijink (Groningen), Ksenija Repina Kramberger, Maja Šorli (Maribor-Ljubljana), Anneli Saro, Hedi-Liis Toome (Tartu), Joshua Edelman, Stephen Elliot Wilmer, and Natalie Querol (United Kingdom, Ireland).

Important differences were also found regarding motivation for going to the theatre:⁶ the peculiarity of Newcastle was that music seemed to be the most important factor, although musical works did not dominate the sample. There were also differences in audience expectations of theatre: in Western European countries the need for entertainment is stronger, while in Eastern Europe theatre represents an important arena for learning, cultural education, and self-improvement. Western audiences generally found theatrical impressions considerably more entertaining, and this was not only the case in the lighter genres such as cabaret and musicals, but also in the appreciation of prose theatre (van den Hoogen 2015, 357)

That said, the important conclusion drawn by the City Project survey as a whole was that the differences between East and West in terms of viewer experience appeared to be relatively insignificant. The majority of respondents were for the most part satisfied with the quality of the productions, regardless of the city in whose theatre they saw it. The highest average score for all questions was given by the English respondents, who rated the presentations they had watched with an average score of 5.54, very close to the six-point maximum. However, respondents in Tartu, Debrecen and Groningen also gave a 5-point rating, indicating high satisfaction. On average, the highest scores in the four cities were awarded for the performance, the evening as a whole and the acting. This was followed by an assessment of the building, the theatrical forms, the staging, the appeal and recognisability of the theme, the attributes of the characters and the story. The lowest ratings were given to the negative indicators, overall, with respondents feeling that the performance was overly unconventional, complicated, burdensome, superficial, or boring. Personal relevance also scored below average, and respondents did not find the productions either comforting or challenging.⁷

6 The STEP research group survey on the motivation for theatregoing essentially confirmed the findings of Vászárhelyi's 2005 survey in Hungary (Vászárhelyi 2005).

7 The research group believes that the exceptionally high values in England, which are indicated in almost every group of questions, can be explained by the fundamental differences between the theatre systems. In the English theatre structure and in the selected sample, the presence of private theatres is considerably more significant, and the state support of theatres is not as extensive as in other countries. According to the STEP group's hypothesis, therefore, the majority of viewers are not so critical of theatres that do not operate with public funds.

The personal and social relevance of theatre in the light of audience opinion

The Sociology of Theatre mainly focuses on the reception of theatre by the community, and its patterns, which the STEP research group attempts to discover in the realisation of artistic values, and in the operation of the social functions of theatre. The questionnaire research revealed surprising correlations between the respondents' personal and social evaluation of theatre. The study asked how much the respondents considered the given performance to be personally and socially relevant. In addition, in the following section of the form, they were also asked how much they considered what they saw in the theatre to be worthy of thought and discussion. Somewhat surprisingly, personal involvement was rated below average in all the cities, where, in addition, talking about presentations was rated slightly higher than thinking. The social relevance of the presentations was rated around average in the case of Tartu, and below average in the three other cities. The perception of personal attachment scored even lower. One interpretation could be that, on average, the respondents felt less that the productions in the survey were directly for or about them. When asked if the actors expected anything from the audience, the responses were higher than for personal involvement (Debrecen 3.46⁸, Tartu 4.17, Groningen 3.24, Newcastle 4.17).

Correlation coefficients can further refine the relationship between relevance and processing in a company. The data shows that audiences in all four cities like to think as well as talk about the performance in question. The correlation between the two questions is very strong, averaging 0.75. The higher they rated a performance, the more willing they were to share their opinion with others, and this was particularly true in Groningen and Newcastle. However, whether the performance was socially relevant was less important in evaluating the evening as a whole. We found above-average willingness to share theatregoing experiences in all four cities. The English, Hungarian and Estonian respondents, and finally the Dutch, enjoyed talking about the performances with others the most. In all cities, social processing was preferred to thinking about the performance, but Newcastle showed the greatest difference in this respect.

⁸ Those filling the questionnaire were asked to express their agreement with the given question on a 6-point scale, where 6 indicated the highest and 1 the lowest agreement. In the following, the numbers in parentheses represent the average of the opinions of the respondents.

	Thinking	Talking	Socially relevant	Personally relevant
Debrecen	4.41 n=1,250	4.63 n=1,250	3.46 n=1,250	2.99 n=1,250
Tartu	4.64 n=1,396	4.66 n=1,396	3.88 n=1,381	2.94 n=1,396
Groningen	4.10 n=1,739	4.31 n=1,740	3.60 n=2,593	3.10 n=1,630
Newcastle upon Tyne	5.13 n=1,551	5.47 n=1,551	4.17 n=1,480	3.73 n=1,474

Table 2. Average scores for relevance questions in the four cities

Thus, the questionnaires reveal that audiences mostly see the same performances as socially and personally relevant, yet they see theatres as failing to make them feel more personally involved in exploring socially relevant issues, or they refrain from acknowledging personal involvement. This is confirmed by the correlation between personal involvement and thinking, which is also low, especially in Debrecen and Newcastle. Since more emphasis is placed on speaking rather than thinking, and social relevance instead of personal relevance, it can be hypothesised that the audiences in the four cities value theatregoing as a social event rather than an opportunity for personal development.

However, it would be premature to conclude that theatre is no more than a social gathering. The evaluation of the performance as a whole, the experience of the evening spent in the theatre and the evaluation of the theatre building paint a different picture. Examining the entire sample, in all four cities the closest correlation was visible between the evaluations of the performance and the evening. We observed a weaker but still very significant co-movement between the evaluation of the evening as a whole and the theatre building. Finally, the rating of productions showed the weakest correlation with the buildings. This result, which was measured on a relatively large sample, confirmed internationally the common idea that the primary role in the perception of theatre as a social practice is played by the theatre production and its quality.

How important do viewers believe that it is for good performances to be socially relevant? Examining the prose productions, social relevance was rated only tenth in terms of the strength of the correlation. The respondents primar-

ily valued the effectiveness, professional sophistication, interesting, exciting, inspiring nature and completeness of the theatre experience. Social relevance showed a relatively significant co-movement with the respondents' perception of the performance in Groningen (correlation coefficient .436), while in Tartu and Debrecen this correlation was slightly lower (.323, .313), and in Newcastle the weakest (.140). According to another question, the respondents regarded the captivating setting of the story, the quality of the direction and the performance as most important. Overall, we can see that the most important factor for audiences to judge a good performance is its captivating nature.

Although the autonomous, aesthetic aspects proved to be important, it cannot be said that the degree of relevance of the presentation is not also significant. The theme of the work scored highly on the list of criteria for the selection of a theatre performance in all four cities: in order of importance, it was ranked second in Groningen and Newcastle, third in Debrecen and fifth in Tartu. In Debrecen, the importance of the subject matter decreased with the educational level of the respondents, ranking third among those with a certificate of secondary education, fourth among those with a BA degree and fifth most important among those with a PhD. The same correlation was also found in Tartu, but in Groningen and Newcastle the topic matter was of equal importance, regardless of education. This result supports the hypothesis that more highly educated and experienced theatregoers are more willing to view theatre performance as an autonomous art form, a complex work of art, rather than an arbitrary medium for telling a story. The results of the STEP audience research may provide additional opportunities for a deeper analysis of this connection, which cannot be discussed in detail here.

The questionnaire survey that was conducted in 2012 concerned nine performances in Debrecen⁹. In terms of both social and personal relevance, the Debrecen audience considered the staging of Igor Viripayev's contemporary play, *Illusions*, to be the most outstanding performance of the time. Viktor Ryzakov's direction was also highly rated in terms of form, but in comparison with the other performances it did not receive as much acclaim as the high rating awarded for social and personal relevance. Second place was awarded

9 The questionnaire survey was conducted by Dr. Magdolna Balkányi, Associate Professor of the Institute of German Studies at the University of Debrecen, with the participation of Zsigmond Lakó, Assistant Professor and students of the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Debrecen.

to the Csokonai Theatre's production of *Peter and Jerry*, surpassing *Illusions* in terms of social relevance, but falling short in terms of personal relevance. The prominent position of the Hajdú Táncegyüttes folk dance performance in the ranking is surprising, probably reflecting the views of respondents who are folk dance enthusiasts. The twenty-two respondents aged 18-38 attended amateur or folk dance performances more often than the others, with an average of 1.7 times per year, compared to 1.3 for the full sample. Although the reception of the performance was neither challenging (2.9) nor difficult (2.46), it was extremely interesting (5.73), mainly due to the high technical ability of the dancers (5.5). Respondents considered the dance performance to be both socially (3.9) and personally (4.1) relevant, and this was reflected not only in the scores but also in the free text responses. Public opinion showed that it was definitely worth talking (5.0) and thinking (5.47) about the performance. The positive reception of the folk dance performance suggested that not only plot-driven prose genres but also dance performances of high artistic quality have the potential to engage the audience in their own world (5.54) and activate their imagination (5.47).

The Tragedy of Man, which was directed by Attila Vidnyánszky, ranks fourth in terms of relevance, and has received outstanding ratings based on the viewing experience, which is mainly due to the excitement it generated. In terms of theatrical form, the stand-up comedy night in Lovarda scored higher than *The Tragedy of Man* in terms of both social and personal relevance, but offered a considerably lighter experience in terms of the viewing experience. The university theatre company SzínLáz performed its own adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in non-theatrical, so-called "found venues", namely, the university basement and the Botanical Garden, which the audience, for the most part university students, found outstanding for its personal connectivity. They praised the humour of the performance and the intriguing treatment of the themes raised.¹⁰ Scoring lowest in regard to relevance were a Puccini opera, a puppet show and the Körúti Színház's adaptation of *Meseautó*, which was a guest appearance in the city. What these three presentations have in common is that their aesthetic dimension scores are higher than their relevance factor scores. The puppet performance received the second highest score for

¹⁰ It is also important to point out that only forty-four questionnaires were returned, while only forty viewers were able to attend the performance at any one time.

formal execution (5.35), but it remained below average in terms of relevance. Meseautó, a guest performance at the Railway Workers' Cultural Centre, scored the lowest in both social and personal relevance, although it is fair to say that this is not the fundamental purpose of this particular form of entertainment. Its reception is not particularly demanding for the spectator (2.22) and, with the exception of the entertainment aspect, it scores below average for theatrical forms. Many respondents expected a staged version of the well-known film and wanted to hear the popular songs live, recalling the humorous moments and turns of phrase uttered by the star actors in the classic film in the stage production. The title track was one of the songs that was missed by the audience from the music, which was rearranged to create a more modern sound. The majority of the free text comments were highly critical of the theatre hall: parking difficulties, ventilation, the technical state of the stage, and the sound system all came under criticism. In this case, it is clear that, despite the overall satisfactory performance (5.16), the inadequacy of the theatre building (3.96) was a factor that reduced the overall rating for the evening (4.78).

The high relevance scores of the performance of *Illusions* in Debrecen show that a contemporary drama that is performed with a strong theatrical vision can be extremely relevant, even if it deals with personal rather than social issues. The two actresses, Magdolna Vass and Nelli Szűcs, and the two actors, Zsolt Trill and Attila Kristán, speak "directly" to the audience with the help of microphones, in a monologue-based dramatic structure that is very typical of Viripayev's plays. Audiences were most impressed by the acting (5.46) and the theme (5.23). Several respondents highlighted the non-instrumental presence of the actors, the direct, authentic performance and the natural style of the acting. Both the direction (5.0) and the theatrical forms presented in the performance (4.8) received high scores, and the *mise en scène* was considered to be in no way too conventional (2.2). Several respondents mentioned the baking of a cake on the stage as their favourite scene, in which the actors shared the cake with the audience at the end. This further strengthened the immediacy of the play, and the common celebration dissolved the boundaries between actor and the viewer, and viewer and other viewers. The sense of relevance of the performance was also strengthened by the decision made on the form of the play: at a certain point the respondents could see video interludes in which residents of Debrecen talked about love. This is not only a formal innovation in the palette of instruments of the Csokonai Theatre, but also, as one of the

viewers explained, “film clips of the man in the street made the problem raised very real”.¹¹ Another respondent also praised Ryzakov’s courageous directorial choices, which represented a deviation from the usual norm. The close connection between theatrical form and relevance was eloquently expressed by a 43-year-old woman who liked the final scene of the performance best, “when the actress offered the audience the cake she had made. This made the performance, which had been ‘scratching’ human emotions, very human. Making the cake during the presentation was an extremely innovative and logistically challenging exercise anyway.”¹² It is noteworthy that, although the characters and actors are between thirty-five and forty years old, the secondary school audience also considered the performance relevant to them, significantly more so than those over thirty-five. The performance is thought-provoking (5.1), worth discussing (5.06), not challenging to watch as a theatrical experience (3.04), as it is light (4.0), easy to follow (4.0) and entertaining as a whole (4.6). Thus, although *Illusions* is essentially a staging of a contemporary drama on a personal theme using the tools of the director’s theatre, at several points the mise-en-scène uses more the tools common in documentary approaches for “breaking down” the fourth wall.

Besides Debrecen, it is also true for the other cities that the audience did not consider the productions of classical dramas to be the most relevant, but rather contemporary texts. These works generally received average ratings for social relevance in all the cities: in Debrecen, *The Tragedy of Man* (3.75), in Groningen, *Mesél a bécsi erdő (Tales from the Vienna Woods)* (3.48), in Tartu, *Oblomov* (4.18 – where the average is 4.19), and in Newcastle, *Pygmalion* (4.32 – where the average is 4.62). The specificity of Newcastle is that while the indicators for the aesthetic and general evaluation of the evening are the highest, the respondents’ evaluation of personal relevance is the lowest. The classical operas *La bohème*, *Carmen*, and *Tosca*, did not stand out for their topical content, either. Musical entertainment performances and musicals also scored similar or even lower ratings.

11 Excerpt from the free text answers of the questionnaire used in Debrecen, recorded by the research team after the performance of *Illusions* at the Csokonai Theatre. Question 13: Which part of the performance did you like the most and why? The questionnaire was completed anonymously.

12 Ibid.

Further lines of research

The STEP quantitative research study, an internationally unique undertaking, sought to map the detailed experience of viewers in distant cities, using the same questionnaire, in a large sample, in a theoretically reflective framework. The large amount of empirical data collected provides many as yet untapped research opportunities, which, beyond their local relevance, may reveal remarkable theoretical connections in systems of European theatre-viewing experience. It is also true, meanwhile, that in the process of interpretation, researchers face several obstacles with regard to methodology and data collection, which make the given reading difficult or even impossible. Audience research has shown that European audiences value the relevance of theatre performances, considering it a separate aspect from other artistic functions of the performance (for example, entertainment). Just because a performance is entertaining does not mean that it cannot also be very relevant at the same time, but the most important thing for the theatrical experience is the quality of the artistic presentation, the overwhelming nature of the performance, and its worldliness. Personal relevance was ranked unexpectedly low in all the European cities examined, which leads us to think further about the complex cognitive mechanisms of viewer identification. At the level of reception, there are differences between “western”, mainly privately operating theatre systems (for example, in England) and “eastern”, state and municipally owned theatre systems (for example, in Estonia), but both structures are capable of producing performances that address significant social issues and that are perceived and appreciated by audiences in all four cities in a similar way. In each city, contemporary texts, transcripts or staging embedded in a specific topical context proved to be more relevant for the viewers than classical dramatic representations. From the methodological point of view, it was revealing that the analysis of a performance with regard to reception can be greatly enhanced if a significant number of well-documented audience opinions are available in a quantifiable form, which we were only able to glimpse briefly in this study. The STEP research team is currently working on a large amount of empirical data. An upcoming multi-authored volume will mainly present the methodological aspects and lessons learned from the research, and is expected to be published in 2023 in the Routledge theatre audience research book series.

A starting point for further investigation of the relationship between personal identification (empathy) and relevance is the application of our earlier study on the reception of artistic experience (Sepsi 2019 and Sepsi, Kasek and Lázár 2022), which would entail the addition of a larger sample size psychometric analysis to the methodology. In this study, the micro-facial expressions recorded by Noldus were assessed in the light of psychometric tests to obtain a more nuanced picture. Given the importance of early mother-child and father-child experience in the development of empathy skills, and their involvement in the development of mentalisation and mirror neurones, we scored the mimic reflection of the reception of artistic experience according to the poles of the empathy, attachment, and parenting scales. When examining the overall test sample for empathy and microexpressions measured with the Noldus Face Reader 8 tool, we observed that the mimic responses among the subjects with low overall empathy that were revealed in the microexpressions found by the programme clearly show a predominance of angry, sad, surprised or disgusted responses, while for subjects with higher than average scores, cheerful expressions predominate over surprised and occasional angry or sad expressions. The psychometric tests made it possible to examine this indicator of artistic reception in the context of developmental psychology. Similarly, the STEP methodology can be supplemented with a psychometric questionnaire survey with a larger sample.

Further research employing a similar methodology is currently being conducted at the Institute of Fine Arts and Liberal Arts of the Károli Gáspár Reformed University, and an adapted version of the questionnaire presented here is currently being used by an MA student of Theatre Studies in his thesis, analysing the reception of a performance staged by the National Theatre, mainly from the perspective of secondary school students. This autumn, another student will begin research on a similar optic. We will provide an account of these results later within the framework of co-authored and individual studies, in addition to which we also plan to write a seminar notebook that will introduce the students to the methodology of the Sociology of Theatre, thereby encouraging the birth of further academic student works.

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Péter Szitás

The World of Theatre in a Time of Change

Before, During and After the Pandemic

Abstract

The past two years have posed unprecedented challenges for the cultural sector as a whole, including theatres. The outbreak of the pandemic, and the restrictions imposed to contain it, turned the institutional routine on its head, placing the world of the performing arts in a dimension alien to it. Our study focuses on the internal processes that characterised theatres before, during and after the pandemic. We will illustrate how the venues have responded to the enforced closures, what they have done to preserve their communities and audiences, and whether they have acquired valuable knowledge at a level that may be applied in returning them to their former domain.

Key words: theatre, cultural life, closures, funding, lessons learned

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Introduction

A recurring theme in the literature at the level of network researchers and epidemiologists is that of the appearance of a virus that will force humanity to radically change its way of life. In the public mind, this has usually been depicted as a kind of dystopia, a popular apocalyptic backdrop for artistic works. While history has documented the major epidemics that have directly resulted in the deaths of millions of people, they have usually occurred either in the distant past or in places physically distant from Western civilization, which we, living in a twenty-first century postmodern urban civilization, and as beneficiaries of advanced medicine and health care, have merely ignored. However, the announcement of pandemic restrictions in early 2020, the closure of international border crossing stations, the transformation of air travel, the imposition of home office working and online learning, the banishing of cultural life to the virtual world and the resulting general disruption have affected humanity as a whole.

The period that we have left behind is not without its consequences, and new situations always offer opportunities for experience and learning. Our study focuses on the issues of change, transition and modification, with reference to a specific slice of the cultural sphere, that of the world of theatre. Our aim is to investigate whether the domestic theatre scene has learned from the past two years, and if so, how and whether it can or intends to use the knowledge it has gained in the future. We have collected data by way of interviews conducted in three theatres in Budapest, namely, the National Theatre, the József Attila Theatre and the Vígszínház. Despite the fact that these institutions are not physically distant from each other, their audiences, their frameworks for self-expression, their maintainers and thus their financial resources differ considerably. In our work we distinguish three time periods, namely, before the closures, during the closures, and today.

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The demand for theatre in Hungary

Clichéd declarations of the “cultured-nationality” of any people are usually supported, as well as being formulated, from a subjective-emotional starting point. At the same time, there are certain objective and accurate scientific indicators that are certainly worth considering in order to assess the validity of the above statement. One of these is analysis of data related to individual participation in cultural events and theatre performances, the results of which show that Hungary is also an internationally outstanding performer in this respect. According to a 2019 study by Világgazdaság, in Hungary “we spend roughly twice as much on theatre tickets as [people do] in other EU member states”.¹ The figures of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office reveal that while in 2008 there were 4.076 million theatre visits in Hungary, within a decade this number has doubled, reaching 8.628 million, which reflects the tendencies within the country, although this does not provide a comparison with other countries.² The rate of growth is striking, especially in relation to the country’s population. Moreover, if we add to this the diachronic data compiled by the World Bank on the development of Hungary’s gross domestic product³, then we can clearly see that the growth rate of our demand for offline cultural consumption is outpacing the growth of our economy, and at the same time it also suggests that above a certain relative income level, the Hungarian population is willing to spend more than ever on attending cultural events.

However, the overall picture is more nuanced. There are strong indications⁴ that such a large increase in the number of theatre tickets purchased is not only related to the increasing popularity of the theatre, but that there is also a strong correlation with the loopholes of the previously existing corporate tax relief (TAO) system. The scheme, which was introduced in 2009, provided

1 VG. 2019. „Egyre többen vesznek színházjegyet, főleg Budapesten.” Viewed on 14 March 2022. <https://www.vg.hu/kozelet/2019/09/egyre-tobben-vesznek-szinhazjegyet-foleg-budapesten>

2 Hungarian Central Statistical Office, “Theatres.” Viewed on 25 March 2022. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/ksp/hu/ksp0013.html

3 “GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$) – Hungary.” Viewed on 25 March 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=HU>

4 Fabók, Bálint. 2018. „Közel hatmilliárd forint közpénzt zsebelt be a színház- és tao-machinátor környezete.” G7. Viewed on 25 March 2022. <https://g7.hu/kozelet/20180125/kozel-hat-milliard-forint-kozpenzt-zsebelt-be-a-szinhazas-tao-machinator-kornyezet/>

the sector with a previously unprecedented level of additional resources, and was deemed popular with market operators until its withdrawal on the 31st of December 2018. In general terms, the procedure meant that companies paying tax in Hungary could offer their corporate tax payments to the theatres they preferred, which could then acquire additional funds of up to 80% of their net ticket revenue.⁵ In theory, this created a win-win situation between the parties, although practice has shown that it also provided an excellent opportunity for subterfuge and, ultimately, corruption. This was one of the reasons given by the government for discontinuing it.

Despite today's advanced Internet penetration across broad social strata, the cultural sphere is one area that requires a high proportion of personal physical presence. After all, while cinemas and possibly concert halls can be replaced, albeit offering a reduced experience by way of commercially available high-tech devices, no analogue or digital media can reproduce the personal, presence experience of the theatre. In addition to their effects on tourism, the restrictions introduced in the spring of 2020 affected the cultural sector in the most comprehensive way. The seriousness of the situation is clearly illustrated by the fact that the last time there was a nationwide cessation of theatre performances was during the Second World War, and never before in peacetime.⁶ The impact of this has not been lost, as data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office⁷ indicates that by 2020 the number of theatre visits in Hungary had almost halved, compared to the figures for 2018. This is mainly due to the closures, but may also be linked to the reform of the TAO system.

Sites of investigation

In all the countries where it is found, the "theatre of the nation" is usually considered the community's primary venue. Hungary is no exception. This status is mainly due to the prestige of the institution, its privileged status resulting from

5 Szabó, Yvette. 2015. Fantomügynökök lepték el a színházakat. Viewed on 26 March 2022. VS. <https://vs.hu/gazdasag/osszes/fantom-ugynokok-leptek-el-a-szinhazakat-1218#!s0>

6 „Ezután: Mikor állhatnak újra lábra a színházak?” 2020. Viewed on 26 March 2022. <https://vs.hu/gazdasag/osszes/fantom-ugynokok-leptek-el-a-szinhazakat-1218#!s0>

7 Hungarian Central Statistical Office. "Theatres." Viewed on 25 March 2022. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/ksp/hu/ksp0013.html



Figure 1. The National Theatre

its direct maintenance by the state, its existence in constant public spotlight and the high quality of the professional work usually performed there. With regard to infrastructure, the newest of the theatres that we examined is the one located at the Pest bridgehead of the Rákóczi Bridge, with its eclectic building designed by Miklós Ybl Prize-winning architect Mária Siklós⁸, which opened its doors only twenty years ago, on the 15th of March, 2002. The National Theatre's journey to the inaugural production of Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* has a long history, but it is far beyond the scope of this paper to discuss it. What is important to mention in order to emphasise the physical proportions and possibilities is that, in addition to the 619-seat auditorium⁹ and the Bajor Gizi Salon, which can accommodate fifty people and serves as a permanent performance space, there are also two studio stages in the building. The latter spaces are named in honour of the nation's former distinguished theatre artists Hilda Gobbi and Attila Kaszás. The National Theatre works with a company of thirty-two to thir-

8 Bojár, Iván András. 2015. „Egy jó színházat akartunk” – Iván András Bojár's interview with Mária Siklós. *Octogon Architecture & Design*. Viewed on 20 March 2022. <https://www.octogon.hu/epiteszet/interju-siklos-maria-val/>

9 National Theatre. “Visit, Building.” Viewed on 19 March 2022. <https://nemzetiszinhas.hu/latogatas-epulet>

ty-five actors and actresses; guest artists usually take part in a single production, with numbers ranging from forty to fifty. The large company consists of 190 people, including staff working behind the scenes. Their actors rarely play in other theatres, but film shootings are becoming increasingly frequent. The National Theatre can be found on the most popular online social platforms, such as Facebook¹⁰ and Instagram¹¹. Their followers number over 35 thousand for the former and around seven thousand five hundred in the case of the latter.

One of the most popular theatres in Budapest and an architectural highlight of the Lipótváros district, the Vígszínház, which was built in 1896, has been one of the cultural centres of Pest since its opening. As reported on the official website of the theatre¹², the institution, which is owned by the capital but financed by the Ministry of Human Resources, has always considered it its mission to represent and promote the appearance of the European spirit in Hungary. In terms of genre, it has constantly striven for diversity, to cover a wide spectrum of dramatic performance. The building, which was designed by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer¹³, can accommodate an audience of 1,025¹⁴, while the institution's chamber theatre, the *Pesti Theatre*, which opened in 1967, has 500 seats.¹⁵ Their studio operates under the name *Házi Színpad (the Home Stage)*. It has a company of fifty-five members, with forty music and dance performers, respectively. Guest artists usually perform under contracts for roles. The Vígszínház's online penetration is outstanding; in addition to having the most visited website nationwide, its popularity on social media is also significant: on Facebook¹⁶ it has more than 120 thousand fans and 25 thousand followers on Instagram¹⁷. Content sharing on all platforms is continuous.

10 National Theatre. Viewed on 19 March 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/nemzetiszinhasz/>

11 National Theatre. Viewed on 19 March 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/nemzetiszinhasz/>

12 Vígszínház. "The 125-year old Vígszínház." Viewed on 19 March 2022. https://www.vigszinhaz.hu/a_szinhaz/a_vigszinhaz.php

13 Papageno. 2020. „Fellner és Helmer – A legismertebb színházépítész páros története." Viewed on 19 March 2022. <https://papageno.hu/featured/2020/07/fellner-es-helmer-a-legismertebb-szinhazepitesz-paros-tortenete/>

14 Vígszínház. "Vígszínház – auditorium." Viewed on 20 March 2022. http://www.vigszinhaz.hu/res/vig_nezoter_alaprajz.pdf

15 Vígszínház. "The Vígszínház – One of Central Europe's most beautiful theatres: the 125-year-old Vígszínház." Viewed on 20 March 2022. https://www.vigszinhaz.hu/a_szinhaz/a_vigszinhaz.php

16 Vígszínház. Viewed on 20 March 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/vigszinhaz/>

17 Vígszínház. Viewed on 20 March 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/vigszinhaz/>

Originally intended as a house of culture, the József Attila Theatre, which is maintained by the capital but financed by the Ministry of Human Resources, has been operating as an independent theatre since 1956, with the original aim of serving the cultural life of the mainly working-class community of North Pest. Since its foundation, however, it has consciously strived not to become a layer theatre, and also to constantly preserve, embrace and serve the complementary dichotomy of not only living in Budapest but also in the Angyalföld district at the same time. As a result, the institution's repertoire is colourful, including comedies, musicals and dramas. The 580-seat József Attila Theatre hosts around 110-120 thousand theatregoers a year.¹⁸ It employs more than a hundred actors per season. The large company is supported by seventy-three full-time employees. Like its peers, the institution is present in the most popular online communities. Its followers on Facebook¹⁹ numbers twenty thousand, with approximately sixteen thousand on Instagram²⁰.

The golden age of recent times

The period preceding the outbreak of the pandemic was extremely fruitful for all three of the institutions surveyed. By the end of the 2010's, the total number of visitors to the Vígszínház increased to 370,000, up from an average of 300,000 in the previous decade, and until the closure of the theatre, performances were almost always sold out. The situation is the same for the József Attila Theatre; its audience and performances were steadily growing until 2020. While in 2011, 213 performances were staged during the season, in 2018 there were 418. Their leading actors performed in ten to twelve plays, twenty to twenty-five nights a month. Attendance for the 2018/2019 season was 94.8 per cent, with record revenues. The popularity of accompanying programmes also indicated a strong upward trend, in addition to which, the purchase of tickets months in advance was also typical. Tickets sold steadily for all the performances of the upcoming monthly shows.

18 József Attila Theatre. "Theatre in Angyalföld – The History of the József Attila Theatre." Viewed on 29 March 2022. <https://jozsefattilaszhaz.hu/szhazunkrol/tortenetunk/>

19 József Attila Színház. Theatre. Viewed on 20 March 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/jozsefattilaszhaz/>

20 József Attila Theatre. Viewed on 20 March 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/jozsefattilaszhaz/>

The National Theatre also enjoyed an outstanding year in 2018, with more than 106,000 people attending its performances. In the following year, a slight decrease was apparent, but the number of guests paying the full ticket price increased by more than the difference between the two years. The National Theatre prefers a free-structure of season tickets, that is, a one-time purchase of four or six discount tickets, which can be used as desired, from performance to performance, or even on a one-time basis. Approximately twenty per cent of its ticket sales are in the form of season tickets.

The Vígszínház is one of the theatres in Budapest that adheres to the traditional season-ticket structure that has been in place for decades. Based on the data available, in the last full season there were nearly 40,000 season ticket holders, accounting for approximately twenty per cent of ticket sales. The structure of the József Attila Theatre's season tickets has undergone a major change recently, with 2019 data showing that the number of season ticket holders represented fourteen per cent of the total audience.

In closure

The Hungarian government declared a national state of emergency on the 11th of March 2020.²¹ Theatres were forced to close their doors with immediate effect as a result of this measure, which had been unprecedented for decades. This caught the institutions unawares and unprepared. This immediately prompted the questions: "What next?" and "What will happen to the companies, the audiences, the people working behind the scenes?" The situation was exceptional from both an artistic and an economic point of view, since the possibility of safely continuing its creative work in a closed community, especially the indoor rehearsal processes, was called into question, while at the same time, it became clear that the loss of revenue from ticket sales due to pandemic restrictions would result in an unpredictable reduction in resources, forcing an immediate adjustment of institutional budgets and business plans. Not all theatres were affected to the same extent, as their budgets vary widely.

²¹ Magyar Közlöny. 2020. "Government Decree 40/2020 (III. 11.) on the declaration of a state of emergency." Viewed on 30 March 2022. <https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/6ddbac40c788cb35b5bd5a-5be4bb31294b59f9fc/megtekintes>



Figure 2. The Vígyszínház

The funding model differs from one theatre to another; there are examples of public, municipal, foundation and private funding. In the context of the closures, the situation of the latter became the most unsustainable, as these theatres mainly cover their operating costs by selling tickets. Theatre funding has traditionally been an extremely sensitive area in Hungary, not only from a professional point of view, but also from a political one, in which rigid, ideologically organised front lines have been drawn since the change of political regime, as part of a large-scale cultural war. Many identify Act CXXIV of 2019, which created the National Council on Culture²², and which was ostensibly approved in order to strengthen national culture, as one of the battles of this "kampf". According to this piece of legislation, there are currently three theatres of strategic cultural importance in the performing arts sector in Hungary, namely, the National Theatre, the Hungarian State Opera House, and the Budapest Operetta Theatre.

²² "Act CXXIV of 2019 on the National Council on Culture, Cultural Strategic Institutions and the Amendment of Certain Culture-related Acts." Viewed on 30 March 2022. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1900124.TV>

The institutions that we examined all receive budget support. The National Theatre, which is financially supported by the Ministry of Human Resources, does not limit itself to maximising its ticket revenues on account of its privileged status. It is a national strategic task to guarantee that the creative staff of the National Theatre may work with a freedom that is not subject to the constraints of the market and that can fully achieve the goals that are declared in accordance with the “national” character of the institution.

From the very first moment of the closures, it was noticeable that the government was taking a generous approach to the cultural sector as a whole, including theatres and artists. While state support for the former has not been reduced, despite the closed gates, the *Thank you, Hungary!* programme was established to assist the latter. The primary objective was to provide financial support to performers who had lost their daily income due to the restrictions imposed by the emergency. The permanent members of the company were not affected; they continued to receive their salaries despite the closures, due to their status as employees. At the same time, it was expected of all publicly funded institutions from the beginning that, just as the state would not abandon them during these troubled times, they should not lose their audiences. As a result, during the emergency, all the theatres examined bore in mind the “pay for work” philosophy, which had been consistently emphasised by the government in the past, employing their staff as far as possible, regardless of their job title.²³

In the National Theatre each successive wave of the virus was addressed with different strategies. When the pandemic restrictions were imposed, the staff continued to receive their salaries and the institution tried to provide them with work. With the exception of art and artistic jobs, this did not involve any particular planning. Eight-hour working days were reduced to four or six hours a day, and tasks such as inventory-keeping, cleaning, and removing discarded or unwanted material, which would normally be postponed during normal

²³ At a macro level, workers in the theatre sector are divided into three main groups: artistic (actors, dancers, musicians, directors, choreographers, designers), supporting (prompters, assistants, the stage manager, tutors) and other (technical staff, economic-administrative workers, the organisation department, as well as those responsible for advertising and marketing operations). It varies from one institution to another whether they prefer to employ their permanent company members on a fixed-term or an indefinite contract basis. In addition, some stage productions are often supported by guest artists. They are usually contracted for a specific performance and are remunerated according to the number of performances they give.

operations, were also performed. Several of the theatre's staff volunteered for the National Ambulance Service, which was under considerable pressure at the time. The greatest challenge was to employ artists, as rehearsals were impossible. In many cases, isolation resulted in individuals suffering from depression, and a lack of purpose that took its toll on the art world as a whole. The National Theatre responded to the situation almost immediately, creating an online show called *Szín-Ház-Hoz (Theatre to your Home)*. Members of the company recorded various productions, usually lasting five to ten minutes, in a video format, which the National Theatre then shared with its followers via its Facebook profile. The content available to date²⁴ is diverse in terms of genre and entertainment, yet it provided a degree of brief but high-quality diversion for theatre lovers confined to their homes. The National Theatre also experimented with streaming performances during the third wave of the pandemic. An "on-demand" version of this was implemented, whereby viewers could buy tickets for pre-recorded performances. The main form of communication was by email, which was the most popular and well-established way of expressing opinions even before the closures.

In the spring of 2020, the work of the actors in the József Attila Theatre focused on online presence. Although voice and speech training, as well as physical, fitness and ballet training, were still available to the artists, they mainly used the free time that they now had for self-training.²⁵ Many of them also volunteered to work with the National Ambulance Service. A workshop entitled "*Theatre for all?*"²⁶, was held for theatre directors and public relations staff, to show how people with disabilities, particularly people with reduced mobility, as well as deaf and hard of hearing, and blind and partially sighted people, could have access to accessible theatre. The institution attempted to maintain contact with its audience through several forums during the closures. To this end, they launched a series of online programmes entitled *J@SzHome*²⁷, in which the company pre-

24 National Theatre. Viewed on 05 April 2022. https://www.facebook.com/nemzetiszinhaz/videos/?ref=page_internal

25 The József Attila Theatre did not have a company membership in the classical sense, but for the period November 2020 to July 2021, it employed nineteen artists as staff members.

26 József Attila Theatre. „A színház mindenké.” Viewed on 05 April 2022. https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=803193003777422

27 Eszter Vamosi. 2020. „Láthatónak maradni.” Viewed on 05 April 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/100196128285033/posts/109330650704914/>

Photo: Anett Kállai-Tóth



Figure 3. The József Attila Theatre's five-part TV mini-series "Theatre Company During the Quarantine"

sented ad-hoc productions via live online check-ins. The videos, which were made available on the Facebook platform, allowed viewers to not only enjoy the current (or actually cancelled) performances, but also to become acquainted with the members of the company, as they were the artists who were due to perform that day. 2020 also marked the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon. The institution's alternative reality game, called *Trianon-files*²⁸, was launched in association with the Hunyadi drama *A Feketeszárú cseresznye* (*The Black-stemmed Cherry*), which was being shown at the József Attila Theatre. In addition to online entertainment, a particularly important contribution was the creation of opportunities for teaching and learning through play. Later, an accessible version of the software was also created, in which the historical figures are brought to life through the voices of the company's actors. The pandemic inspired the artists of the József Attila Theatre to shoot the five-part TV series *The Company during*

²⁸ Trianon Files. Viewed on 05 April 2022. <https://trianonaktak.hu/>

*the Quarantine*²⁹, which can still be viewed on YouTube. The episodes of *Kulissza TV*³⁰, featuring interviews with the institution's background personnel, can also be found here. Performances were streamed twice.

In the initial period, the majority of spectators persisted, and only a small number demanded a refund of the ticket price. Later, however, this ratio worsened, and in practice it became apparent that the operation of the pass system in times of crisis could be problematic for the issuer. This was due to the fact that, while ticket sales were successfully frozen almost immediately in the spring of 2020, rescheduled performances had to be arranged for the large number of season ticket holders.

At the time of the closures, the Vígszínház also followed the employment model that we have already explained in relation to the National Theatre. A marked difference was that, unlike the National Theatre, the Vígszínház works with a large number of guest artists, who are remunerated according to the number of their performances. Given that crisis management in Hungary was particularly elaborate, and that theatres were not forced to make cuts even during the pandemic period, there was no obstacle to the guest artists receiving an advance payment from the theatre, the value of which would be "played out" later.

The finance and organisation departments were busy, and the shift also had to confront a number of new challenges, such as ensuring that online activities run smoothly. At the time of the closures, the online rehearsals of the actors were continuous, and live webcasts became a regular feature. The practical implementation of the latter meant that the programme was shown in real time in front of an empty auditorium, and that those who had bought tickets could follow it from their homes. This worked well, as *A Padlás (The Attic)* and *A dzsungel könyve (The Jungle Book)* both had connection numbers in the tens of thousands. It is important to note that these figures represent the number of "links" purchased, and so it is not unreasonable to assume that the actual number of people who viewed the production may have been several times higher. Despite the relatively high viewing figures, it was not possible to com-

29 József Attila Theatre. 2021. "József Attila Theatre – Társulat a vesztegzár idején – 1. rész: Kiből lesz a cserebogár." Viewed on 14 March 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD38RrmEVkU>

30 József Attila Theatre. 2021. "1 Kulissza TV: Pozsár Rózsa, Bergendi Áron, Fila Balázs." Viewed on 15 March 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY5ydd5BD68>

pensate for the loss of revenue from the cancelled performances. At the same time, this solution proved its worth, both in terms of interaction with the audience and employing the entire staff. That the Vígszínház operates in a twenty-first century fashion is clearly demonstrated by the way it reached out to one of the popular genres of our decade during the pandemic restrictions and launched its own podcast channel, called *Vígpodcast*.³¹ In episodes that were published on a daily basis, members of the company provided a wide range of audio material for a wide audience: in addition to theatre-related stories, they recorded and made available for free fairy tales, novels, short stories, and compulsory reading material for schools. In addition, the organisation department embarked on an intensive outreach programme. As part of this, they telephoned as many viewers as possible to enquire about their condition and their intentions regarding the tickets or season tickets they had bought. This was well received; people were pleased to be approached. During this period, the economic and organisational departments of the institutions had a considerable burden to bear, as they had to organise a system of refunds.

After reopening

For the cultural sphere as a whole, it was questionable whether the public would return in the event of the institutions opening their doors again, and if so, how soon and in what proportion. The fear of having viewers not being able to attend was not unfounded, since from the beginning of the closures, the media, politicians, the pandemic operative staff and epidemiologists all drew attention to the need for social distancing, through all available channels of communication. After reopening, three priorities were set for the theatres: on the one hand, the missed performances had to be rearranged, and on the other hand, the new season had to be announced and launched at the same time, and the auditoriums had to be filled as much as possible.

Revival of the performances presented immediately before the closures in the József Attila Theatre³² was of strategic importance, so this received proportionate marketing attention. However, due to the close proximity of the audiences and performers in the confined studio space, the repertoire was only

31 Vígszínház. "Víg podcast." Viewed on 16 April 2022. https://www.vigszinhaz.hu/a_szinhaz/podcast.php

32 As a result of the closures, only forty-nine performances could be held in the 2020/2021 season.

reintroduced gradually and was also delayed.

At the same time, ticket sales also decreased, and are now only recovering slowly. To compensate for this, the theatre first opened a ticket counter in the Pólus Center, and later in the Allee shopping centre and in Jászai Mari Square, besides also having a salesperson stationed twice a week in the Játékszín theatre. In addition, they entered into a contractual relationship with eighty commission ticket sellers, since in their case, ticket sales at the box office were always more important than online sales. Digital signs and LED facade lighting were also installed to help raise awareness.

Attracting their audience back as soon as possible was also a priority for the National Theatre. In addition to the institution's intensive poster campaign, it also made an image film, which was shown in cinemas. The nurturing of international relations and the theatre's immediate reopening following the lifting of the closures was identified as an important objective. One of the milestones was the rearranging of the previously cancelled Madcap International Theater Meeting (MITEM) in September 2021. Since the organisation of the following MITEM was on the agenda in April 2022, this international theatre event took place twice during one theatre season.

The audience of the Vígszínház reacted quickly to the reopening and immediately returned to the auditorium in significant numbers. Standing ovations



Photo: Anett Kállai-Tóth

Figure 4. The József Attila Theatre's five-part TV mini-series "Theatre Company During the Quarantine"

became standard, and often the actors also applauded the audience. The emotional charge of the performances has intensified compared to what was usual in the past.

Lessons learnt

In the last two years, the art world has faced constant challenges, but it has survived and returned. Among the lessons learnt during this period, the most important is that personal relationships cannot be replaced by something else. Despite the fact that a wide variety of Internet platforms of impeccable quality are available and that the virtual world has become a reality, none of them can permanently replace the experience of physical presence.

The important conclusion for artists is that feeling a sense of security is not the same as actually having it, especially when it comes to finance. While the actors of this sphere were characterised in countless cases by the maximisation of momentary profits, as opposed to long-term thinking under normal circumstances, the existence of the employee relationship in the pandemic situation was able to provide enormous added value compared to the practice of the invoicing system established in the sector, which at the same time does not calculate with vulnerability. Members of the affected community could only hope that the government would assist them. This happened in Hungary, but not in many countries around the world.

In addition to individual experience, there are also professional lessons learnt from the period that are worth considering. The theatre sector relies heavily on face-to-face presence, but there can be no delay in implementing online solutions. Although theatre cannot become two-dimensional, one of the prerequisites for survival and the growth of audiences in such a critical situation is to gain a more prominent position in digital space. Making high quality recordings of the performances and providing the technical backdrop for live online streaming has become indispensable. The former, for archiving purposes, is already prescribed by the current legal environment, but the latter is complicated by the complexity of royalties and the licensing system.

Challenges for the near future

Caution is a priority when planning for the new season, especially when it involves spending. This partly includes ensuring day-to-day liquidity and increased control over the entire work process, but also a greater degree of security in considering investments and strategic decisions made for the longer term. The aim is to maintain the operation of the theatre companies providing public service theatre, the repertoire and the season ticket system that is based on it. It has presently become a commonplace for there to be no longer any need to buy tickets in advance or queue for tickets to the most important programmes. Whereas in the past, when the tendency was to buy tickets months before the performance, today's uncertainty means that the decision to buy is made in the days immediately preceding the event. For all theatres, it is important to boost ticket sales once more. However, this is not just a question of art, as there are also strong economic preconditions for achieving it. The uncertainty is well illustrated by the fact that in the case of the Vígszínház, three strategies have been developed for the challenges of the near future – quoting the words of the financial manager, “a crisis version, a live-and-die version and a dream version”.

In the upcoming seasons, there will be fewer main stage productions with less costly and possibly reusable sets, and the main marketing focus will be on reviving existing repertoire. It is a general estimate that, in the event of an economic boom, the overall viewing figures of the sector will be able to return to close to the previous peaks in approximately three years. However, this is not guaranteed to happen. The question currently is whether the pandemic will truly be a thing of the past, and it is already certain that the outlook for the Hungarian economy as a whole will be affected by the new economic recession caused by the Ukrainian–Russian war.

As in all other sectors, the issue of remuneration is an important consideration in culture. On a day-to-day basis, real incomes are being eroded by unprecedented levels of inflation. This will be mitigated by the recent twenty per cent wage increase for the cultural sector as a whole, but the strong financial pressure on theatres, with particular regard to the technical staff, is expected to increase further, as they have to compete with market trends, which are already having a significant draining effect on the construction and concert industries.

Changes are also expected in ticket sales trends. Currently, over fifty per cent of tickets are sold on the Internet, as a result of which the agent system can be expected to disappear, and its position will be taken by larger online agents.

Conclusion

Viewed from the paradigm of economic rationality, it is theoretically possible to live without a theatre, but at the same time, with regard to a mental welfare society, it is not worthwhile. It is the responsibility of all of us to nurture our language and culture and pass it on to future generations. In this field, the role of the theatre is both invaluable and unavoidable. We have left behind us a golden era of theatre. In addition to the economic and organisational challenges, besides any others that are faced by the theatre companies, the education of cultural consumers and the organisation of new artistic and consumer generations will become a task in the near future that needs to be addressed through a strategy of joint research, dialogue, and foresight.

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Zsolt Antal

The National Character of Hungarian Culture

Challenges in the New Media Space

*“The culture of small nations must be retained
by the state, because if it privatises it,
it will set it on the road to destruction.”*
(György Spiró 2020)

Abstract

Globalisation and the explosion of communication technologies have created unprecedented challenges for states, with regard to their responsibility for the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage. In the era of digital content production, state cultural institutions have become key players, as they undertake the tasks of value preservation, value creation and value transfer, and in so doing provide an important public service. Such organisations are responsible for preserving the national character of culture in the face of the negative effects of globalisation, while creating a twenty-first century version of culture that meets the demands of the new media space and social networks.

Key words: national culture, new media, social networks, cultural institutions, public service, globalisation

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1. National culture in the age of globalisation and digitalisation

The competitiveness and success of a national community shows a close relation to both its cultural background and scientific performance. State institutions that safeguard and nurture national culture must face the negative effects and challenges of globalisation. In the twenty-first century, the character of culture is increasingly determined less by its conformity to traditional value criteria, but, as a result of global, market-driven processes, the presentation of a form of culture that is tailored to mass demand, and which is focused on entertainment and attracting attention, has come to the fore. This occurs concurrently with a worldwide deterioration of the credibility of high culture and the homogenisation, uniformisation and individualisation of different cultures (Antal 2011, 166; Kucsera 2021, 92). The current revolution in infocommunication, also referred to as the fourth industrial revolution, questions the social role and content of culture, blurring the hierarchy of values between popular and high culture, and creating an interconnectedness and interdependence of culture beyond the domain of the nation-state.

“[...] The infocommunication revolution has brought about the spread of the English language, a radical reduction of the spatial and temporal distances between individuals, groups, organisations and institutions, an intense migration of cultures, a transformation of lifestyles, networking, westernisation and homogenisation of popular culture” (Nemesi 2015, 99).

With this in mind, the study interprets the essence of culture through the threefold principle of value preservation, value creation and value transfer, applying the methodology of critical axiology (value theory), for the preservation of national cultural heritage. Value theory is an indispensable element of both ethics and aesthetics, and as such, it is of use for understanding the situation and challenges of institutions that cultivate and promote culture, and for identifying their potential. Péter Fekete, the Hungarian Secretary of State for Culture, may have also adopted this approach when, at the ceremony on the occasion of the Day of Hungarian Culture in 2020 at the Uránia National Film Theatre, he stated that:

“[...] Our notion of culture focuses on our national past, our roots clinging to existence, our national identity, our accumulated intellectual and material treasures and values. [...] It would not be good if technical progress were to abandon

culture, just as I would not consider it fortunate the other way round. We need to turn the world of computers, the world wide web and the worldwide networks towards culture, and we need to adapt culture to the accelerated and different civilisation trends" (Fekete 2020).

There are both pessimistic and optimistic scenarios for the integration of culture into computer-mediated communication, new media and social communication dominated by social networks (Tóth 2022, 6). The aim of this study is to examine the new media space as an arena for cultural communication and as an opportunity for mediation, despite the clearly negative effects and consequences of the revolution in infocommunication.

This paper is not intended to provide a detailed investigation of the academic discourse in which the term 'national culture', which is most often used to define our community identity, is embedded. It should be noted, however, that conservative and liberal thinkers differ in essential aspects of their concepts of nation and culture. Depending on their orientation, the individual authors approach the essence of these concepts based on entirely different premises, as well as including different attributes in the set of meanings behind the word (Csepeli 1987; Egedy 1998; Poszler 2000).

According to ethnographer Gábor Barna, by national culture "[...] we always mean a representative culture that produces political, social ideas, meanings, values and ideologies, and thus includes all the beliefs, interpretations and worldviews that influence social and political action.

Every national culture strives for the individuals under its influence to have a clear historical consciousness, common cultural forms of behaviour, a clear sense of belonging and a specific personality structure" (Barna 2011, 63). Extending Barna's definition to cultural institutions makes their value-creating and value-carrying role and significance conspicuous.

The common characteristic of theatres, museums, and other cultural institutions, as well as the media that play a role in cultural transmission, is that in contrast to the global, market-oriented perspective, they "prioritize the public interest, that is, they keep in mind the pursuit of the common good" (Antal 2017, 325), and they lay great emphasis on nurturing national culture and respecting traditions. With regard to the definition, it is also worth discussing why the present paper finds a definition conceived in an ethnographic paradigm to be the most suitable link for the study of the relationship between culture based on the Judeo-Christian tradition and the national character, and the new media

space dominated by social networks. This is because, compared to other disciplines, ethnography, which focuses on the study of folk culture, is the closest to the subject of study, in that it creates a cultural space that connects the past with the present, thus transcending the often misleading, over-politicised attempts of other disciplines to provide a definition.

2. The possibilities of value preservation and value transmission in the media

Even today, the publicity of cultural institutions is difficult to imagine without state, public service media and quality journalism. Public service radio and television are the primary mediators for cultural institutions in presenting their works and values, and in moulding and orienting a culture-loving and understanding audience. The task of the public service media is precisely to maintain content services that ensure the presentation of national interests, values, and opinions (Antal 2011, 51), to nurture national culture, language, and identity (McQuail 2003, 42), and to satisfy the social and cultural needs of the public.

The ethos of public service information therefore also includes the need to adhere to and establish high-quality professional standards, while at the same time attempting to correct the shortcomings of the offerings of market-based media. For decades after the Second World War, there was a persistent difference between the perceptions of market and state actors in the dual media system, and a disparity in their influence potential.

Thanks to the entertainment-oriented content offered by market players, which also cover serious topics in a popular form (such as entertainment, infotainment, and edutainment), and to tabloid-style, sensationalist editing, they were, from the beginning, more successful in homogenising and transforming the public into consumers than the public service media in the social integration of the public and the forming of the citizens' sense of community journalism (Antal 2011, 33, 160–165).

The merger of the global media and the telecommunications industry in the last three decades has further increased the distance and disproportion between market and public service media actors. Internet-based media has created a universe of mass culture that transcends national culture (Bayer 2002, 749–750), which today goes far beyond the differences in values and interests

of the dual media system. "Not only has the logic of business prevailed over the preservation and creation of values, but at the same time the traditional notions of the historical state and national cultural heritage and tradition have been challenged, and the notion of the public interest and the common good has faded" (Kucsera 2021, 90). The audience is no longer a citizen, but a consumer, at best a consumer citizen (Bayer 2002, 751). Furthermore, the cultural content provided by transnational corporations is presented in a standardised, commercialised way in order to ensure the widest possible market distribution (Bayer 2002, 750).

The cohesive development of various media technologies, that is, media convergence, promises significant economic benefits and economic convergence to the actors of the global media industry. Due to the interoperability of individual channels, the homogenisation of content that has already prevailed in the traditional media system also continues on digital platforms. In the process, essentially the same content has become available for sale on other platforms in exactly the same form. With a seemingly wide, but actually homogeneous offer, a specific platform also strengthens the position of another one (see the concept of content convergence, Andok 2016).

For actors in the global media industry, this situation is synonymous with what the Austrian economist and sociologist Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1980) defined in the 1940s as creative destruction: that is, whether it is a product, service or process, the result of innovation systematically replaces what has gone before, with a destructive effect. However, an important element of the optimistic Schumpeterian concept is that although innovation is inevitably accompanied by some degree of upheaval, that is, there will always be losers in the process, the emergence of the new can ensure (economic) growth in the medium and long term. The Schumpeterian dichotomy of creation and destruction (and the linking of this process to radical market competition) provides a useful description of the situation in which the revolution in infocommunication has overwhelmed state cultural institutions, which have assumed the trinity of value preservation, value creation and value transmission, and therefore play a public service role, the latter having been assigned the role of losers.

With regard to major technological transitions and innovations affecting (also) the media, there is a consensus in the literature that existing technologies were often replaced by new ones, for which, while often affecting the entire

Source: Edelson Institute

LONG WAVES OF INNOVATION

The theory of innovation cycles was developed by economist **Joseph Schumpeter** who coined the term 'creative destruction' in 1942.

Schumpeter examined the role of innovation in relation to long-wave business cycles.

Source: MIT Economics

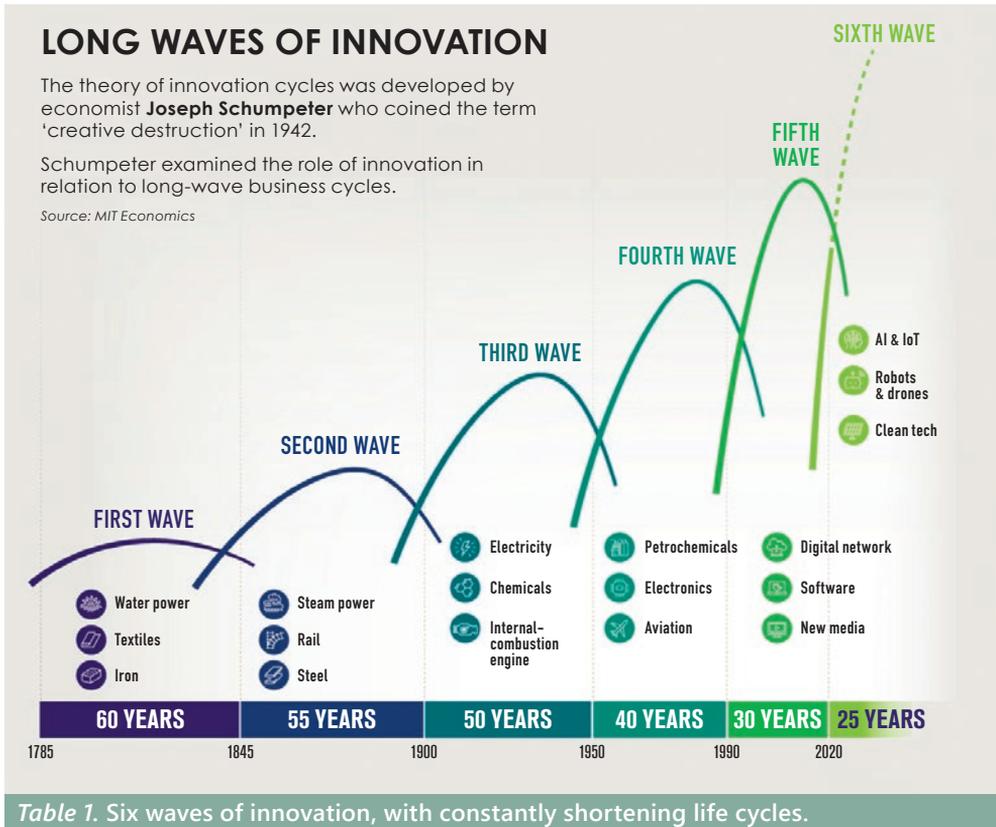


Table 1. Six waves of innovation, with constantly shortening life cycles.

population, neither the state, the society nor individuals were sufficiently prepared. The main challenge of technological transitions from a perspective of public interest is that the new has always sought to eliminate old technologies before society could adapt to them at its own pace. The problem was modelled by Rogers (1962), who defined the diffusion of innovations as the spread of information about innovation through specific communication channels within a given society over a given period of time. In other words, diffusion is a decision making process that can be described in time, in which different types of information and knowledge transfer mechanisms play a role at different stages, and the success of the process is largely dependent on the success of the transfer of crucial information during this process (Antal 2011, 22–23, 29).

It is essentially this process that is reflected in the speed theory of the French social philosopher Paul Virilio (1991/2003, 1998/2002, 1993), known as dromol-

ogy¹, through which the self-defined urban theorist was among the first to warn of the dangers of the accelerating world that pervades all aspects of life, including communication and the arts. Virilio called the technological explosion a “*total accident*”; because, according to his pessimistic point of view: “[...] the new technical procedures have accelerated the flow of information to such an extent that the time of memorization will become shorter and shorter [...] parallel to the acceleration of the flow of information, as if in response, the process of forgetting also accelerates. This is what I call the industrialization of forgetting [...]. In some ways, cyberspace could be seen as the last colonial empire. Because what do we create with the Internet or cyberspace? A new area for expansion [...]and I ask myself if these new electronic technologies that are being offered today are not a deceptive device, whose real purpose is to take away our culture and roots, just as we took away the culture and roots of the peoples of the Third World before leaving them to die and be taken by disease [...]” (Virilio 2018, 22–33).

The fact is that the success of digital platforms has led to more concentrated, homogeneous content offer than ever before, and the gradual eclipse of public content providers, leaving little visible alternative to guide citizens in their choices. For example, thanks to digital television channels, streaming services such as Netflix and the Internet, the media consumer can apparently now plan the programme they want to watch from the content offered by the various platforms (Bayer 2002, 752), but compared to traditional media, it is striking that the viewer no longer receives any editorial assistance or guidance.

Therefore, we argue that in order to offset the negative effects, there is still a need for state service channels and interfaces that seek to meet the needs of the audience and are diverse in terms of their programme structure, and which also provide a handhold in the digital age by defining value creation as a goal, offering guidance for their audience. The search for new alternatives in the media is therefore unavoidable for a community exposed to globalisation processes that wishes to ensure the survival of its culture and identity (Antal 2011, 170). Indeed, *creative destruction* in the Schumpeterian sense by no means precludes the fact that state cultural institutions that play a public service role may also regard innovation as a means of making a profit. Virilio’s pessimistic admo-

1 The theory of dromology is a new dimension in social science research. Virilio defines dromology from the word *dromos*, meaning ‘race’. Dromology is therefore the logic of the race (Virilio and Lotringer 1993, 40).

nitions are of course real dangers. One only has to think of the extent of the (image) destruction that may be caused by negative opinions on the World Wide Web, which are slowly becoming equivalent to the persuasive power of the traditional media. Nevertheless, the examples presented in the following chapters demonstrate that, putting aside the moral resistance of high culture in general, cultural institutions, by way of deliberate communication by skilled professionals, are also capable of applying technological changes in a forward-looking way that connect the creator with the audience. Today, this is the only way for cultural institutions to be part of the public sphere that is created by the new media.

3. Cultural institutions as producers of social media content

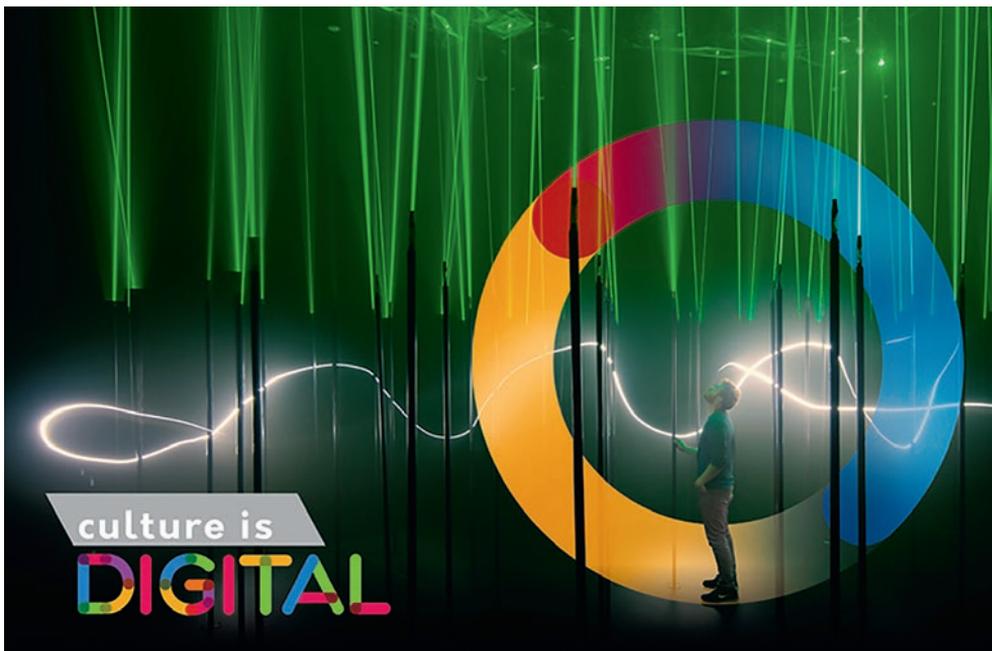
In an era that has seen the merging of telecommunication, media and entertainment industries, the dilemmas behind the position, role and future of the public service media represent a thought-provoking challenge for cultural institutions. With the decline of traditional media platforms in favour of new media, and their inability to meet the communication needs of institutions representing Hungarian culture, cultural institutions have also been forced to take steps forward. They are increasingly less able to avoid mobilising (financial and professional) resources to create their own interfaces, social media, and the production of their own content. In addition, they must also communicate to the domestic and international audiences at the same time, as this is a prerequisite for a specific cultural institution to be included in the interwoven network of international cultural institutions (Káel 2021, 99–100). Experience shows that only institutions with better-than-average digital communication can enter this “blood circulation”. In this way, both new and old media surfaces may contribute to the presentation of the character of contemporary national culture, to the development of the framework, forms, arenas, and content of the self-esteem of individuals, communities, regions, and the nation.

It is not surprising that the dynamic multiplication of communication tools and the need to reach audiences in a broad and creative way is giving rise to an increasing number of innovative responses from the world of art institutions. A number of international studies, such as *Branding in the New Museum Era* (2017), concern the branding trends of cultural institutions, in which the stra-

tegic image building of institutions and communication solutions play a key role. Taking advantage of their unique features, the buildings of an institution can even become cultural icons (for example, the Sydney Opera House or the Danube cultural district of the National Theatre and MÜPA in Budapest), but it is also a recurrent element that certain institutions make themselves instantly identifiable through modular design solutions that can be applied uniformly. Below we present international and domestic examples whose participants regard the relationship between digital communication and cultural institutions as an opportunity.

3.1. Culture as a national brand: Culture is digital – The United Kingdom

The success of digital platforms and the eclipse of traditional media indicate that the future of cultural institutions and the maintenance of their relations with their audiences is increasingly unimaginable without a deep involvement



Source: Assets Publishing

Figure 1. According to the UK's National Culture Strategy, which was published in 2018, technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the country's cultural sector.

in the digital space and network society. *Culture is digital*, the motto of the UK's national cultural strategy, which was published in 2018, refers to this dependent relationship. Presenting the government's strategy, Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, argued that technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the UK's cultural sector. The tools that are made available by digitalisation have an important role to play in attracting new audiences, both nationally and internationally. Digital platforms should therefore be regarded as an opportunity, not only to increase the accessibility of a world-class artistic and cultural heritage, but also to provide a certain level of networking space for the creation of artistic and cultural content and experiences in digital space. Hancock also emphasised that not everything is high-tech, nor does everything have to be: "[...] we still like to have a book in our hands, or see a painting or a play without a mobile phone. Even in a traditional format, great cultural experiences are created and the audience appreciates it. However, audience expectations change over time, as do the practices of artists, creators and curators, so we need to ensure that the right structures are in place to support this transformation so that the country can continue its long history of creative excellence – digital and analogue."²

Digitised television channels and the Internet allow members of the public to plan the programmes they want to watch from the various elements on offer. At the same time, with the forming of the audience's orientation, a new door opens for cultural institutions to arouse interest.

The emblematic institution of the UK's digital culture strategy, the British Museum in London, which opened its doors in 1753 and has one of the largest collections in the world, has digitised nearly 4.5 million exhibits to date, a significant proportion of these, around 300,000 items, after the outbreak of the corona virus pandemic in the spring of 2020 (Cascone 2020). By its own admission, the museum has always considered "the preservation and accessibility of knowledge" its primary goal, and by digitising its priceless collection, the institution has set itself the goal of bringing its cultural heritage to those who may not be able to see the exhibits in person. While the state cultural establishment is clearly investing considerable energy in value preservation, the creation and

² The UK's Cultural Strategy, which was published in 2018, is available at the link below: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687519/TT_v4.pdf Viewed on 17 February 2022.

transmission of value, and more specifically the cultivation of the national character of British culture, is far from straightforward.

The left-wing Black Lives Matter movement, which started in the United States and gained fresh momentum worldwide after the death of an African-American man named George Floyd during a police check, became stronger than ever in the United Kingdom in the second half of 2020. The effects of this cultural war on society were felt most by cultural and historical institutions that aim to preserve traditions. Britain's cultural heritage, which indisputably includes a colonial past, has suddenly become the target of the cancel culture, and violent street protests involving the defacing and toppling of statues have also sought to hold accountable in the new media space any institution that keeps national history alive. However, neither the Conservative government in power nor the state cultural institutions yielded to the movement. In response to mounting pressure, the British Museum released a statement explaining that they did not intend to remove controversial objects from the exhibition, but rather to place them in context, helping the visiting public to understand the circumstances of the creation of the specific monuments.³

3.2. Citizen-focused image building on Twitter – Sweden

It is now an axiom that the nature of communication in the digital new media space has changed. This is not only due to the fact that the boundaries between written and spoken language have become blurred, and in the new means of communication "we are writing as if we were speaking" (Balázs 2003, 18), or because the new linguistic and thinking quality is now almost inseparable from visual support, but also because in digital communication the boundaries between the role of the communicator and that of the receiver have disappeared. The "one-to-many model has been replaced by the horizontally highly efficient option of many-to-many" (Aczél 2014, 21).

The Swedish Liberal government sought to exploit the potential of this to build the country's image and develop the national character in social media

³ British Museum 'won't remove controversial objects' from display. 2020. BBC. Viewed on 18 October 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-54325905>

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/tyinternety/david-orlic-visit-sweden>



Figure 2. The Curators of Sweden social media campaign endeavoured to present the country's cultural life from the subjective point of view of ordinary people.

when it published the first tweet from the @Sweden⁴ Twitter account in 2011.⁵ Stockholm made the country's official Twitter account available to the Swedish public, who are proud of their diversity, as part of a social media campaign called the Curators of Sweden, so that the world could gain a subjective taste of the country's culture through the posts of a different (ordinary) Swedish citizen every week. According to Patrick Kampmann, the creative director of Volontaire, the advertising agency commissioned by the Swedish government to carry out the campaign, "Sweden stands for certain values. It wants to be progressive, democratic and creative, [...] and the best way to demonstrate these virtues has been to put control in the hands of ordinary Swedes, instead of cen-

4 Sweden's Twitter site. https://twitter.com/sweden?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtm%5E833117884360560640%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffpost.com%2Fentry%2Fsweden-twitter-experiment_n_5b9f3510e4b04d32ebf9b4fb Viewed on 11 February 2022.

5 @Sweden's citizen driven nation branding is a global success. <https://mb.cision.com/Main/1623/9248950/5184.pdf> Viewed on 11 February 2022.

tralised communication, so that they can present Swedish culture themselves” (Christensen 2013, 40).

The Curators of Sweden project is the result of a partnership between the Swedish Institute (in Swedish: Svenska institutet, SI), which has an organisational structure and profile similar to that of the Balassi Institute, which is responsible for shaping the cultural diplomacy of Hungary and public diplomacy in other nation states,⁶ and VisitSweden, a state-owned joint-stock company that specialises in tourism with functions almost identical to those of the Hungarian Tourist Agency. While the primary aim and mission of both governmental organisations is to promote Sweden and the Swedish culture abroad, the Curators of Sweden campaign was also openly aimed at providing feedback to their own citizens, showing what best characterises the everyday life of Swedes.⁷

The project has caused considerable inconvenience for the government. There have been several instances of speakers sharing their controversial political views on the microblog for the political leadership of the country, with one curator of the project promoting conflict with Denmark (Löfgren 2016) and another personally criticising former US President Donald Trump (Toor 2017). However, the vast body of literature analysing the campaign concludes that the project has gained merit by building bridges between the state and ordinary people through digital communication, while its success in national branding is also significant (see for example Christensen 2013, and Hoffmann 2015).

Among other things, Hoffmann’s (2015) research revealed that although the curators were not given any instructions on what topics to thematise their posts

6 The term public diplomacy first appeared in 1856 in the pages of *The Times* magazine, as a social articulation of criticisms of the actions of Franklin Pierce, US President at that time, and as a manifestation of citizen activism in this direction (Szörényi 2010, 138). The first institutionalisation of the term is most widely credited to the founding of the Edward R. Murrow Public Diplomacy Center in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, a professor at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a noted career diplomat in the United States. According to Gullion, “public diplomacy is [...] concerned with influencing public opinion in order to formulate and implement a country’s foreign policy. It includes dimensions of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacy: the efforts of governments to influence public opinion in other states; the interaction of civil society organisations and interests between states; means information on international relations and their impact on policies [...] and the process of intercultural communication” (Hansen 1984, 3).

7 While the government Twitter account given to ordinary people was also intended to underline the commitment of the Scandinavian country to democratic values, the selection of the lucky few was far from democratic and fair. Patrick Kampmann himself was a member of the three-man committee that selected the tweeters of @Sweden week by week. He says that throughout the project, which has been running for more than eight years, he has been looking for people who are interesting, skilled in microblogging and willing to write short text messages in English.

around, tweets capturing moments of everyday life and conveying broad political positions dominated the news feed, followed by posts mainly promoting local culture. The curators of Sweden also regularly reported on the microblog about their experiences at the cultural events and festivals they visited, so the project indirectly promoted, not only within the country but also internationally, several different segments of Swedish culture and public institutions, depending on the cultural interests of the particular Swedish citizen who happened to be managing the official account that week.

The project is controversial in many respects, because although the Swedish example is an excellent illustration of how a country can integrate social networks into its activities of public diplomacy, the national character of culture, in this case Swedish culture, has hardly been cultivated through decentralised digital communication. Nevertheless, taking into account the positive and negative lessons learned from the project and adapting some of its elements to the domestic context, we consider it worthy of attention. Although the number of Hungarian Twitter users did not start to increase until 2022, the time has come for Hungary to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Facebook and Instagram, which are also popular social networks in Hungary, and to exploit the wide range of opportunities created by new media and digital communication on a larger scale than previously. The Swedish example shows that the popularity of cultural institutions can be increased, not only in the capital, but also in rural areas, even in cooperation with the tourism sector, with little financial investment. Cooperation between institutions could also represent a way forward: a social media campaign such as the one conducted in Sweden could be implemented, for example, by highlighting a coordinated selection of artists from public cultural institutions nationwide. This would create the opportunity for a culture-sensitive public to gain brief glimpses into the world behind the scenes, the everyday life of artists, and the diversity of rehearsals, thanks to social networks. Not least, such a project may also draw attention to provincial theatres or other cultural institutions that occupy a peripheral position compared to the strategic institutions of Hungarian culture.⁸

8 The cultural institutions in Hungary include the National Theatre, the Hungarian State Opera, the Budapest Operetta Theatre, the National Centre for Artists, Performers and Circus Arts, Müpa, the Honvéd Ensemble, the Petőfi Museum of Literature, the Hungarian National Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, the National Széchényi Library, the Hungarian National Archives, the Institute of Hungarian Research, the Hungarian Heritage House, the Museum of Ethnography, the Open-air Museum of Ethnography, the NMI Institute for Culture and the NMI Institute for Culture.

3.3. Transnational success stories

The capacities of cultural institutions in different countries, in rural and metropolitan areas, are significantly different, not only in terms of financial resources and media professionals, but also in terms of their distance from network nodes (Barabási [2002] 2019). However, there are some transnational digital projects that can help bridge this gap, and at the same time provide an opportunity for the international representation of the national character of Hungarian culture. One example is the title of 'European Capital of Culture'⁹, which focuses attention on a provincial town in each member state for twelve months in order to showcase its cultural life and history worldwide, as well as to highlight the cultural richness of its member states, thereby increasing the sense of belonging to the common cultural area of European citizens and thus nurturing a better understanding of each other. The original aim of the title was to raise awareness of the fact that the common space of European culture is the result of the combined contribution of different countries and cities. It uses the language of art to convey the notion that European culture is common and always the result of cultural activity in a given region. The city or region holding the title will be at the centre of European attention for the cultural fare it produces, thus enhancing the image of the city or the mother country, while at the same time increasing the efficiency of local creative industries and the attractiveness of the locality for tourism.

Until now, approximately sixty cities, including Pécs, have proudly held this title. The project involves a year-long series of cultural events, but also has a number of other effects, including acting as a catalyst for urban development. In 2023, once again a Hungarian city, this time Veszprém, will become the European Capital of Culture (Morvay 2019, 321). During the season, which starts on the 21st of January, 2023, the county seat and the Bakony–Balaton region are preparing numerous cultural and artistic events and projects, community-building programmes, and infrastructure development.¹⁰

Among the transnational success stories, it is worth mentioning, without claiming to be exhaustive, the Opera Vision project, which was launched on

⁹ European Capitals of Youth and Culture. Viewed on 15 September 2022. https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/intercultural-understanding/being-european-capital-of-youth-or-of-culture_hu

¹⁰ For more information see: <https://veszprembalaton2023.hu/> Viewed on 9 September 2022.

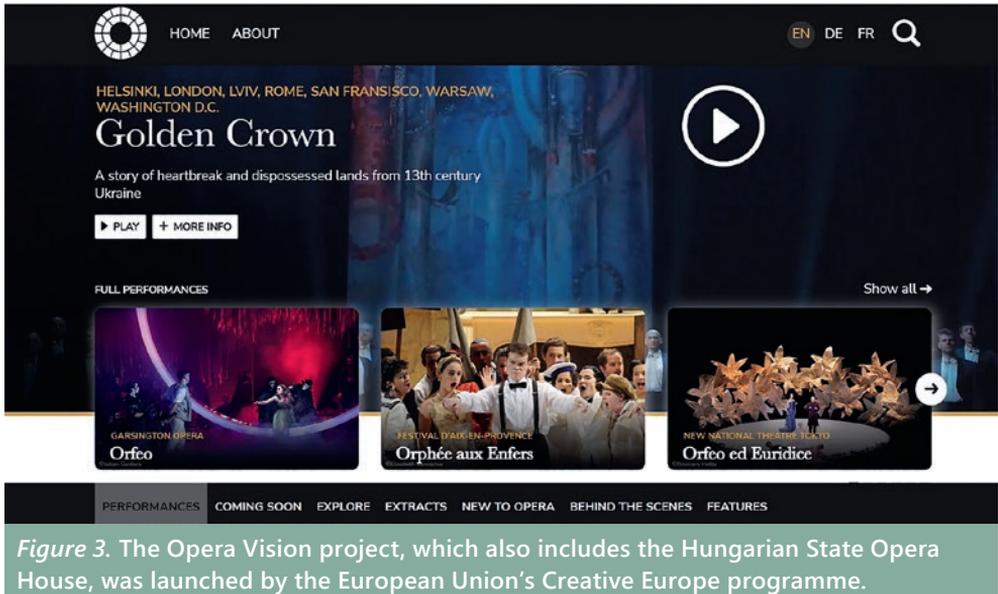


Figure 3. The Opera Vision project, which also includes the Hungarian State Opera House, was launched by the European Union's Creative Europe programme.

the 12th of October, 2017, and which provides the platform of Opera Europe, an association of European opera companies and festivals. Inspired by the success of the Opera Platform, Opera Europe, in partnership with thirty opera companies from eighteen countries, has created Opera Vision, a portal that allows you to watch Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande* from the Komische Oper in Berlin or Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* from the Teatro Real in Madrid live from anywhere in the world. The project, with the Hungarian State Opera among its members, was supported by the European Union's Creative Europe programme, which had supported more than 13,000 programmes by 2020, co-funding 647 cultural cooperation projects across Europe involving 3,760 organisations.¹¹

3.4. Hungarian Success Stories

The exploitation of the opportunities inherent in the digitised new media space and social media networks is increasingly becoming a natural medium for the

¹¹ Creative Europe: over €2 billion to support the recovery, resilience and diversity of the cultural and creative sectors. Viewed on 28 February 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/IP_21_2587

communication of domestic cultural institutions. All cultural institutions have official accounts on Facebook and Instagram, which, in Hungary, are considered to be the most popular, to maintain the audience's attention and multiply access to individual productions. Some theatres use these channels to not only promote their performances, but to also create their own brand parallel to that, and to this end they prefer to employ their own artists. The following is a list of Hungarian cultural strategic institutions that, by deliberately exploiting the potential of analogue and increasingly digital communication, may serve as a good example to counterbalance global, market-driven processes and, in accordance with the trinity of value preservation, value creation and value transmission, to cultivate national culture in the new media space.

3.4.1. The institution as a global brand: Müpa

Inaugurated in March, 2005, the Palace of Arts (Müpa) is a multifunctional institution, providing a permanent home for three different artistic disciplines, namely, music, visual arts, and theatre. The institution describes itself as "the best-known cultural brand in the country" and one of the most modern cultural institutions. In the autumn of 2005, Müpa launched a call for tenders in a restricted procedure, which was won by the Máta and Végh Creative Workshop, for whom, according to their own words, it was clear that they had to develop a well-functioning "trademark" from the institution's brand, which would communicate not only to the Hungarian audience, but also would serve to present the productions it created abroad.¹² Due to its unique operation, Müpa had to develop a marketing communication strategy that differs significantly from that of other cultural institutions in Hungary, as it hosts hundreds of performances per year, which differ in genre, performers and target group. The large number and diverse nature of the performances therefore require a constant presence in a wide variety of media and social networks, both online and offline, but also make it difficult to convey something of the Hungarian cultural character to international audiences.

At the same time, Müpa's mission is not to serve public taste, but to shape it. It has performers, and hosts musical events performances and works that

¹² MÜPA branding case study (2005–2014). https://kreativmuhely.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/mupa_esettanulmany.pdf Viewed on 16 February 2022.

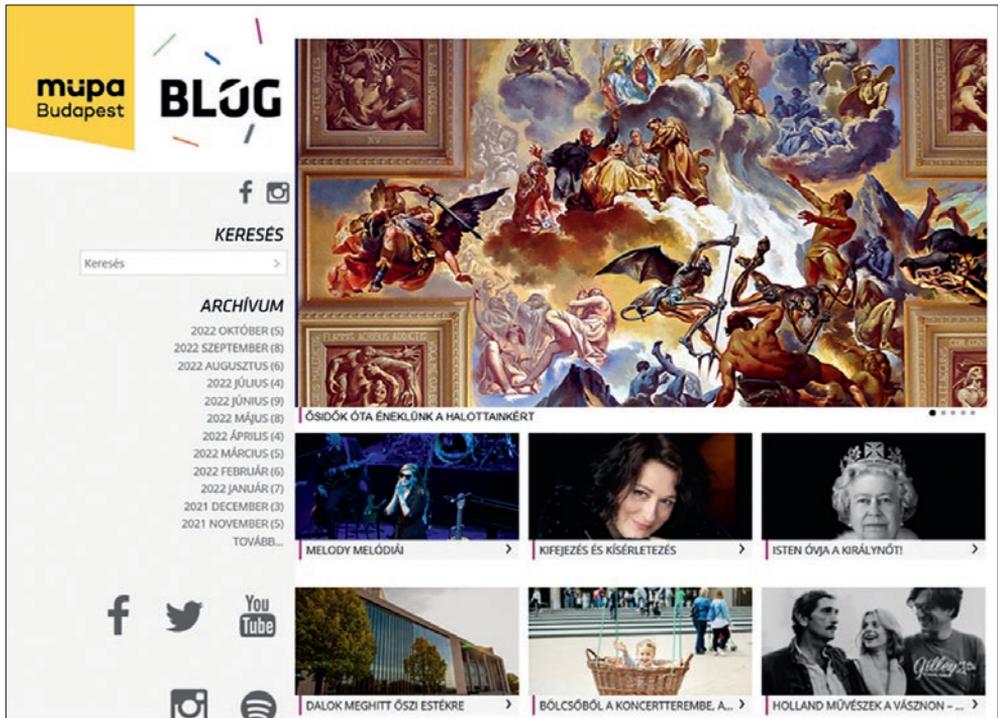


Figure 4. Extract from the MÜPA blogosphere. MÜPA has a number of notable activities in both the old and new media space. The connection of Podcasts, Digital Literary Compilation, Playlist-Spotify with the audience, as well as print-based publications all serve to promote culture.

contribute to major cultural processes around the world, representing specific artistic values.¹³ Since its opening, the institution has become a global brand, an inescapable factor in the international cultural bloodstream, thus supporting the cultural diplomacy activities of Hungary and Budapest. As film director Csaba Káel, the General Director of Műpa Budapest, states in his study, "...one of the most important achievements of the first period of Műpa was undoubtedly that it put Hungary back on the classical music tour map, broadened the horizon of the international market, as world stars started to 'travel further' for

13 MÜPA branding case study (2005–2014). https://kreativmuhely.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/mupa_esettanulmany.pdf Viewed on 16 February 2022.

the sake of Müpa Budapest, they did not stop at Vienna, but started to include Budapest in their schedules, booked several years in advance” (Káel 2021, 95).

Another peculiarity of Müpa is that although in the beginning it only allowed high culture within its walls, nowadays the brand image of the institution represents considerably greater diversity of genre and quality culture, and this broadening of the spectrum is reflected by the fact that since 2015 the name of the institution has officially been Müpa, a nickname that was previously used by the audience and the artists (Káel 2021, 96).

3.3.2. The institution as a national brand: the Hungarian State Opera House and the Liszt Academy

The Hungarian State Opera House has an impressive track record in building national cultural character, and represents one of the strongest brands among Hungarian cultural institutions. The Opera House attracts the attention of the public with its innovative, sometimes provocative posters, appealing to young people and refuting the idea that the era of outdoor, public posters is long gone. They have also managed to attract attention with their actions to bring their performances to life outside the iconic building on Andrásy út. In the case of *Anyegin (Eugene Onegin)*, for example, a green lawn was created in front of the steps of the Opera House, and the building was decorated with black roses, the central symbol of Kovalik’s production. In addition, great efforts have been made to focus attention on the leading artists of the Opera House. The image of the Erkel Theatre was also built in the same spirit, where, for example, those who were the quickest to like the site could win tickets in the “Facebook gallery”. They aim to attract the audience of the future with their project called *Operakaland*, which has already reached more than 200,000 students. They often organise performances to promote shows, staging free season-opening open-air performances in front of the Opera House, and their press conferences could be small shows in themselves, while they are also in constant communication on social networks.

The communication of the Liszt Academy is also worth mentioning. The advertising post entitled *Lisztérium*, which captures the ars poetica of the institution’s concert-oriented activities in forty seconds, won the Red Dot Design Award in 2015, representing an important recognition of the international com-

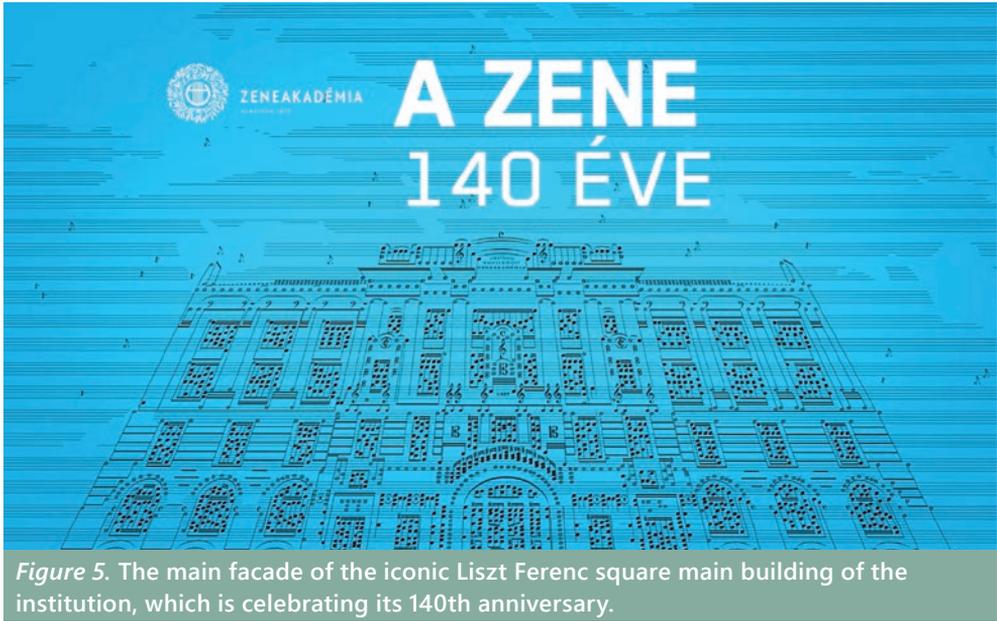


Figure 5. The main facade of the iconic Liszt Ferenc square main building of the institution, which is celebrating its 140th anniversary.

munication profession.¹⁴ Similarly successful was the '*Liszt Academy – 140 years of music*' campaign, which organised a series of programmes to mark the 140th anniversary of the institution's foundation, and helped promote high culture to a wider audience through online media and distribution. However, the greatest achievement of the Liszt Academy's communication lies in the representation of its values beyond the borders of the country. For example, the cultural institution enjoys an extremely high reputation in the Far East (including Japan and South Korea), and thus indirectly influences the tourism sector through its high quality offer and value-creating community building, while also actively participating in the country's activities of public diplomacy through various transnational activities.

¹⁴ Kouble communication success for the 140th anniversary of the Liszt Academy. 2015. Viewed on 16 February 2022. <https://zeneakademia.hu/hirek/kettos-kommunikacios-siker-a-zeneakademia-140-szuletesnapjara-111985>

3.3.3. The institution as an instrument of cultural diplomacy: the Hungarian National Theatre

At the heart of the National Theatre's more conservative communication policy is the threefold unity of tradition, modernity, and internationalism (Vidnyánszky 2018). These values and principles define the thinking of the institution, carefully testing the question of whether the cultural institution can be considered such a commodity that is subject to traditional marketing concepts, or how to ensure that high art is not just the preserve of the few. A good example of the latter is the *#anemzetimindenkie* charity programme, which was organised for the first time in 2019, in which the theatre advertised free performances for those who would otherwise not have access to the theatre, for example, in cooperation with the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, the South Pest Central Hospital and the Bethesda Children's Hospital (Lukácsy 2019).

A noteworthy project initiated by the institution is the Madách International Theatre Meeting (MITEM), which was launched in 2014.¹⁵ Established with the intention of creating a tradition, the annual meeting offers a platform and an opportunity for other cultures and nations to have a refreshing influence on the Hungarian theatre, and for foreign professionals to become acquainted with Hungarian performances and artists. In reference to the programme, Attila Vidnyánszky, the General Director of the National Theatre, said at the opening of the 2022 festival, "when the idea of MITEM was born, we already wanted to build bridges between different cultures, arts, countries, because we need to have a dialogue" (Petrovics 2022). Referring to the cultural diplomatic purpose of the festival, State Secretary Péter Fekete stated that it was important to emphasise that "the event series proclaims to the world through its actions that we are a truly inclusive nation, as MITEM is a great melting pot of different cultures, arts, trends and creative creeds."¹⁶

¹⁵ MITEM official site. Viewed on 10 October 2022. <https://mitem.hu/aktualis>

¹⁶ Welcome speech of State Secretary Péter Fekete on the official MITEM website. Viewed on 10 October 2022. <https://mitem.hu/aktualis/2022/04/mitem-2022-koszonto>



Figure 6. The float of the National Theatre representing the 10th Theatre Olympics at the 2022 Flower Carnival in Debrecen.

MITEM's international reputation, acceptance and stable position have contributed to Hungary hosting the 10th Theatre Olympics in 2023 under the coordination of the National Theatre.¹⁷ The event will be held on the 200th anniversary of the birth of Hungarian playwright Imre Madách, in collaboration with MITEM. Hosting the Theatre Olympics in Hungary presents a unique opportunity for Hungarian culture to demonstrate its values within and beyond its borders, as well as to strengthen its diplomatic position. As Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki, a member of the Organising Committee of the Olympics, explained, "The importance of cultural projects in the age of modern technology lies precisely in the fact that they help to share experiences of similarities

¹⁷ In January 2020, Theodoros Terzopoulos, the Greek theatre director, creator and initiator of the Theatre Olympics, announced in Budapest that Hungary had won the right to host the tenth Theatre Olympics in 2023. The Theatre Olympics have been hosted as follows: 1995, Delphi, Greece; 1999, Sizuoka, Japan; 2001, Moscow, Russia; 2006, Istanbul, Turkey; 2010, Seoul, South Korea; 2014, Beijing, China; 2016, Wrocław, Poland; 2018, New Delhi, India; 2019, St Petersburg, Russia and Tojama, Japan; 2023, Budapest, Hungary.

and differences between nations. The International Theatre Olympics Committee believes that the strong presence of the performing arts in the 21st century is a sign that there is still hope for genuine global communication" (Suzuki 2022).

Summary

The presented international, transnational and domestic examples prove, without claiming to be exhaustive, that despite the explosive development of globalisation and communication technologies and the resulting cultural homogenisation, there is a future for institutions that assume the trinity of value preservation, value creation and value transmission, and that therefore fulfil a public service function. Although the content that nourishes cultural identities, national culture, the freedom of art and the meeting of cultures must be positioned in a media noise that is considerably greater than before, which requires more effort than previously, the aim, in the Schumpeterian (1980) sense, must be to enable state cultural institutions, as market actors, to use the opportunities offered by the new media space for their own purposes. This is the only way for national cultural institutions to receive the same degree of attention in the age of the new media that the traditional media had granted them as a matter of course.

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The Return of Dionysus

András Kozma's interview
with Theodoros Terzopoulos

"In Terzopoulos's theatre, myth is not a fable but a condensed experience; the rehearsal process is not the performance of a dramatic concept but an adventurous journey through the landscapes of memory, a search for the lost keys to body and speech, to the word as a natural unity."

(Heiner Müller)

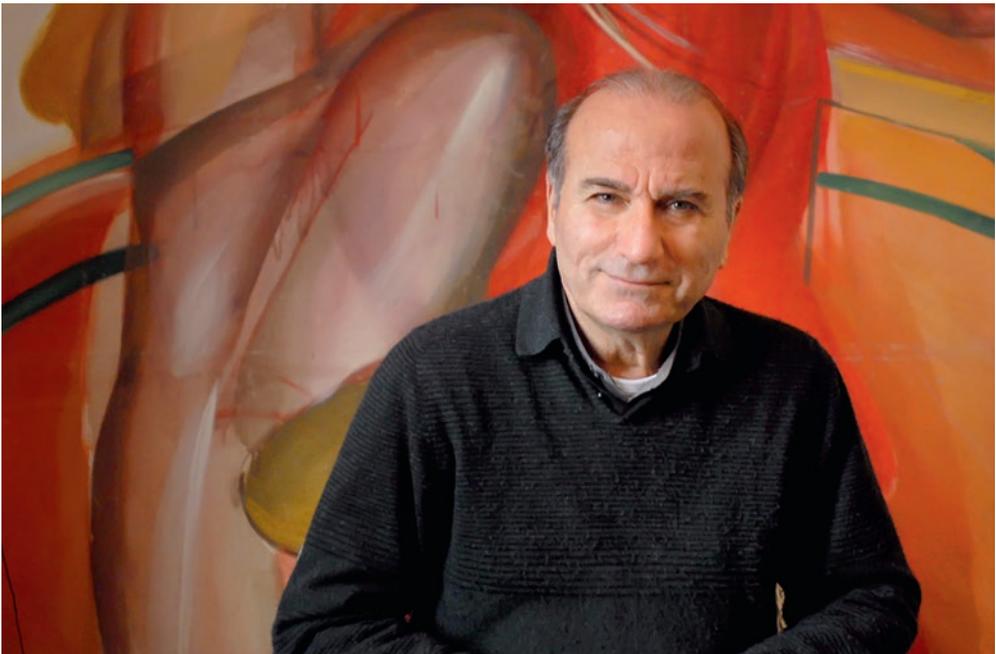


Photo: Johanna Weber

Seventy-seven-year-old Theodoros Terzopoulos, is a leading figure not only in Greek theatre but also in the international theatrical world: company director, an innovator of theatrical form, and one of the founders of the International Theatre Olympics. The Greek master maintains that only by practising theatrical rites can we return to the spirit of the ancient tragedies. To achieve this, he developed and published in a book his theatrical method, called *The Return of Dionysus*. His career begins in the 1970s: between 1972 and 1976 he worked at the Berliner Ensemble, where he meets the German playwright-director, Heiner Müller, who is one of the world-renowned artists with whom in 1994 he created the International Theatre Olympics, one of the world's largest theatre festivals. As the host of the first Olympics, in Delphi, Greece, he welcomes foreign companies to rediscover ancient tragedies. In 1985 Terzopoulos founds the Attis Theatre in Athens, whose first performance in 1986 was *The Bacchae*. His particular way of working emerges in the creation of this production, which already contains the most important elements of his artistic credo. His methods and training have been presented and applied in many renowned workshops. He has worked in major theatres around the world, including the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, the Taganka in Moscow, the Teatro Piccolo in Milan, in Künstlerhaus Bethanien, West Berlin's once legendary alternative art centre, or in the Schauspielhaus in Düsseldorf. His production of *Dionysus* was presented at the Bogotá International Festival in 1991, where it won the Best Director prize.

For decades, you have been a prominent artist on the world theatre scene, a pioneering innovator of contemporary theatre language, both in practice and in theory. Your work ranges from Brecht to research and reinterpretation of the ancient Greek theatre tradition. It is a fascinating question as to which cultural strata this diverse and rich oeuvre is drawn from. I understand that, among your Greek origins and many other inspirations, you have also been influenced by Georgian culture.

■ Yes, my parents lived in Georgia for a while and only went to Greece in the early 1920s. But their families originally fled to Georgia from Trebizond (now Trabzon – A. K.) on the Black Sea coast of Turkey. As a child, my mother was sent to a village called Takova and my father to Sukhumi in Abkhazia. Then, around 1921 or '22, they had to flee again, so they moved to Greece as children; my mother was only four years old, my father ten. They only met much later, in Greece, and had four sons, of whom I am the youngest. My eldest brother, who is now eighty-five years old, taught International Law at the University of Leipzig for many years

The experience of constant change and encounter with different cultures was an important part of your family life. How did this affect you as a child and how did it influence your later life and thinking?

■ In our family, several languages were spoken at home. I heard them speak Russian and Turkish, for example, as well as a dialect of Greek used in Pontus¹. Indeed, I could say I grew up in a multicultural environment, but they were all close, almost sister cultures. I heard one of my grandmothers singing Turkish laments and the other one was singing Russian laments. They were singing these songs in an ancient, archaic way; I remember them sitting on the floor with their hands on their hips, almost looking like some kind of Bacchae. They sang about their lost homeland, their connection with nature, and of course about their faith, their Orthodox religion. These songs had a very intense tone

1 The Pontic Greek language or Pontic language (or the more Latinised form Pontus is also used) is a variant of the Greek language originally spoken in the Pontic region of northern modern Turkey. As in other varieties of Greek spoken in Asia Minor, Turkish, Persian, and Caucasian influences are also apparent in Pontic. Due to population exchanges following the First World War, the speakers of modern Pontic are mostly resident in Greece

and were accompanied by dances. For example, they were well acquainted with the ancient Greek fire dance, and I saw them dance it passionately on several occasions. It was as if these people coming from the Caucasus were evoking the radiance of the culture of ancient Athens.

Can it be said that your theatrical thinking and mentality is rooted in these childhood experiences, among other things?

■ Of course, I was very much influenced by the fact that I realised my Middle Eastern roots at a very early age, as a child. It was an important realisation for me, and it has accompanied me throughout my life. When my parents came to Greece, they brought with them a clear-cut, diverse culture, which was reflected in their everyday life, in their songs, food and eating habits, in the way they brought up their children. My paternal grandmother, whose name was Despina, graduated from an almost university-level secondary school in Trebizond², and knew ancient Greek. I grew up hearing the terms and concepts of the ancient Greek language from her. Previously, their family was in a privileged position, and represented a wealthy, cultured class. My grandfather, for example, wrote some great travelogues, including a wonderful text about the Caucasus. From this point of view, the impulses I had as a child represented a high-quality cultural experience for me. And despite the fact that we lived in a small village in Pieria, at the age of eight I was reading Dostoevsky and discovering several masterpieces of world literature, and by the age of seventeen I could speak Italian and read Dante in the original. So my family background was a very strong motivation for me, and that's where my love of reading and writing came from. Of course, typically of refugee families, they always had to leave everything behind when they fled and moved, so they were constantly losing everything they had. My parents were farmers, typically left-wing in their thinking. Although my grandparents could still be called well-off capitalists, by the time they got to Greece they had lost everything and become communists. Both my father and my grandfather were active members of the Greek Communist Party, which, of course, [meant that] they later suffered. My mother's family were also refugees, we lived in great poverty, and I was often

² *Trabzon* (also referred to as *Trapezunt*) is a city in the northern part of Turkey, on the Black Sea coast, the capital of Trabzon province, and the centre of the district of the same name. It was founded in the 8th century BC.

told to leave the village because they could not give me what I needed there, only poverty. I left at the age of twelve, and went to high school in Katerini, but in the meantime I worked in a small grocery store, delivering groceries to customers' homes, or helping the waiters, even washing dishes. This was the only way I could support myself. But, of course, whenever I could, I was always reading world literature, Russian, French, German writers... I have to add that my father was not an Orthodox Christian, but belonged to the Protestant denomination, so I had the opportunity to visit the library of the Protestant church and I started learning Italian, German and English at a very young age. Leaving the family home at such an early age helped me face reality and stand on my own two feet, but I never really had the joy of a happy childhood. In the summers I went back to our village and worked in the fields with my siblings. From the age of five, my parents took me to the fields where our family grew tobacco at that time. I remember being taken out at dawn in a basket, in which I slept, and they were picking tobacco from sunrise.

So for me, the refugee family background has always been a memory of a lost homeland, a lost culture, along with poverty and a lot of reading. All my siblings loved to read, and we inherited the love of reading from our mother. And also the sense of freedom, the knowledge that we can turn the world around even if we are alone, and that opened a lot of doors to me. In other words, I matured very early and felt it was important to take action in order to make the world a better place. When I was in my twenties, during the military junta, I became a member of the Lambrakis³ resistance youth group, so as an opposition member I had to report to the police every Saturday. When my situation became unsustainable, I was forced to flee the country through Yugoslavia with a false passport. I joined a travelling theatre company that was on its way to Germany to perform for Greek refugees living there. Before that, I had been studying at a drama school, which I almost finished, but then I received an invitation from my brother, who was already teaching at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig. His girlfriend was Brecht's daughter Barbara, so I was invited to the Berliner Ensemble through her.

³ Grigoris Lambrakis (1912–1963) was a Greek politician, physician, athlete, and professor at the University of Athens Medical School. He was a member of the Greek resistance against the Axis powers during the Second World War and later became a prominent anti-war activist. His assassination by right-wing activists sparked mass demonstrations and led to a political crisis in Greece.



Figure 1. Bacchae by Euripides, Berlin 1987, Berliner Ensemble, Calliope Tachtsoglou, Akis Sakellariou, Sophia Michopoulou, Giorgos Symeonidis

Before we move on to the most important milestones in your theatre career, can you recall the moment when you first felt theatre was to be your true calling? When did you first feel the overwhelming power of the theatre?

■ In the village where I lived, from the age of seven, I was always the main character in the school celebrations, and I even helped the others, explaining to them how to play their roles. Even then I felt I had a very strong affinity with it, despite the fact that I had no developed theatrical vision and I had never even seen a single theatre performance. On Mondays theatre shows were broadcast on the radio, which I listened to with my mother, and it was through them that I first heard the voices of the great Greek actors. From then on, I kept asking about them, [and] went to the cinema, but only very rarely did I get to see theatre, only sometimes when a travelling company was performing. But when I moved to Katerini at the age of twelve, I was able to go to the theatre regularly, I went to Saloniki and other cities, and that's when my ideas about theatre

and acting really started to take shape. Eventually I decided that I wanted to do this for the rest of my life, as an actor, and a comic actor at that.

Choosing a career in the theatre was a deliberate choice, but until you had a fully developed concept, were you equally deliberate in seeking out those you could learn from? Who do you consider your masters in your theatre career?

■ Indeed, I looked for the masters from whom I could learn the most, who were the most inspiring to me. I consider Manos Katrakis to be one of my first masters, and when I entered a drama school in Athens (*the Drama School of Kostis Mikhailidis, 1965–67 – A. K.*), I was already assisting my teachers in their productions. At that time I didn't think I was going to be a director, I was more interested in being an actor, and as a student actor I had already played small roles in musical theatre performances and comedies. As soon as I stepped on stage, everyone burst out laughing, but after a while it bothered me more and more and I thought I didn't want to be just a comic actor, one of a dozen. For instance, Beckett was much closer to me, and it didn't fit at all with the style of play that was typical of the entertaining type of commercial theatre. And then I received an invitation from my brother in Germany, but despite my desire to go there, I couldn't get a passport because of my left-wing sympathies. So I had to get a forged passport to leave the country. Then in Amsterdam I left the theatre company and contacted my brother on the phone, who put me in touch with the Patriotic Anti-Dictatorship Movement. This organisation helped me travel from Germany (*West Germany – A. K.*) to Sweden, where I was able to join the Royal Swedish Theatre through connections with relatives and friends, and work as one of Ingmar Bergman's assistants for about two months. Bergman was directing Hedda Gabler at the time, and for me it was the first encounter with an outstanding director, a great artist. During this time I had my visa for East Germany ready, so I could finally travel to Berlin to join the Berliner Ensemble. I remember my brother waiting for me at the train station, and we met again after twenty-five years, as he was one of those who had been repatriated from the dictatorship to various socialist countries as a child. And from that point on, a different and very exciting life began for me.

The morning after my arrival, I was terribly excited to go to Brecht's theatre. Around half past seven an old lady was walking just in front of me, and I followed her to the theatre. When I entered the theatre cafeteria, someone came

up to me and said that Helene Weigel, the theatre's director, and Brecht's wife, was waiting for me. When we met, she turned out to be the old lady I had been following and thought was a cleaning lady. After that, I became close to a great many people, including Ekkehart Schall, one of the greatest actors in Brecht's company and the leading actor in his productions, and Heiner Müller, the theatre's dramaturge, who later became my mentor and master, but I also met many other important actors and artists. Ultimately, they were the ones who shaped me, because I went there with a lot of ideas and thoughts, but I was in a kind of "Mediterranean chaos". I couldn't really control my wide-ranging, sprawling imagination because of my passionate, Mediterranean temperament, and it was there in Germany that I understood that I had to build a system, and develop a method of working. I was fortunate to have teachers from an early age who were important artists, such as a Chinese master from Shanghai, from whom I learned a lot about the interpretation of time, or Ekkehart Schall, who was also an excellent juggler and worked systematically on developing his diaphragm by packing iron plates on his stomach, or the renowned set designer Karl von Appen. But first and foremost, I must talk about Heiner Müller, to whom I owe most of all. When I first arrived in Germany from Greece, I was mostly influenced by Max Reinhardt, believing in a more "classical" approach to theatre. But, strangely enough, it was Heiner Müller who led me to the deeper essence and philosophical significance of my own classical, ancient theatrical heritage, and this was far from a neoclassical or romantic understanding. In other words, he did not make me see the ancient heritage from the perspective of Schiller or Goethe, but rather from a kind of theoretical, neo-Marxist point of view, although he was also a serious critic of Marxism in later years. Heiner Müller, who joined the Berliner Ensemble in 1972, felt that there was a crisis, a strong opposition between the company and Brecht's legacy, and suggested a new approach. Brecht actually influenced me through Heiner Müller, and it was through him that I came to a new interpretation of classical Greek tragedies. Our acquaintance began in a rather strange way: in the canteen I saw a man in the evenings who often got drunk. Once he asked me where I was from. To my reply, he simply said, "Ah, Greece? I am just writing a play about Medea". Then he invited me to his place. The very next day after my visit, I knew that he would be my master. He first read *Medeamaterial* to me, and later also *The Liberation of Prometheus*, which I staged in Berlin some twenty years later, in 1991, with Heiner Müller himself playing the role of Prometheus. I consider

him my real master; later we became friends, and he visited me several times in Greece. I think that there were real masters then, and a master-student relationship really existed. Today, many people prefer to learn through YouTube, and the learning process has changed a lot. After my years in Germany, I returned to Greece and started to go my own way, which proved quite difficult at first. I set up a small theatre group, a creative workshop, with which we began to look for a completely independent language of form.

Why did you decide to return to Greece? Would you have had the opportunity to continue working with your master in the famous Berliner Ensemble?

■ During the military junta, I had no opportunity to return to Greece, but as soon as the dictatorship ended, I wanted to go right back. But Heiner Müller himself and Matthias Langhoff were always urging me to stay, saying that I would have a great career in Germany. But I didn't see the point, I felt I had to go, and a career was possible without staying in East Berlin. My ways didn't really fit the German mentality anyway. Of course, this was not the case with Müller and his circle of friends, such as Castorf, with whom I had a very good relationship, and I considered them my role models because of their philosophical and literary work, but at the time there was a euphoric, celebratory mood in Greece because of the end of the dictatorship, and I felt somehow caged in Germany. My severe homesickness obviously played a part in this.

Returning to Greece a whole new era has begun for you. Did you have to rebuild your theatrical existence or was this a continuation of the journey you had already started?

■ It was more of a continuation, as people were waiting for me, many of them hoping that I would return. Back home, they knew about my experience, the Brecht seminars I had held, my relationship with Heiner Müller, so they welcomed my arrival. I moved to Saloniki, and there I founded a company, whose members later became very famous actors. I took over the management of the Drama School of the State Theatre of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki, where I was director between 1981 and '83. I was also co-chair of the theatre's cultural committee. I staged Lorca's *Yerma* and Brecht's *Mother Courage*, which was a huge success, but after a while I got fed up with the cumbersome nature of

public theatre and decided to hit the road and just travel the world for a year. From New York to Shanghai and Tokyo, I had an incredible variety of experiences. In Tokyo, for example, I met Tacumi Hijikata, the founder of Japanese butoh dance. These experiences were very important for me, because I wanted to reinterpret myself, the theatre, everything that seemed obvious before.

During your performances at the State Theatre, did you apply the actor training method that you have since developed in detail and which forms the basis of your later work and educational work?

■ I first started using it when I was directing *Yerma*, because I didn't see it as a dramatic work, but as a tragedy. In fact, from the end of the '70's onwards, I turned increasingly towards ritual theatre, partly under the influence of Brecht, but mostly because of an inner urge and interest. This probably reflects the influence of my origins and the

cultural experiences and oriental traditions I carry. This was already very evident during the staging of *Yerma*, which was like a ritual choreography. During the preparation, I gave the actors a training session, which I had learned from my



Photo: Johanna Weber

Figure 2. Dionysus based on Bacchae by Euripides and pre-Colombian myths, Bogota 1998, Teatro de la Casa, Jorge Ivan Grisales

Chinese master. It was, of course, different from what I have been doing for almost forty years now, but it was a very positive experience for the actors and it had a significant impact on the quality of the performance. I myself have studied classical ballet for eight years, as well as Martha Graham's dance technique [and] the Alexander Technique, I have worked a lot on my own body, and I have also studied the traditional rites of Northern Greece. I have danced on burning embers myself, I have tried many dangerous things. I underwent a lot of these bodily experiences and began to incorporate them into a system of my own, based on breathing. And over the years I gradually developed an individual training method.

Did you develop your training method entirely on your own, or was its incorporation into the system already linked to the creation of the Attis Theatre Company?

■ You can't work alone in the theatre. There is always you and the material you are working with. If we consider the actor as material, we have to conduct thorough research first in order to build up a solid theoretical system. If you meet actors who work from routine, who build on stereotypes, and you simply put them side by side, you can only create schematic forms. I often experience this, but it makes a difference how open this material is to change and development. We should not be content to let the actor remain mere material, only reproducing stereotypes. It is important to wake him up to the need for change. I had this intention in mind when I founded the Attis Theatre, and since then I have created some 2,300 performances around the world in this spirit.

What do you see as the fundamental difference or similarity between Brecht's theatre and the tragedy towards which your theatrical path has moved?

■ Brecht has nothing to do with tragedy, at most we can discover it in the structure of his plays. Just as in tragedy there is a dialogue and a chorus, so in Brecht's plays the dialogue is usually followed by a song, which reacts to the previous dialogue and prepares the next. Perhaps that is all there is in common. But Brecht draws from society and speaks to society, so in that sense it is social theatre, whereas tragedy is a dialogue with God, so when I direct tragedy I am speaking to the gods and to people at the same time. The orientation is differ-

ent, as in the case of Brecht the performance has a political message, a political “core”, whereas in the case of tragedy it is ontological. At the same time, it is much easier to discover a political dimension in tragedy than to find an ontological root in Brecht. Brecht always gives a social explanation and opens up a political dimension, and is more concerned with questions of human life, while tragedy turns towards the whole universe and asks a much deeper question, the ontological essence of existence. In this sense, Brecht sacrifices a lot on the altar of a presentation for society, although he could have gone much deeper if he had gone down to the ontological depths. In terms of structure, for example, his drama *Galileo* would have been suitable for this, or even his adaptation of *Coriolanus*, which is closer to tragedy in genre.

Compared to the strong politico-social approach of the German theatre, did the reinterpretation of Greek tragedies also represent for you a kind of intellectual-spiritual paradigm shift towards a more universal, “vertical” oriented theatrical language?

■ This orientation has been present in me from the beginning, mainly through my family roots and upbringing, but also through my theatre studies and work, and my encounters with the great masters also guided me in this direction. Gradually, I came to the realisation that I must always look upwards, that I must move upwards. I could describe this shift with Hegel’s dialectical concept of *Aufhebung*⁴, which is a very beautiful, philosophical expression, a capturing of a paradoxical idea. After the statement comes the denial of the statement, and then “denying” it, we come to another, different kind of statement. This concept expresses man’s aspiration to always rise above things, phenomena, and to deny something in such a way that he thereby also moves to a higher spiritual level.

And this spiritual progress, this new stage in your career, is marked by the creation of the Attis Theatre, which you founded in 1985.

⁴ *“Aufhebung” or “Aufheben”* is a German term that has several seemingly contradictory meanings, for example, “to lift”, “to abolish”, “to interrupt”, “to suspend”, “to preserve”, “to surpass”. In philosophy, the term *Aufheben* is used by Hegel in his exposition of dialectics, and can be understood in English as “to preserve by eliminating”, or “to exceed”.

■ Indeed, the founding of the Attis Theatre thirty-seven years ago marked the beginning of a new era, the first step on this journey. Yes, in three years we will celebrate its fortieth anniversary!

The name of the company, Attis, is also revealing, as it draws from ancient Greek mythology.

■ The name was a conscious choice on my part, as Attis is the Phrygian version of Dionysus. I decided a long time ago that I wanted to work with Greek tragedy, and specifically with the Bacchantes and Dionysus, who is the god of theatre [and] of metamorphosis, but we could also call him the god of strength and energy. He is the one who connects and unites people with nature and other gods. I wanted to enter into the study of this, into this spiritual force field, so I turned to the Bacchantes. I spent a year honing and developing my training method, the method I have used to prepare the actors to work on the stage. When I talk about training, I am talking about a very well thought-out, systematic physical exercise regime, which is also unthinkable without a certain intellectual-philosophical background. As in medicine, the practitioner must have an elaborate scientific system behind him, otherwise he is not a doctor, but a charlatan. Thus, each practice or set of practices has a detailed explanation, a scientific basis.

On the one hand, the system of operation of the Attis Theatre is based on the training method you have developed, on a rational, scientific basis, but when you say that theatrical creation has started on a particular "Dionysian" path and that "tragedy is in dialogue with God", can we assume that there is a spiritual or even mystical experience behind this?

■ This path is a conscious decision on my part; there is nothing random about it. Because nothing happens by chance. And when I speak of God, I do not mean the Christian entity in the mystical sense. In fact, I don't give him a face or any particular character. By that I mean the power above us. Ascension, or transcendental orientation, for me is a state of seeking God.



Figure 3. Heracles by Heiner Muller, Athens 1997, Attis Theatre, Sophia Michopoulou, Ieronymos Kaletsanos, Giorgos Symeonidis

You mentioned earlier your Eastern roots, the experiences that are linked to the Eastern tradition. An important part of this tradition is the inner journey, the metaphysical experience of being.

■ When I used to dance on burning embers during fire dancing rituals, my body was in a state in which my feet didn't burn from the heat because I was in a state of trance that protected me from it. I noticed that when I was in this state, the control of the brain was reduced, that is, it was not my brain that was controlling my body. I jumped into the fire and my feet didn't burn while dancing. It was the result of an ecstatic state, but I wouldn't call it mystical or diabolical. My blood circulation was probably accelerated, so my own temperature was heated up, I would say, to a "Dionysian" temperature. For the blood in my body, which circulated at an accelerated pace, is the wine of Dionysus himself. Of course, there are many other ways to describe or explain this phenomenon. But one thing is for sure, if you put your cold foot on the fire, you will get burnt.

*The Attis Theatre's first and one of their most significant productions to break into the theatre scene was *The Bacchantes*, and it marked the beginning of the company's journey, now several decades in the making. As I understand it, you vowed at the time to stage this production not once, but seven times. To whom did you make this vow and why seven times?*

■ That's right. This is my sixth production at the National Theatre in Budapest. And the seventh will be either in Senegal or in Yakutia, in the form of a ritual play in the forest. And I have made my vow to Dionysus, and I have done it seven times because it is a magic number.

*How are the six versions of *The Bacchantes* born so far different from each other?*

■ The first performance was still "virgin", that is, formally pure. And the costumes were in an oriental style, so it was a kind of oriental version of Greek tragedy, but I was already relying entirely on the method I had developed in creating the production. The second version was staged during the US invasion of Afghanistan, with the Bacchans looking like the Taliban and the palace evoking Germany's first industrial era. The set designer was Jannis Kounellis, an important representative of the Arte Povera art movement. This performance was produced in 2002 by the Schauspielhaus in Düsseldorf, starring prominent actors, and took place in a Siemens factory building, where Hitler and his men were preparing to build the atomic bomb. And the third show I directed in Colombia, with the participation of shamans and anthropologists as actors, and most of it was produced in villages in the Amazon, around Cauca Selva, where we were researching the ancient traditions of the indigenous tribes there. I myself participated in these rites, and later wrote about my experiences in a separate book. It was an extremely interesting and liberating experience for me, an inexhaustible, boundless, and profound feeling. It was quite fascinating to experience this depth of consciousness. The fourth version was created in 2015 at the Stanislavsky Theatre in Moscow, where I was invited by the new artistic director Boris Yukhananov. In the completely renovated and transformed theatre (*which was then called the Stanislavsky Elektrotjeatr – A. K.*). I chose the cast from about four hundred young actors, but excellent older actors also played there, who always had the spirit of Stanislavsky hov-

ering over them. What made this performance special was that it managed to find a balance between tragedy and the style of Stanislavsky's first period, which, for example, was represented by Maria Lilina at the time. It is no coincidence that Eisenstein also mostly called on Stanislavsky's actors for various roles. In this production, Dionysus was played by a woman, Yelena Morozova, one of the most prominent Russian actresses of our time. It was an extremely physical and crazy performance. My fifth production was in Taipei, Taiwan, organised by the National Theatre there, and it was the largest production of its kind ever, with a cast of about sixty and with the involvement of a legendary drum ensemble, the Ten Drum Art Percussion Group. Alongside the actors, it featured thirty-five dancers and huge drums. A special open-air venue was set up between the palace buildings, and around two thousand spectators sat on the steps of the old palaces to watch the performance. At my special request, the performance featured a chorus of women from an indigenous minority in Taiwan, who resembled Filipinos or Papuans. The final result was shocking, the presence of the choir almost shocked the audience, and the actor playing Dionysus was in an almost frantic, mad state, producing a very extreme presence. I staged the sixth performance here in Budapest, at the National Theatre, but I didn't really have a choice of actors, so I accepted the theatre's proposal. But I have to say that I can work with great actors, and I feel that I have found a good rapport with all the actors, including the student actors in the chorus and supporting roles, who have been through two months of hard training. I think the end result is an extremely powerful piece.

*One of your most important writings, *The Return of Dionysus*, which was published in 2015, has been translated into around twenty-five languages. Can we consider it a kind of summary of your work to date, an intellectual and theatrical ars poetica?*

■ Yes, in a sense you could call it that. It will be followed by another one, *The Song of Dionysus*, which is mostly about voice, the use of voice.

Reflecting on the title of your book, why should Dionysus return? Because it means that he has disappeared from our world. Why did he disappear and why is he returning now?

■ On this question, in 2011 a three-day symposium was organised in Berlin, chaired by Erika Fischer-Lichte and based on my theatre work, entitled *Dionysus in Exile*⁵. This has led to some excellent writings, mostly interpreting the disappearance of the Dionysian spirit. I believe that Europe was the first to expel him, and put Apollo in his place, focusing on the idea of beauty and harmony. This approach also influenced the ideology of National Socialism later on. Three volumes on the subject have been published so far, one of which is *Journey with Dionysus*⁶, in which several major theatre thinkers, including Hans-Thies Lehmann, write about my work, and the other *Dionysus in Exile*⁷, while the third is the *Return of Dionysus*⁸, in which I explain my training method in detail. As we live in an age in which we have lost our voice, lost our energy, lost our physicality, and technological developments have erased everything, perhaps his return could be the solution. We can rediscover him, [and] our senses, [and] learn to hear again, because today we can no longer hear our world and each other, we are almost deaf. So that we can see again, because our vision has been distorted, and so that we can speak again, because we are mute. So that we can think again, because we have become dumb, so that we can grasp things again, because we are unable to do that today. Dionysus embodies all of this, and it is something that is sorely lacking in theatre and in life today. Gone is the tradition of lamentation, which is a very important aspect of our existence, the capacity to mourn. Also, a true expression of joy, of ecstasy. We have to experience all this again to become human again. I would say that Dionysus is the liberating force and the force that creates Man. Once, before one of my performances, I wanted to put a microphone on stage, but that night I had a nightmare, Dionysus appeared in front of me to literally kill me. Then I understood that I had to throw away the microphone and let the natural human voice

5 Between the 23rd and the 25th of September, 2011, the Hellenic Cultural Foundation in Berlin presented “*Dionysus in Exile. The theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos.*” The theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos, an international symposium brought together scholars and researchers from the fields of theatre studies, classical philology, psychoanalysis, psycho- and neurolinguistics with writers, dramaturges, directors, and actors to share their views on the specific characteristics of Terzopoulos’ theatre, and its Dionysian character.

6 Raddatz, Frank M Reise, ed. 2006. *Journey with Dionysos: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit.

7 Raddatz, Frank M Reise, ed. 2019. *Dionysus in Exile: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit.

8 Raddatz, Frank M Reise, ed. 2020. *The Return Of Dionysus: The Method Of Theodoros Terzopoulos*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit.

prevail. What I mean by that is that I have a very direct, strong relationship with Dionysus, both in life and in the formal language of my theatre. As I said, for me he is the creator of Man. Of course, this form varies somewhat from performance to performance, but I always keep the natural basics of theatrical expression. I never use video feeds or microports, for example. With actors, I tend to try to open up their voices and struggle for months to get them to speak in their own voice. In fact, that's the vow I made to Dionysus, to put my art at his service.

You have directed and taught in countless places around the world. What is your experience, how open are actors to this Dionysian approach in their theatre work?

■ They are absolutely open. I would say that when Dionysus opens the door for them, they rush to enter. This is the Dionysian material. It frees us from the bonds of psychologism and moves us towards natural existence, towards inner vision. For example, when twelve actors breathe on stage at the same time, there is nothing more powerful and natural in the world. And this is captivating for the actors, almost therapeutic, calming them down, bringing them back down to earth. I am always delighted when, anywhere in the world, not only young actors but also older, experienced actors, up to seventy or eighty years old, come across this new thing and throw themselves into it with great enthusiasm because they are not afraid to experiment.

During our conversation, we have already talked about the masters who have started, shaped and inspired you throughout your life. How do you see you can pass on your knowledge as a master and will the theatrical journey of Dionysus' return continue in your students?

■ Yes, definitely. Savvas Stroumpos⁹ is the most important representative and teacher of this theatrical path and of course all my actors, but he is the

⁹ Savvas Stroumpos (1979–) is a Greek actor, director and theatre pedagogue. He graduated from the Drama School of the National Theatre of Greece in 2002. In 2003, he obtained an MA in Theatre Practice from the University of Exeter (UK). Since 2003, he has been working as an actor at the Attis Theatre and as assistant to the director Theodoros Terzopoulos.

Photo: Johanna Weber



Figure 4. Persians by Aeschylus, Epidaurus 2006. Ancient Theatre, Chorus

one who most responsibly continues this spirit and method. He himself has trained some forty teachers worldwide, and my method is taught in various schools and theatre academies. For example, at the Moscow State College of Dramatic Arts, or in China, where this is taught to second-year acting students eight hours a week, but there are also teachers in Seoul, Berlin and Italy, there is actually a network of teachers. When a symposium on my work was held in Delphi, our students gathered there, but also Anatoly Vasiliev, Eugenio Barba, the Rimini Protocol and many others came to see a six-hour demonstration of

our method. One of the reasons why this was fantastic was that our students spoke different languages, Chinese, Korean, Italian, Portuguese and Russian, yet they were all from the same school. Our teachers are invited to many countries to give training and workshops. The results are fast and spectacular because it opens up the voice and energy of the actors. Of course, there have been repertory theatres where this kind of method did not fit with the established acting presence, but, for example at Beijing State University or in Istanbul, there are special departments dedicated to my method and Tadashi Suzuki's method. I have many followers and I am glad that more theatres want to learn about the method, because it can help educate the next generation of theatre makers. The forty teachers we train come to Greece every summer to attend a month-long seminar and it's a wonderful feeling to see them improve year after year. It is interesting to note that in this respect the English theatre is a rather closed medium, because Shakespearean theatre dominates there.

In addition to ancient Greek tragedies, you have also staged works by other authors. Which of these do you consider the most important?

■ Indeed, it is important to clarify that my work is not only related to Dionysus or ancient Greek tragedy. I have been commissioned by theatres and international festivals all over the world to direct productions based on works by Brecht, Beckett, Heiner Müller and others, some of them several times. My important works include *Mother Courage* by Brecht, *Endgame* by Beckett, and *Medea-material*, *Quartet* and *Mauzer* by Heiner Müller. I have also staged many new Greek works in Greece, introducing many new writers and poets to audiences, who have become very successful through this. They also reflect my approach to tragedy, because for me this is the basic principle of theatre, which can give even a small performance a large format, [making it] able to expand and open up the energies inherent in the text. Such as *Amor* or *Alarme*, which were also presented at MITEM.

In addition to your directing and theatre pedagogical work, the creation of the Theatre Olympics, which you initiated in 1995 in Delphi and which has since grown into one of the largest theatre gatherings in the world, is of particular importance. Was this impressive event born specifically as an outgrowth

of your artistic quest, or more out of a need to shape society and create community?

■ This clearly came out of my work in the theatre, my artistic quest, because I wanted to dig as deep as possible in understanding and experiencing tragedy. My desire was to get to the heart of tragedy. So in 1984, I organised a theatre forum in Delphi, to which I invited the most important creators of the theatre world. Among the participants were Andrzej Wajda, Robert Wilson, Heiner Müller, Dario Fo, Tadashi Suzuki, Jan Kott, [as well as] many prominent philosophers and artists, the cream of the artistic world of the time. We talked about why we should get together regularly and do a theatre event together. I first discussed this publicly with Tadashi Suzuki in 1986 in Tokyo, on Japanese state television channel 1. I made this proposal and asked Suzuki to be my partner and collaborator in this. Then I invited other renowned artists to collaborate, and the idea grew into a serious theatre forum, in which we discussed the crisis of theatre, [and] the crisis of art, with prominent personalities. This creative restlessness would not have led us to create a festival, nor was it planned, but we simply wanted to tell the truth about the state of theatre art and theatre education and to formulate new creative principles. I invited Eugenio Barba, Anatoly Vassiliev, the founders of La Mama theatre, Richard Serra and many other renowned artists. A late-night discussion developed, which I chaired, and that's when we decided to create a large theatre meeting. The second question was where to get the money from. Together with Tadashi Suzuki, we went to Japan and managed to get the mayor of Sizuoka city to support our initiative. In Sizuoka, which is an industrial city, they were going to build a whole section of the city for this purpose, based on the design by a famous Japanese architect.

I took these plans to Melina Mercuri¹⁰, the Greek Minister of Culture at the time, and I told her that the Japanese would like to organise the first Theatre Olympics, but that in my opinion it should be launched in Greece. She supported my initiative and thanks to her we organised the first Theatre Olympics in Delphi in 1995, which was a huge success. In the presence of around five hundred journalists, we announced the manifesto of the Theatre Olympics,

¹⁰ *Melina Mercuri*, Latin transliteration: Melina Mercouri (1920–1994) Greek actress, singer, politician, member of the Greek Parliament, first female Minister of Culture of Greece from 1981–89 to 1993–94.

and Juan Antonio Samaranch¹¹ gave us permission to use the word “Olympics”. Japan then hosted the second Olympics in 1999, followed by Moscow, Istanbul, Seoul, Beijing, Wroclaw, Delhi, St Petersburg and Toyama. The Theatre Olympics have grown into an event of huge significance, which deserves a separate discussion. The history of the past twenty-seven years is extremely rich and varied, and we would like to capture this in a well-prepared and documented book following the year 2023 Hungarian Theatre Olympics.

¹¹ *Juan Antonio Samaranch Torello* (1920–2010) Spanish sports diplomat, known worldwide as the 7th President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

András Pataki

Understanding Through Experiencing

Some Thoughts on Theatre Pedagogy

"It is commonly believed that there is a big difference between learning and having fun. The former may be useful, but only the latter is pleasant. [...] Actually, we can only say this much: between learning and having fun the contradiction need not be inherently legitimate, has not always been, and need not always be. [...] Theatre remains theatre, even if it is theatre for teaching purposes, and if it is good theatre, it is entertaining."

Bertolt Brecht

It is clear from Brecht's words, written in 1936 (Brecht 1969, 128-129), that the idea of associating theatre with education has long been the subject of debate over the role of theatre. If we want to clarify the concepts, it is not made any easier by the fact that there are several schools of thought regarding the nature of drama and its relation to theatre and education.

Even if we take as a starting point that by drama we mean the genre of literature that is determined by roles and dialogues, adding that in the dialogues there must always be a continually changing relationship that manifests itself within the framework of the situation, other questions may also arise, such as whether it corresponds to a written text or to a theatrical performance, or both.

Behind the thinking about the nature of "drama", and the use of terminology associated with it, there are four ways of approaching drama and theatre in the literature and in the practice of drama teachers:

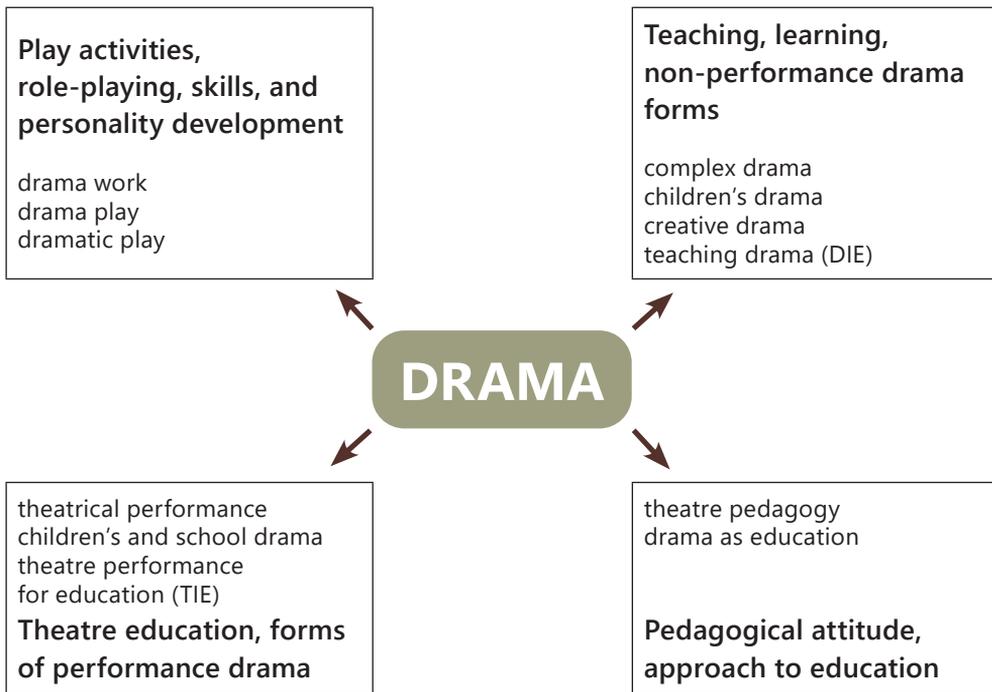


Table 1. The relationship between drama, dramatic forms, and attitudes (cf. Gabnai 2015, 417–440)

Depending on which term or denomination they prefer, this reveals the various ways in which people think about drama: they may veer towards theoretical foundations or philosophical questions, they may approach the subject from the perspective of educational theory, or they may see it as a tool, which is an effective method for developing skills, and learning rules or play activities in general.

Theatrical form is important in drama work that is performed by those on the other pole, but the fundamental difference is that more emphasis is placed on the theatrical side (that is, on the dramatic form of performance), than on educational activity. The latter also employs the tools and elements of the theatre (and here we mean not only the external elements, such as props and scenery, but also the building of the dramatic action itself, to heighten the tension), yet the goals are different. These tools are used for theatre education, attempting to prepare the child for receiving a theatre performance as a member of the audience, obviously providing an artistic experience, while

the other side focuses on understanding and experiencing the content within the context of the drama and the emphasis (here the content comes to the fore, and theatre tools are subordinated to this educational goal).

However one views drama through the lens of theatre pedagogy, it seems clear that it does not equate to the genre of literature, or knowledge of it. While its peculiarities, such as characters, dialogue, context and changing relations, may also be found in drama work, they are not treated as texts, but take the form of activity. Thus, it is not a transfer of knowledge, but rather a form of learning.

Drama work emerges during a specific activity, in a specific community, and always conveys new meanings. This way, we could also place our entire school education system on a new foundation and transform it for the benefit of the children, and we could consider it not as a system of tools, not as a method, but as a brand of education in itself. All school education and training could be based on such a foundation, since drama offers the most broadly applicable system of thought, an alternative approach to our vision of schooling.

This would require that we do not distribute and offer literacy material to children within the current curricular framework, thinking in terms of fields of culture and subjects, but rather develop a curricular structure that is extremely specific, focusing on systems of human relationships. We could practically guide students through the history of civilisation, in which the intriguing questions of humanity, the great steps forward or backwards, would be presented in a context of relationships and conflicts, in a personal way. This would map the journey of a child's personal development and awakening, the change of mindset and the path to adulthood. It would allow "philosophical" (existential and epistemological) questions to be raised and the appropriate forms of activity to be coordinated, and adapted to the age of the child and important for them at that particular stage of their life.

From each major era, we could highlight themes and ideas for which we can design contexts (for example, time and space, people and outstanding personalities) specific to a particular age, and these could be used as drama, in which children can undertake roles, while all other types of activities (technical or physical, for example) are adapted to the dramatic situations that we have developed and offered. This way, the fragmented system of subjects would also change, as we would come to think in terms of a unified whole.

In this drama-based structure, drama is also a working method, employed how and when we need it to achieve our educational objectives. This working

method is child-centred, drawing on the child's previous experience, using language that is adapted to the child's imagination, and which takes account the child's interests while motivating him or her to participate. It offers alternative ways of learning (dramatic activities, drama), and, by placing the child in a fictitious situation, it encourages the children to collaborate in an interesting and exciting situation, almost on their own, without any external teacher motivation.¹

Drama work, like all collective activities, socialises the participants. With a group learning method, the teaching-learning process traverses back and forth, with cooperation, decision-making ability, acceptance and empathy: its essence and benefit lies in the acquisition of these skills, and this represents the truest sphere of learning. It focuses on knowledge that is acquired in the social environment and uses imaginary situations in order to decipher the real world and our own selves (cf. Neelands 1994, 36–42). Fictitious situations provide protection, but in terms of their mechanism, they model real situations. Hence the real benefit is that the experience gained here can be applied to real situations. It represents an area of activity in which we acquire new knowledge, which is nothing other than a higher level of understanding of the dilemma at the heart of the matter, and which is accompanied by experience.

A fundamental dilemma in the encounter between theatre and children is posed by the extent to which the education system allows theatre into the school and encourages visits and collaborative work. In essence, it is the setting that separates the two problems. On the one hand, this is the field with which we want to familiarise pupils. Education can be achieved by bringing the child, the class, the school into the theatre, so that children may learn its language and its operation directly. On the other hand, there is the performance itself, what is being performed, and what problem is being addressed. This does not always require a theatre presence. If we consider the problem situation to which we want to introduce the children to be of greater importance, it can also be arranged for them to attend the presentation in the usual school space.

The problem of the setting is particularly important in solving issues related to theatre education in the upcoming period. Although it seems to be a simple question of space, in reality there are educational and theoretical considerations lying behind it. The question is how willing and able the school is to

¹ Ervin Németh's literature textbook *Irodalom Birodalom*, for grades 5 and 6, offers a drama-based framework that fits the above perfectly.

change its closed, strict structure in order to be able to meet the expectations set by curriculum requirements. After all, the National Basic Curriculum (NAT) includes drama as an area of literacy. In forming the general curricular requirements, the document also states the fact that theatre as an educational field represents an important part of children's education.

The problem is often that the school sooner chooses the option of going to the theatre, exposing the children to traditional performances, and familiarising them with the general rules of behaviour (wearing formal clothing, for example), rather than considering the benefits of hosting a special educational theatre performance within a school framework. For the most part, they see it as a problem, having to reorganise the school schedule, and arrange possible substitutions. Unfortunately, many believe that the best result is achieved by teaching the student how to attend a theatrical event, when in fact they are only sanctifying the somewhat reprehensible convention that by attending the theatre they imply that it is merely a social event at which the viewer relaxes and has fun, that is, one of society's entertainment mechanisms that is solely designed for that purpose.

Most schools do not prepare for internal events at all, although this is emphasised in the curriculum requirements. In the best scenario, a teacher of Hungarian literature "takes time out" from their class to discuss with the pupils what they have seen. In many instances, there is no mention of the awareness of the theatrical experience, any interpretation of the problems raised by the play, not to mention the gesture of "referring it to ourselves".

In other cases, if drama enters the doors of the school, it is not treated as a toolset, but as some type of methodological update and play technique. So often, all that happens in class is the performing of a series of exercises. Little is revealed about the fact that the dramatic work is about something, that it focuses on a problematic situation that may present an important moral or sociological issue for the children at that particular stage of their lives, or that its fragmentary elements are present in the work process.

Educational drama or educational theatre performances, which could function as a genuine forum, are only peripherally present in schools today: such performances are more common in Budapest and in the larger cities, rarely in small towns and scarcely ever in villages. There is a shortage of teachers in schools who can plan and direct educational drama. If there are any, the scar-

city of time slots, unrealistic curriculum and timetable arrangements, and inadequate school spaces present real obstacles to drama work in schools.

If we are to imagine future generations as members of a democratic society comprising a multitude of individuals who are willing and able to engage in public affairs, we must not forget what the Greek polis democracies created long ago: the theatre as a social institution plays an extremely important role in educating citizens to use the institutions of democracy. This role of the theatre should not be neglected today, which is why it is necessary to develop a truly effective and operational theatre education structure for children.

This would require rethinking the system for training and employing drama teachers, actor-drama teachers, and theatre educationalists, developing the infrastructure needed for effective work, and making the school system more flexible (for example, block schemes and theme weeks). It is also necessary to develop the optimal conditions for the creation of performances that seem to be the most effective in theatre education and for their access to schools (educational performances by independent so-called TiE companies, as well as permanent theatre companies). All this must be implemented in order to give every child the opportunity to experience understanding through theatre or drama.

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Dániel Hegyi

Review of András Visky's monograph “What is Theatre for? On the way to the theatrum theologicum”

Source: L'Harmattan Könyvkiadó



Figure 1. András Visky: The cover of the volume entitled What is Theatre for? On the way to the theatrum theologicum

As the author emphasises in his preface to the volume, the phrase “*theatrum theologicum*” is even older: it was originally a term coined by Daniel Fesselius, a little-known post-Reformation thinker, who first used it in his book *Theatrum theologico-politico-historicum*, which was published in 1668, “offering an ideological, political and historical explanation of the disappearance of the secular powers, and the vicissitudes of their fate, in the theatre of theological discourse” (Visky 2020, 13). As his starting point, Fesselius used the well-known idea, restated by John Calvin, that the world is the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, that is, the theatre of God’s glory. “Among Calvin’s [...] favourite figures of speech is to make the perfect mastery of divine creation and the scene of redemption, that is, the human world

and history, seen as God's 'beautiful', [...] 'glorious' theatre, where man [...] occupies the orchestra and there plays the spectacle of divine goodness and wisdom [...] to the delight of men and God" (Visky 2020, 13).

The term, therefore, was not originally used in a theatrical sense, but its introduction was first suggested by the author of this volume, when Melinda Gemza was writing her thesis at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University on the theatre of József Nagy and Romeo Castellucci, in the hope that this term would be of help in a comparative analysis of the performances of the two theatre artists (Visky 2020, 12). The mention of Castellucci's name is no coincidence, as the author believes that the world-famous director is one of those contemporary artists who at the same time perceives theatre as a kind of divine question in our time. This volume claims that the *theatrum theologicum* also seems to describe Castellucci's theatrical aesthetics in a prolific way, since the aforementioned question of God and the Western Christian theological tradition are also captured in an active way in his musical theatre performances and opera adaptations, among other things.¹ "Visky mentions Romeo Castellucci as the greatest of his contemporaries to achieve such a beneficial success, despite the fact that he has not yet referred to Castellucci's works in any of his writings" (Prontvai 2021, 636).

The work is divided into four sections in terms of both structure and genre: the first two parts contain the author's studies and essays on a wide variety of subjects, which sometimes "have different motivations and factures, sometimes very divergent" (Visky 2020, 13). In other respects, however, what almost all of them have in common is an emphasis on the importance of the joint participation of performer and audience in the performance, in terms of the theatre's contract with itself. The entire work of art is created by the recipient together with the creators and the performers, by becoming (or being) an active participant in the production, and this includes the question of post-performance interpretation.

This idea is known to be closely related to performativity, so it is no coincidence that the opening essay of the second part of the volume, entitled *The Performance of the Spectator*, which is in itself a telling title, discusses the importance of audience participation in the light of the performative shift that took

¹ Be they the *Divina Commedia*, considered by many to be a major work (and mentioned several times in this volume), or Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Mozart's *Requiem*, *The Magic Flute*, or the performance of *On The Concept of Face, Regarding the Son of God*, to name just a few of the most successful productions.

place in the 1960s and 1970s. In the second paragraph, we can read the following about the significance of this shift, which was to radically change the logocentric tradition that had hitherto dominated the theatre:

“The innovative [...] creators of contemporary theatre [...] have moved from the work of art as a sacred object to be admired to the work of art as a process, with a consequent shift of emphasis [...] to the co-presence and joint activity of spectators and performers, [...] eliminating the romantic image of the artist – [the image of the creator as [a] ‘great man’, the demiurge], which [...] provided the ideological basis for [...] power games and institutional appropriations [...]. Co-presence is not just an empty slogan [...] but [...] the demonstration [...] of the common elements of the creative process” (Visky 2020, 91).

At the same time, the author of *What is Theatre for?* also emphasises in this essay that the powerful pre-turnaround convention, which is mainly fed by the cult of operetta, which perceives theatre as something “‘not serious’ but entertaining, and therefore insignificant, a light ‘weekend’ event” (Visky 2020, 92), has exempted the creator from taking responsibility.² The performative shift, however, makes it impossible to avoid this assumption of responsibility by drawing attention to the risk-taking of the spectator-participant, which carries more weight than one might at first think. To illustrate this assertion, the author cites Purcărete’s production of *The King is Dying*, in which the protagonist is chosen from among the audience, “indicating at the very beginning that the performance is not about the death of someone with whom we have nothing to do and who is above us” (Visky 2020, 92). Instead, the central element of the performance becomes the common presence and the “‘closeness of bodies’ (Erika Fischer-Lichte), or rather the ‘closeness of heavy bodies’ (Hans-Thies Lehmann)” (Visky 2020, 92), a gesture which, on the one hand, dissolves the obligatory reverence on the part of the audience, but which also entails an element of risk, since it forces them to experience a hitherto unknown mode of interpretation. It is no coincidence that the essay concludes with Abramović’s version of his manifesto entitled *Art Vital*, which has been translated into Hungarian by the author, in which the performance artist articulates what he considers to be the most important aspirations of contemporary art. According to Visky, its lines are particularly important in terms of the vulnerability of the audience (and not the artist), as they highlight that “spectator activity is not simply fashion and cheap

2 See Harnoncourt 1989, 9-13.

provocation, but a demonstration and recognition that the author's act does not separate, but connects us" (Visky 2020, 93).

It is perhaps no coincidence that the second essay that follows immediately begins with the well-known opening scene of Castellucci's above-mentioned *Divina Commedia, Inferno*, when the director takes to the stage and introduces himself in the most direct way: "Je m'appelle Romeo Castellucci."³ In Visky's interpretation, everything in the space of the Papal Court in Avignon, turned into a stage, has an important added meaning: we are witnessing "that the once common knowledge of Western culture can only be assembled with great difficulty, and has become an archive of personal, fragmented bodily experiences" (Visky 2020, 94). Moreover, Vera Prontvai, the author of another review of the present monograph, relates this line of thought on the loss of identity in Western culture to poetic theatre, of which the author (Visky) is himself an important representative in Hungary: "The man of today, according to the philosophy of Beckett, Pilinszky, [and] Imre Kertész, can no longer tell the determining story of his own life, which goes back to universal roots, [and] language no longer carries the meanings that would recall it. Theatre turns to poetry in order to echo the Logos in space and to reconstruct a forgotten reality no longer recognised by modern man" (Prontvai 2021, 636).⁴

In Visky's interpretation of the essay, the above contextual framework on the loss of identity, which is presented through the opening gesture of the *Divina Commedia* and is ultimately related to the question of performativity and, according to Prontvai, to the aesthetics of poetic theatre, points to the contract that the theatre has with itself, to its inherent social function, which is best manifested in the distinction between the notions of "benevolent" and "evil" success.

This is elaborated in the fourth and final part of the monograph, in a tract entitled Pseudo-Augustine's *On Success*, which is written in the form of a dialogue, thus crystallising for the reader the primary mission and fundamental existence of theatre, as the author sees it, and at the same time summarising the texts of the preceding three parts of the volume, which are of different

3 My name is Romeo Castellucci.

4 The question of the loss of identity, in the context of Castellucci's performance, is connected by Visky at a later point in the essay to the notion of the German historian Wolfgang Stöcker, the creator of the world's first dust archive, who argues that dust best expresses the nature of culture, time, and man, as well as the universe itself. The reason, Stöcker argues, is that whether it is footprints, bone dust or stardust, "dust has the richest and most gentle memory" (Visky 2020, 95).

genres, and facilitating the possibility of (joint) further reflection. The work in question may have been composed after Augustine's works *Confessions* and *De musica (On Music)*, or it may be considered a direct continuation of the latter, given that on several occasions it takes passages from them verbatim, which Visky explains by the fact that in all probability Pseudo-Augustine may have memorised several passages, since Augustine was known to have intended the *Confessions* to be read out.

The last of the three chapters of the tract, published in this monograph, illustrates the difference between the two types of success through the example of the Ancient Roman parodist, St Genesis, who was later to die a martyr's death. Genesis was widely known in his day as a popular actor and entertainer, and his fame led him to be invited to the house of Diocletian, the emperor who was notorious for introducing the Tetrarchy and the most brutal persecution of Christians. Since the ruler thought that the actor's talent could be used for political purposes (as he saw the unity of the state threatened by the new religion), he asked him to create a performance in the Coliseum that would parody the liturgy. Genesis readily accepted the assignment, and therefore not only studied the text of the ceremony thoroughly, but also learned it word for word, and for the sake of the authenticity of the production, employed a real priest to conduct the ceremony. However, when the priest sprinkled holy water on Genesis, baptising him, he first collapsed, and then, shortly afterwards, regained consciousness and gave an impromptu speech about the effect it had on him, which caused many of the audience to enter the arena with Genesis, transfixed. As Diocletian then slaughtered Genesis, the priest and the audience members on stage, as well as the starved beasts, it is questionable whether we should talk about the success or failure of the career of the hitherto famous Genesis, while the tragic event itself is an example of the spectator becoming an actor, as discussed earlier.

Pseudo-Augustine's tract offers general insights on success that merit reflection for all those seriously engaged in theatre (or any other related art form), regardless of the historical period, and we are encouraged to think further by the fact that the series of dialogues, which can be seen as a common organising element of the preceding loosely connected studies and essays, is placed at the end of the volume. "We hope that the three chapters of the last part, written in dialogues, does not close the volume, but on the contrary, will set the direction for a possible continuation" (Visky 2020, 13). The main characteristic of secular,

in the words of Pseudo-Augustine simply “evil”, success, which is primarily concerned with profit, fame, and recognition, is that it is measurable: in the case of literary works, it corresponds to the number of copies of books sold, and in the case of theatre or cinema, it is the number of viewers of the production and the financial recognition often associated with it that indicate the achievement in market terms. The “beneficial” success, on the other hand, was, as the author puts it, immeasurable: Genesisius had gained the highest esteem in contemporary society as a comic actor, but when he was baptised and converted during a performance that he had carefully planned and rehearsed (as the priest who celebrated the mass conducted the ceremony with the utmost seriousness, despite the mockery to which he had been subjected), Diocletian’s patronage was suddenly shattered. Yet the impact of Genesisius’ testimony on his audience cannot be described by the traditional criteria of secular success.

“Beneficial” success is meaningless in the context of the Holy Mass (or any other religious ritual), as it is in the case of ritual (and perhaps we may say poetic) theatre, in which the main purpose is not to provide entertainment, but rather to transfigure the viewer and involve him or her in the events taking place at the altar or on the stage. However, we do not have any relevant means of measuring the impact on the individual members of the audience, and in this case, the highest number of viewers of the given production cannot be a consideration either. After Grotowski, for example, withdrew from giving public performances and began his theatre laboratory work, he shifted his focus from performance to an experimental attitude, and from that time did not even intend his productions to be seen by large audiences. Intent on creating more in-depth workshop work with a small community of artists, he was no longer interested in his work being more widely known, or having any kind of popularity or financial success.

The aesthetics of Silviu Purcărete, one of the most internationally renowned figures of ritual theatre, can be related to the characteristics of Grotowski’s experimental work as described above in terms of the Pseudo-Augustinian “beneficial” and “evil” success, and the dichotomy between entertainment and usefulness, which may have exerted a mutually productive influence on the work of the author of this work. András Visky, who is active not only as a theoretician, but also as a poet, playwright and director, has worked as a dramaturge in several large-scale theatre projects with the Romanian-born director, and this collaboration has resulted in one of their most significant productions, *Tragedia omului* (*The Tragedy of Man*). A detailed insight into the rehearsal process

Photo: <https://mitem.hu/program/eloadasok/az-ember-tragediaja-1-3>



Figure 2. Stage design of *The Tragedy of Man* (Director: Silviu Purcărete)

leading to the premiere, which was sometimes paved with obstacles, is provided in the dramaturgical diary published on the pages of *What is Theatre for?*, as part of the third genre and structural unit of the volume, detailing the most important moments of Purcărete's canon of forms.⁵

The production of *The Tragedy of Man* in question is particularly relevant to this course of thought, because in this performance Purcărete attempted to create the so-called Theatre of Parousia, which he announced to the actors as the main objective of the performance at the first rehearsal: Visky relates this in the first entry of his diary (Visky 2020, 175). The Greek word "Parousia" referred to the rite of the visitation of the ruler, which, in a biblical context, denotes the second coming of the Messiah, entailing the Last Judgment, (Visky 2020, 175).

⁵ As well as being one of the most, if not the most, thorough accounts of the artist's beliefs and key objectives in relation to the theatre, the diary also presents a claim for a summative Purcărete monograph, which has yet to be written (András Visky 2020, 192).

The term is thus directly related to rites, to the creation of rites, and through this to the central concept of the work, the *theatrum theologicum*, as referred to by the author in the title of the diary, *The Tragedy of Man* as the *theatrum theologicum*.

As if to confirm this parallel, *What is Theatre for?* was published in 2020 within the framework of the rite research group of the Károli Gáspár Reformed University, and, in addition, the English version of the dramaturgical diary of the Purcărete performance was published (with minor changes) in another volume of the research group's Károli Books series, entitled *Poetic Rituality in Theater and Literature*.⁶

Visky researcher Vera Prontvai also draws attention to the connection between ritual, *theatrum theologicum* and the Theatre of Parousia in the context of the Pseudo-Augustine dialogue: "*What is Theatre for?* culminates in a conversation between Pseudo-Augustine and his disciple about the beneficial success that is the basis of *theatrum theologicum*, in contrast to the evil success, the theatre dominated by market laws" (Prontvai 2021, 635). She goes on to say that "the *theatrum theologicum* described by Visky aims at immersion in transcendence: conversion itself. And the theatre aesthetics that he believes should be followed emphasises the need to face the necessity of redemption" (Prontvai 2021, 635).

Although at the end of the Preface the author refers to the three chapters of the Pseudo-Augustine tract written in dialogues as "not closing the volume, but on the contrary, setting the direction of a possible continuation" (Visky 2020, 13), at the same time, however, it helps to find the logical connection between the sometimes disjointed studies and essays of the first three parts of the volume and the dramaturgical diaries. In this context, the reflections on the Damian Hirst skull, discussed in the study *White box versus black box* and in the Hamlet essay *Go not to Wittenberg*, may be even more meaningful, as the author uses the skull as an example of an emblematic archetype of contemporary art, one that is in the grip of money and power, in contrast to the Yorick skull, which resonates love and humanity (Visky 2020, 59). "It quickly became the icon of art in

6 For a detailed presentation of the Rite, Theatre and Literature research project and its research group of the same name, please click on the following link: <http://www.kre.hu/portal/index.php/ritus-szinhas-es-irodalom-cimu-kutatasi-projekt.html>. The page on L'Harmattan and its brief description in the volume *Poetic Rituality in Theater and Literature*: <https://harmattan.hu/poetic-rituality-in-theater-and-literature-2474> (Download: 19.05.2020)

the third millennium [...] the artistic act followed a pattern of substantial material investment and guaranteed profit [...] removing the artist from the self-reflective intellectual activity of the individual and society. Hirst's diamond skull equates success with profit, so money becomes the only measure of success" (Visky 2020, 59-60). The study proceeds to describe the connection between the Hirst skull and János Térey's play *Asztalizene* (*Table Music*), directed by Levente Bagossy: the former was first shown in a gallery called the White Cube, and the latter features a restaurant of the same name, where the author "parades his

Photo: Levente Bagossy



Figure 3. Stage design of the performance entitled *Asztalizene* (Directed by: Levente Bagossy)

lifeless, soulless puppet characters" (Visky 2020, 59). "[The] characters of *Asztalizene* in the dramaturgical sense [...] live in a gilded cage of well-made form, [...] meaningless, their suffering obscured by a flawless [...] language that belies elegance, quality, and ultimately success" (Visky 2020, 59). So while the theatrical black box, as the Easter representation of the empty tomb, is a place of death and resurrection, the white box, stripped of all spirituality, is the home of the Hirst skull (Visky 2020, 59)⁷.

By way of a conceptual distinction on the nature of success, the dialogues maintain that, inherently, art has always been (and should be) about much more than being a means to market success, as hallmarked by the Damian

⁷ For an analysis of the performance of *Asztalizene* and the parallels between Yorick and the Hirst skull, also see in particular the relevant excerpts from the essay *Go not to Wittenberg*: (Visky 2020, 125–126).

Hirst skull. “[Hirst’s] skull obliterates the person, [...] renders the unique and unrepeatable time between birth and death empty and worthless, and places the idol of profit, which obscures all value, in the white cube of museums” (Visky 2020, 126). It is not surprising, then, that for contemporary culture “the body remains the only means of hysterical rejection of the time and death that consume us [...]. The human body and time are in the most direct relationship possible: if nothing extends beyond the body, [...] then only in the artificial maintenance of the body [...] can we seek the possibility of redeeming ourselves. [...] The most direct representation of this pattern is [...] sport, which has become the religion and community rite of our time”

(Visky 2020, 126). However, since the theatrical text is read by the totality of our bodily experiences, it is important that we are present in the performance with our body and soul: so that the work of art, despite its not being describable by market metrics, can have an effect on us and thus play a significantly greater role in our lives than as a means of mere entertainment, and thus reduce its purpose of existence to the exclusivity of “beauty”, meaning pleasantness (Hannoncourt 1989, 9–13). The emphasis on the idea of the spectator as participant through performativity expresses the intention and the need for art not to be marginalised but to occupy a central place in our lives. On the other hand, the dialogues attributed to Pseudo-Augustine also emphasise that the spectator also becomes a “doer”, even by simply watching the performance (Visky 2020, 224). According to the text, Alypius, who came to the amphitheatre at

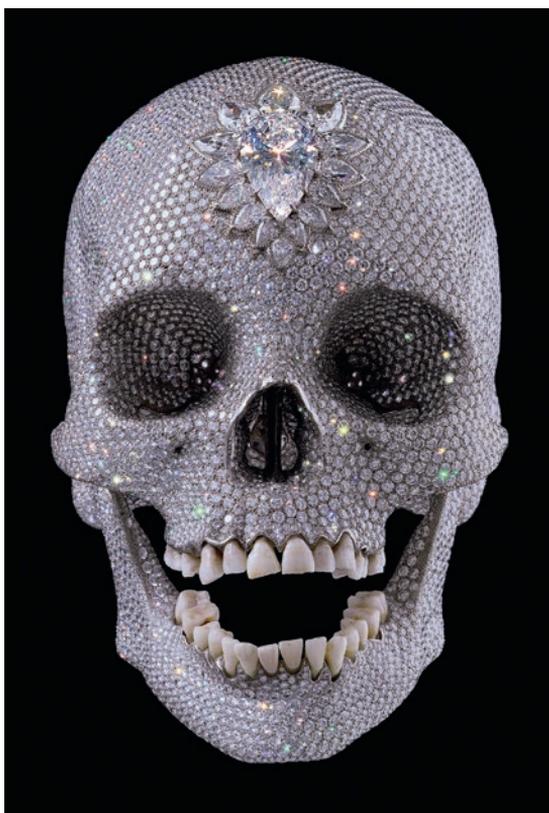


Figure 4. Damien Hirst: *For the Love of God* (2007)

Photo: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/damien-hirst-for-the-love-of-god-devotion-11>

the urging of his friends, closed his eyes but could not block out his hearing, and first his body and then his soul became one with the surging rhythm of the crowd, who were in a frenzy of joy over the spilled blood of the gladiator who had fallen to the ground (Visky 2020, 224).

The book examines from several angles the significance, the importance and the weight of the audience becoming the “doer” in theatrical performances, with a particular focus on the question of the viewer’s risk-taking, and in close association with this, the assumption of the author’s responsibility. In the context of the *theatrum theologicum* (in the theatrical sense), the author examines the works and performances of a number of contemporary artists,⁸ whose works are seen to articulate the importance of rites in human life and their vital role in the construction of community identity, in a way that contrasts with the mainstream of our time, which does not place such emphasis on rites.

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István Fazekas

Euripides and *The Bacchae* at the National Theatre

To describe how the world might have felt in Antiquity is always a daring venture, or even an impossible one. In the field of the Ontology of Art, historical research on ideas and beliefs would lead us to think that it was not very long ago when the sun itself was considered a type of deity (Eliade 1994, 81), yet the problem rather stems from the fact that today the world appears considerably bleaker than it did in Antiquity. The mythical unity between Man and nature has been severed, being has become unbalanced and we can under-



Photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó

Figure 1. The ecstatic moment of the Choir – beyond the limits of linear perception of space and time.

stand joy and suffering, and even renewal and death, only in terms of details. When scrutinising Ancient Greek dramas, one thing must be borne in mind: the original meaning of the text can only be reconstructed at a certain level of probability, and all serious critics agree that a text can assume new meanings as circumstances change. New interpretations of the dramas of Euripides, particularly *The Bacchae*, appear frequently.

Theodoros Terzopoulos recognised that dramatic tension does not only concern the soul but also the body. A multiperspective interpretation of the human condition implies that besides their spiritual nature, forebodings of tragedy also have an innate physical character. As the world famous director explained in his study *The return of Dionysus*: "His [the actor's] body, open to inner and outer stimuli, changing constantly, balances on a tightrope between life and death" (Terzopoulos 2019). Whoever recognises this can therefore approach Greek theatre from the aspect of the body. For no matter how we may have lost the feeling of Antiquity, it is the body that is the most universally conscious, as the belief in the life of our cells, the survival instinct, is universal, akin to the will to live that is present in all other bodies. This certainly merits further attention, if we are to deconstruct Terzopoulos's works.

When a person's blood becomes too hot, their throat is suddenly gripped by the moment when they can only growl and feel that if they do not unleash the animal suddenly that is awakened within them, they may perhaps not even remain the being that they were born to be, and may easily fall into a state of primal barbarism. It is also beyond doubt that Man's ecstatic state when "he is beside himself" opens to him the purity of life lost, and an elusive beam of life from the whirl of time thawing the ego nearly leads him back to where he was expelled from and shines on the gates of Eden. What is this? Divination? Animalisation? Divine frenzy or ungainly madness? Or something altogether different? Who actually is Homo sapiens, if superheated blood flooding his heart, liver, and brain makes him capable of enkindling the most immense horrors?

Staging Euripides's drama *The Bacchae*, with a method of work that was to mature into an inter-cultural form of drama, was the first attempt by the Greek director with a penchant for transformative solutions to present the anthropological atmosphere of Ancient Greek theatre. Thanks to the efforts of Attila Vidnyánszky, this attempt has now become visible on the Hungarian stage, performed by Hungarian actors and actresses. The performance has not started, yet in this interpretation of Terzopoulos we are already partaking of something

that can only be provided by the theatre and nothing else, in which the stage is a border zone, that of being and human existence, which is where struggle for life, the natural fight for life or death, first whirls and then assumes an action-driven form.

The ominous opening scene, as Cadmus lies surrounded by a jumble of transfusion tubes on a black throne that could well pass for a catafalque, might correspond to a mythical portrait of modern Man and the viewer may, following the scene's meditative start, even come to imagine that it is he or she who is lying in the middle of the stage, the one who could be revived by another person's blood. This black-red, spirit-unveiling metaphor emphasises that we are living in the present day of humankind, but the blistering entry of a salivating chorus, conjuring up two- and four-legged madness, makes it clear that the polyphony of the simultaneity of past and present reveals itself to us in the hollow, horizontal floodlight, and just as the present applies to the past so the past applies to the present in the craze of the increasingly delirious herd gasping for air.

The director is a globally known and recognised artist, the creator of the Theatre Olympics, who has been working for more than three decades in the Attis Theatre that he founded, with the inspiration to unlock the modern day intellectual and spiritual dimension of the stage of the earlier East-West axis, which cut through the original ritual sacrificial circle, that is, the orchestra. He



Photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó

Figure 2. The movement of the Choir, the explosive release of the body's inner energies, involve breathing in and out together.

once explained its practical essence in very simple terms, saying that the “performance should atavistically devastate people” (Terzopoulos 2022). Terzopoulos’s view of Greek theatre is brutally naturalistic in its diversity, which we can see for ourselves in a concrete, reality-enhancing form, as *The Bacchae* that he has staged at the National Theatre. There can be no doubt that this approach perceptibly reflects the spiritual interpretation of E. R. Dodds, who, in his foreword to *The Bacchae*, was the first to draw attention to the importance of certain elements of the rite of Dionysus, and in particular, the acts of sparagmos and omophagy, in relation to the interpretation of the tragedy, and to the fact that this work of Euripides depicts a historical view of an actual rite and an example of mass psychosis. This statement is proven by the fact that Terzopoulos cannot interpret the closing scene of the original work, so he casually abandons it, as it cannot be organically aligned to this directorial concept. Yet this does not truncate the work itself, and the performance brings the bygone world of Antiquity even closer to the audience. By way of this approach he would obviously choose not to pay more attention, even indirectly, to the actual theological content of the original text, as it would both undermine the unity of the composition as it descends from the heavens to earth and break the momentum of the linearly interpreted plot as it metamorphoses into insanity.

The Bacchae is the last of Euripides’s tragedies in which he uncovers and presents us with Man’s sordid, paranoid state (even diving deep into his own vomit), with ruthless objectivity and an ominous condensation of dramatic effects. Pentheus is portrayed as a tyrant whose rule is based solely on intimidation and sheer violence (Fischer-Lichte 2001, 60).

He wrote the play during the last year of his exile in Macedonia, and after his death it was performed in Athens, together with two other dramas born during his exile: *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Alcmaeon in Corinth*. This is the only Greek tragedy bequeathed to us that scrutinises on stage the key elements of the mystery religion that was earmarked with the name of Dionysus, and it consequently upholds the metamorphosis that inevitably takes place in Man as a result of his encounter with the transcendent. It focuses on that episode of the life of Dionysus in which the young god takes revenge on those denying him and those turning against him. Earlier, great directions also examined the question of whether such revenge is justified on the part of the god, but Terzopoulos focuses on something else, only on Man, the body and its insanity.



Figure 3. József Szarvas in the role of Teiresias, with a cylinder in his hand symbolising tunnel vision.

Another element of his directing method is that he not only stages plays but also designs their scenery and costumes.

András Kozma used Gábor Devecseri's translation as the basis for the script. In the interests of easier understandability, he made slight adjustments in places, so the sense of Antiquity has remained unchanged. The text and its recital in sonorous voices lend an archaic quality or character to the stage, which is really what helps the audience feel that they are witnessing an Ancient Greek drama, because neither Panayiotis Velianitis's modern background music, nor any of the sets, costumes or movement elements would indicate this. Pentheus, dressed in camouflage overalls, with a grenade belt strapped across his waist and a bullet-proof vest on his chest, and with a tucked-in legionnaire's cap, looks like a paratrooper emerging from a helicopter. When Dionysus loses his mind and lets him visit the Bacchae, his masculine appearance transforms into a feminine one, and the warrior longing for a vision of the god without initiation turns into a man-whore, tiptoeing in high heels. Pentheus stares into a pipe that symbolises a gun, that symbolises power, and when from its other end Dio-

nysus stares back at him, from that point it appears as if he would only be able to watch events unfold through that pipe, as his denial of the god causes him tunnel vision. This is how he becomes a ridiculous fool and, when he turns into a repulsive prostitute, his entry wearing lipstick and stockings becomes a reference to modern-day gender madness.

The costumes are simple, emphasising the body, and the tone of the muscles and their movements. Two actresses dance in black bikers' trousers, the members of the chorus also wear black, the other women and men wear trousers, the boys are bare-chested, while the girls wear narrow little bras. The rest of the actors wear loose cloaks. The costumes enhance the acting, and the steam rising from their bodies makes Terzopoulos's most important endeavour, that is, to reveal the disintegrated human soul in a painfully honest way, even more comprehensible.

The performances are shockingly poignant. Nelli Szűcs brings Agaune to life so powerfully that we almost return with her from madness into reality, and although there is nothing in her hands, we all see Pentheus's bloody, severed head in her lap. In the Dionysus played by Roland Borbás we recognise the self-confident deity who behaves brutally towards those who dare deny him, the one who is truly capable of activating the beast in Man. Ádám Schnell personifies Cadmus, King of Thebes, as a prudent ruler whose words are always sincere, and József Szarvas plays the blind prophet Teiresias on the borderline between trance and consciousness.

In short: for those interested in the Greek theatre, I would wholeheartedly recommend this unmissable performance.

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Attila Szabó

Contemporaries in the Drawer?

Professional Conference on the State
of Hungarian Drama Today

Among the masterpieces of our national drama, some works that are considered among the greatest today were hidden in desk drawers for years, even decades. *Bánk Bán* was first performed as late as eighteen years after it was written (in 1833, in Kassa), but it did not really enter the literary and theatrical landscape until the Revolution of 1848-1849. *The Tragedy of Man* waited even longer, twenty-three years after it was written, Ede Paulay staging it at the National Theatre in 1883, which was an extremely daring undertaking at the time. It is also well known that Mihály Vörösmarty did not live to see the premiere of *Csongor és Tünde* in 1879, which was also directed by Paulay. Forty-nine years elapsed between the play being written and its first performance.

On the 23rd of May, 2022, the Hungarian Academy of Arts organised a conference on the state of contemporary Hungarian drama, entitled "Contemporaries in the drawer", in an attempt to address the question as to how well new Hungarian plays of recent decades are finding their way onto the stage, and how this compares with the situation in other European countries.

The situation in Hungary

In an impassioned speech, playwright József Kiss, the main organiser of the conference, affirmed the description of the situation as given in the title: in the last ten years, thirty-nine theatres have announced as few as thirty-nine contemporary Hungarian premieres, with an average of one per theatre every ten years. The programmes of twenty permanent theatres in the countryside and eighteen in Budapest show that the number of premieres of full-length contemporary Hungarian plays for adults performed on the main stage is remarkably low. Nationally accredited theatres have fared no better than the national

average, and the fluctuations in the number of performances do not indicate any conceptual trend. Kiss relates this negative picture to the crisis concerning drama as a thoughtful, sovereign work of art: discourse on theatre increasingly refers to texts that are merely the raw material of theatrical performance, rather than the backbone. The excuse offered by the theatres is that due to the season schedule, which is tight, and the pressure to sell out houses, they are compelled to select works by well-known authors that guarantee sure success. At the same time, there is a demand from audiences for fresh, high-quality and accessible performances that speak a modern language. According to Kiss, a possible solution would require mentoring and scholarship programmes, which would continue in the form of a career model, while at the same time theatres should be given financial incentives to stage contemporary Hungarian productions. He recalled the *József Katona Tender*, which was launched in 2001 but which has unfortunately been forgotten since then.

Relying on the data of the Theatre Data Repository, which was developed by the National Theatre History Museum and Institute, I have examined the aggregated data of Hungarian premieres from the last fifty years, which may somewhat clarify the picture. The Repository currently contains nearly forty-six thousand theatrical performances, with a steep increase every decade. From the 1970's to the present day, Hungarian authors account for nearly 50% of all performances, so the number of performances of Hungarian works is commensurate with the growth of the theatre system. Although what is meant by a contemporary author is far from easy to define, it is telling that the number of works by authors who are currently still living has increased dramatically since the 1990's, compared to the essentially stagnant number of presentations of "classical" Hungarian playwrights. Performances of living authors more than doubled in 2010 compared to the 1990's. From the 2000's, the total number of performances of the most frequently staged authors has significantly increased, with the result that works by "established" authors are performed more frequently and in more venues than in previous decades. From another perspective, however, the pool of authors whose works have been played has widened, as the number of authors who have had at least six of their plays staged is also rising sharply. This otherwise welcome diversification may also have the consequence that dramatic masterpieces that attract large audiences, and that are performed in several theatres and in many versions, are less likely to appear. Thus, the figures from the Theatre Repository may not contradict the conclu-

sions drawn by József Kiss to any great degree, particularly since, in many cases, the adaptor, or stage writer, is also credited as the author.

Ottó A. Bodó employed a similar methodology to summarise the stage presence of contemporary Hungarian authors from Transylvania. He examined ten Transylvanian permanent theatres, with 60% of a total of 380 contemporary performances being the works of Hungarian authors, while the proportion of Transylvanian Hungarian authors amounted to 15%. His presentation revealed that the situation among Hungarian-language theatres in Transylvania is no better than in Hungary: the scarcity of contemporary performances in the fixed season ticket system can also be explained by the lack of interest on the part of directors under the age of forty-five. The percentage of those under the age of thirty who are receptive to contemporary texts is approximately 7.8%, which rises to 17% for those under the age of forty-five. Young directors are more inclined to turn from world literature to contemporary drama.

The European outlook

Ákos Németh, playwright and chairman of the newly-formed Playwrights' Roundtable, reviewed the programmes of Austrian, German, French, Belgian and English theatres and drew attention to the dominance of contemporary authors. The Deutsches Theater in Berlin, for example, stages twenty performances a week in May, with full houses, of which only three are classical plays, the rest being contemporary drama. The programme of the Schaubühne theatre featured only one single classical author, and four of the eight performances this season have been premieres of contemporary plays. Yet many premieres are also staged in Vienna, Zurich, Brussels, and London. The Comédie Française seeks contemporary works in a programmatic way: when an author submits a play, it is read by a group of leading actors who may or may not recommend the text for performance. What is more, London's Royal Court Theatre has been organising workshops and artist-in-residence programmes for international contemporary playwrights for decades.

György Vidovszky has presented a case study from Ireland, drawing attention to the curious contradiction that while Irish drama is one of the country's most significant cultural "export items" worldwide, Irish theatre is largely unknown to the world. He spoke about the well-known predecessors and contemporaries: the names of Murphy, Friel, Carr, Kilroy, and McPherson were mentioned, as well

as the best known, Martin McDonagh. The latter is highly controversial because although he is seen as a fresh and strong articulator of Irish identity on the world stage, the author is in fact of predominantly English identity and is less accepted by the Irish as their spokesman. It is possible that there is an image of Ireland that only exists in literature.

Patricia Pász, dramaturge and literary translator, a mediator and expert in Polish culture, has presented a unique practice in our region, which supports the birth, dramaturgical polishing, and rapid staging of contemporary drama. The playwright Tadeusz Słobodzianek and the Drama Laboratory that he created are credited with the generational change that occurred at the turn of the 2000's and gave a fresh impetus to Polish drama. Weekly workshops feature readings with young playwrights and directors, to test the dramaturgical and stage viability of new texts. The texts that are corrected during the workshop will be performed in a closed rehearsal, with instructions from the director. The author and director will then continue to work in readings that are open to the public. Finally, the text, which will have been reworked several times, will be performed by leading actors in one of Warsaw's theatres. To date, the Laboratory's workshops have analysed nearly three hundred new plays, with the participation of approximately ninety directors, seventy playwrights, a thousand actors and a hundred external experts. As a result of their joint work, more than seventy recent Polish plays, which have since proved to be significant, have been staged in Poland. In the last two decades, a number of other forms of support have also appeared: the Drama Writing Programme distributes six-monthly grants to contemporary Polish playwrights, while the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage also supports the staging of their plays.

In her summary, Patricia Pász asked: "Where, when and how did the Polish 'dramatic regime change' rush past us? Perhaps when the Poles had the courage to decentralise culture, risking the expected losses, to put civil initiatives on a stable footing, and since then continue to provide substantial funding for it, or to place the most important theatrical and literary institutions in competent professional hands, independently of the current government policy? Or when they dared to combine professionalism with business considerations (also) in culture, while at the same time voting for their national traditions and self-conscious Polishness?"

Authors, directors, and theatre managers

In a speech entitled “Why do we sometimes write plays for ourselves?”, director Géza Bodolay illustrated his own working method, in which classic dramatic texts are sometimes so radically altered during the staging process that they can almost be considered contemporary plays. Among the many professional and common meanings of the (theatrical) piece, the speaker stressed the concept of the piece as a fragment: “That we write our texts for ourselves, along with everything else, is not a question – two of the great authors of our last century, László Németh wrote and edited *The Witness (Tanú)* and Dezső Szabó the *Ludas Máttyás* booklets alone.” Bodolay considers it an inevitable task of the director to constantly reformulate the text for the stage. As examples, he cited his own productions of plays by Bulgakov, Molière, Schimmelpfennig, Mikszáth, Jarry and Zsigmond Móricz that he has directed.

Tamás Bank, director of the Játékszín theatre, asserted that, from a theatre manager’s point of view, a theatre that is essentially described as a tabloid theatre may also provide a platform for domestic, contemporary authors. In recent years, István Csukás, Károly Szakonyi, Csaba Székely and Vajk Sente have all represented Hungarian playwrights in private theatres.

The closing discussion in the conference, which was chaired by dramaturge Brigitta Szokolai, concerned playwriting tenders and grants. The István Örkény Playwriting Scholarship, which has been in place in its present form since 1998, supports playwrights under the age of forty in writing their draft within one year, if their application is successful. The two participants in the discussion, Andrea Pass and János Antal Horváth, have won this scholarship several times. The greatest problem with the scholarship is that it does not cover the costs of the theatrical representation of the texts produced. The case of the two young playwrights is fortunate: their works have been staged, albeit only under their own direction. Both state with conviction that they would strongly wish to attend the presentation and wonder what someone else has read from their lines. Two of Andrea Pass’s plays were brought to the stage as winners of the Staféta tender, which she won immediately after being awarded the Örkény scholarship, and which then allowed several of her plays, which are now out of competition, to be presented. From the very beginning, János Antal Horváth has only been able to write independently “in addition”, his everyday life being occupied with writing series and dramaturgical work alongside other directors.

Sometimes he stages his own plays or translations, renting small independent venues, which are far from being profitable.

In addition to the Örkény scholarship, the Open Forum, the play development programme of the Guild of Theatre Dramaturges, has been in operation for thirty-six years. On average, twenty critics, peers, directors, writers, and dramaturges work on the selected texts, and in an ideal case two different companies or voluntarily recruited teams present the work, in its half-finished and final form, but without the existential security that would aid the creative period. This is the method that the National Theatre's playwriting mentoring programme, now endowed with an allowance, is designed to follow. Additionally, there are occasional grants offered by the NKA (the National Cultural Fund), the EMMI (the Ministry of Human Resources), the MMA (the Hungarian Academy of Arts), and the Theatre College, and scholarships for translators and literary translators, which relieve budding playwrights of their immediate financial problems for a few months or half a year; or drama tenders, which may offer hope that the finished work will also be presented.

According to Andrea Pass, the fierce competition forces those who are beginning their careers in this field to express their vision and originality in a great work, to demonstrate their talents with a work of such gravitas as *Othello*. János Horváth is examining the reasons behind this apparent lack of interest in contemporary texts in domestic director training, or rather the reasons for its shortcomings. This perhaps because Hungarian audiences, similarly to their German and Irish counterparts, also want "the new story, the never-heard-before, here and now, about their 21st century selves" (Horváth 2022).

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Balázs, Géza (born 1959):

Hungarian linguist, ethnographer, and university professor. Teacher at the University of Theatre and Film Arts and the Partium Christian University in Oradea. His research areas include Hungarian language and folklore, language policy, language strategy, language cultivation, anthropological linguistics, textual studies, pragmatics, internet linguistics, network research, and the cultural history of Hungarian pálinka. Main works: 1993. *A kapcsolatra utaló nyelvi elemek a magyarban*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; 1998. *A magyar pálinka. A monograph*. Budapest: Aula Kiadó; 2001. *Magyar nyelvstratégia*. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia; 2017. *Az álom nyelve. Álomesemény, álomemlék, álomelbeszélés, álomértelmezés*. Budapest: Inter Nonprofit Kft; 2021. *A művészet és a nyelv születése*. Budapest: IKU-monographs.

Pataki, András (born 1971):

Jászai Mari Award-winning director, cultural manager, film producer, currently Deputy State Secretary at the Ministry of Culture and Innovation. Founder of the Forrás Theatre, which is noted as the theatre of the countryside, an expert representative of Hungarian poetry recitation, and vice-president of the National Poetry Recitation Association. He also works as an artistic advisor to several theatres and as a teacher at the University of Theatre and Film Arts. As a theatre director, he led the Petőfi Theatre in Sopron for ten years, where he considered the development of a system of theatre education a priority. During his creative career he has directed hundreds of plays in a variety of genres.

Sepsi, Enikő (born 1969):

Writer on film theory and literature, and historian of the theatre. University professor and head of the Institute of Art Studies, the Department of Art Studies and Media Pedagogy of the Károli Gáspár Reformed University. Founding Director of the Benda Kálmán College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and series editor of Károli Books. Her research areas include the anthropology of the theatre, artistic reception studies, modern and contemporary French and Hungarian poetry, contemporary French, American and Hungarian theatre, and the philosophy of religion and mysticism. Main works: 2019. *Művészeti befogadás pszichofiziológiai vizsgálata* Noldus Facereader segítségével Budapest: KRE–L'Harmattan Könyvkiadó; 2019. *A művészeti befogadás pszichofiziológiai vizsgálatának lehetőségei (irodalom, színház, film)* Budapest: KRE–L'Harmattan Könyvkiadó; 2022. *Poetic Images, Presence, and the Theater of Kenotic Rituals*, London-New York: Routledge.

Szabó, Attila (born 1983):

Hungarian theatre historian. Lecturer at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University, and the University of Theatre and Film Arts. Deputy director and museologist of the National Museum and the Institute of Theatre History. His research areas include the history and theory of theatre in Hungary and abroad, contemporary theatre and drama in Central Europe, the sociology of the theatre and audience studies, and processing the theatrical past and preserving theatrical memory. He has been a member of the STEP international theatre sociology research group since 2006. Main works: 2019. *Az emlékezet színpadai*, Pécs: Kronosz Kiadó; 2019. *A valós színterei*, Budapest: Prae Kiadó.

Szitás, Péter (born 1984):

Adjunct Professor at the Németh Antal Institute of Drama Theory, the University of Theatre and Film Arts, and Research Fellow at the Danube Institute. His research field in literary studies focuses on the theory of absurd drama. Main works: 2014. *Samuel Beckett – Színház a drámában*. Komárom: Selye János Egyetem; 2014. *Véggjáték az élet paradigmájában*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó; 2015. *Színházi véggjáték drámára vetítve*. Komárom: Selye János Egyetem; 2015. *Zenei motívumok Samuel Beckett A játszma vége című drámájában*; 2016. *Recitáló halál – A játszma vége értelmezése modern pásztoridillként*. Pécs: EMMI – Balassi Intézet.



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