

Creativity, the Engine of Artistic Research

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Abstract: *Creative thinking has long been considered essential for the development and advancement of numerous fields included in the sciences and the arts. It is for this reason that I consider the rapport between creativity and genuine human connection to be essential in establishing the credibility of the modern-day artist-researcher. The importance of exploring revolutionary ways of benefiting society through art is made evident by the latter's transformation and survival throughout history as well as its interdisciplinary qualities. Looking at various examples from the field of performing arts, I will analyse what I consider to be the most noteworthy facts about the field of artistic research, concluding with significant viewpoints about its future, underlining the fact that scientific and artistic researchers share the same creative thinking that fuels their curiosity, originality and necessity to discover revolutionary viewpoints of approaching societal problems in order to get their messages across.*

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Today, art education is about navigating, negotiating, about doing what you want to do and reconsidering, again and again, whether a specific structure is supportive or not, about being aware of its limitations and creative about using its possibilities, and about taking hybrid positions (Bangma, 2004, p. 126).

In the current day and age, creative thinking is becoming more and more valuable. Creativity is not and has never been accessible only to a certain category of people. However, the ability to find solutions, to look at things from a unique, original perspective belonging to one person but resonating with several, makes the difference between a mentally, spiritually, financially, and socially satisfying life and a life lived without purpose. Being

creative means being aware of both yourself and others, being empathetic, knowing the environment, and making connections. Being creative gives rise to the need for evolution because life is continuously developing, and development is about improving individual skills, suitable for advancing to the next level. Research is the main means by which this goal can be achieved. It is fuelled by curiosity and creativity, and the results of performing arts research highlight its importance in society and emphasize the need to empower the research artist community to bring to light the full range of questions and answers associated with each art form in existence.

In this paper, I will be discussing the main purposes of art, as well as the connection between performing arts and the field of scientific research. I will present some examples – mainly focused on theatrical performance, but also other types of performing arts – in order to strengthen the idea that artistic research is dependent on the mentality of researchers, whose skills and sensibilities, although not reserved exclusively for those directly involved, are the right catalysts for promoting a revolutionary approach to research by seeking and adopting different points of view. I support the idea that creative thinking and the creation of authentic connections between people are the two fundamental elements on which both art and the need to investigate the various phenomena that take place within it are based. I will conclude the paper by formulating the problems characteristic of the field of research in the performing arts, but also potential solutions, and I will present relevant mentalities for the future of this branch.

A unique and irreplaceable encounter

Starting from Kant's aesthetics, Helen Nicholson – author to whom I will return later – mentions the reasoning of artists who consider themselves a catalytic tool for social change through the horizons of their visionary thinking, driven by an imagination freed from the restrictive norms of society. This mentality, born in the nineteenth century, is still alive today, and one of the basic qualities of the art of theatre, which amplifies the need for the depth of the connection process, is its transcendence. The experience proposed by a theatrical event, regardless of its type, is always based on the relationship established in real-time with the audience. Once created, this experience takes into account the specificity of each of its components (space, spectator, actor, special conditions, etc.) and cannot be created again, even under the same conditions. The experience itself has its role and produces its effect when it happens in real life.

The term *Ichigo ichi-e* (Japanese: 一期一会), in translation: *one time, one encounter*, is a phrase associated with Zen Buddhism and is the basis of many Japanese cultural practices. This expression includes, in its simplicity, a multilateral concept on which a whole set of values is based. Its role is to emphasize that any chance meeting we may have in this life is unique and unrepeatable. Even if the same people meet once more, in the same formulation, the meeting will never be able to be replicated exactly. This expression invites us to reflect on the value of the significant moments of our ephemeral existence and on the

fact that, in order for something to have factual value, it will have to be practiced with full involvement, repetition never actually being possible.

The more we analyse the implications of this way of thinking, we can see how the actions based on this concept become true rituals. Tea ceremonies and martial arts are the best-known examples of activities based on this mentality. Therefore, their training is not based on repeating an action until it becomes significant. Instead, each attempt is seen as a valuable step in the evolution of that practice. A ritual does not offer the possibility to stop during its development so as to restart the process from the beginning in the case of a deviation from the rules. In life, time continues moving forward, and the lessons learned from each deed will contribute to the improvement and spiritual evolution of the practitioner.

Theatre is, without a doubt, such a ritual as well. It proposes a unique encounter with the audience, the energies produced and exchanged in one moment impossible to replicate in another. The value of the teachings that can be deduced from such a confluence of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions is what creates depth and substance, attributing to the theatrical manifestation the quality of ceremony.

I believe the definition of the term *ceremony* from the book titled *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*, to be original as well a good argument for supporting the previous statement. The author of the book, Ellen Dissanayake believes that

“ceremony” is, in fact, a one-word term for what is really a collection or assembly of elaborations (of words, voices, actions, movements, bodies, surroundings, and paraphernalia) – that is, of arts (chant or song, poetic language, ordered movement and gesture or dance, mime, and drama, along with considered and even spectacular visual display). It is as if the people who create and engage in these art-saturated ceremonies believe that in order for their efforts to succeed, nonhuman powers must be attracted and persuaded by displays of supreme beauty, skill, extravagance, and impressiveness. These qualities, which require an expenditure of time, thought, and effort, are unmistakable signs of caring and care (Dissanayake, 2000, pp. 138-139).

The author's observation refers to the way the artist approaches his purpose and the purpose of his art in relation to his audience. Those so-called *non-human powers* that are part of another plane of existence refer to those factors that produce, both in the spectator and in the artist, that *something* which can only be defined by analogies and which takes place when the delivered message genuinely resonates within the recipient's being.

The artist's relationship with the audience

This being said, even today, being an artist is a somewhat controversial occupation. Opinions are divided between those who recognize the importance of art in the evolution of society and those who do not consider being an artist a serious or a real job. The latter are probably the ones who would gain the most by introducing art into their lives.

I appreciate *The Art of Asking or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help* as an excellent argument for defining the position of the independent artist in the world we live in. In this book we are presented with the artistic evolution of the author (Amanda Palmer); a path marked by the defining mentality for an artist: creative thinking. The artist, whatever the nature or object of his art, uses his intuition and creative spirit to access those circumstances that allow him to position his own art, in order to convey a message in which he truly believes and which, consequently, will produce important changes in the world by influencing a multitude of people, in turn, interconnected.

Speaking about the relationship that is created between the general public and artists, the author notes that,

We have a fucked-up relationship with artists. While artists are, on one hand, applauded for their awe-inspiring, lifechanging works of art, they're simultaneously eyed with suspicion, disdain, and other sentiments of the GET A JOB variety. Look at the media: we deify artists one second, demonize them the next. Artists internalize this and perpetuate the cycle; artists do this to each other, and they do it to themselves (Palmer, 2014, p. 198).

The fact that an artist's work is defined by the uniqueness of his art, which is outlined in part, by the identity of those who receive the message, gives him the right to create his own rules in the creative process. As long as the finality is an exchange of energy, a significant connection between the artist and the public, the way in which this destination is reached can be any. Through introspection, the creator knows his own needs that he can fulfil through various means compatible with his lifestyle, with his conceptions and moral values, etc. What is really impressive about the aforementioned book is the clarity with which we can see the importance of creating and maintaining a close relationship with the public. The artist uses all means of communication, from social media to telephone and face-to-face meetings to enhance the connection with her fans, they even contribute to the direct or indirect fulfilment of the various needs necessary to finalize the artistic product.

The role of performing arts in the evolution of the human species is also examined in the book *Engaging Audiences A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, by Bruce McConachie. Analysing the type of relationship that is established between spectators and the art they consume he observes how the physical correlation of abstract ideas from a psychological level allows the acquisition of behaviours and attitudes convenient and applicable in everyday life. Quoting Ellen Dissanayake, McConachie emphasises the idea that:

The inborn rhythmic-modal sensitivities of mutuality, through cultural elaborations, became adaptive means for arousing interest, riveting joint attention, synchronizing bodily rhythms and activities, conveying messages with conviction and memorability, and ultimately indoctrinating and reinforcing right attitudes and behaviour (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 139).

On the same note, Helen Nicholson argues for the usefulness of the creative individual in society, outside the artistic sphere. She observes the transformation of the general mentality of considering creativity as belonging only to those with artistic inclinations, the main idea being that those who master certain dexterities such as spontaneity, flexible thinking, and the ability to take risks are more likely to also possess a high degree of creativity. Anna Craft also lists the basic characteristics of the creative individual. These are:

Reflection: making time to reflect, in a variety of ways. **Leveraging:** picking out what they are good at and really pushing that. **Framing:** the spin put on things that do not work out. Creative people neither ignore nor are put off by failure but instead ask: "What can I learn from this?" (Nicholson, 2005, pp. 112-113).

This last phrase is the basis of productive thinking and is especially important in theatrical pedagogy. This way of thinking is maintained throughout the study of the art of the actor in university because, when applied correctly, it offers the student the most valuable opportunities to learn through experimentation, therefore, to think creatively-constructively.

Science in art, the trigger of curiosity, the catalyst of research

Due to the current times' wide access to information and novelty, we are able to see, more and more, the impact that art has on the economy, health, social welfare, and education. Art in general, and the art of theatre in particular, have strong links with all areas in which people get involved using their personality and creative skills. In this sense, we can say that there is no difference between a scientist and an actor, both using their curiosity, imagination, and creativity to solve those problems in their spheres of interest, to uncover and analyse phenomena, in order to improve the field in which these processes take place.

Curiosity in any branch is the motor of examination, and in the performing arts, the creative person's mentality mentioned above is compatible and very similar to the mentality of the researcher. In other words, the evolution of the performing arts and their perpetuation today have taken place as a result of the desire triggered by the curiosity to find answers to questions born by practicing various art forms.

Art-based research has emerged as an extension of the study of the nature of artistic experience and is defined by the systematic use of the artistic process, generating artistic expressions in its various forms. This form of research proposes an investigation of human experiences through art, often using the tools of psychology (Oltean, 2019).

Psychologically speaking, each person, depending on their inner spiritual and emotional composition, reacts to and resonates with various external stimuli, such as works of art. Taking into account the theory of internal family systems, we can say that those component parts of our being that we have rejected and those that we allow to exist, simultaneously influence our perception and reaction to the stimuli generated by the work

of art. At the same time, by being aware of our own system's components, we can identify what blockages, but also what needs are manifested to create what we call *I (myself)*.

Internal Family Systems (IFS)

From the point of view of the artist, especially of the actor, the study of his sphere of interest will last throughout his entire lifetime. This process is an introspective one, which allows the actor to know his own psychic triggers, to determine those inner mechanisms that determine genuine emotions, and with adequate guidance, to discover various instruments compatible with his being, through which to reach an emotional balance. We can observe here the connection of the actor's art with psychology, the latter containing indispensable knowledge for any field that primarily focuses on the human being and interpersonal relations, be they self-centred or cantered on others. But if a person is one individual being, then the meaning of the phrase *relationship with oneself* becomes questionable, as a relationship is established between two or more beings or elements.

A relevant example of this is the theory of *Internal Family Systems* or IFS¹ whose founder is Richard Schwartz. IFS is a therapeutic method whose purpose is self-knowledge through a process of individualized introspection based on the theory of multiplicity, which argues that the internal composition of each person is the result of the sum of elements called *parts*. These *parts* of the human mind are personified and classified according to the role they play in *the system*. They are called: managers, exiles, and firefighters. The person who encompasses all these parts represents *the system* as a whole. Each component of *the system*, here called *part*, has a set of responsibilities to keep the person (*system*) in a state of balance.

In other words, each part of a system has a specific and distinct personality, as well as a well-defined role. Thus, *managers* are the ones who maintain control by anticipating problematic situations. Their role is to maintain the balance of *the system* by finding solutions to drive away what is not wanted – usually traumatic experiences that cause unpleasant emotions. *Exiles* are those parts that formed as a result of trauma (usually dating back to childhood) and which are rejected by *the system* and suppressed by those with a protective role. *Firefighters* are those who enter the scene when *managers* do not successfully perform their protective functions. They are responsible for triggering behaviours with immediate effects, usually extreme, in order to rebalance *the system*. For example, a drug addiction to suppress thoughts and emotions caused by abuse.

The main purpose of IFS therapy is to maintain a healthy balance of the system, by identifying healthy methods through which all its components can perform the functions for which they were created and can coexist in harmony with each other. In 2015, IFS therapy was included in the National Registry for Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) as a proven practice for relieving symptoms such as phobia, panic, generalized anxiety, depression, and certain physical conditions.

¹ Information from the IFS institute official website: <https://ifs-institute.com/>

On the IFS official webpage *IFS Institute – Internal Family Systems Official*, Dr. Richard Schwartz talks about the starting point of the Internal Family Systems therapy, namely, the problems that result from the rejection of internal component *parts*. Their integration and acceptance into the general *system* is the first step towards healing those inner wounds caused by traumatic experiences. Rejection and suppression of *parts* associated with strong feelings of shame, anger, suffering, is why the internal *system* becomes unbalanced. This rejection arises from the erroneous presumption that the *part* and the burden it bears are one and the same. The rebalancing technique proposed by Schwartz is to raise awareness of each suppressed *part* and reintegrate it by finding solutions that allow it to function simultaneously with the others, within the *system*.

This rebalancing technique based on understanding, acceptance and reintegration of one's own being, also depicts the process by which the artist completes his relationship with his work, in relation to his audience and himself, throughout his entire career.

Artistic research – implications, shortcomings, future

In the academic field there exists a certain segregation between artistic research and other types of research, art being positioned at the opposite pole of science. However, the arguments presented so far are meant to highlight the connections that cannot be ignored in all areas of study. By its flexible nature, art can create a bridge between any field, as its fundamental specialty is building and strengthening connections.

In the seminar *Visioning the Future, Artistic Research in Performing Arts in Ireland* (Visioning the Future, 2020), organized by IMBAS², Helen Phelan, a professor of artistic practice at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, the University of Limerick in Ireland and the founder of IMBAS, talks about the obstacles faced by doctoral students at the university during their research process. The lack of research methodologies in the artistic field forces these students to design for themselves the means and techniques they need for research, depending on the chosen topic. Consequently, getting the results of their research accepted as valid and scientific becomes a difficult task.

Using her pedagogical experience, Phelan identifies the importance of the following issues, which she considers imperative to talk about in the academic environment of the arts in order to strengthen its scientific attributes and to bring to light as diverse solutions as possible. The first problem is the isolation of artistic researchers from the scientific field, a split that results in the amplification of the persuasion work necessary for their works to be considered valid. By intertwining different artistic and scientific fields, it is possible to remedy this problem, as well as broadening the range of possible topics, which may result in new questions and therefore new research opportunities.

Another important element highlighted during the seminar is the need to build artistic academic communities in order to strengthen and develop the field of artistic

² Irish Advocacy Organization for Artistic Research in Ireland – a forum dedicated to those interested in artistic research in the performing arts in Ireland

research. Phelan supports the idea that, by sharing knowledge and results in an interdisciplinary framework, the field of artistic research will develop considerably, by forming the exact methodologies applicable in various fields of art.

In her doctoral dissertation, Adriana Popovici, an important presence in the field of Romanian theatrical pedagogy, also talks about the difficulties encountered by artists during the history of theatre, noting that:

The lack of status of artistic professions and their suspicion in terms of Christian ideology have created many difficulties for artists, but it was probably also one of the essential triggers for a general effort of defence and assertion, and perhaps it was this urgent need that contributed greatly to the dimension of their art (Popovici, 1998, p. 15).

We can apply the same reasoning to the obstacles encountered by the artist in the scientific field, concluding that their research work is all the more valuable the more difficult it is to undertake. And the fact that artistic researchers have already initiated the change that Phelan is talking about is obvious. The need for artists to measure the results of the investigations they work on, not only in order to capitalize on their points of view but also to position the arts among scientific disciplines, represents the drive for research and solving the various problems encountered along the way.

Applied theatre – a means of expression and empowerment

As we noted earlier, we can say that each person is a whole system of interconnected elements, both physically and mentally, sensory and mental. Physically, an organism is made up of a multitude of cells, microorganisms, each with its own existence, reunited to form a single body. In conclusion, each of us is the result of infinite combinations of elements, circumstances, personalities, thoughts, feelings, different sensations, reunited in a single physical representation, independent of other such representations. It can be seen how this model is reflected in many planes, in universal reality.

One of the basic human needs, even more important than feeding, is to socialize, which shows us that we are not really as separate as we might think. Studies show that isolated beings (both humans and animals) become apathetic, depressed and that they stop satisfying their physiological needs, even if they have access to food and water. Basically, they behave as if they no longer exist due to the lack of connection with their peers. This behaviour speaks for itself, highlighting the extraordinary importance of positive social relationships.

The need to improve the quality of these relationships is also reflected in the growing desire of teachers to use creative principles in order to improve the quality of their teaching, regardless of the form of education in which the learning process takes place. The introduction of theatre in schools' curriculum as an independent, optional subject has manifested itself in a need for change and is a strong argument in favour of creative thinking. The fact that the art of theatre is based on skills such as empathy, concentration, attention,

intuition, memory, teamwork, allows those who practice it, both as a guide and as a learner, to practice and use those innate mechanisms to perpetually evolve, applying the principle of lifelong learning, and to also establish beneficial relationships with others. In addition, due to the introspective methods used by the art of theatre, there is a transformation of the school environment by reducing the rate of bullying and aggression, improving relationships between students, and also between students and teachers.

In his book, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Sir Ken Robinson, a renowned university professor, associate professor, and international advisor, points to this need by describing the current-day field of education from a global perspective. In order to illustrate the differences between the fixed opinions of a stationary way of thinking and one based on innovative creativity, he presents the example of Michael Faraday. In his day and age, Faraday impressed the audience of the Royal Institute of London with the first demonstration of electromagnetism, despite the fact that none of the most famous and intelligent researchers of the time could see the usefulness of this new discovery. He himself could not formulate a field in which his discovery could have been used, but by using his extraordinary intuition, he allowed it to follow its creative course, he further investigated the phenomenon, thus laying the foundations for a discovery that is nowadays considered essential for the harmonious development of daily life on the planet.

However, we must also keep in mind that:

Chasing originality can have detrimental effects. An example is the crisis of science born of the publishing race, especially in the field of psychology. Replication research is missing, those that validate or invalidate previous research. Their contribution is fundamental, even if it is not something creative or innovative. You can also be original by writing summaries or treatises. There are thousands of ways in which you can present, in an original way, the development of a discipline. You can be provocative, you can offer a new general scheme of interpretation, you can recover what has been overlooked or forgotten, you can reconstruct an entire history in the broad plan of a synthesis. Originality is not just an arrow shot towards the future, it can be the way we give a new image to the world we live and think in without using new elements, only new perspectives (Socaciu et al., 2018, p. 132).

By implementing this concept, various ways of practicing performing arts or the principles underlying them in various unusual environments are born. It is the same reason why art research is so controversial, but also original, useful and revolutionary, producing changes of perspective in many fields with which it creates connections.

The idea of applied theatre is a relatively new one in the history of theatre and refers to the different possibilities of using it in various fields to bring benefits to targeted social groups. Theatre practiced in unconventional spaces, such as schools, hospitals, prisons, etc. contributes to collective well-being. In other words,

Applied theatre is a fairly recent category of practice that draws together work that is conducted outside mainstream theatre venues and that is often designed to be of benefit to the individuals and groups involved (Brodzinski, 2010, p. 21).

For example, theatre can improve the time of those hospitalized and their families. Playing theatrical games or engaging in shows adapted to the clinical environment can give patients the opportunity to participate in creating a comfortable atmosphere by transferring attention to those elements that can influence them, thus providing them with a sense of control over the situation in which they find themselves. In prisons, detainees can explore various environments of artistic expression, experiment with various situations and roles, and better understand themselves, and also those around them by practicing the art of theatre. In schools, applied theatre brings benefits to both students and teachers, improving relationships and benefiting communication between generations.

One of the branches of applied theatre in which research is particularly necessary is applied theatre in the field of health. The specialized literature of this field leaves much to be desired, especially in Romania. Consequently, there is no practical methodology for those interested in working in this unconventional environment. Research is a safe and accurate method, which can result in the development of this aspect and encourage artists specializing in performing arts to get involved in the process of solving long-term problems. Such research can give those involved the chance to intervene, to influence society for the better through their art.

Drama provides a powerful opportunity to ask questions about whose stories have been customarily told, whose have been accepted as truth, and to redress the balance by telling alternative stories or stories from different perspectives. It is this understanding that narratives can be changed that lies at the heart of practice in applied drama (Nicholson, 2005, p. 63).

In conclusion, research in the field of performing arts not only has the potential to obtain solutions to possible problems encountered in the fields of artistic activity, but it also has the means to create a group of professionals with a recognized status, accepted as relevant to their research on an international level. Each person belonging to this group possesses a huge potential to positively influence society, both through the art they practice, but also by recording, analysing, and disseminating the results they obtain. Moreover, the field's interdisciplinarity considerably widens the horizons that artistic research can aim for.

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