

Theatre and Tap Dance Pleading for Co-action and Artistic Complementarity

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Abstract: *The art of Tap Dance contains a latent artistic potential that made possible its activation and re-activation in various cultural spaces and artistic milieus. Currently, it represents a very versatile, expressive and sophisticated art form and musical tool that can be utilised in order to emphasize the artistic qualities of certain theatrical performances, thus increasing the value of theatre as an artistic outlet. This research can be interpreted as a pleading in favour of a synergic, flexible and complementary fusion of the two forms of artistic expression: tap dance and theatre.*

Keywords: *theatre, tap dance, co-action between theatre and tap dance, artistic complementarity of theatre and tap dance.*

The actor and the dancer – two correlative artistic roles

The recent scientific literature on choreography has highlighted its importance not only in the art of dance in general, but also in other performance-based art forms, such as dance and theatre, especially in the latter, which – as of late – has adopted numerous principles, mechanisms and techniques that have solely been attributed to the art of dance. In the last 3 to 4 decades dance-theatre has evolved and restored the gap in development that had been so visibly present between classical and dance-theatre. Comparatively, 20 years ago, on the Romanian art scene, the importance of the body as a tool had been a real struggle to explain and define its importance in the display and rendering of the artistic message, to the point where the actors needed to be convinced to utilise means of expressions that go beyond the verbal; today the situation is proving to be complexly different.

It has improved greatly, firstly because no convincing needs to be done regarding the importance of the psychometric dimension in the performing arts, furthermore, one can notice a greater acceptance, on the part of the actors, when it comes to movement on the stage in general and dance in particular, increasing the actors' willingness to include the psychometric dimension in the entire theatrical performance.

Therefore, it can be stated, that at this point, in Romania, choreography as an art form has gained an ever increasing role, presently holding an important position in the overall theatrical experience, so much so, that almost every production team features professional choreographers. Irrespective of the fact that a play may or may not contain choreographic elements the choreographers are invited and co-opted in a team, this had not been the case in

the recent past as some directors have shown resilience to such an addition to the team.

At the moment, the actor and the dancer are seen as two correlative roles. In contemporary theatre the stage becomes the space where all the personal – and in some cases social – struggles and experience can be „burnt“ and transformed into art or artistic symbols due to the symbolism of the human body that has become a means of personal expression. These symbols are to be interpreted and deciphered by the

viewers, thus shaping their consciousness through art.

The connection between the actor and the dancer is very artfully invoked by Friedrich Nietzsche in the following quote: „The actor, the mime, the dancer, the musician, the lyric poet, are closely akin; in their instincts they are ultimately one. But they have gradually specialized and separated from each other – to the point of mutual contradiction. The lyric poet longest remained at one with the musician; the actor with the dancer.”¹

Tap dance – body-gestures-sound complementarity

The rhythmic and musical variety of *tap dance* renders it the top position on the list of all dance forms, relying on the absolute complementarity of the body, its gestures and sounds. These two elements –dance and music – complete one another, producing a rhythmic musicality accompanied by artistic expressions and virtuosity. Hence, there is a musicality of the motion produced by the dancers whenever they use it as a means of artistic expression, often becoming an authentic audible universe, that reaches its maximum capacity through *tap dance*. All these descriptions lead to the conclusion that the actor/dancer attribute utmost importance to rhythm, irrespective of its being interior or exterior rhythm, due to the fact that they (the performers) are forced

to engage with it as an essential factor, thus, making its absence on the stage unimaginable. In the same way, *tap dance* considers rhythm to be essential, the fundamental element, due to the fact that the variability of the rhythmic formulas and the relevance of the sense of rhythm make this art form rank the highest on the scale of percussion-based dances. Additionally, the convergence between rhythm and musicality elevate this form of bodily expression to the rank of higher art from.

Furthermore, there are types of dances that encourage improvisation and theatrical interpretation that could be considered a convergence of rhythm and musicality in the context of *tap dancing*, as well as an artistic complementarity between theatre and *tap dance*.

Ideational Premises

General ideational premise:

In the cultural and creative sector it is an essential fact that the actor, as well as the audience, is going through a continuous transformation.

The status of the actor has become the centre of a debate „between two fields of influence and use: one represents the traditional play, the classical one, that is linked to the institution of the Theatre and features a production mode governed by a traditional and classical paradigm; whereas the other is the result of cultural industry and entertainment, and is

linked to the quasi-general spectacularisation of communication. The actor gradually loses the contemporary aura of a unique star, no longer being the sole protagonist of their own show in order to become a part of an industry that requires the usage of the communicative abilities outside the theatre as an institution.”²

The audience goes through continuous transformation as well, especially due to the

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of Idols*. http://www.academia.edu/24897621/Friedrich_Nietzsche_Twilight_of_Idols

2 Marian Popescu, *Theatre and Communication (Teatrul și comunicarea)*, București, UNITEXT, 2011, p. 60

following main reasons:

- the diverse category of consumers;
- the change in the rapport between these consumer categories;
- the existence of the transformative effect of the cultural goods and products;

The immediate consequences of the cultural management, occurring both on a large and small scale can be linked to the following factors:

- the objective knowledge of the audience;
- the stimulation of the cultural consumption;
- luring in and educating a new category of consumers in order for them to participate more actively or even passively to cultural events by involving all the actors of the community;
- the alphabetisation of the new audience

Specific ideational premises:

As two forms of the performance arts, the two complementary forms of artistic expression – theatre and dance – can be presented in a stage reproduction that elaborates on the full capacity of both *tap dance* and theatre. The ideational premises of this artistic relationship are as follows:

1. There is a complementary relationship between dance and theatre, this makes them both easy to integrate and to feature in various artistic scenarios, i.e. in co-action.
2. The artistic valences of *tap dance* can be

based on its cultural consumption;

- the creation of adapted cultural offers, and viable cultural answers, solutions;
- loyalisation of the audience;
- the decrease of the non-cultural consumption, the increase of the audience's motivation to take part in the theatrical experience and the triggering of a collective cultural consciousness in the audience;
- intensifying the role of a theatrical community – making available, for the potential audience, a wide array of shows; establishing and developing an artistic capital purposefully designed to offer cultural entertainment for the community, on medium and long term;
- the development of a cultural infrastructure on a national level.

utilised in order to accentuate, ameliorate the augmentation of the expressive power and artistic qualities of the theatrical productions and in a visible increase in the theatre's artistic quality.

3. In the globalised contemporary societies, cultural hybridization and the combination of the traditional with the post-modern allows the creation of prolific cultural and artistic diversity, where the cultural and traditional forms are revalued, reinterpreted and updated, thus utilising their creative potential to the fullest.

For an efficient complementarity and co-action between theatre and tap dance

The conclusions of the studies conducted in Romania³ as well as the expert opinions lead to the idea that, in Romania, there is a current cultural context that is characterised by great changes. The performance arts are undergoing a full process of reactive, proactive and active

transformation influenced by cultural, social, demographic, educational, aesthetic and managerial etc. factors.

Figure 1 highlights the fact that the theatre, as well as *tap dance* can be closely analysed and established in two main ways: as independent cultural phenomena and as cooperative cultural phenomena that complement one another. Thus, the theatre as an artistic phenomenon, through the work of the artists and through

³ *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014 (Barometrul de consum cultural 2014). The Culture between the Global and Local Sphere*, The National Institute of Cultural Research and Development, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria, 2015, p. 8

all of the cultural elements involved will ultimately provide cultural goods, which, through specific marketing mechanisms, will become collective goods, part of a collective consciousness as cultural products on their own. Similarly, *tap dance* is analysed as an independent artistic phenomenon, it provides moments and artistic acts that carry cultural messages, that are characteristic to this particular art form. On the other hand, the enabling of a co-action and complementarity between *tap dance* and theatre will provide the possibility of experiencing concerted artistic acts, through which the synergy and complementarity of these two art forms will insure the emphasis, improvement and augmentation of their expressive quality, as well as the mutual capacity of their artistic valence. Due to these mutual influences, the possibility of constructing various potential artistic messages has been ever increasing, this fact will significantly improve the quality of the artistic scenes, acts and events. As the table below illustrates the technical elements retain their importance, irrespective of their rigidity; however, the mark and value of these specific moments and events will always be provided by the following elements:

- Insuring their high expressive value (used combined), on a much higher scale than in the case of *tap dance* and theatre as individual art forms. The harmonious and synergic combination of these two art forms in such a way that their message will become much more accentuated and nuanced from an instrumental and expressive point of view.
- Insuring the artistic completeness through the collaboration between the verbal and non-verbal elements of communication, this combination operates as a great advantage and support for the actor; enabling them to convey the desired artistic message, both verbally and non verbally, the latter can be easily exploited in situations that do not allow an adequate verbal rendering of the desired artistic messages.
- The actor's acquisition of artistic independence, of the ability to convey a multimodal artistic message. Therefore, in *tap dance*, the message is mainly an auditive one complemented by the bodily expression and the style and mode of instrumental and aesthetic expression; all these features will be chosen in order to deliver a clear message, that will get through either to the audience or to the stage partner of the performing artist.
- The multimodal range through which the messages can be transmitted proves the complexity and importance of the fusion of two different forms of artistic expression. All these considered, the *tap dance* needs to be defined and understood as a multi-valent form of expression that possesses certain features, that utilise the technical elements of the actor's artistic expression i.e. rhythm, complex bodily expression, motor coordination, memorisation, collaborating and mutual synchronization with colleagues.
- The crystallization of a certain visionary attitude of the actor; this will help in the artistic localization not only in the actors' short and medium term approach, results and performance, but on a long term as well, thus creating a bridge between the present and future in a complete fusion of inspiration and reason.

These issues discussed in the current research are those of an authentic nature and actuality having as their purpose the creation of a statement about this artistic phenomenon in our country, and thus, they constitute a priority in the agenda of the performance arts' project management and marketing; similarly, such a research can show advantages in the field of education, dance methodology and artistic learning. Furthermore, it can contribute beneficially to the establishment of a modern vision about professional theatre and music. The vision this paper puts forth represents a way of doubling the quality of the contemporary theatre performances by

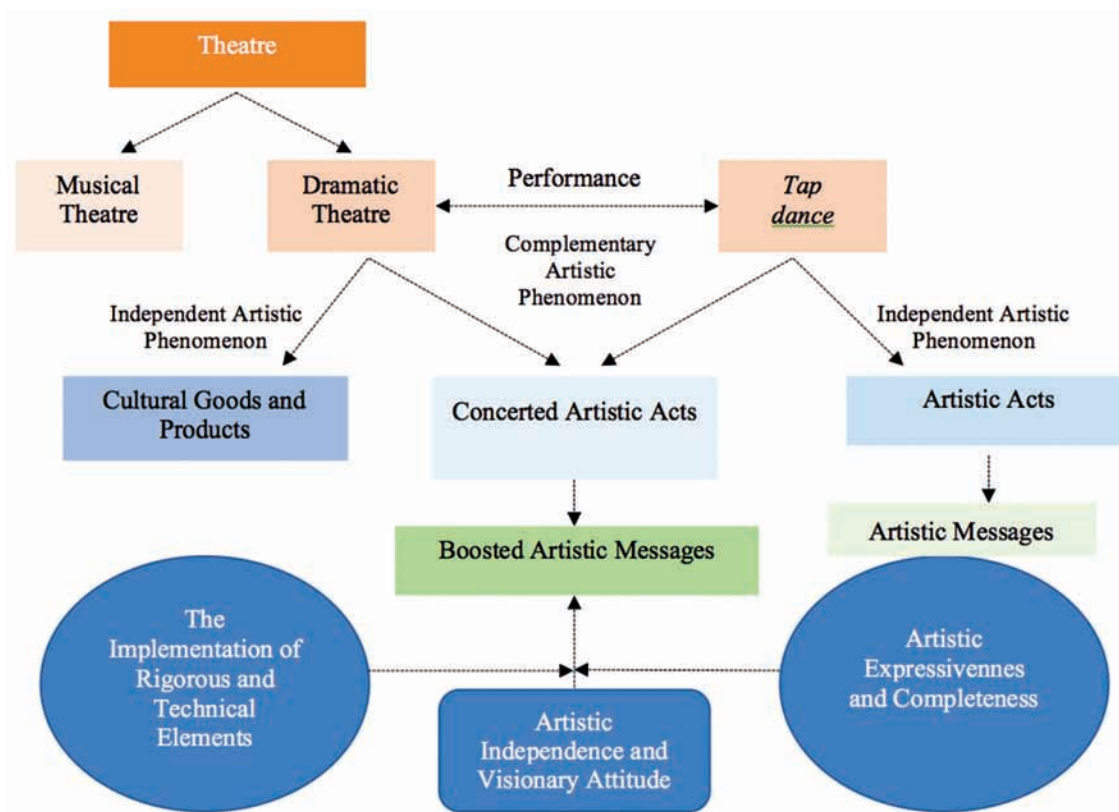


Figure 1 The advantages of the co-action and complementarity between theatre and tap dance

infusing them with the power of *tap dance*.

From an artistic point of view, the analysis and correlations that can arise from various

aspects involved in this equation allow the investigation of an ample research field and the creation of a more extended research horizon.

Conclusions

It is an incontestable fact that tap dance possesses a latent potential that, through time, has made it possible for this art form to express itself on a global scale, emerging in various cultural and artistic settings.

Nowadays, at the beginning of the 21st century, it can be safely stated that this art form is compatible with the image of contemporaneity and it represents a versatile, complex and

sophisticated form of art and music. It's artistic valences leave room for exploitation in many aspects, such as the quality and expressiveness of the theatrical performances. Its numerous attributes represent the fundamental ground for pleading in favour of its flexible, synergic and complementary use in order to create an artistic fusion between *tap dance* and theatre.

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