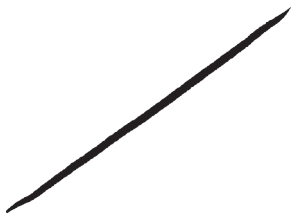


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FROM THE NOTES OF AN FNT CURATOR. **THE FESTIVAL AS A DIRECTION**

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Abstract: The present text aims to highlight the curatorial experiences of its author (curator of the 2022, 2023, and 2024 editions of the Romanian National Theatre Festival), experiences oriented towards answering questions such as: how can a festival constructively influence the developmental directions of a nation's theatre? Why and in what ways is *curating* fundamentally different from *selecting*, and what are the concrete benefits of this recent paradigm shift in Romanian theatre? What directions/new beginnings has the National Theatre Festival proposed/initiated in recent years?

Keywords: festival, theatre, curator, direction, cultural policy, I.L. Caragiale Romanian National Theatre Festival (FNT).

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Introduction

For three years (2022, 2023, 2024), I was one of the curators who prepared the National Theatre Festival¹. In 2020 and 2021, together with two colleagues (Ludmila Patlanjoglu and Maria Zărnescu), I handled the selection for the same event, during a time so unpleasant (the Covid-19 pandemic) that I almost find it hard to recall². The curatorial years were intense enough, full of contradictions and challenges to leave a lasting impact on how I relate to theatre today, both in general and to Romanian theatre in particular. Likewise, those experiences imposed on me certain personal views on the concept of theatre festival, views that I don't claim to be definitive or irrevocably true. I still feel, in contexts like this one, the need to bring them into discussion. Since this text is based on subjective, personal perceptions and conclusions, I've chosen to tone down the academic voice in favor of a more rigorously free style, one able to express both the doubts and certainties I've had.

The selection of genres... those of theatre versus their curation

When, in 2022, the playwright and professor Mihaela Michailov invited me to join the management team for that year's edition of the National Theatre Festival, I was very tempted to decline. My previous experiences, I believed had been enough. It was a time of general confusion, post-pandemic traumas were

1 In 2022 and 2023, I was part of the curatorial team alongside Mihaela Michailov and Oana Cristea Grigorescu, and in 2024, together with Mihaela Michailov and Ionuț Sociu.

2 About the strange experiences I went through then, I discuss on large in <https://thetheatretimes.com/the-digital-spectator-romanian-experiences-during-the-pandemic/>.

being felt, and the limitations of our theatre, both institutionally and as an art form, had been revealed to us with disarming brutality. What ultimately convinced me to accept, however, was a word Mihaela used with great enthusiasm; a word that was new in relation to theatre, though of course I was familiar with the term “curator” and its semantic content. What Mihaela Michailov was proposing at that moment was provocative, dangerous, even scandalous, risky... therefore persuasive: to stop talking about *selection* and *selector(s)*, and to instead embrace entirely new roles within the theatrical field: *curation* and *curator(s)*. It wasn't just a terminological reconversion, merely a nominal shift of accent, a simple change in wording; when viewed in its full depth, the change had the potential, at least as a matter of intent, to signal the will of a turning point. I use the term “turning point” in the weighty sense given to it in German philosophy (“Kehre”): a stepping away from a well-trodden, validated, traditional path toward a foreign, unknown, and ambiguous horizon, one capable of radically redefining from base the act of inquiry. A turning point is not, in itself, a path, but rather the possibility of a path, one that opens up at the very moment when another, paradoxically, strays from another path.

Imported from the realm of visual arts, with a remarkable career consolidated over the past decades, *curation* radically changed the perspective on what the National Theatre Festival was to become. In concrete terms, it ensued abandoning the old practices (of over 30 years) of bringing to Bucharest what we considered to be the most successful theatre productions of the year in Romania, claiming them as mysteriously personal choices, and trying to present, through our selection alone, the “living essence” of Romanian theatre. I wouldn't want it to seem like I'm undermining the importance of the *showcase*. Not at all, it's a marketing and comprehensive theatre awareness formula that has proven its success time and again. It also offers a chance to “lay your cards on the table”, so to speak, and show what you've got at your best, as an institution or as an artist. The problem arises when, at the scale of a large festival, the showcase becomes repetitive; when a frustrating sense of a “Moses' tablet,” of a predetermined truth, of a fixed value scale, starts to creep in. The *showcase*, generally speaking, avoids risk, or prefers to minimize it, so much so that it ends up reaching a fairly high level of predictability, and it was precisely that predictability, generated by a selection constantly worried about not missing its encounter with Capital-V Value, in both the literal and figurative sense, that I found discouraging and uninteresting.

The question about direction...

But it wasn't just that, there was also another issue, one that, in the Romanian space, was acknowledged and articulated quite late: the one relating to the very direction of Romanian theatre. In the first decade after 1989, the direction was, in a way, self-evident: it was one of aligning with everything we had missed out on during the previous decades. It was a direction of recovery, but realistically speaking, recovery can only ever be a partial direction, if not even a pseudo-direction. In about the 2000s, after we'd lost patience waiting for the great "drawer-kept" dramatic literature and started to feel, more or less, in step with the *world*, we began, still rather timidly, to formulate questions about direction. Where are we headed, and why are we heading that way rather than another? EU integration, a growing degree of internationalization in some (not many!) local theatre projects (the festivals in Craiova and Sibiu are good practice examples), increasingly close contact with foreign aesthetics and creators (also, thanks in part to certain past FNT editions, which opened key international connections, and also to major Romanian theatre figures like George Banu, who built solid cultural bridges) all provided a vague answer to this question: we're heading in the direction the *cultured world* is heading! we told ourselves, without really understanding where exactly this *cultured world* was going.

The question of direction was also avoided for another reason, one somewhat ideological in nature. Many believed, and still believe, that to ask where a nation's theatre is headed is to legitimize the idea that there exists a national cultural specificity, something of ours and only ours, that must be preserved, promoted, even celebrated. But such a stance would bring us back to old nationalist rhetorics, a fragile and problematic territory, both in the past and especially today. Such a question was therefore seen as limiting and backward, entirely unnecessary as long as we were speaking about "integration," about "Europeanness," "universalism," "globalism," and so on.

Once such precautions were overcome, the question in question came back into focus. I tend to pinpoint a fairly specific moment: I would locate it during the Covid-19 pandemic and in the immediate aftermath, when we were put in the position of interrogating not just the essence of theatre in general, but also the behavior of institutional Romanian theatre in times of crisis, the audience's connection or lack thereof with artists in difficulty, the modest capacity of Romanian directing to innovate and adapt by proposing new aesthetics and performative formulas under creative and economic discomfort, theatre's dependency on enclosed spaces, the fragility of archives and the list goes on. In those moments, the question felt so pressing that I—and others colleagues in the

field—felt an acute need to speak about the future much more than the past³. The topic remained open and was eventually discussed in a more dispassionate manner during nationally visible gatherings, the most recent being hosted by the 2024 edition of the National Theatre Festival, where I conceived and moderated the debate “*Theatre ro. Directions, Constraints, Freedoms...*” where I invited personalities from different generations and creative spheres: Catinca Drăgănescu, Andrei Măjeri, Radu Nica, Doina Papp, and Ofelia Popii, joined by an unexpectedly large and genuinely engaged audience.⁴

Who establishes the direction?!

If we were to outline, not necessarily in any particular order, the possible answers to the question “who could still decide the direction of Romanian theatre?”, the list would look something like this:

- theatre directors. This answer is quite vulnerable, because each director follows their own aesthetic program, which they very rarely feel the need to justify publicly⁵, even if that “public space” is reduced to something as simple as a theatre playbill. Romanian directing has perhaps never been as fragmented as it is today; it no longer consolidates around unified generational discourses, nor around a majority preference for certain themes considered urgent, nor in adherence to any dominant aesthetic. I’m not saying here whether this creative individualism is good or bad, only that it undermines the contribution of directors to the question of direction. Several variables come into play when we talk about top-tier directors, those capable, through their finest productions, of setting or suggesting theatrical trends. The only one who can truly be said to have done this over the past two decades is Radu Afrim; the kind of theatre he has practiced consistently throughout these years has provided a very tempting direction, where social messages (the multitude of marginalized characters featured in his work places him in the realm of socially engaged art, though some Romanian critics disagree with this reading) are delivered through highly elaborate aesthetics; in Afrim’s work, the social message does not dilute the aesthetic, in contrary, it nuances it, in a very specific and easily recognizable way. Afrim’s influences on Romanian theatre culture is subtler than many are willing to admit. It remains to be seen whether we can integrate this *influences* into the concept of *direction*, and

3 To be seen Călin Ciobotari, “Without mask, about the future of theatre”, Cultural Observatory, sept. 2020, article online on <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/fara-masca-despre-viitorul-teatrului/>

4 Details on: <https://fnt.ro/2024/modulul-dezbateri-in-fnt-2024/>

5 As was the case, for instance, with director Letea Popescu and the popular theatre program she launched at the “Fani Tardini” Theatre in Galați.

whether we can speak clearly, or only in whispers, of an *Afrim direction*. Another major creator, Silviu Purcărete, who also holds significant influence in how we make and view theatre in Romania, has remained anchored in the venerable tradition opened by Peter Brook, that of dazzling reinterpretations of classical texts, that is in a direction that most contemporary theatre cultures around the world consider, or wish, outdated. In the same paradigm of directing as a form of updating (whether of a text or a world) placet themselves Andrei Șerban, Mihai Măniuțiu, Alexandru Dabija, Tompa Gábor, and so forth. Many other attempts to open new paths (political theatre, community theatre, collaborative practices, etc.) have been too isolated and too sporadic to leave a significant mark.

- local playwriting. Hypothetically, this could be a highly plausible answer, especially if we're willing to look at the decisive ways in which, in other geographical contexts, playwriting has undeniably influenced the performing arts. The most accessible example remains German playwriting in the early 1990s, as well as the major shifts brought about in British theatre (and beyond) by the unconventional force of playwrights such as Sarah Kane. In the 2000s, the so-called "writing for the stage" became omnipresent in European theatre, and was timidly and unconvincingly adopted in the Romanian space only after 2010. It is only recently that the integration of the playwright into the creative team, as a presence throughout the rehearsal process, has become a regular occurrence. Playwright-director duos, once regarded as a kind of fleeting exoticism, if not even as a theatrical perversion, are now increasingly common⁶. And yet, there are still too few "flowers" to declare the "springtime" of a new direction. Theatres continue to refuse to include playwrights in their organizational structures; collaborations remain project-based and temporary, and it's very possible that we won't hear for years about a duo that once seemed functional and built for the long haul. We are still far from a point where a significant portion of the audience would buy a ticket to a show simply because the play was written by a certain contemporary playwright (Romanian or otherwise). Grants, creative scholarships, and residencies are all extremely scarce. The inclusion of playwriting courses at both undergraduate and master's level in theatre universities is a gain that must be defended and kept safe from collateral interests that lack serious purpose. Still, talking about the profession of the playwright remains a very delicate matter...

6 See also the debate organized at the 2024 edition of the National Theatre Festival: "What Does Contemporary Romanian Playwriting Need?", moderated by Ionuț Sociu, which brought together directors, playwrights, and theorists alike: Oana Borș, Vlad Cristache, Eugen Jebeleanu, Maria Manolescu, Leta Popescu, and Gabriel Sandu. A year earlier, at the same festival, another debate on similar themes had enjoyed great success: "Living Together. Who Needs Contemporary Playwriting?", moderated by Mihaela Michailov, which focused on such creative "duos" as Alexandra Felseghi – Andrei Măjeri & Adina Lazăr, and Yann Verburgh – Eugen Jebeleanu.

• the audience. We need to be honest and admit: if Romanian theatres had guided themselves over the years by the so-called “taste of the audience,” their development, such as it has been, would have suffered. The audience can indeed set a direction, but it is one that has little to do with the actual evolution of this art form. It’s enough to imagine a theatre where the manager decides to stage only productions with guaranteed *public* appeal. Financially, that might bring satisfaction, but such a theatre will quickly become uninteresting to the (fluctuating) minority of professional spectators, to critics, etc. These kinds of parentheses have existed, and will continue to exist, in the life of public theatres. The example that comes to mind right now is the Braşov Theatre, which for some time has been in a kind of national shadow, settling for productions that offer easy satisfaction to a local audience. Another example is the Bârlad Theatre, which also had its period of glory in the past, but is now reduced to aesthetic conformism and the comfort of superficial catharses. A particular case in Romania is that of the Hungarian-speaking audience, which is much more demanding and quick to react to the absence or dilution of value, without necessarily aspiring to influence the direction taken by Hungarian theatres in Romania.

• social media. I’m starting to believe that social media can influence the commercial success or failure of a production, especially in Bucharest, where the *Mergem la teatru*⁷ (*We go to the theatre*) group has begun to be taken seriously by both theatre managers and directors. Still, influencing the box office of one or several productions is not the same as shaping a medium or long-term aesthetic trend. The initial enthusiasm of artists for the so-called “commentary criticism”—impulsively practiced by “civilian” spectators expressing their opinions online—has also started to fade. These opinions, generally understood as emotionally driven feedback, don’t have a significant impact on creative teams, and they don’t influence the artistic product in question or the team’s future work in any meaningful way.

• theatre criticism. If we’re being realistic, we have to admit that the current main concern of Romanian theatre criticism revolves around efforts of self-legitimation. Our primary worry, as theatre critics, seems to be that of being taken seriously, that our professional existence be acknowledged as something more than merely formal. Otherwise, under these conditions, the goal of a true “directional criticism”⁸, one capable of tracing the developmental trajectory of theatre and anticipating its further evolution, feels dishearteningly distant. We find some consolation in the similar state of affairs in contemporary Romanian

7 At the time of writing, the group included above 56.000 members.

8 A ‘vectorial’ criticism, as Adrian Lesenciuc calls it. (to be seen Adrian Lesenciuc, *Critica de direcție – analiză vectorială*, vol. I, Editura Junimea, Iași, 2021)

literary criticism, where, in a study dedicated to this issue, Andrei Terian concluded unequivocally: “No matter how active current Romanian critics may be, and no matter how much data they provide to legitimize the *direction* they support, these legitimations will always be retroactive, because any contemporary Romanian critic who would claim to have directly *inspired* literature would be fullfilled with ridicule. Therefore, there is (and under current conditions, cannot be) any form of *directional criticism* in contemporary Romanian literature. In Romania, *directional criticism* is a dated historical phenomenon that ended around 1930.”⁹ The only “directional” critic from recent decades might remain George Banu; though the discussion is complicated, as the well-known theatre scholar avoided identifying with the profession of critic. Still, the books he wrote about theatre, the major encounters he facilitated, and the deeply animated form of cultural engagement he maintained all pointed to a direction he consistently cultivated: the cultural dimension of the theatre show and its interdisciplinary openness. In Banu’s wake, most theatre critics today limit themselves to practicing the so-called “reception criticism” (theatre reviews), whose primary purpose is to comment on and, in doing so, “archive” the performances they write about. The influence of theatre criticism, therefore, tends toward zero.

- theatre management. Logic and common sense would lead us to credit theatre management as the most important decision-making factor in the complex issue of direction, especially given that, in Romania, managers are theatre professionals, not economists, financiers, or marketing strategists¹⁰. Yet it is a responsibility that most of our managers do not fully assume, constantly pointing to external constraints that surpass and limit them. Another entity, the “budgeting authority”, *oversees the scene* without truly knowing or valuing it, at best, in a superficial or incidental way. Even if a manager were granted complete freedom, the only tangible object of their honest efforts to build a direction would be the institution they lead. And that is, in fact, exactly what happens: each theatre claims to have its own direction, independent of all the others. It’s enough to look at our National Theatres to see how divergent their paths have become. Moreover, the National Theatre in Bucharest has long ceased to *set the tone* for Romanian theatre. Extrapolating from this, one could reasonably argue that each Romanian theatre institution is a world unto itself, with its own repertory philosophy, with

9 Andrei Terian, „Critica de direcție. Note despre istoria și semantica unui concept în cultura română”, in Iulian Boldea (coord.), *Comunicare, context, interdisciplinaritate*, vol II, Petru Maior University Press, Târgu-Mureș, 2012, pp. 309-318, online on https://www.academia.edu/36910524/Critica_de_direc%C8%9Bie_Note_despre_istoria_%C8%99i_semantica_unui_concept_%C3%AEn_cultura_rom%C3%A2n%C4%83

10 Legislation establishes theatre studies as a mandatory requirement for anyone wishing to apply for a managerial position at a public theatre institution.

strategies dispersed across more or less realistic management plans, and with a remarkable ability to change... direction whenever the situation demands it. Even though the quality of theatre management has improved significantly in recent years, we have yet to see the emergence of inter-managerial collaborations that could reflect a shared theatrical vision.

- theatre festivals. The complexity of this subject requires a separate discussion, one attentive to details that may prove essential to our broader conversation about direction. So, then...

...what's the point of a theatre festival?

I haven't counted all the theatre festivals in Romania, but I believe they number in the dozens. I'm also including those events that avoid the term "festival", opting instead for other names, among which Theatre Days... being the most common. I've often wondered what drives the leaders of a community (local, county-level, regional, etc.) or the directors of theatre institutions to so eagerly pursue a festival. The possible answers are many, varied, and sometimes surprising. I propose a brief, to-the-point review:

- the genuine need for a macro-event that can strengthen the public image of the organizing theatre both locally and nationally or, more rarely, internationally. This type of motivation is supported by arguments related to commercial, marketing perspectives: ticket revenue, economic development of the community (guests will be accommodated, fed, seduced by the local beauties, places they may one day return to as tourists, or speak of in glowing terms, sparking others' interest in the culture and *retreat* potential of the place/area/region¹¹). The most frequently cited example, rightly so, is the evolution of the city of Sibiu, closely linked to the expansion of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival.

- Achieving a festive dimension necessary to mark an important date in the calendar of the city or the theatre, or to offer the local audience the joy of a theatrical feast. The core meanings of the *festival* concept are precisely the exceptional nature of the moment, the break from routine, the cheerful and noisy (publicized) *celebration* of something, the (re)encounter as a reinforcement of ongoing connections, communion, communication, and so on.

- a certain state of undeclared competitiveness between theatres. Sometimes discussions like this arise: „everyone has a festival, only we don't!” or

11 Ric Knowles, the author of an extensive study dedicated to international festivals, suggests that one of their once-important goals, cultural tourism and the resulting benefits, is now secondary to other priorities: intercultural exchange, the conscious acceptance of outside influences, the integration of those influences into one's own way of understanding and practicing art, etc. (Ric Knowles, *International Theatre Festivals and 21st – Century Interculturalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2021).

„why them and not us?“. Egos also come into play when there is a traditional rivalry between neighboring communities, egos fueled, let's admit, by some political-electoral pressures exerted by the budgeting authorities (who are not abstract entities, but flesh-and-bone people in dark-colored suits) on the management of theatres. It is very possible that at the root of some of the most successful festivals we have lie such proto-egos, displays of organizational muscles, and so on. A subtle theme of self-sacrifice runs through the mythologies of some festivals that live their existences on the edge of legend: personal loans, pawnings, major risks, clashes with real or imaginary enemies, loneliness against all, misunderstood visions, and so forth.

- the circulation of public money is another reason why some organize festivals. The talent, as we well know, must not be buried, but must be helped to circulate in various ways. Most of the time, the ordinary spectator cannot imagine the financial comings and goings happening in the background so that they can enjoy a successful evening at the theatre. A certain Romanian cooperativist inclination leads to very advantageous inter-theatre exchanges (“I invite you, you invite me!”) which, unfortunately, are not always based on quality-related criteria and which generate situations of “blind spots” or “vicious circles.”

- the change of leadership in a theatre institution can have as an immediate consequence the abandonment of the old festival and the creation of a new one, considered, of course, superior in every aspect.

- routine, no matter how petty this reason may seem, makes it so that this year too the such-and-such festival is organized (because it was held last year, and two years ago, and because, in general, it's not good to disturb the waters of tradition, etc.). The manager sighs deeply, starts making phone calls, and in the end, will cobble together/patch up/throw together a new edition that will pass almost unnoticed among the city's other events.

There are few festivals whose echoes actually matter. Because the value of a festival, at least from my point of view, should not be limited to what happens during its course but should also be measured in what follows after it ends. Ideally, after a strong edition, there should be a process of decantation in the consciousness of participants, whether they are regular audiences or professional audiences (a distinction I don't particularly like, but which is useful). A strong edition should leave traces, provoke reflection, spark a desire for debate, cause confusion, contradictions, a taste for polemics (with oneself and with others), create frameworks for the development of new projects, trigger changes in repertoires, foster unexpected contacts, generate a state of unrest and urgency,

a sense of inspiration and stimulation, and the enigmatic intuition of a new beginning. How often does this happen after we return from a festival? Let's admit it, not very often. Most of our experiences at a festival amount to a sense of well-being, mental comfort, pleasant physical and maybe emotional tiredness. In other cases, we experience a thrill of being overwhelmed, a few disappointments, a few fleeting moments of wonder. Then, suddenly, it all ends, and we start preparing for the next festival.

Is that enough? I tend to think not... Unfortunately, many of our festivals – with budgets large enough that they really could matter – miss one of the missions they should ideally have: reshaping the current course of Romanian theatre, constructing new secondary channels for the theatrical flow to branch out, reorganize, and seek new paths. Maybe we are wrong to demand that theatrical entities (managers, great creators, festivals, critics, etc.) create directions; maybe what they should do is create those new frameworks that are tempting and provocative enough to suggest the possibility of new directions, not directions themselves; to formulate working hypotheses or horizons of expectation toward which we feel an urgent need to move. Just like theatre itself, I believe a festival's task is not only to mirror the world but also to open new windows to possible worlds. To a large extent, today's theatre festivals in Romania are merely festivals-of-mirroring¹², many of them animated by the most honorable intentions and, often, managing to deliver editions that deserve honest applause. However, their mission stops halfway, because I rarely sense any festival's concern with reshaping the world they mirror, opening it toward the future, making the act of mirroring something more than an eternal showcase: a pretext for a window that opens with a loud noise...

Several directions created by the National Theatre Festival during the period 2022–2024

One of the discussions that constantly resurfaced within the curatorial teams I was part of concerned the moment when we should announce the concept of the respective edition. It seemed to us that, ideally, it should be announced as early as possible so that, in building their repertory, theatres could take into account, even if only slightly, the conceptual underlining we were proposing. Immediately after we announced the theme, literary (dramaturgy) departments and managers

¹² In his Dictionary, Patrice Pavis emphasizes one of the functions less often fulfilled by theatre festivals: to offer the audience “the possibility to see, in the same place and in the same period of time, new performances, to discover lesser-known trends and experiences, to confront the opinions of theatre practitioners and enthusiasts” (Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of Theatre*, translated from French by Nicoleta Popa Blanariu and Florinela Floria, Editura Fides, Iași, 2021, p. 151).

would begin to wonder what from their existing productions could match our concept. This situation of “matching” was rather uncomfortable and somewhat schematized the relationship between the curatorial act and the theatrical productions already available on the market. Only later did we realize that it was a false problem, that our themes were aiming more toward the future than toward the past or present.

Looking back, I believe that, during the aforementioned period, the National Theatre Festival developed several directions. Not formally, but argumentatively, not for the sake of simply creating a concept or an edition identity, but out of the sincere conviction that such themes were necessary. Their necessity arose either from the fact that they had been neglected until then, or from the fact that they could, in a constructive way, generate new fruitful relationships within the artistic field, stimulating creativity and theatre creators. I will list them below:

- the concept of a *creative laboratory*. The revival of a practice that had made its mark in Europe in the 60s–70s, the laboratory, was by no means a sign of retrograde thinking or nostalgia, but rather the proposal of a focused attention on a very modern phrase, still avoided in the Romanian space: *artistic research*. To see the theatre performance as the result of research and not as a mere staging following a predefined recipe means to approach an art form, one that we often accuse lately of superficiality, with seriousness. Each of the curators received encouraging feedback from artists who admitted that they had lacked this perspective. Of course, this does not mean that immediately after announcing the concept all rehearsal spaces turned into laboratories; but I am convinced that, at the level of individual consciousness among many Romanian theatre practitioners, this direction of research has taken root and will bear fruit in the long term. Research is not just a “business” of Universities and Research Centers, but a reflex (which must become conscious!) of all those who, in one form or another, make theatre. The discussion can also be extended to the level of the spectator: do we want a passive spectator, a kind of receptacle into which we pour sets, lights, texts, visuals, sounds, messages, or, on the contrary, an active spectator who also exercises a form of research when watching a performance?!

- *the stimulation of contemporary playwriting* was, I am convinced, another vigorous direction over the last three years of the National Theatre Festival. It constituted a strong emphasis through which we imparted a certain sense of urgency to a subject that had only been episodically addressed in the past. If the following editions also insist on the importance of the playwright within creative teams, on the programmatic, methodical cultivation of writing for the stage, on collaborative formulas essential for the playwright-director relationship,

I am convinced that we will be able to speak, indeed, of a direction opened by a Romanian festival. The unexpected interest in staged readings (full houses at the inconvenient afternoon hours), the massive participation in specific debates, the constructive intensity of some polemics, the success of the playwriting laboratories hosted by the FNT, the involvement of universities – all these are signals that we are at the beginning of a very interesting opening toward a new national horizon.

- *the educational function of theatre.* It is the undeniable merit of Mihaela Michailov, my colleague from the FNT curatorial board, to have consistently, emphatically, and argumentatively advocated for a function that has been discussed in the past but which today seems more necessary than ever. Why? Because it compensates for or attempts to soften the educational void into which Romania increasingly tends to sink. The absence of long-term strategies, the controversial measures taken by decision-makers, the orientation of education toward specialization at the expense of cultivating emotions and general cultural knowledge, relaunch the discussion about art as a type of alternative education. The extension of the National Theatre Festival into Bucharest schools (for now), the involvement of students in creative workshops, the elimination of certain prejudices related to the seriousness and rigidity of theatre, have proven to be pertinent starting points not only for shaping a competent audience of tomorrow but also for an additional responsabilization of the artist, who begins to accept that the role of pedagogue is also included in their “job description.” At the time of writing this text, I have confirmation that the educational component of FNT will remain a constant in future editions. “*Educated Romania*,” the presidential project launched a few years ago but somewhat left in a state of potentiality, has the chance to gain real meaning and content if we are willing to credit art (theatre, in this case!) as a formative direction in the educational field.

- *the ethics of the creative process* was a constant concern for us throughout all three editions, all the more so as the ethical consciousness of Romanian artists still has certain fragilities and vulnerabilities. It is a much more complex topic than it might seem; it is not limited to “politeness” during rehearsals but also influences thematic choices, the relationship with the character, the artist–spectator relationship, the shaping of self-awareness and self-esteem, and so on.

Conclusions

The importance of festivals in the development of a nation’s cultural field is, at least for me, beyond any doubt. Hence, a heightened degree of responsibility falls on the organizers of festivals, whether they are managers, artistic directors, curators, selectors, theoreticians, or practitioners. Each festival should be driven

by the ambition of a creative surpassing. A good use of resources and an intelligent (re)construction of the identity of each edition can, in the medium and long term, lead to surprising results and to placing Romanian theatre on truly fertile paths. Without claiming any merit for myself, I believe that the National Theatre Festival of recent years can serve as a source of inspiration for other organizers of similar events in Romania. Pragmatism must meet dreams of the future, and our Festivals must become a rational celebration not only of what has been, but also of what could be.

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