

Adaptation and Continuation Born from Our Non-Recognition of Abandonment

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Abstract: *The explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language defines art as „an activity of man that aims to produce aesthetic values and that uses means of expression with a specific character; all the works (from an era, from a country, etc.) that belong to this activity”. Looking back, we find that, regardless of the era we are focusing on, art, as a whole, has not known downtime, despite any unfavorable conditions of a social or economic nature. On the contrary, when major crises situations took over society, art experienced a revival in almost all its forms of expression.*

Key words: *art; downtime; crisis; society; revival.*

Back to history

„Quo vadis music? Quo vadis art? Are options, choices, and attitudes limited? Forbidden art or arrested art? Acceptance or protest?” (I quoted from the invitation to the conference Music and Art in Pandemic - University of Arts of Târgu-Mureș, March 18-19, 2021). A series of questions that now, more than ever, are stirring up the art world on most meridians. In these times of crisis, a call to history (a look at history) may lead us more quickly to possible answers. „The Black Death” or „The Black Plague”, the bubonic plague pandemic that shook Eurasia and North Africa territories in the mid-14th century, is considered the worst pandemic that shook mankind between 1347 and 1351, between 75 million and 200 million deaths were recorded. The socio-economic consequences of this pandemic have been dramatic, with radical changes at all levels of society. Demographic collapse has led to the depopulation of urban and rural settlements, massive social movements, and endemic wars. Europe was desolate, starving, the feudal system collapsed, the psychological deviations of the destabilized population led to the emergence of „the collective executioner” and „the collective victim”, pogroms became a practice in major European cities. The big picture of that period is that of hell. And yet, from this collective nightmare arose one of the most influential periods in the history of Europe, considered to be the cultural link between the Middle



Ages and modern history: the Renaissance. Against the gloomy background of the Black Death, the territory of present-day Italy (the cradle of the Renaissance) was one of the hardest-hit regions, where death became an everyday familiarity of ordinary people, the great rich, but also of scientists. They began to look at life differently, social contraction and human suffering causing them to turn their attention more to concrete human existence, to the detriment of the afterlife and religious spirituality. The need for good, for innovation, animated science, and technology, the Renaissance was born on the remains of people killed by the plague, then offering the pattern, eyeglasses, telescope, compass, clock, etc. And with science and technology, art, in all its forms of manifestation, took an unprecedented boom until then, the Renaissance remaining one of the most beautiful chapters of human culture. From this perspective, we can observe an essential difference between the reactions recorded at the human level: the non-destruction of social relations.

After looking at the past, I appreciate that both knowledge and understanding of the great phenomena that have shaken humanity can lead us to a deeper analysis and understanding of the present, its challenges, and above all, the chances we have now, in another pandemic era. Obviously, this is also due to the multiple means of communication, in the 21st century technology providing to each of us with direct means of communication, in real-time, which allows both the continuation of the lucrative process in various fields and creation of new means of artistic expression.

In this context, I am convinced that, if we refer to art, we can say with certainty that its prerogative is completely lacking in abandonment, while options, choices, and attitudes know no bounds. The same history clearly shows us that forbidden and arrested art are just baseless notions, despite any official stoppages and different eras restrictions. It is always a manifesto capable of raising questions about the dominant discourse of the times, an ideal vehicle for transmitting ideas that generate progress, all this being possible due to its unlimited capacity for adaptation and continuation.

Unexpected challenge

Starting from here and considering the unfortunate period that is now shaking humanity, I believe that we cannot talk about acceptance or protest, but about adaptation and continuation. Adaptation and continuation - two words to which I give a special power, two attitudes that have saved humanity over the centuries.

I see that history tells us something, about once a century, according to an algorithm known only to her. Once a century, nature seems to turn against humanity, subjecting it to a new test, to new challenges. Naturally, art, in its many forms of expression, is in turn subject to all the vicissitudes that arise from the test of nature. But, as a whole, like humanity, in fact, art does not give up, does not allow itself to be arrested and does not remain confined to a latent *modus vivendi* in anticipation of better days. On the contrary! It adapts and continues his journey.



The year 2020 marked the beginning of a new era. It may seem paradoxical, but that Stop! demanded by nature, as a result of which people found themselves locked in houses, some being left without income or losing their businesses, marked the moment of a new way and, in the end, of a new solution. This Stop! also brought with it that thrill of the people of art, who suddenly found themselves on the wall, with their hands tied, widowed by the public. But after the initial shock, artists began to look for and try new ways to put their creative vision into practice. I say, „new ways of putting into practice” and not „new forms of expression”, because artists, depending on the specifics of each art, have changed especially their platforms of expression, places, spaces, and not so much the forms.

Presentation / Review of the new conditions

Students and teachers from art faculties have also adapted to the same new path. Exiled in the online space, I had at the beginning the feeling that absolutely everything we do is placed under the sign of falsehood, of uninspired improvisation, of lack of communication. In fact, the lack of communication was the first touchstone on the new road. The lack of direct communication, face to face from a physical point of view, gave the feeling of working in vain, without the spiritual and emotional load that characterizes the work of the actor. It may sound incredible, but this thought is false.

After weeks of doubt, I remembered that man is able to interact, build and give emotion beyond physical contact. If I were to deny all this, it meant, for example, that I deny the power of transmitting the messages and emotions that literature has. Because when you sit with a book in your hand and let yourself be guided by the writer's hand in another world, that hand is invisible, you lack the tactile, physical sensation, being guided only by words and ideas transformed into letters. This was the moment when I realized that the actor - this true physical vehicle of words combined in the idea - is able to communicate and transmit emotion, regardless of the space in which it manifests. And the virtual space, the computer screen has since become a real lecture hall, reading room, rehearsal room, performance hall.

From own adaptation to the adaptation of the whole team

During my career I had to adapt, depending on the continent and the country where I lived, as an actor, as a director, as a teacher. From performer to creator, then to teacher. From the stage to the set, then to the circus arena. With these experiences in my luggage, I adapted and changed the classroom and the performance hall with the virtual space. In front of me were the ones who represent the most delicate, fragile, and, at the same time, most tender work material: students. A material that if you do not handle and lead it with dedication and delicacy, you risk breaking it, and no adhesive can return it to its original shape. Driven by this belief, I made the students understand that the road was not closed, that no barrier was placed in front of them, but that, on the contrary,



they were offered a new chance, a challenge that others did not have so far. Once they understood the new situation, we proposed a project in which they would have the opportunity to express themselves according to the practical knowledge acquired, but also the emotional accumulations of each one: *FMT – UVT homemade*.

In his work *Commedia dell'Arte*, David Esrig points out that „during the millennia, the first and most elementary forms of artistic mirroring of everyday life have been born here, with untiring freshness, and every time the institutionalized theatre was destroyed by historical evolution, comedians took refuge back in the anonymity of the market. In this place of chance encounters, the short numbers of the tricksters developed, the coarsely caricatured characters found their form, they were carried on and modified, during a permanent confrontation with the public, the traditions of the mimes (...) and many other precursors. Which the performer did not know, of which he was not aware.” Translating this idea today, we can say that the anonymity of the market is represented, for today's comedians, by the virtual space. As such, the entire spectacular baggage was unfolded in the virtual space that became the open stage for thousands of spectators.

We did the same when we made *FMT - UVT homemade*. I started a project in which both my colleagues from the Faculty of Music and Theatre within UVT were involved, as well as the students, aiming to transmit, using technology, joy and hope. In making this 27-minute film, we started with the idea of uniting the two fields of our faculty – music and theatre. We relied on the principle that theatre always means us, never me, defying in a way the reality in which we worked: each one alone, at home, relying on his own imagination and on a simple device available. Yes, it was harder to make from me, us in the absence of concrete work on stage, but in the end, we managed not to deviate from our principle. The argument of our project is exposed right at the beginning: „We retreated alone in the shell of our room, we hid in the cloak of our fear until, in the middle of the night, we heard the cry: Wake up and bring joy to the people! Since then, we started singing, playing, alone, but together. Since then, I have become an artist again.”

Text, music, game, all were worked both individually and in groups, on the online platform. The new way of working provoked teachers and students alike, each coming with the most daring ideas, proposals, and solutions. Everything was discussed, analyzed, adapted as a team, the screen no longer being perceived as a screen, but as a worktable, around which we all worked and enjoyed together. The options, choices, the attitudes knew no limits or obstacles. Once exposed, they were analyzed contextually and adapted to both the chosen theme and the environment of expression. The actor remained an actor, the musician remained a musician, the teacher - teacher, and the student, the sponge eager for knowledge and self-representation.

Having specialized in directing entertainment and theatrical events and producing shows in unconventional spaces, such as circus arenas, concert halls, and outdoor scenes, I was used to combining different artistic disciplines. During my stay in Canada, I collaborated with Cirque du Soleil, a leading scene in the world of modern showbiz, where he masterfully combines circus disciplines with other artistic disciplines. Seeing the shows



from the outside, but also working inside them, after my return to the country I was tempted to find solutions for multidisciplinary shows. This is how this idea was born.

Initially, the project was designed for the auditorium, but after entering the isolation I had to rethink the whole concept and decided to try to produce this project online. That's how we started this adventure, not knowing all the details or the paths that this project will take us. The basic scenario was to create the feeling that everything is happening live on a Google Meet platform (as we are all accustomed to during this pandemic period). The work interval for the realization of this project was April - June 2020, in the first month starting the construction of the scenario. At the beginning of May, after a few online meetings with the heads of departments and after explaining the red thread of the project, I asked both my colleagues and the students from the Faculty of Music and Theatre to send me different moments, filmed, related to the repertoire they were already working on. And if the red thread was still discussed, during the online meetings, we decided that it can become, in fact, one of the connecting elements between the scenes filmed by students and teachers, the red thread appearing from the beginning of our film and marking the map of Timișoara. And the points on the map of our city, connected to each other by this red thread, marked the places where the protagonists were, the places where each one, in his room or yard, recorded his own scene.

Since I teach the discipline of body expression training, I already had many movement studies, filmed and adapted online, materials that resulted from working with my students, some of them appearing in the final product. But, to my joy, the avalanche of new materials was triggered. Once we received these videos, we had to think about adapting the script so that the video montage works as a show, as a whole.

From text to online presentation

The actual work with my actors and colleagues followed, with whom I decided how to make the connections between the scenes, so that this real potpourri of moments works in a logical scenario. At the end of May, beginning of June, we designed a prologue, some connecting scenes, including improvisation, as well as a final scene. The entire material was also viewed by the dean of the Faculty of Music and Theatre, who, based on them, composed a dramatic line. Once the text was written, we returned to the scenes and filmed the moments of connection, leaving each actor the freedom to come up with his own contribution in the individual scenes. It is also worth mentioning that, given the conditions imposed by the rules regarding the pandemic, we could not work with a film crew to provide technical support to each actor or musician. As a result, the performers filmed themselves, which was a challenge for both and those who made the final editing.

Obviously, during this project we were faced with obstacles, and challenges, to which we had to either adapt, or we had to find solutions. These include, first, technical issues, which have led us to focus on many secrets related to film and television, in order to solve problems related to the quality of video materials received online, sound, etc., thus allo-



cating a lot of time and energy to post-production, video and audio editing. We have set a deadline, the date of the premiere - June 15, 2020; as a result, the last week has been intense, precisely because we have tried our best to meet the deadline we have assumed.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the final product was a successful one and enjoyed success, recording, for example, immediately after the premiere of over 2000 views. Below, the film can be accessed by those interested in the link-<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYzge4IrPa4>

This trip was made possible thanks to the support from all the students and colleagues who put their shoulders to the project. The list is long. The materialization of our film is also due to my colleagues assoc. dr. Silviu Văcărescu and assistant univ. doctoral student Claudiu Dogaru, who were, along with me, part of the creative team, from beginning to end, and were also the protagonists of some filmed scenes. Many sleepless nights, heated discussions, divergences, but all led to a good ending.

What followed

Starting with this semester, which - at least until now - took place in a hybrid way, we continue the work on a new show, with movement studies and a lot of research. The first stage of its realization took place in the first semester, online. Together with the students we try to analyze the effects of the pandemic on us, while taking a look at the post-covid world, in which the lack of human interaction disappears, and the development of artificial intelligence and robotics is installed. Until recently, we had the luxury of working face to face again, but as Timișoara was quarantined on March 8, we had to move online again. From the beginning of the project, we set out to present the future show in the open air (the performance hall being inaccessible to the public in these times), going down the street, in the squares, because, as David Esrig pointed out, in times of crisis the actor returns to the market, in the public forum, where it takes place, lives and even hides, if necessary.

FMT – UVT homemade

A concept of Costa Tovarnisky, Contradicted by Petru-Silviu Văcărescu, Confused by Claudiu Dogaru, Playwright: Violeta Zonte

With: Peter Oschanitzky, Petru - Silviu Văcărescu, Johny Bota, Alexandra Bugariu, Titus Sărăcuț, Laurențiu Ernest Slach, Bordos Csilla, Paul Grosar, Andreea Petrilă, Familia Petrilă, Claudiu Dogaru, Emanuela Bunai, Regina Csermak, Lucian Silviu Matei, Sabine Oschanitzky, Jaqueline Kohl, Adrian Korek, Andreea Vlass, Paul Balaj, Firuca Cina, Marina Santrac, Maria Lelea, Andras Gabor - Robert, Andrei Sărăcuț, Ioana Urda, Silvia Torok, Ioana Balint, Amy & Cara (our four-legged friends).