

## The Emergence of Independent Theatre in the Romanian Postcommunist Society

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***Abstract:** The following paper is a transcription and an adaptation of a lecture held by the author in September 2016 in Budapest, at the University of Theatre and Film (SZFE), in the framework of the European project 3 Layers of Telling a Story. The purpose of this study is to examine the state of the independent theatre after the fall of communism in Romania, and to emphasize the contribution made by the pioneers of this movement to the entire theatrical landscape. The paper focuses on three aspects: in the first chapter, it establishes the propriety of terminology, analyzing theoretical concepts such as "independent", "fringe" and "alternative" theatre, while in the second chapter, it tackles the socio-political environment in the 1990s in Romania, as well as the general state of the theatre. The third - and last - chapter of the study is based mostly on the book coordinated by Liviu Malița, "Viața teatrală în și după comunism", EFES Publishing House, Cluj, 2006, and it consists of the synthetic presentation of ten independent theatres, companies and programs that emerged in Romania in the 1990s and later.*

***Key words:** Romanian independent theatre; the fall of communism; theatre and society; contemporary performing arts.*

### 1. Independent, Alternative or Fringe Theatre?

I would like to start this study with some theoretical questions, regarding mainly the use of the term "independent theatre" and its history. Should we use the term "independent", "alternative" or "fringe"?

In order to answer this question, let us take a look at the history. Although independent theatre originated at the end of the 19th century, it only became a worldwide movement during mid-20th century. Some interpreters even claim that it was born at that time. As for the meaning and the nature of these terms (alternative/fringe/independent), I have turned to The Cambridge Guide to Theatre, edited by



Martin Banham, where I found an entry regarding “fringe” theatre, signed by John Elsom, whose analysis of the term is enlightening. Elsom states that “fringe” theatre is

[...] a movement which began in the 1960s in Britain and corresponds to the Off-Off Broadway theatres in New York and to the ‘free theatre’ groups in Europe. [...] The term came into use in the late 1950s [...]. Much fringe theatre has its origin in political protest movements, notably against the war in Vietnam. In the 1960s, the ‘hippy’ and ‘flower power’ movements, led by Julian Beck’s Living Theatre, were primarily American in origin, although they had many imitators in Britain. [...] Not all fringe theatre, however, was political. In small theatre clubs [...] various kinds of experimentalism could be attempted which might otherwise have fallen foul of the censor, theatrical censorship only being abolished in 1968. Improvisatory drama, environmental theatre, plays with strong sexual impact or sometimes violent spectacles were staged in clubs to avoid the restrictions of the law. [...] The daring adventurousness of fringe theatres, the secret of their attraction in the 1960s, became less wild in the 1970s, although the standard of production undoubtedly rose. It ceased to be polite to describe them as ‘fringe’, for most companies preferred the word ‘alternative’. They regarded themselves as being different from mainstream theatre but not on its edges.

Elsom, 1992, 371-372

In Marvin Carlson’s view, this type of theatre started its development in Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when several theatre professionals and amateurs formed small production organisations outside the institutional theatre in order to avoid censorship, to explore new ideas in the areas of playwriting and staging and to look for new or more specialized types of audiences (see Carlson, 2000, 249).

Coming back to the three terms: “alternative”, “fringe” and “independent” theatre, we can look at another perspective, outlined by one of my colleagues at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş, the academic and theatre director Theodor-Cristian Popescu. He claims that the notion of alternative theatre has to be permanently referred to in connection with the type of theatre for which it constitutes an alternative. Popescu argues that in the theatrical cultures in which it was possible for independent theatre to occur and develop during communism – within certain limits, of course – such as Hungary and Poland, the notion of alternative theatre is used for all independent theatrical events. “Alternative” as a term was generated, in Popescu’s opinion, by the fact that this type of theatre uses another kind of language. He also underlines the fact that “independent theatre” was a problematic term, unlikely to have been accepted during communism (see Popescu, 2012, 15-16).

What defines independent theatre is a strong propensity towards the experiment, and there wasn’t much freedom to experiment in Romania during communism. After 1989, however, artists had found their inner and outer freedom, and the language of the theatre began to suffer mutations. Thus, independent theatre in Romania, after 1989, has a powerful experimental side. So let’s take a look at what experimental theatre is: Patrice Pavis approaches this type of theatre (in general), claiming that the term “experimental



theatre“ competes with expressions such as “avantgarde theatre“, “laboratory theatre“, “*performance art*“ and even “modern theatre“; all these are opposed to conventional, commercial and bourgeois theatre, the foremost purpose of which is financial profit and which is built on established artistic formulas; experimental theatre is also opposed to the idea of repertory theatres, where either classical works or plays by established playwrights are staged. Experimental theatre is more than a genre or a historic movement; it refers to the artists’ perspective on traditions, institutions and commercial operations. According to Pavis, this type of theatre is marginal. Mainstream theatre is attractive to the public, creating stars, bringing in liquidity and is a part of an institutionalized theatre; whereas experimental theatre is very visible (due to its excentricity), and, at the same time, marginal - because of its budget and audience (see Pavis, 1999, 133-134).

Thus, there is a strong connection between experiment and independent theatre, viewed as an alternative to the mainstream. There is another definition of independent theatre, a definition that I would like to share with you. It belongs to the prominent Romanian theatre critic and professor, Anca Măniuțiu. She argues that alternative theatre represents a possible alternative both to the private, commercial theatre and to the official, subsidised theatre. It is economically, artistically and ideologically independent (see Măniuțiu, 2006, 391-392).

So, “fringe”, “alternative” or “independent”? I chose the term “independent theatre” for this study because, after 1989, this was the hardest struggle of the newly-formed companies and theatres: independence.

## **2. The Fall of Communism in Romania – Social Crises and Transitions. A Few Considerations on the State of the Theatre**

Independence is also a synonym for freedom. And I think that real independence in theatre is impossible in a closed, constrained, “unfree“ society. That is why, at least in Romania, independent theatre truly and strongly emerged and flourished only after the fall of communism.

On the 22th of December 1989, Romanian society suddenly changed. It was painful. It was bloody. But freedom had won. Those were turbulent times, the end of an era. And, as Maria Ghitta underlines, theatre played its part in these changes. Thus, the actor Ion Caramitru and the poet Mircea Dinescu were given two unforgettable parts in the dramatic turn of history: they were the ones who announced on public television that “the dictator has run away“, “the army is with us“ and that “God has turned His face towards the Romanians“ (see Ghitta, 2006, 315). Ghitta writes that the fall of communism in the Eastern European block is often compared to a miracle (see Ghitta, 2006, 317).

The Romanian Revolution in December 1989 meant, according to Eugen Wohl, a first step towards social freedom. The transition towards a democratic system was not



smooth. Just like all the areas of Romanian social life, theatre also entered an era characterized by crisis. It tried, on one hand, to recover a theatrical tradition that had been greatly hindered by the regime, and on the other hand, to renew the contact with the Western theatrical culture (cf. Wohl, 2006, 325).

Theodor-Cristian Popescu states that the violent events that led to Ceaușescu's demise and to the collapse of communism in Romania, the violences against the reconstitution of historical parties, the interethnic conflicts that took place in March 1990 in Târgu-Mureș, as well as other violent events, polarised Romanian society. The streets were noisy and the media amplified this noise. In the middle of this world that was going through transformations, theatre seemed overwhelmed by the situation, unable to keep up with the hysterical tempo of social events (see Popescu, 2014, 12).

Maria Ghitta thinks the inhabitants of Eastern Europe were stunned to realise that communism, which seemed to last forever, had ended, and that this ending was a process that was going on right in front of their eyes. For Romanians, who had lived under probably the most restrictive communist regime in Europe, under the most closed dictatorship, the instability of communism's professed eternity seemed even more unlikely. That is why, in Ghitta's opinion, in Romania, the border between "before" and "after" December 1989 is even stronger than in other former communist countries and this was also true for the theatrical world (see Ghitta, 2006, 317).

The status of the theatre in the Romanian society was changing; there was fear of change, theatre was undergoing a terrible crisis. Its problems had originated in its communist past (45 years) and theatre people were, at that point, critical rather than creative. However, slowly but surely, theatre started to recover from the handicaps of the isolation and the absurd of the dictatorship. Universities became autonomous, new theatres – private ones – were opened, and performances which had been subject to censorship were brought to the attention of the audiences (see Ghitta, 2006, 319-323).

New playwrights and directors emerged on the Romanian theatrical scene in the '90s and at the beginning of the third millenium: Theodor Cristian Popescu, Saviana Stănescu, Ștefan Caraman, Radu Macrinici, Alina Nelega, followed by Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu, Mihaela Michailov, Radu Afrim, Bogdan Georgescu and others, who introduced reality-adequate elements in the Romanian performing arts. UNITER, the first postcommunist union of theatre professionals was formed, and it started funding contests and festivals. New theatrical journals and magazines were published, and theatre was slowly exiting its state of crisis by the second half of the '90s.

In this difficult social and cultural context, Romanian independent theatre started to become a strong and coherent movement. As stated above, unlike in Poland or Hungary, there were very few independent theatres during communism in Romania. However, in the 1990s, after freedom had arrived, the theatrical landscape started to change.



### 3. Romanian Independent Theatre in the 1990s and Beyond

This section of my study is based mostly on the book coordinated by Liviu Malița, *Viața teatrală în și după comunism*, EFES Publishing House, Cluj, 2006. The following synthetic presentation of the independent theatres, companies and programs is in great debt to the articles in this volume which deal with independent theatre and which were coordinated by Anca Măniuțiu (see Malița, 2006, 411-433).

Anca Măniuțiu underlines that there was a theatrical *boom* between 1990 and 1995. The birth of UNITER, the Romanian Theatrical Union, in February 1990, was a financial and strategic landmark in the launching of the first independent theatre initiatives. Anca Măniuțiu mentions, among these, *Teatrul Inoportun* (The Inopportune Theatre), *Teatrul Franco-Român* (The French-Romanian Theatre) and *Trupa pe butoaie* (The Troupe on Barrels) (see Măniuțiu, 2006, pp. 395-399).

*The Inopportune Theatre* was established in September 1991 and it was led by Victor Ioan Frunză, a prominent Romanian director. Its purpose was to stimulate activity in the theatre and to encourage artists to work in unconventional spaces. *The French-Romanian Theatre*, led by Cristina Dumitrescu, was created in order to facilitate theatrical exchanges between French and Romanian artists. And, last but not least, *The Troupe on Barrels* was formed in Târgu-Mureș by the same Victor Ioan Frunză, in 1994. Later, between 1995 and 1997, it became a UNITER project. Its aim was to resuscitate the lost tradition of the popular, itinerant theatre – and the group became known through open-air performances (see Măniuțiu, 2006, 395-397).

These were the first initiatives in the area of independent theatre. They were not long-lasting, but they were followed by a constellation of new groups. Thus, the most visible independent theatres formed in Romania after the fall of communism were: TOACA Cultural Foundation, Luni Theatre at Green Hours, Act Theatre, The Inexistent Theatre, Daya Company, Underground-Ariel Theatre, DramAcum, The Impossible Theatre, Theatre 74 and Arca Theatre.

#### **TOACA Cultural Foundation**

TOACA Cultural Foundation was a non-profit and non-governmental organization, founded in 1996 in Bucharest, by Nona Ciobanu, theatre director, and Iulian Băltățescu, actor and set designer. Its aim was to offer an environment for interdisciplinary projects and to support independent ones. TOACA Studio opened on May 19th 2000, as a space dedicated to dance, theatre, exhibitions, concerts, etc.

As a theatre producer, TOACA collaborated on a national and international level with several theatre companies, and, besides regular shows, it also entered the area of performance art.

The traditional partners of TOACA were Moving Academy for Performing Arts in Amsterdam, Contemporary Dance Association in Bratislava and Mamapapa in Prague.



So, this bird's-eye view entitles us to say that TOACA is a hybrid space, like a crucible created especially for contemporary artists and performing arts.

### **Luni Theatre at Green Hours**

This company was born in December 1997. It was the first café-theatre in Romania and the only theatre with a permanent theatrical season. Its manager is Voicu Rădescu. Luni or Monday theatre is actually a program of Green Hours 22 jazz-café, one of the best-known jazz clubs in Bucharest.

The cast of the shows that have been produced and hosted by Luni Theatre often include prestigious Romanian actors, such as: Maia Morgenstern, Dorina Chiriac, Coca Bloos, Florin Piersic jr., Mihaela Rădescu, Dragoș Bucur, etc. The directors, set designers and playwrights that are usually on the team are also well-known: Radu Afrim, Ana Mărgineanu, Peca Ștefan, Gianina Cărbunariu, Alina Herescu, etc.

The club's atmosphere is not a conventional one; it is an artistic venue and its prestige has increased over the years. Thus, its productions have been awarded by UNITER, by The Young Actor's Gala, by the Ministry of Culture in Romania, by Dublin Fringe Festival, etc.

Luni Theatre is financed with money obtained from the Green Hours Club, where it is located. It is also supported by many media partners.

### **ACT Theatre**

Founded in 1998, ACT Theatre was the first Romanian independent theatre that had its own space, properly set up for theatre. Its manager is the Romanian actor Marcel Iureș. The projects generated by ACT Theatre aim to address a young audience and are not limited to theatrical productions. They include workshops, debates, book launches and exhibitions, as well as conferences and seminars.

ACT works as a theatre based on projects, it produces or co-produces its own shows and it also hosts productions by independent companies and artists. Its first project was *The Sun Citadel*, directed by Mihai Măniuțiu, a well-known Romanian director, currently the manager of the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca. Other productions followed, but ACT went even further than that: it got involved in dance-theatre shows and it also organized events the beneficiaries of which were disadvantaged children.

ACT Theatre's own productions include titles such as: *The Theatre Creator* by Thomas Bernhard, directed by Alexandru Dabija in 2002 and *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett, also directed by Dabija in 2003. Co-productions were based on plays by Dea Loher, Eric Bogosian, Sarah Kane, David Mamet and Evgheni Grishkovetz, among others.

ACT Theatre was a cohesion factor for the Romanian independent companies, due to the partnerships it initiated with them. It still exists and it's one of the best-known independent theatres in Romania.



### **The Inexistent Theatre**

This company was founded in November 1998, as a small underground theatre by a team of artists. The best-known among them are Theo Herghelegiu (theatre director) and Antoaneta Zaharia (actress). It didn't have a permanent staff and nor did it have its own space, but even so, its productions, which were hosted by other independent theatres, participated in many national and international festivals.

The company encouraged introspection and new artistic expressions, and its productions were based on plays by authors such as Saviana Stănescu, Theo Herghelegiu, John Cromwell, and Sybille Berg.

### **Daya Company**

Born in 1999, this company was formed by a group of students and graduates from UNATC "I. L. Caragiale" in Bucharest. Its manager is the young director Chris Simion. It didn't have its own space and it was socially-oriented, but it also aimed to promote authentic values and to encourage contemporary artists.

Daya's first performance was based on Pascal Bruckner's novel, *The Divine Child*. Actually Bruckner is the company's president of honour. Later, Daya got involved in shows based on plays by Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionescu, Chris Simion, etc.

### **Underground-Ariel Theatre**

There are few independent theatres in Romania about which books were written. Actually, I don't know any, except for the Underground program of the Ariel Theatre in Târgu-Mureş. Late theatre critic Eugenia Anca Rotescu wrote a book titled *The Detachment from the Squad. Underground Ariel 1999-2009* (Rotescu, 2009). The book, written in Romanian, is an outline of this program's activities, performances, manifestos and directions. It is a priceless document which archives one of the most innovative, daring and special initiatives in the Romanian independent theatre.

Why special? Because this program is an example of the way in which an alternative program can be born in the framework of a state-subsidised structure. Actually, underground-Ariel assumed a semi-independent status.

Underground-Ariel is a program which was founded in 1999 by the Ariel Theatre and the Dramafest Foundation in Târgu-Mureş, with the support of the Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society in Bucharest. The projects' venue was the cellar of Ariel Theatre, so it was really "underground". The program aimed to reach young intellectuals, students, artists, people who were interested in the experiment, in playful explorations and in aesthetically unconventional events.

Alina Nelega, who has won the UNITER award for playwriting twice so far, was the initiator and coordinator of this program, together with the multiple award-winning theatre director Gavril Cadariu, the manager of Ariel Theatre.



The program aimed to rethink the relationship between the audience and the performance, to use puppetry and animation in shows that were destined not for children, but for a more grown-up audience, and, basically, to create a space where artists could experiment freely. Among the most notable artists who have worked in this program, I should mention Alina Nelega and Gavril Cadariu themselves, Saviana Stănescu, Radu Afrim, Horațiu Mihaiu, Gigi Căciuleanu, Alexander Ivanovski and Olga Barabas. As Ariel Theatre has two departments – a Hungarian and a Romanian one – there were performances in both languages in the framework of the underground program.

Underground-Ariel was one of the most lively and creative programs in the landscape of the Romanian independent and semi-independent theatre after the fall of communism.

### **DramAcum**

On January 25th, 2002, an ambitious project was launched within UNATC “I. L. Caragiale”, the university of theatre and film in Bucharest. It was called DramAcum, and it was initiated by several directors and playwrights: Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Apostol and Alexandru Berceanu. Together with one of their professors, Nicolae Manda, they created DramAcum in order to give birth to a climate that would encourage new writing.

Their first manifesto, launched in the media, was addressed to people younger than 26, and it encouraged them to write or translate a play by a contemporary author whose mother tongue was less known. This was actually the invitation to participate in a playwrighting contest, the winner of which would receive payment and his or her play would be staged in one of the theatres in Bucharest. The project was supported by the Rațiu Foundation Romania. The organizers received 115 plays, which were read and evaluated. The final selection consisted of 16 plays, which were promoted in theatres and included in the UNATC library.

The winner of the first dramAcum contest was Peca Ștefan, who is today an accomplished playwright, but who was at that time a sophomore in Communication and Public Relations. His two plays, *Punami* and *Nils' Fucked up Day*, had readings in Bucharest, at Bulandra Theatre.

The great benefit this project brought to Romanian theatre, together with its forerunner, Dramafest Contest and Festival organized by Alina Nelega in Târgu-Mureș, was the fact that theatre directors became very interested in contemporary plays. I should mention the fact that Dramafest was a pioneer in the field of new writing in Romania. Actually, one of the founders of DramAcum, the playwright-director Andreea Vălean, won the Dramafest contest with her first and most successful play, now a motion picture, *When I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*.

Coming back to DramAcum, its success led to a new contest, organized in 2004 and titled dramAcum 2. Now the organizers had a new partner, besides UNATC: Act theatre, about which I wrote above. This time, the playwrights who came into the





spotlight and who are fashionable even today were Bogdan Georgescu, Nicoleta Esinencu and Vera Ion.

DramAcum was a salutary project, as it infused Romanian theatre with new, valuable plays which reflected the convulsions and transformations of the Romanian postcommunist society.

### **The Impossible Theatre**

The Impossible Theatre was founded in 2003 in Cluj-Napoca. Its initiators were Cristian Nedea, a theatre director, and the theatre professionals Rareş Crăiţ and Adina Raţiu. The Impossible Theatre was founded with the help of “Ten Sions“ Foundation in Cluj. After a while, its members created The Impossible Theatre Cultural Association and new colleagues were added: Andreea Iacob, Ramona Dumitrean, Eugen Wohl, etc.

The Impossible Theatre was officially launched in February 2003, at the Euphorion Studio within the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca. The events that accompanied the newborn company were varied. Thus, the initiators launched an electronic anthology of recent Romanian plays by authors such as Matei Vişniec, Alina Nelega, Radu Macrinici, Saviana Stănescu, etc. They also organized a symposium on Romanian private theatres and presented their first three shows, directed by Cristian Nedea.

The Impossible Theatre had a complex program and many projects: performances, readings, the promotion of new plays, the editing of man.in.fest theatre journal, editorial projects and a festival.

The aim of the Association was to promote new plays, to bring young people closer to the theatre, to popularize alternative spaces and to encourage young theatre professionals. Among the playwrights they were interested in, I should mention Marius von Mayenburg, Ştefan Caraman, Ioan Peter, Nicoleta Esinencu and Saviana Stănescu. The performances of this theatre took part in national and international festivals, and the Impossible Theatre Association benefited from financial support from local authorities, NGOs and firms.

This theatre was a brave initiative and the city of Cluj-Napoca and its theatre life benefited greatly from its activities.

### **74 Theatre**

We are back in the city of Târgu-Mureş, in 2004. On the 27th of April, The 74 Theatre Multimedia Center is opened. Its initiators stated that their aim was to highlight the multimedia interferences in a European context, and to encourage new artistic expression. The main catalyst of this project was the actor Nicu Mihoc.

Supported by the Mayory and Local Council of Târgu-Mureş, 74 Theatre is located in the Medieval Citadel. The name of this theatre comes from the number of seats for the audience: they are 74.



The projects of 74 Theatre aimed to promote contemporary artistic language. It hosted many cultural events: performances, exhibitions, book launches and concerts. But its main project was theatre production. The team at 74 Theatre produced plays by Yasmina Reza, Patrick Marber, Victor Haim, David Mamet and others.

74 Theatre participated in many national and international festivals, and its main partners were The Mureş Local Council, Ariel Theatre and Dramafest Foundation.

### **Arca Theatre**

Arca was the second independent theatre in Bucharest which had its own stage. It was born in December 2004 and it was hosted by the “La Scena“ club. One of its aims was to get funds in order to transform the attic into a studio hall. Thus, PartER foundation was created, and it benefited from the support of several cultural organizations. The founders of the Arca theatre are, among others, Victor Scoradeţ, a well-know critic and translator, accompanied by Dan Hornoiu, Monica Sorian, Mugur Grosu and others.

The first show produced by Arca was *Top Dogs*, by Swiss author Urs Widmer. A ticket cost 100 Euro and the funds were used to transform the attic into a studio space. This was the first “luxury“ production in Romania. It was directed by Theo Hergehelegiu, and it had a prestigious cast. Valeria Seciu, Victor Rebengiuc, Şerban Ionescu and Claudiu Bleonţ were some of the stars of this show.

Other performances followed, and they were based on plays which were already appreciated in Romania, written by Yasmina Reza, Lukas Barfuss or Sybille Berg.

### **Conclusions**

Ten companies were presented in this study in order to give the reader a view of the independent landscape in postcommunist Romania. This “landscape“ was not as eclectic as it may have seemed at first. From the information I have just offered on each and every company presented here, we can deduce that these initiatives had a common goal and they each tried to reach it in their own way. There were festivals they all attended, there were friendships and partnerships among their members, there were rivalries, there were co-productions.

I have tried to analyse a constellation of the most important independent programs in Romania after 1990. Romanian society underwent a lot of changes after the fall of communism, and, also, after the inevitable cultural and economic crisis that happened right after the fall; Romanian theatre reflected, enhanced and was nourished by these transformations. The fact that theatre and society are deeply connected is already common knowledge, we know this from the classics. If we take a look at this relationship now, in 2018, the connection is more obvious than ever.



What I would like to underline is the fact that independent theatre has played a major part in the social changes that occurred in democratic Romania. This type of theatre was made by people who dared to “think different“, as Steve Jobs would say, by artists and theatre professionals who wanted to experiment and investigate social problems and who have shaped, in the last (almost) 30 years, a great segment of the Romanian audience.

Nowadays, the independent artists of old, as it were, have become popular. They work both independently and in state-subsidised theatres. A new generation of independent artists has come into the limelight. I should mention *Reactor de creație și experiment* and *Fabrica de pensule* in Cluj-Napoca as most prominent, also *3G Theatre* in Tîrgu Mureș and *Replika* in Bucharest, one of the many independent theatres that have sprung after 2007-2010, owing to the enhancement of funding resources for independent activities. It must be said that the politics of independent theatres and groups has changed from the '90s until now, oscillating from experimental and laboratory theatre to community involvement and social intervention.

However, some of the pioneers of Romanian independent theatre have accomplished their mission. Thus, *Underground-Ariel* is more of a legend today. *The Impossible Theatre* has also accomplished its mission of revitalizing the cultural life of Cluj-Napoca. *Luni Theatre* at the *Green Hours Club* still exists, and so does *Act Theatre*.

The directions in which Romanian independent theatres have evolved are varied. There is a strong social trend, characterized by a propensity for devised and documentary theatre. Here I should mention playwright-directors Bogdan Georgescu and Gianina Cărbunariu, but they are just two names in a sea of artists. They work both in independent and in state-subsidized theatres.

Next, I would like to mention the experimental direction, at the peak of which are, in my opinion, theatre professionals such as Alexandra Pîzgu and Leta Popescu, or the choreographer and dancer Andrea Gavrilu.

Romanian theatre has come a long way from its revitalizing moment of crisis in the '90s. Now, in 2018, we have superproductions, we have commercial theatre, we have festivals, playwriting contests, we have international connections and tours. But, more importantly, we also have independent companies – some, like *Act* and *Luni* – are old-school, and some, such as *Point* or *Reactor* – are new.

The existence of independent theatre in a society is a sign of freedom - or of the struggle for freedom – let's think about Polish alternative theatre during communism, for instance. In nowadays Romania, independent artists continue their fight for inner and outer freedom. The social and cultural landscape has changed, and the independent theatre movement was and continues to be an important part of this change.



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