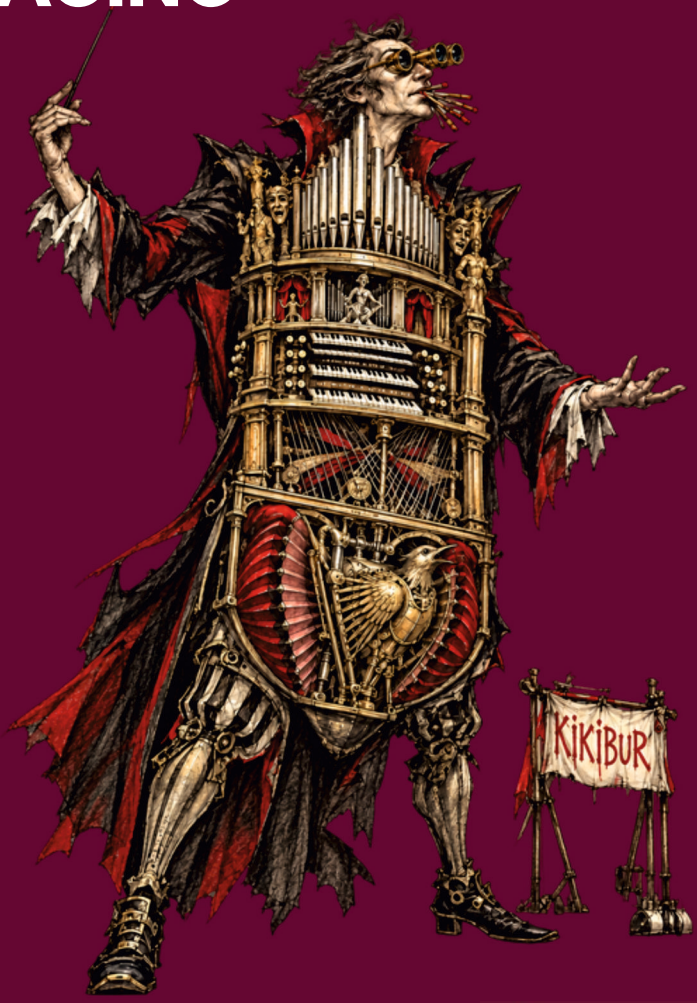
LONG THEATRE'S JOURNEY INTO STAGING



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Long Theatres's Journey into Staging

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Presa Universitară Clujeană
2026

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Last but not least, I thank the project's partners, particularly the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș and Radu Olăreanu, for their willingness to respond to every request for collaboration.

Epigraph:

'True art is only that which does not reveal itself; and there is nothing in which one must take greater pains than in concealing it: for if it is revealed, one immediately loses the trust and esteem of others.'

Baldassare Castiglione, *Curteanul* (Book I, ch. XXVI)

Introduction

I.1. Arhiva regizorală – What We Did

There is an increasing discussion in academia of *practice as research* as a scientifically valid research method, particularly in the performing arts. In theatre, since Peter Brook, the emphasis seems to have shifted from the product to the process. Imagine my surprise when, in 2021, I began my doctoral research on the director's notebook, with all the enthusiasm of a first-year doctoral student, ready to visit archives, investigate primary materials and, ultimately, learn 'how it's done': there were no archives, no primary materials and not much of a guide to 'how to do' artistic research on this subject.

The reality is that preparing a production leaves few public traces. Axel Schmidt and Arnulf Deppermann argue that most research in sociology, theatre and *performance* studies focuses on the product, while rehearsal processes are rarely studied systematically.[1] In Romania, director's notebooks are

[1] Axel Schmidt and Arnulf Deppermann, "Editorial: Social Interaction and the Theater Rehearsal," Human Studies 46 (2023): 192, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-023-09678-2.

not consistently archived; there is no systematic practice of filing the materials a director leaves behind on leaving a theatre or after their death. Apart from a very recently established research centre at Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB), I found virtually no archive or library in the country where director's notebooks could be consulted: neither at specialist universities, nor at theatres (except the Hungarian State Theatre in Cluj), nor among the Romanian Academy's holdings.

In 2025, I set out at much greater length[2] why I firmly believe in the importance of archiving director's notebooks. I will only briefly revisit the arguments. First, the director's notebook constitutes an element of intangible cultural heritage, an indisputable element with a historical value of its own. Second, it is a repository of the director's initial intention, an intention for the production that will always be distorted/changed/perhaps-even-lost on the way to the stage, because of the shortcomings of the theatrical process and the creative interventions of the other team members. How can we know what the director wanted to construct without examining source material, seeing only the finished construction? Timmy De Laet also supports this argument in *Inside the Rehearsal Room*, stating: 'director's notebooks are

[2] TEODORESCU, Alex, „Caietul de regie românesc sau Antespectacole de teatru in România", Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2025.

tangible documents in which annotative strategies are visualized and become perceptible [...] These have yielded up insights into the meaningmaking processes directors undertake in their pre-rehearsal period.'[3]

Third, the director's notebook is the basis of the director's (related) rights and a record of their working technique. With so few directors writing publicly about their understanding of their own art or the techniques they use, an archive of director's notebooks can and will provide particularly valuable material for the younger generation of directors, who can encounter their predecessors' *modus operandi* through these documents.

Starting from this identified need, I created *Arhiva Regizorală* (the Directing Archive), a project to research and archive intangible cultural heritage in Romania, delivered by Asociația Învață de mic and co-funded by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN). The project aims to create an online platform bringing together director's notebooks, filmed interviews with Romanian directors and university teaching materials, such as curricula and course models, to preserve ways of constructing director's notebooks. We managed to conduct 20 interviews with Romanian directors. If we estimate the number of directors currently

[3] Timmy De Laet et al., quoted in Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021).

working actively in Romania at 100—even a generous estimate—this means that we obtained accounts of working and preparatory processes from a fifth of the profession. We write this not to boast, but as a form of real scholarly validation of the research undertaken.

The model we believe could be developed further - a Romanian theatre archive, as envisaged by Matthew Reason:

> *Instead of containing the original thing itself, therefore, the performing arts archive represents the formal collecting, cataloguing, preserving and consecrating of traces of past performances, but crucially not the performances themselves. Such performance archives can consist of almost anything, including but not limited to theatre programmes, brochures, leaflets, photographs, videos and sound recordings, press releases and press cuttings, details of marketing strategies, figures of ticket sales, contracts with performers and confidential budgets, correspondence, descriptions of sponsorship arrangements, venue plans, set and costume designs, stage and lighting plans, production notes, playscripts (sometimes annotated), interviews with directors or actors, actual costumes and examples of stage properties and so on.*[4]

[4] Matthew Reason, Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 37.

Until we can create such an archive, however, we have the present one. This book is a direct outcome of the research conducted this year, research rushed by delays in signing cultural funding contracts and already under pressure from the extremely short time-scales AFCN funding allows. The book draws on 20 interviews with contemporary directors, available in full on the project website: www.arhivaregizorala.ro The interviews follow a shared protocol to ensure thematic consistency, not to compare directors, but to demonstrate the real variety of working methods in Romanian theatre and theatre education. The book is to be launched at six workshop-style promotional events in six university centres in Romania.

This is certainly not the first book of interviews with directors. In Romania, alongside the lengthy contributions in Revista Teatrul, Miruna Runcan and C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic's *Cinci Divane Ad-Hoc* (1994) stands out. Internationally, perhaps the most relevant title is Giannachi and Luckhurst's *On directing* (1999), in whose footsteps Arhiva Regizorală attempts to follow. I have consistently said that Arhiva Regizorală is a project made by directors (myself and Mihai Gligan, whom I take this opportunity to thank) for directors. The interviews are not intended as a set of anecdotes, a collection of collaborators and names or a constant exercise in *dropping production titles*.

They seek to offer real reflection on the techniques and working processes each director employs. This kind of investigation addresses a gap in contemporary theatre research.

Last but not least, to address possible concerns: *Theatre's Long Road to the Stage* and Arhiva Regizorală are not monuments to the autocratic director or the dictatorship of the director. We are not developing an argument against improvisation, collective creation or collaborators contributions to theatre. Arhiva Regizorală seeks to recover techniques, but also a history of ways of working, within the directing profession. In this respect, perhaps it is time to stop treating the history of Romanian theatre as 'something' that is naturally lost because, after all, theatre is 'something' ephemeral: "If we consider performance as 'of' disappearance, if we think of the ephemeral as that which 'vanishes,' and if we think of performance as the antithesis of preservation, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably whitecultural) logic of the archive?"[5]

[5] Rebecca Schneider, „Performance Remains Again," in Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance, and the Persistence of Being, ed. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2012), 65.

I.2. The Aims of This Book

There is a paradox I have noticed in almost all the interviews we conducted. The directors we interviewed tend to deny having a working method. Yet those same interviews reveal that they have a very clear method (or at least a set of techniques), which they either apply consistently or change deliberately and knowingly. Mihai Ranin told us: 'I haven't said anything about my working techniques, because they're my own and, how shall I put it? I haven't formalised them so that I can articulate them as such.'[6] There is, then, an inherent contradiction between how some directors define their own work and how that work unfolds. My hypothesis is that this stems from a characteristic of theatrical work: it is work that disappears.

When we watch a production, its rehearsals are hidden from us. The failures, the searching, the techniques are hidden from us (even when, as in post-dramatic theatre, those techniques are shown to us). We never see the actor trying to remember their lines; we do not see the technical team's efforts; we see nothing beyond what we are meant to see. This is not a matter of style, but of theatre's need to control its own meanings by limiting the spectator's perception.

[6] Interview with director Mihai Ranin, Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

We find that directors retain the same reflex of concealing their own preparatory work. Rehearsal is where the director plays their role. It is normal, then, for directors to conceal the work they do to prepare for rehearsal. Perhaps not normal, but at least customary. Moreover, whereas theatre rehearsals leave concrete traces—from technical elements to rehearsal sheets, notes and jottings, rehearsal reports and much else—a director's method and preparation can sometimes be very easy to conceal, as Eugen Gyemant attests: 'I mean, actually, at the same time I'm also doing a kind of analysis in my head of what's going to happen. For me, that's the most important stage. […] Usually, at the start of the preparation, I always have this burst of diligence and I start writing all sorts of things down... But I make the notes in my head.'[7]

This book seeks to make the work of preparing a production visible in all its forms, including improvisational and collaborative practices. I do not wish to claim that 'all productions are prepared by the director before the first rehearsal' or that 'THIS is what preparing a production looks like'. Eugenio Barba wrote that every head is a different jungle, and that he did not wish to establish a school or a method to share with others. He could, however, recall his

[7] Interview with director Eugen Gyemant, Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

experiences.[8] We believe that the work of preparing a production is becoming increasingly relevant today, at a time when we do not know what the limits of artificial intelligence in theatre and art are, or what they will be.

With current models from major AI companies, creating a production project that is usable and artistically valid may cost only a few hundred euros; perhaps it is time for the director's work to cease being concealed. With the US Copyright Office having concluded in a report that using generative technologies to assist creative work does not in any way affect that person's intellectual property rights,[9] and with Romania granting theatre directors only related, interpretative rights rather than copyright over the production, preserving the method and work that go into a production may soon become a matter of survival.

Art seems to distinguish itself from the other available forms of generative creation precisely through its human quality. People (still) hang paintings made by humans on the walls of their homes and galleries because they are made by humans,

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[8] Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House (London: Routledge, 2010), *passim.*

[9] U.S. Copyright Office, Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, Part 2: Copyrightability (Washington, DC: U.S. Copyright Office, January 2025), Executive Summary, https://www.copyright.gov/ai/Copyright-and-Artificial-Intelligence-

even if they promote their gallery online using AI-generated elements. Can directors today still afford to maintain the image of a production that 'happens', seemingly without effort on their part? I predict that making the trace of this working process visible will become a production's mark of value in the near future. Yet we cannot help wondering whether writing is the best form in which to elaborate and preserve this work.

Arhiva Regizorală and this book are intended as a comparative map of practices for students and young directors, rather than a book of recipes. The research corpus itself contains an inherent contradiction: some directors affirm the need for a clear methodology, while others consider method a danger. The contradiction is visible not only in this research, but across the whole field of books on directing written over the last hundred years. Theatre is an art of tension, and the young director reading these pages will have to find their own way among these contradictions. Although, on the basis of the interviews, we might invite directors to find their own ways, because the decision is never final.

Beyond its educational purpose, the book also addresses theatre researchers, who have so far lacked a research ecosystem concerning the art of directing in Romania. Unfortunately, Romanian theatre history has focused much more on preserving productions than on preserving the techniques used in them. We

all know famous productions, such as David Esrig's Nepotul lui Rameau. We know very little about how that production was actually made. And this preparatory work and the sum of the techniques present in Romanian theatre today, passed from director to director through teaching and productions, are even less accessible to researchers abroad. This is why the book and the Archive seek to be as accessible as possible to international researchers, in the hope of promoting Romanian directing. We hope that those who use the Archive's materials will also travel what David Esrig called the *path from information to inspiration*:

> *The theatre I have made and built through a methodical journey begins with my conviction that art is, first and foremost, a lived journey, and much less a finished commodity offered up for sale. This quality was captured perfectly by [Florin Vidamski's doctoral thesis], and for that reason it documents with what I would call pedagogical precision the path I also call "from Information to Inspiration".*[10]

This book deliberately begins with this justification of my position as its author. Unfortunately or fortunately, the position from which I write is perhaps not quite as academic as it ought to be. I am a director. I coordinate Arhiva Regizorală. I work with students in academia. In other words: I am

[10] David Esrig, „Cuvânt înainte", in Florin Vidamski, Metoda David Esrig – de la informație la inspirație (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2018), 25.

subjective. I invite others to consult Arhiva Regizorală and write objective studies based on its contents, and leave them to do so. I have written that the difference between conventional textual analysis and a director's analysis is that the latter always carries an intention on the director's part, which guides the act of analysis and automatically makes it profoundly subjective. In the same way, my analysis of the research corpus underlying this book is guided by my own beliefs as a director and educator.

Academic works most often aspire to be like a photograph. I cannot be a photographer of Romanian directing, but at most a witness. A witness in Adam Ledger's sense: a participant who moves away from the passivity of observation and takes part in what they observe. This participation leads to a subjective account that mentions only certain aspects of what has been seen and presents its own interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon observed.[11]

I.3. The Route through the Book

The book follows a simple structure. This introduction is followed by a note on method: an indictment, in fact, of my subjectivity, but one that must be acknowledged academically. The first chapter

[11] Adam J. Ledger, The Director and Directing: Craft, Process and Aesthetic in Contemporary Theatre (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 110.

defines my position on the book's main arguments. There follows a chapter on the starting points of a theatre production, a section on the director's *sprezzatura*, a chapter on authority and a final part on archiving the director's work.

At the end of the book is a selection of visual archival materials, with extracts from the director's notebooks documented through Arhiva Regizorală. The interviews and archival materials are available entirely free of charge at www.arhivaregizorala.ro, both in the interests of complete transparency concerning the research corpus and to make the intangible cultural heritage of Romanian directing accessible to all interested users.

A Note on Method

N.1. The Corpus and the Protocol

The corpus on which this book is based comprises 20 interviews with theatre directors working in Romania and abroad. Together, the edited interviews amount to approximately 20.7 hours and a total of 180,000 transcribed words in Romanian. The structure of the corpus follows Schmidt and Deppermann's observation in their editorial on theatre rehearsals:

> *If the rehearsal has moved in focus, then it was by way of interviews and field notes (MacAuley, 1998, 2012; Pavis/Anderson, 2013; Taft-Kaufman, 1983; Volkova, 2019). What has been almost totally absent until today is the study of rehearsals in the minute details of their production, moment by moment. The aim of this special issue therefore is to change the perspective from the product to its production, using video-recordings of theater rehearsals.*[1]

[1] Axel Schmidt and Arnulf Deppermann, „Editorial: Social Interaction and the Theater Rehearsal", Human Studies 46, no. 2 (2023): 192.

The directors were selected to ensure the greatest possible diversity of perspectives and working methods within the project. We selected directors from different theatre schools (Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș, Bucharest, Iași), with different ways of working (traditional, devised, participatory) and varied political and aesthetic positions. We also sought directors at different stages of their careers, from emerging to established practitioners. The selection attempted to give particular attention to women directors, who are under-represented among theatre directing practitioners in Romania. It was also important to ensure visibility for Hungarian-language theatre in Romania.

Beyond the academic rigour to which the project committed itself, the selection of participating directors also depended on professional networks and on directors' willingness to be interviewed. Alternative ways of collecting interviews were therefore proposed according to directors' preferences: audiovisual interviews, audio interviews, written interviews and online interviews. As regards collecting director's notebooks, the corpus was limited, on the one hand, by the lack of systematic or official archives nationally, including at state theatres, local libraries, museums and the Romanian Academy. On the other, collecting was also limited by the unwillingness of heirs/current holders of certain personal archives to digitise and publish materials in Arhiva Regizorală.

A final aspect that emerged was the difference between the directors' positions and the author's own positions on directing. One of the major risks of this research lies in the author's dual position as researcher and director. I therefore tried to bring into the project directors whose methods were radically different from mine, to avoid biases arising from my own directing practice. Another way of moving beyond these biases lay in the very structure of the interviews, which corresponds to Alessandro Portelli's observation that the content of a written source is independent of the researcher's needs and hypotheses, being a stable text that can only be interpreted; an oral source, however, depends on the researcher's questions and their personal relationship with the interviewee.[2]

Arhiva Regizorală's interview protocol included 22 questions, grouped into four blocks, on the following themes: preparing a production (text, research, character profiles, the production's idea and concept); collaboration with the artistic team and rehearsals; training and the teaching of directing; each director's recurring techniques and practices; and the future of directing in Romania. The interviews followed the protocol loosely, with interviewers

[2] Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 54.

seeking answers only to questions that were relevant or that the director had not already answered independently. We wanted to give interviewees the freedom to digress and tell their own stories, out of respect for the stories being told,[3] which describe each director's artistic world. I think it is important to remember that we undertook scholarly research, but that its object is eminently artistic, and a rigid structure cannot capture the reality of an artistic practice. A notable exception is the interview with Belai Marcel, who chose to answer every question in writing. The protocol forms an appendix to this book.

It is therefore natural for this book to be limited by its own corpus. An interview is, by definition, situated oral testimony, a way for directors to recount their own practice. Accordingly, this book cannot set out to describe the reality of that practice in the rehearsal room. The research did not involve observing rehearsals and is therefore confined to comparing subjective accounts of these working methods. Portelli's observation that oral sources show us not what people did, but what they wanted to do, is relevant here.[4] It aligns with the argument underlying our project, according to which the director's notebook is the sole witness to directorial intention. In this context, the interview is the element

[3] *Ibid*., x.

[4] Alessandro Portelli, 1991, p. 50.

of the corpus that complements the testimony of a director's notebook, available on the project's online platform.

N.2. Transcription, Quotation, Verification

The interviews were video-recorded and automatically transcribed with timestamps. In the first draft, we tried using Whisper for transcription, but it did not deliver the results the project needed, so we used Sonix, which the research team had previously validated in other projects. Nevertheless, automatic transcription produces errors, particularly in proper names, specialist terms and the correct attribution of speech.

All quotations used in this book were checked against the recordings, and the interview transcripts were checked before publication on the platform. In writing the book, I sought not only to quote accurately the words spoken in an interview, but also to represent accurately the intention of the director who spoke them. Lynn Abrams, citing David Dunaway, observed that an oral interview is a multifaceted communicative event, whereas a transcript is static and flat; the transcript is therefore a re-creation and a translation of the interview.[5]

[5] Lynn Abrams, Oral History Theory (London: Routledge, 2010), 13.

The quotations therefore seek to preserve the orality of the original interview, including hesitations, repetitions and spoken syntax. Quotations assembled from several answers were avoided. Interestingly, the methodology used to handle the interviews is not solely a research methodology, but also a cultural and directorial one, as Tim Etchells elaborates:

> *One of the things you notice as soon as you start working with a video camera on a daily basis [...] is that when you transcribe actual speech it's quite extraordinary. I mean, the patterns of looping, self-qualification, unfinished sentences, ideas that flow off in particular directions. Often, now, we are effectively transcribing text off videotapes of rehearsals and using that as the basis for scripts. What I like about this process is that a performer will improvise a particular part of a show and, the first time they do it, it will have a really rich texture of dense qualification [...] But when you go to the transcripts of the first one and you look at it as text, you can end up with stuff that sounds like you are really saying it now, for the first time [...] And maybe that gives you an understanding of a certain linguistic texture of authenticity.*[6]

[6] Tim Etchells, „Looking Back", in Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance, and the Persistence of Being, ed. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2012), 189.

N.3. The Limits of the Corpus

Beyond the structure of the corpus, which limits the aims of this research, the research corpus is limited by the directors who wished to participate in the project. Arhiva Regizorală cannot be considered an exhaustive investigation of Romanian directing. For example, of the 20 interviews, only six are with women directors. Moreover, the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș (the project's main partner) and the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest (UNATC) are over-represented in relation to other Romanian faculties. There are only three representatives of Hungarian theatre in the corpus. Although this might be proportionate to the ratio of Hungarian to Romanian directors in Romania, it does not allow us to draw meaningful conclusions about differences between Romanian directing practice and that of the Hungarian minority. Another notable absence is that of many prominent figures from the older generation of directors who still work consistently in Romania.

The book will therefore refer hereafter to 'the directors interviewed' as a unified corpus, while acknowledging that this corpus is eminently limited. Nevertheless, this is a natural limitation of such a research undertaking, as Alexandra Mermikides also observes of her case studies in *Negotiating Creativity*.[7]

[7] Alex Mermikides, Negotiating creativity: an analytical framework for the study of group theatre-making processes (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2006), 40.

Although we do not want circumstances to become an excuse, the budget limit imposed by AFCN's funding ceiling and the very short time such a research project is allowed within an intangible cultural heritage project contributed directly to these limitations.

The interviews were approved by the directors before publication. The project's editing team removed certain sensitive information before publication, even where it had been recorded in the interviews (or indeed in director's notebooks): information concerning third parties, personal data or information that, taken out of context, might harm the reputation of interviewees or third parties. This followed the Oral History Association's (OHA) good practice guidance, which calls for respect for the narrator's perspective, dignity, privacy and safety and recommends clear procedures for review, restriction and redaction.[8]

As I noted above, the corpus and the research itself are limited by my position as a director and theatre practitioner, a colleague of those interviewed and the principal interviewer. I was the only member of the delivery team present at every interview, which gave me privileged contextual understanding of many of the directors' statements. Yet this very

[8] Oral History Association, OHA Principles and Best Practices: Principles and Best Practices for Oral History (Oral History Association, 2025), 10–13.

contextual understanding and the narrative I formed from one interview to the next (also shaped by the order in which we conducted the interviews, which was random) are elements that must be disclosed before writing this book, because they may influence my objectivity. In the interview with Florin Vidamski, I said: 'I think this is the first time in my life I've felt that I belong to a profession.'[9]

I have to accept Persse's observation: 'My professional and personal identity cannot be removed to provide a totally objective study; who I am informs and effects the research.'[10] Yet it is precisely this position that allows this book to take a stance, in a Brechtian sense. The interviews I conducted and the way I conducted them begin from my position and practical argument: that directors have a professional responsibility to prepare their theatre productions. For this reason, this research constitutes not only an effort to recover intangible cultural heritage, but also practice as research as Robin Nelson defines it: 'A key requirement of my model for PaR is reflexivity, a principle beneficial to all research, requiring us: to be aware of where we are situated and where we are coming from, to be open to the discursive positions

[9] Marius-Alexandru Teodorescu, in the interview with Florin Vidamski, online, July 2026.

[10] Danny Persse, Fishing for Phronesis: A Search for Tacit Knowledge in Technical Theatre Education (master's thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2018), 41.

of others, and to engage dialogically (and not just in words) with others.'[11]

Nevertheless, the practice as research characteristics of this book are limited. Autoethnography has a limited presence here. I will discuss the practice and responses of the interviewees, which I will try to contain within a coherent scholarly argument. This constitutes a crucial difference from practice as research processes. In writing, I therefore separate myself from my position as a director, seeking to avoid the clear error Robin Nelson himself identifies in practice as research methods:

> *[B]ecause I am an artist, and because I need to experiment, and because all materials and possibilities are accessible and open for me, I can do anything with everything and that anything I do, because I am an artist, is, in itself, interesting and significant. Amen …. This blatant naivety, too often verging on obsessive and self-congratulatory stupidity, is not only supported by false beliefs about the conditions of creative activity. It is also supported by a misunderstanding of the structures of research activity.*[12]

The privileged position I held in this project offered advantages as well as limitations. Alongside

[11] Robin Nelson, Practice as Research in the Arts (and Beyond) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 12.

[12] Robin Nelson, Practice as Research in the Arts (and Beyond), 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 25.

Mihai Gligan, I was able, first of all, to gain access to the resource persons interviewed for the project. Moreover, we could have a dialogue grounded in similar experiences of working on stage and in the shared language inherent to theatre practitioners. The interviews pursued a practical rather than theoretical purpose. At the other end of the spectrum lie the risks of our position: complicity arising from shared experiences and perhaps even a certain degree of opacity in the interviews. I cannot help wondering how intelligible they are to a non-practitioner or a director just starting out, who does not share a tacit understanding of certain working processes.

One final point: in 2025, I published my first book, *Ante-spectacole de teatru în România*, on the history of the director's notebook in Romanian theatre. This book does not necessarily extend my previous research, nor does it summarise it. It begins with a different kind of primary material: the interview corpus, which addresses much more than the writing and construction of a director's notebook.

1. Preparing a Production and Authorship

1.1. The Director between Author and Coordinator

The theatre director, as we have understood the role since the twentieth century, emerged thanks to/because of the increasing complexity of theatre production. Without wishing to suggest that Greek theatre or other forms in the history of the performing arts were not complex, twentieth-century theatre begins to bring together more and more constituent elements. Beyond the actor and playwright, there is now a need for specific lighting, specific sound environments, particular technical elements and logistical coordination, the possibility of touring, sets and costumes designed specifically for each production, and so on. As more and more specialists gather in the theatre, their relationships require mediation, and the mediator of those relationships is, above all, the director.

Until ten or twenty years ago, this complexity only increased, with additional roles such as stunt

performer, répétiteur, directing or dramaturgy assistant, sound designer, lighting designer, video designer and so forth, often within increasingly complex institutions. Today things seem to be changing, with a European tendency to move away from large institutions and with the emergence of now ubiquitous project funding. Technology is changing too: whereas managing a theatre's lighting or sound equipment once required expertise acquired over years, technology and software now allow us to fulfil these functions with far less experience and at significantly lower cost. And, of course, as we shall see, the emergence of artificial intelligence only makes it easier for a small group, or even a single person, to manage entire productions of considerable complexity.

The argument of this book is simple: today, the author of a production is becoming possible again. Whereas the (creative) contribution of many participants was once indispensable to a production, it is becoming possible again for a performer, or a director and an actor, to manage and deliver productions incorporating original text, acting, lighting, original sound, projections, props, costume and set. And because a production can again have a single author, I think it is important to discuss this authorship. Where should we begin? With the director, that ambiguous entity whose art is always subject to the eternal discussion: what is the object of the director's

art? Referring to Meyerhold, Innes and Shevtsova say the following about the director:

> *[...] the art of the director is the art not of the executant, but of an author – so long as one has earned the right'. [...] He cut and edited according to his purposes with greater confidence than ever before, challenging the idea that there was such a thing as a fixed, 'true' text. In doing this, and in taking charge of the scenic work as the work of a creator rather than that of an interpreter or 'executant', he behaved as an 'author'. The very notion of the director-author, or auteur, to which this book draws attention in a later chapter, has its roots here.*[1]

The director is precisely the person who takes responsibility for the performance's ultimate meaning and integrates all the languages present on stage. From here, we will be able to extrapolate positions concerning a possible sole author of a theatre production.

What does it mean to be the author of a production? Historically, the term 'author' is attributed to the person who writes its text, while the director, if there is one, ensures that the playwright's intention is staged. Today, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the author of a production means the director-author, the person responsible for the

[1] Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 85.

production's concept, as distinct from its text. There are a thousand productions of *Faust*, and each has its own distinct author, although all are based on Goethe's text. We are thinking, of course, of the familiar 'a production by...' on posters today.

This book, however, begins with the question 'what does the author of a production do?' If I put on the poster that I am its author, but after my name we see set designer, lighting designer, sound designer, psycho-designer, costume designer, video designer and a thousand other kinds of designers, can I claim to be its author? Perhaps I am more of a production coordinator, a director in the literal sense of the Hungarian word. Perhaps someone who manages the staging, in the French sense. In small and large theatres alike, a new kind of author is emerging: a director who writes their own text, works without a designer or with only a directing assistant, knows how to light a production and perhaps works with only an operator. A director who may not compose the music but chooses it and tells the sound operator how and when to play it. A director who 'steals' the expertise of production roles they once shared with others. Even a director-educator, who trains the actors according to the production's needs. This director, who combines (almost) all the meaning-making functions in a production, is the director-author made possible by the technologies around us. A clear example of a director-author is Katie Mitchell, who says:

> *She said 'look, it's great work, great visual sense, great aural sense, but absolutely nothing is going on between the actors; you're not even directing them. What tasks did you set them?' I said, I didn't set them any tasks. I just asked them questions. She said: 'No, your job is to set them tasks; their job is to execute them. Don't ask actors what the tasks are.'*[2]

The opposite of the director-author is the director-coordinator. Neither is more of a director than the other; neither is 'better'. Both are directors, but in completely opposite ways. We most often encounter the director-coordinator in collaborative, devised working processes, or those in which the director positions themselves as one member of an ensemble. When the director says 'I am here to guide you towards OUR production', they are no longer its author, but the binding element in a group creation. John Collins is a pertinent example of a director-coordinator:

> *[...] the Artistic Director of Elevator Repair Service (ERS), John Collins, recounts both his own creative processes and those he experienced while working as a sound designer for the Wooster Group. The main principle he eventually engages with is that of the contemporary director's willingness to relinquish their authority. He notes that LeCompte, for*

[2] Professor Soloviova, quoted in Mitchell (2008), quoted in Dan Rebellato, „Katie Mitchell," in Contemporary European Theatre Directors, ed. Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 437.

> *example, prefers to be referred to as the director 'in' the ensemble, rather than a director 'of' the ensemble. However, another key characteristic of such a director is his/her willingness to behave as a facilitator/editor of ensemble authorship, rather than as an author in their own right.*[3]

To return to my point, I do not think we can demonstrate that one director is better than the other. I do not even think it is a question of taste: I think both kinds can create objectively wonderful productions. The change taking place is a return to an earlier position concerning the director. While the director's emergence in the twentieth century was immediately followed by much discussion of the director-tyrant, in the sense described by Craig or even Brecht, the second half of that century saw a liberalisation of the creative process, visible even in writing about theatre. Books by Barba, Brook and Mnouchkine argue for a theatre negotiated among participants in the creative process. Specialist literature followed their example. Today, however, we can no longer overlook the emergence and establishment of director-authors, much more modern than their predecessors, who cannot necessarily be accused of tyranny, but who vigorously assume responsibility for the course of their own productions.

[3] Duška Radosavljević, Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 83.

There are also voices in the literature vehemently opposed to the idea of the author of a production. Gay McAuley categorically rejects the notion of an author and describes theatre as a model of group creativity. McAuley describes rehearsal as the process through which artists with different skills and using different expressive media jointly produce a unified work.[4] Since rehearsal is an eminently collaborative process, it is natural that the resulting product should contain 'the profoundly collaborative nature of theatre-making'.[5] Beyond the extreme example of the performer, who can unequivocally claim sole authorship of their own production, I firmly believe that director-authors exist. Not in the sense that the other creators involved make no creative contributions to these authors' productions, but in the sense that, through expertise and control across all the production's constituent elements, the director exercises almost complete control over the meanings that reach the spectator from the stage.

The ideal of the total author is not a contemporary invention. On the contrary, it is a concept that has fallen in and out of favour in specialist literature for more than a hundred years. Some associate it positively with the position of the creator and artist.

[4] Gay McAuley, Not Magic but Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), passim.

[5] *Ibid*., 4.

Others associate it negatively with colonialism and excessive force. We can trace this aspiration back to Wagner, who discusses the total work of art, or to Craig, who aspires to be the artist commanding every means. Yet whether the director, the coordinator of an eminently collective art, can ultimately be considered the author of their own theatre production remains debatable. Arnold Aronson underlines this difficulty in relation to artists who also design their productions:

> *Even in a Gesamtkunstwerk it is rare for a single individual to be responsible for everything. Gordon Craig argued that if theatre were to be an art it had to answer to a single artist. But in the phenomenologically complex world of theatre, this is a difficult proposition. In addition to Svoboda, the term has been applied correctly to some of the more visually-oriented contemporary directors such as Robert Wilson, who generally conceives and supervises all the scenographic elements of a production, even if discipline-specific designers create some of the actual component elements such as costumes.*[6]

A whole range of directors today claim the position of a production's complete author. Notable examples include Robert Wilson, Romeo Castellucci, Robert Lepage and Jan Fabre. Romania brings certain particularities to this discussion. Young directors in

[6] Arnold Aronson, ed., The Routledge Companion to Scenography (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 10–11.

Romania often obtain limited production budgets that frequently mean doing without collaborators, including designers or dramaturgs. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of resources in schools and theatres. At the directing school in Cluj, for example, a lack of technical staff means students are encouraged to learn not only to design but also to operate lighting and sound for their productions; lacking a dedicated design department, they also conceive and realise their own productions. In theatres too, the absence of roles such as lighting and sound designer, replaced by mere operators, and budgets that often exclude bringing in collaborators oblige directors to fulfil these functions themselves.

Romanian directing is particularly aligned with German directing, at least concerning the director's position. (If we discuss acting aesthetics, Russian and French influences carry much greater weight.) Thus, from Victor Ioan Popa, Soare Z. Soare and Ion Sava, through the Ciulei–Pintilie–Esrig–Penciulescu generation, to Silviu Purcărete, Mihai Măniuțiu and Alexandru Dabija, there is a significant tradition of auteur theatre. It remains equally valid today. The idea of the director as a production's complete author is therefore increasingly relevant, in view of aesthetic changes, financial changes (ever smaller production budgets and a shift towards independent production spaces), the absence of a training system

for support staff and the long-term erosion of professional expertise in theatres.

A concrete example? *Magda by Gianina*, with and by Gianina Cărbunariu. A production with just three production-team members: Gianina Cărbunariu, Kinga Boros (dramaturg) and Adrian Ganea (video concept). A production in which a Romanian director assumes the indisputable function of author. An established Romanian director, not someone just starting out who is forced to accept any production conditions.

Of course, the director-author's position also has a political dimension. Beyond cases I hope remain isolated, such as that of Andriy Zholdak in Cluj, the history of directing is marked by discussions of abuse, hierarchy and recognition of the authorship of everyone involved in making a production. Personally, I ask whether these risks are inherent to the director's position of power or to any environment involving a working collective. I do not think that making directors disappear would solve the problem of recognising every artist's creativity in theatre. I do not think it would solve the problem of theatrical hierarchies (playwrights would surely find new people with whom to debate their supremacy, and actors would too), just as I do not think abuse would cease or diminish. Moreover, I agree that such a theatre group is impossible, an idea I take from Jo Freeman:

> *This means that to strive for a structureless group is as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an "objective" news story, "value-free" social science, or a "free" economy. A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones.*[7]

The observation that genuinely non-hierarchical production structures are impossible is reinforced by Alexandra Mermikides, who demonstrates how egalitarian structures are unsustainable and ultimately undermined by their own attempts at self-preservation.[8] Beyond the practical instability of this kind of group, any collective structure eventually generates its own leaders. Eugenio Barba stresses that creative collective members' wish to avoid taking responsibility for painful and unpleasant decisions is superficial and utopian.[9]

Another example of a director combining several functions in Romanian production processes is

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[7] Jo Freeman, „The Tyranny of Structurelessness," Ms. magazine, July 1973.

[8] Alexandra Mermikides, *Negotiating Creativity: An Analytical Framework for the Study of Group Theatre-Making Processes* (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2006), 94.

[9] Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 157.

myself. Through working in my own company, like many *independent* directors, we have to write our own texts, do research, handle lighting and sound, make video, assemble or build sets, sew a costume now and then, and much else. Without even mentioning writing funding applications. Or organising events. Yet I do not consider myself a director-tyrant and, as far as I know, neither do those who have worked with me. The position I seek to defend here concerning the director-author is also a personal one: a director who is not a dictator but does not submit to a group practice either; a director who combines several functions, most often assisted by production technologies. My position is one of responsible, permeable authorship, in which the director maintains the product's coherence by taking responsibility, but also by making other participants' contributions visible and sincerely negotiating compositional power at each moment.

1.2. Approaches in Europe and Beyond

Before we begin discussing Romania in detail, it would be useful to consider the main approaches to the director's position in the creative process that we can distinguish across Europe. In this book, I use the idea of a position in the creative process and the relationship between directing and authorship almost

interchangeably. The director's position in the creative process is the determining factor that changes their influence on the production's ultimate meaning and, implicitly, affects the extent to which they can be considered its (sole, sic) author. I will therefore try to map relationships between directors and creative collectives as defined in specialist literature.

The first relevant area is the German-speaking world, which I have just identified as the principal influence on Romanian directing. Perhaps this explains why, after emigrating, so many important Romanian directors sought refuge in Germany or in countries with similar working principles: David Esrig in Germany, Radu Penciulescu in Sweden, Lucian Giurchescu in Denmark. German theatre is distinguished by the presence of a co-author alongside the director: the dramaturg. Päsler-Ehlen defines Regietheater as a form of directing in which the director's individual signature shapes the staging's style, locating its development particularly in the German-speaking world from the 1970s onwards; directing nevertheless remains a collaboration with dramaturgy, design and the ensemble.[10]

[10] Sabine Päsler-Ehlen, "Regietheater," in Schlingensief-Handbuch, ed. Teresa Kovacs, Peter Scheinpflug, and Thomas Wortmann (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2025), 467–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05850-8_64.

In this understanding of theatre, the director is an interpreter of the production's text, as Duška Radosavljević emphasises:

> *[...] this view certainly accounts for the necessity of the authorial role of the director and for the possibility of an entirely unanticipated interpretation of a text. But it also appears to be a very specific understanding of what a director does, best illustrated by the German practice often referred to as Regietheater. Peter Boenisch warns us that Regietheater should be seen as a historical category in German theatre associated in particular with the efforts of certain directors in the Federal Republic in the 1960s, such as Claus Peyman, Hans Neuenfels, Peter Stein and Peter Zadek, to challenge the canon and its associated values, especially in relation to Germany's recent past. However, this particular theatre-making practice has grown to characterize German theatre in general and especially in terms of its precipitation of what is now considered 'postdramatic theatre'.*[11]

I consider postdramatic theatre a term that must be distinguished from *Regietheater*; we find the definition above extremely useful. In my interpretation, postdramatic theatre involves a series of concrete working techniques, including the deliberately aesthetic use of theatrical mechanisms made

[11] Duška Radosavljević, Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 35.

visible. Moreover, it involves the synthesis of all the arts present on stage, including design, lighting, sound, music, video art and so forth. *Regietheater*, also known as directors' theatre, involves an attitude on the director's part: the director claims interpretative freedom in relation to the underlying text (where one exists), and a certain monumentality of production. Moreover, this kind of theatre requires the creative collective to accept the director's autonomy in relation to it. One criticism concerns precisely the director's sometimes authoritarian position. Another concerns directors' theatre's tendency to become decorative and to lose sight of spectators' theatrical needs in favour of a kind of grandeur.[12]

Another understanding of theatre can be found in France. The *metteur en scène* is, obviously, the person who stages something. What? Most often a text, following the author's lines much more rigorously than in *Regietheater*. The term 'stage writing' developed in connection with the profession of staging, as Roger Planchon defines it: 'the director who coordinates all the resources of the stage within a unified visual conception which was, perhaps for the first time, born of something other than the

[12] Peter Sellars in Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato, eds., Contemporary European Theatre Directors, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 478.

playwright's work.'[13] I think it is particularly relevant to draw attention to the fact that both French and English understandings of directing emerge in response to a long negotiation between the supremacy of the director and that of the playwright. I do not wish to pursue this discussion in the present book, because I consider it eminently historical. Nevertheless, contemporary definitions of directing in these two contexts should always be treated as responses to that historical discussion, overlaid with the contemporary discussion (itself immediately becoming historical) of the balance of power between director and actor.

Accordingly, when we speak of staging, we will always be discussing some form of writing, whether textual or semiotic. In her thesis on Joël Pommerat, Magrou defines écriture de plateau as a process in which the text is the outcome rather than the initial impulse of the production; space, design and work with actors are organised in a different order from conventional production.[14] Paradoxically, Vinaver argues that the emergence of the all-powerful director in the late 1960s led to the playwright being

[13] *Ibid*., 2.

[14] Rafaël Magrou, "La dimension spatiale dans les écritures de plateau: les architectures scénographiques résultant des compositions de l'auteur-metteur en scène Joël Pommerat" (PhD diss., Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2023), abstract, https://theses.fr/2023BOR30009.

treated as a kind of specialist author, while the art of constructing the performance text became the province of theatre artists, especially directors.[15]

The English solution to the struggle between director and playwright was different and led to what we now call collective creation, whatever specific form that creation takes. Its purest branch is devising, through which the collective creates every constituent element of the production, including the text, in a process where the architecture of authority is constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Heddon and Milling show that 'devising' is the dominant term in Britain and Australia, while 'collaborative creation' is more common in the United States; the practices they study develop from the 1950s and 1960s in different political, community and performance contexts.[16] Theresa Heskins offers an example of how hierarchy and creation can emerge in devised theatre:

> *I remember clearly that week one Thursday that 10.30 to 11.15 was scheduled to be 'solve elephant' and we had forty-five minutes to do it. That was terrifying, but there are thirty-three scenes in that play, so there's a lot to do. I said to the eight actors: 'in four groups of two: make an elephant: use anything you find in the room, or across the building, or even grab*

[15] David Bradby, Annie Stephenson and Annie Sparks, Mise En Scène: French Theatre Now (London: Methuen, 1997), 73.

[16] Heddon and Milling, op. cit., 1–3.

> *passers-by in the street. Bring back an elephant! You've fifteen minutes!' One group had found an Inverness cape in the corner of the room and they discovered it could be twisted and turned to make ears and a trunk.*[17]

We can observe how the directorial solution emerges through improvisation tasks. This way of working recalls accounts of how Silviu Purcărete constructs his own productions. Extending the idea of devised theatre, the very status of the theatre text as the production's seed is called into question. Discussing Simon McBurney, Adam Ledger describes a redefinition of the playwright's role within a poetic drama in which gesture and movement are more powerful means of communication than the text itself, and the director becomes a dramaturg of physical theatre.[18]

Another kind of stage writing is found among directors also called 'auteur-designers': those for whom stage writing is eminently visual. Of these, Robert Wilson is, of course, the best known; his work revolves around 'visual books', the equivalent of the performance text in a traditional theatre production. These visual books actually serve as his director's

[17] Theresa Heskins in Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 117.

[18] Innes and Shevtsova, quoted in Adam J. Ledger, The Director and Directing: Craft, Process and Aesthetic in Contemporary Theatre (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 156–157.

notebooks, because Wilson constructs a production over an extended period. For Wilson, visual language is the medium of writing in the performing arts.[19]

Last but not least, among directors who write productions, a distinct tendency emerges after the 1970s: that of group writers. Not in the sense of a group writing a production, but in the sense of the group becoming the medium through which it is written. The Wooster Group comes to mind as an example of this practice, in which technology and actors, alongside direct quotations from other productions and cultural products, generate meaning. Another exponent might be Anne Bogart, for whom dramaturgical composition and the very way rehearsals are conducted under time pressure become the director's expressive media. We are thus discussing a dramaturgy of process, a dramaturgy of the group and, in some interactive productions, even a dramaturgy of cohabitation between spectator and actor. Unlike writers of visual productions, those who write group productions focus their writing not on the final product, but on how it is constructed or constructs itself live.

Thus, when we discuss director-authors, looking at Europe without local terminologies, we are

[19] Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 161.

actually discussing four types of director. The first is the director-interpreter of the text in the German-speaking world, for whom the dramatic text, explored alongside a dramaturg, becomes a score for their own creative exploration. The second is the director-writer, who devises their whole production, often including the text, to create a coherent cultural product of their own. The third is the visual writer, the director who creates images irrespective of the textual basis used; the final type of director-author is the creator of contexts, the creator of groups. All these types are in perpetual negotiation with the idea of directing in collective and professional understanding, whether through the struggle between director and actor, director and dramaturg, theatre and technology, or other kinds of canon:

> *Directing is perceived as a negotiation of traditions, texts, materials, and processes. It is less about 'interpreting' than about collision and exchange. Marthaler is both musician and director; McBurney and Mesguich both actors and directors; Purcărete and Castellucci both designers and directors; García and Lauwers both writers and directors. Directors' theatre in Europe is haunted both by its own cultural memories and by the wider historical, social, and cultural structures in which it takes place.*[20]

[20] Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato, eds., Contemporary European Theatre Directors, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 17.

All these influences flow into Central and Eastern Europe, where a strong tradition of directors' theatre emerges.

Taking Romania as a concrete example, Miruna Runcan identifies two distinct periods in the emancipation of directors.[21] The first is that of the theatricalisers, such as Victor Ioan Popa, Soare Z. Soare, G.M. Zamfirescu and Ion Sava, who establish directing as an autonomous art. The second relevant period, in the latter half of the twentieth century, is marked by the re-theatricalising directors, including Ciulei, Pintilie, Mugur and Teodorescu. Re-theatricalisation pursues precisely the conflict between director and playwright that we also identified in France and England.

The exodus of major figures in Romanian directing in the early 1970s leaves the theatre world without concrete models. In our interview in July 2026, Alexandru Dabija described his own challenge of defining his productions in the absence of masters. Against the backdrop of the departure of Radu Penciulescu, David Esrig, Lucian Pintilie, Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Giurchescu and others, a generation of directors emerges with radically different understandings of theatre, which can no longer be grouped within a unified vision of 'Romanian theatre'. This

[21] Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea și reteatralizarea în România (1920–1960)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2003), *passim.*

phenomenon is visible throughout the Eastern European bloc and is also observed by Stefanova and Carlson. They begin from the recognition that directors have remained the central figures on Eastern European stages and analyse their impact after 1989 through styles, political contexts and international circulation, rather than as the simple continuation of a single national model.[22]

After 2000, a real independent theatre movement emerges in Romania, which must also be seen as an aesthetic form in its own right. Independent theatre was marked by the emergence of directors who could not find a place in state theatres and institutional production models. Some of these directors, including Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Apostol and David Schwartz, were interviewed for this study and have since become recognised artistic figures whose methods are now accepted in state theatres too. At the beginnings of the independent movement in Romania (an independence that meant dependence on other, usually precarious funding), the resources available to these theatres were profoundly limited.

The aesthetics of 'independent' productions were marked by minimalist sets and the exposure of

[22] Kalina Stefanova and Marvin Carlson, eds., 20 Ground-Breaking Directors of Eastern Europe: 30 Years After the Fall of the Iron Curtain (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52935-2.

stage mechanisms—because actors move the sets and there are no resources to conceal these mechanisms—and by addressing socially significant themes. Moreover, there was a predisposition towards participatory, collaborative processes, which also led to a generation of actors with acting styles different from those in state theatres. Just as directors' theatre differentiated itself from playwrights' theatre in France, independent theatre in Romania was constructed as a response to the limitations of the state system. Today these boundaries are increasingly less relevant, as the state system becomes more precarious and skills acquired in the independent sector allow practitioners to secure resources and funding and create productions with impact. Today it no longer seems impossible for the Romanian Theatre Union (UNITER) to treat an independent production with the same seriousness and consideration as a National Theatre production. The change took a long time and required entire generations to bear its cost; nor is it uniform across Romania's cultural landscape.

To sum up this attempt to map directors' positions in Europe:

> *In each region, the figure of the director takes on a different character, a cultural combatant in France, overlapping and merging with the figure of the actor-manager in Spain and Italy, a fully professionalised*

> *figure of authority in Central and Eastern Europe, never entirely eclipsing the figure of the playwright in Britain and Ireland.*[23]

It would certainly be useful to extend this map of directing to other relevant cultural contexts, such as Japan, China, South Korea, African theatre and Latin American theatre. Unfortunately, Romanian directing (and this book will focus primarily on Romanian directing) treats these cultural contexts as exotic, and we cannot speak of a real borrowing of directing practices from outside Europe into Romania. This could constitute a separate research path and a distinct aim for Romanian theatre: drawing techniques and constructive elements from beyond its immediate cultural context. Unfortunately, with resources allocated to culture diminishing in Romania (and Europe), the window of opportunity for such an undertaking may have closed.

Within this lineage, the sole-author director has close relatives in solo performance and the recent tradition of the author-performer. Perhaps this kinship begins with Kantor, who refuses to leave the playing space and becomes a conductor of his own memory. In *Clasa moartă* (*Umarła klasa*, 1975) or *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), Kantor does not watch

[23] Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato, eds., Contemporary European Theatre Directors, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 30.

from the wings, but is physically present on stage throughout, dressed in a black suit. He adjusts the mannequins, gestures, stops the actors and intervenes in the scene's rhythm. Another transition towards the performer is made by Spalding Gray, who moves from the Wooster Group's collective directing laboratory to autobiographical solo performance. Gray perfectly embodies the author-performer. He does not play a fictional character, but transforms his own neurosis, failure and life experience into dramatic text and performance.

Angélica Liddell is a director-author who writes her own text and conceives her own space, and for whom the body becomes a site of exploration through extreme actions borrowed from body art. In *La casa de la fuerza* (2009) or *El año de Ricardo* (2010), Liddell refuses the traditional director's safe distance. On stage, she makes real incisions in her body, exhausts herself through extreme mechanical effort (weightlifting, running to collapse), cries and shouts violent monologues about systemic violence and personal grief. It is difficult to say: is this theatre or performance? Directing or performance-making? In solos such as *Racconti di giugno* (2005), or in his group productions, Pippo Delbono stands at the microphone and directly confesses his life: his HIV-positive diagnosis, his years of wandering, his encounter with Bobò (the deaf and non-speaking

man confined for decades in a psychiatric institution, whom Delbono brought out and made the core of his theatre). I firmly believe that Delbono is a theatre director, but one who no longer stages a play, instead turning his life into a direct theatrical event.

The theatre director and the solo performer share a total commitment. If I were to draw a line in the sand between them, it would be the line of stage architecture. Directors externalise their universe by projecting it onto the stage, the entire stage, with all its constituent arts, even when, like Kantor, they conduct that universe in plain sight. Performers, however, abolish every intermediary, themselves becoming screen, text and design through action. Beyond my line in the sand, in both cases the production ceases to represent a fictional world and becomes an ontological act: the unmediated exposure of the creator as witness, victim and demiurge of their own discourse.

I believe the greatest driver of change in the director-author model today is technology. It (re)opens the possibility of a sole author of a theatre production. To see how technology and theatrical tradition intertwine, we need not a map, as in this subsection, but a historical excavation. Of course, that excavation will be just as subjective as the map above.

1.3. The Historical Arc: The Performer, the Large Stage, the Return

The model we propose for describing the director's evolution in relation to technology is certainly a simplification of historical realities. Its principal value is heuristic. The basic idea is to demonstrate a reduction in the director's level of control and, implicitly, perceived authorship of a production when the means of production are distributed among several people. The distribution of the means of production is closely linked to whether technology can be operated by non-specialists. We therefore cannot equate technological advancement with increasing specialisation, but can describe an arc in this relationship. For example, before printing, an advertisement required someone who could write and paint, a brush, paint and a little creativity. One person, such as a merchant, could make their own advertising sign. As the means of advertising production advanced, writing and printing were distributed among several people, each specialising in a particular stage. This change resulted from technologies requiring specialisation. In the third stage, when editing software and printing equipment became accessible to non-specialists with minimal investment, production capacity returned to non-specialists' hands, even though advertising and printing specialists, for

example, did not disappear from the market. A similar trajectory can be traced in the relationship between the theatre director and the means of production.

The history of European theatre begins with ancient Greek theatre. Unfortunately, how productions were structured in that period is more a matter of supposition than historical certainty. It is certain, however, that Greek theatre already used highly advanced stage technologies, such as pulleys, stage cranes, instruments producing specific noises, masks and so forth. Yet how far these means were adapted to each production, and how far those coordinating the work could request individualised sets and props, remains unclear. Precisely because these means of production were most probably relatively standardised, the playwright could closely coordinate the staging of their own text. We probably impose a contemporary reading on Greek theatre by assuming a written text at the start of rehearsals, followed by rigorous rehearsals under the author's direction and then performance. Tiffany Stern also stresses the risk of imposing this contemporary lens on rehearsal processes in later periods of European theatre:

> *Nowhere is the tendency to conflate modern and past theatrical practice more marked than in the field of rehearsal; many—if not most—editors, theatre historians, and literary critics impose on the past a mythical period of regular group rehearsal that is*

> *very much in the twentieth-century style. [...] Modern rehearsal takes the form it does because of the 'producer' (these days often called the 'director'), who is in charge of productions but (generally) not a performer in them. This figure did not come to be a regular part of production until the late nineteenth century.*[24]

Author-directors such as Molière and Shakespeare, but also creative collectives such as commedia dell'arte actors, fully possessed their own means of production. The author wrote the text on stage, starting from the stage's needs, in a manner recalling the stage writing discussed above. The author-director managed the staging of each moment according to available resources, but did so not from outside the stage apparatus, often instead as an actor in their own company. Moreover, the author also managed the company, implicitly taking responsibility for promoting productions, organising tours and other logistical details. This director-author-manager was possible because the means of production were particularly limited. Costumes were often standardised and used across productions, alongside reusable painted scenery. Casting was also standardised, with actors specialising in particular kinds of roles. Moreover, this was an eminently spoken theatre, with no question of

[24] Tiffany Stern, Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

complex stage movement, coordinating crowds on stage, synchronising with external personnel and so on. Accordingly, in a theatre functioning through simply staging a text, the need to delegate the director's responsibilities disappears. However little we may like to admit it: the first authors were not directors; the first directors were authors.

At the end of the nineteenth century, production begins to become increasingly complex. Stages become technological machines, with traps, moving platforms, fly bars and curtains. Theatre moves indoors and the magic of the Italian-style stage emerges, requiring lighting, initially gas and then electric. In this context, the need arises for a coordinator of the process, initially an eminently technical role with growing artistic responsibilities. This need is intensified by increasing global interconnectedness: no longer authors staging their own texts wherever they go, but canonical texts emerging and contemporary texts being staged in diverse, sometimes distant locations. The playwright's authorial control over the finished production becomes limited by the distance, in time and space, between them and that future production. Gradually, the artistic director emerges in Europe, someone who begins to make an original contribution to the staging. Sets, costumes and props become individualised for each production. The director must also prepare the production, as presence of mind during rehearsals

becomes insufficient to ensure its aesthetic and semiotic coherence. The classic example of this director-who-is-still-an-author is Max Reinhardt:

> *Reinhardt's Director's Book for each production gave a moment-by-moment placing of the actors, their moves, gestures, even facial expressions and tone of voice, written in the text or notated on ground-plans of the stage-setting, together with detailed notes on the lighting changes, music and sound effects, in addition to three-dimensional sketches of each scene. Prepared in the minutest detail before the actors were hired or rehearsals for a particular production began, and revised with added notes over the years a production ran, these effectively controlled not only the actors, but every element of a production.*[25]

In his Arhiva Regizorală interview, director Cristian Ban describes precisely the emergence of this modern director, linking it to theatre's increasing 'complication': theatre no longer meant only actors speaking text, but also pauses, music and images. These require an 'organising person', someone who, once they have appeared, 'you can no longer do without'.[26]

The birth of modern directing is influenced not only by theatrical technology, but by changes in the

[25] Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 151.

[26] Cristian Ban, interview for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

world that also directly result from technological change. Industrial society brings increasing urbanisation. This allows creative collectives to emerge in the same cities and compete with one another, something previously found only in major commercial and cultural centres.[27] Ever faster transport allows comparison between stagings of the same text and automatically creates a need for originality in staging. Actors can no longer specialise to the same extent. If a theatre collective stages several theatrical styles, with several possible dramatic structures, traditional casting by *emploi* becomes increasingly less functional. A director is therefore needed who also coordinates acting and sets tasks specific to each production. The emergence of realism in theatre is another factor creating an urgent need for an outside eye to impose coherence on the theatrical act.

Paradoxically, this is the historical point at which directors accumulate the most power, despite technological development. At this stage, the other participants in the creative process are still technicians rather than artists. Yes, stage lighting is needed, but the technology for lighting effects is not yet available; a lighting designer is not yet required. Yes, productions need visual interventions, but these will be made by scenic painters, prop-makers and other personnel mainly managed by the director-author.

[27] Sidiropoulou, "The Rise of the Modern Auteur," 11–32.

As technology advances over the following decades, the people occupying these roles also emancipate themselves. Designers, choreographers and a whole array of other 'designers' emerge, gradually taking over directors' functions and proclaiming a degree of artistic independence. Negotiating power within the creative collectives in which they work becomes one of theatre directors' principal tasks, and remains so today.

Additional directorial tasks also emerge in this period that are not necessarily technological. One is analysing the theatre text, through the Russian formalist model and the systematic popularisation of the Stanislavskian method in Europe. Ironically, the tradition of lengthy table readings attributed to the Russian director contradicts how he structured his own rehearsals. Sonia Moore writes that Stanislavski saw prolonged table readings as sources of error because they produced a rupture between spiritual and physical behaviour, so he began constructing the staging immediately after discussing the production's central idea.[28] This is relevant because a rupture gradually emerges between directors' responsibilities and production itself. Directors become increasingly distant from the workshops, the lighting console or the orchestra, and actors become their

[28] Sonia Moore, The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 12–13.

principal working medium, precisely because coordinating them takes up more and more time. The image emerges of the director as coordinator of actors, increasingly less as coordinator of production. This is the second decisive factor in the dissolution of the sole-author director, alongside increasingly complex technology and the need for specialists.

From this point, directors will articulate their desire for a theatre in which they become authors again. This idea has a lineage from Wagner to Craig, Artaud and Kantor. It also resonates in Romania. Here a movement emerges, that of theatricalisation, in which directors impose their own perspectives on theatre, demanding precisely the professionalisation that would allow them to regain control of the means of production. Ion Sava's essays in *Teatralitatea Teatrului* are particularly eloquent in this respect. Sava describes the director as the guarantor of the final production, involved in every element of its making. What remains an old but still unattainable dream, in Europe and Romania alike, is the technical realisation of a production by a single creator, a director-author, an expert in the performing arts for whom the production remains the principal medium of artistic expression.

The decisive technological change occurs over the last forty years, through the emergence and increasingly widespread use of digital technologies. Initially, these technologies only increased a

production's potential cost. As technology becomes more affordable, it significantly reduces the cost of each specialist. Today we no longer need an orchestra to make a production's music, but a single composer. Thus, rather than needing a conductor to lead the orchestra, that composer can be coordinated directly by the artistic director. Moreover, a significant trend sees people with minimal experience using software that once required specialists. Early versions of Adobe Photoshop or Premiere Pro, for instance, were highly specialised programs, difficult for people who did not use them full-time. They have become increasingly *user-friendly*, allowing directors or theatre-makers to create or adapt their own materials without specialist intervention. The same applies to sound-editing, projection and lighting-design software.

There is also a significant other side to this, because reducing the cost attached to each theatre role places excessive responsibility on the director. If a lighting designer is paid less and less per production because more people can fulfil the role, fewer people will practise the profession, and they will devote less time to any one production. Coupled with systemic changes in theatre, a progressive decline in employees and an increase in freelancers, theatre management in many environments, including institutions, expects directors to handle many production aspects. How many directors in Romania

today are allowed to bring lighting designers into their productions? How many theatres can afford this for every production or employ a permanent lighting designer? This is the familiar trajectory of technology initially easing our tasks, only subsequently to create additional tasks and raise work standards for each individual.

As any of us can observe, the culmination of this democratisation of working processes is the emergence of artificial intelligence and its integration into almost every program we use daily. AI's evolution is exponential, and its trajectory cannot currently be described. At the same time, the ethical limits of using this technology in theatre and its mirror, the world, are still being discussed and remain debatable. I look forward to seeing how the claims in this book survive the coming years. The principal change AI brings to any working process concerns the user interface. Today I no longer need to know how to draw; I need to know how to ask someone to draw. I no longer need to know how to write a text, only how to ask for it to be written. Certainly, the quality of the outputs we receive is still debatable, but given the pace of technological evolution, I believe it is only a matter of time before we have the kind of output each of us seeks.

I do not wish to enter discussions about these technologies' impact on creative professions, because that is beyond this book's scope. What is certain is

that AI, however it is used, enormously accelerates the speed at which a single person can generate text, images or music. Moreover, technology opens access to other technologies. I have personally found myself in a theatre faced with software I did not know how to operate, and using LLMs allowed me to use it independently to achieve the result I wanted. I think the idea of a 'production without AI' is gradually becoming utopian, because AI systems are integrated into almost every program we use daily.

Based on 24 interviews with practitioners, Horváth identifies artistic and operational uses of AI; adoption is mainly bottom-up in marketing and audience work, while artistic experimentation is more common in independent theatres and contemporary productions.[29] I described earlier how digital technology alone already allowed a single person to become a production's sole author. Twenty years ago, a production in which one person could act and simultaneously manage lighting, sound and video cues was difficult to imagine. Today this is no longer the case: systems integrating MIDI and DMX already make it standard theatrical practice. We can therefore only imagine that AI opens the possibility of increasing numbers of productions in which the

[29] Dóra Horváth, "Curtain Call for AI: Transforming Theatre through Technology," Sustainable Futures 9 (2025): 100747, 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sftr.2025.100747.

director (or whoever fulfils the directing function) has almost complete control over production. AI thus by no means invents the figure of the complete director, but makes it accessible and dramatically reduces the level of training such a person needs.

What lies beyond AI? Certainly the use of AI through semi-autonomous or autonomous agents. The impact such technology would have on theatre cannot yet be estimated and is the subject of personal research I wish to undertake in the near future.

The model described above is, as I acknowledged from the outset, a simplification. Perhaps even an oversimplification! First, it leaves out other participants' creative input, from those recognised as artists (designers, composers and so forth) to those recognised as technicians (lighting and sound operators, prop-makers, tailors etc). In theatre we tend to create this opposition between artists and technicians, although it is not necessarily appropriate. Through their work and constant contact with artistic products, theatre technicians develop exceptional skills, those of craftspeople rather than technicians, and have an enormous, often unrecognised impact on artistic decisions.

The use of AI effectively cancels out the entire body of knowledge and creative input these people bring to a production. The sustainability of such a system is profoundly precarious. The model leaves out cultural institutions, whose operating structures

will not allow theatrical practices to adapt so easily to technological evolution. Moreover, these very institutions, sometimes perceived as outdated and unnecessary, may prove to be spaces protecting genuinely human theatrical principles. Certainly, in the hope of enlightened institutional management, rather than management oriented towards 'as much as possible, as cheaply as possible'.

The model also leaves out audience preferences: audiences might object to the use of AI in theatre. Of course, this would require audiences to recognise AI-created elements (increasingly difficult) or theatres and artists to be obliged to identify them explicitly in a production. This also raises the question of oversight bodies' ability to enforce these standards and detect irregularities. Audiences might become an important source of pressure to protect traditional ways of making theatre and thus significantly affect how AI influences directing and directorial authorship. Although the model I describe above is far from perfect or complete, it is useful because it shows how theatre and technology have evolved in parallel, focusing on the director's function. Its value is to make a question visible.

It is clear, however, that AI in particular and technology in general open the way to a different theatre, a different way of making theatre. The question is what happens to directorial authorship today in the face of AI, and what directors can do to

protect their profession against a manager's prompt ten years from now: 'Hello, ChatGPT. Here's a scan of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Act as an expert in theatre and the performing arts. Please help me create a production for theatre X in town Y. Here are the population profile, the theatre's profile and a description of its organisational structure, including pictures of its actors. I want you to help me create a director's notebook for the production, with detailed instructions for each actor and member of the technical staff. But I'd like us to begin by adapting the text to contemporary language while retaining its Shakespearean spirit. Let's work step by step. Do you have any questions before we begin? Could you please create a skill or plugin for this action? I think it would be best to discuss our next steps. Before anything else, conduct intensive research into other productions of the play over the last twenty years in Romania and abroad. Save the file in the project documents so we can ensure the project's artistic originality.'

1.4. AI and the Sole Author

To describe how AI leads us to reconsider the director's role in the creative process, I think it is relevant to establish what this technology can currently bring to theatre. Dóra Horváth describes the situation of AI in theatre as follows:

> *In the artistic fields, there is a sense of experimentation in the use of AI, particularly in independent theatres, contemporary plays and younger directors. [...] In the domain of artistic applications, which encompasses scriptwriting, dramaturgical support, improvisation, costume, set and visual design, and artistic translation, the potential of AI lies primarily in its capacity to enhance efficiency and enable creators to focus on more creative tasks that demand higher added value.*[30]

There are three kinds of AI use in theatre today. The first is more subtle and does not involve the theatre artist opening an LLM and typing a prompt. It concerns AI systems integrated into search engines, editing software or even programs for writing, management and information storage. All these systems radically accelerate work and improve the production's artistic outcome in many areas, from lighting and sound design to video design, administration and project management.

The second use is the most obvious: an LLM (*Large Language Model*) or VLM (*Visual Language Model*) system to which users send input and receive output, whatever its form. From here on, I will try to avoid references to marketing and management, because they are not necessarily relevant to the book's purpose. Today, however, these systems are most often used in artistic creation for writing and

[30] Dóra Horváth, op. cit., p. 8.

research. AI's ability to gather and systematise information is particularly useful in research-based working processes. Another widespread use of AI is generating video, photographic and audio content. Theatre companies usually find these very expensive to obtain, whereas generating them through AI is very cheap. AI can also create customised animations or virtual avatars, as I used it to do when creating Stele care cad, by Iana Oprișa, at Teatrul Re-Act in 2025. Initially, such generated materials were obvious and used in productions much like web design is used in glitch art. Today, however, we can see AI-generated video and images on major stages without their use being acknowledged. A direct example is *Micul Ponei*, directed by Antoanella Cornici at the Elvira Godeanu Drama Theatre in Târgu Jiu. Note: I mention this as neither an attack nor a criticism, but simply an observation of a phenomenon.

Practitioners perceive this tool as a saviour in two respects. On the one hand, it extends the technical capabilities of projects that cannot afford—primarily financially—to bring in every specialist required. On the other, it saves time negotiating between team members and allows design elements to be created precisely according to the creator's artistic needs, without a second creative intention modifying the initial concept. In informal discussions for Arhiva Regizorală, several directors of

different ages told us how they use AI for functions ranging from design assistance and transforming their own sketches into more professional drawings or renderings, to generating music, video and images for productions. To protect those who gave us interviews, we will not pursue this further.

AI's use in certain theatrical areas, such as dramatic writing, remains limited because we do not yet have single-prompt AI systems for theatre. Theatre is generally a niche art, and its writing needs are atypical. From my experience with premium Anthropic, OpenAI and Google LLMs in 2025 and 2026, we are not yet at the point of formulating a prompt such as 'Write me a five-character text about adolescent drug use.' Certainly, the system will write a text, but with considerable banality. The same applies to other niche elements of theatre. With VLMs, however, for over a year we have already been able to request set, costume or atmosphere sketches with a single prompt. I first tried this successfully in 2024, creating materials for a directing competition application based on the myth of Narcissus; today AI agents' capabilities far exceed those of two years ago. For example, we can ask an agent to supply technical drawings to scale or renderings that preserve proportions.

AI's use in theatre is also limited by its still being used only by artists. In other words, only directors, dramaturgs or cultural managers, alongside actors,

designers or composers, use this technology. And they use it knowingly, often simply to compensate for resources or technical skills they do not possess themselves. I am a director who often designs my own productions. I use sketches developed with AI not because I cannot define my own playing space, but because it saves considerable time and because workshop staff find drawings not made by my hand much easier to understand. What I have seen in other fields, however, is that many areas of expertise are being invaded by non-experts.

Perhaps the clearest example comes from marketing and promotion, where many designer or copywriter positions are replaced by AI-generated materials used by people without direct expertise. Because marketing and promotion are not niche fields, these people stand a good chance of generating text, image or video products that are competitive, depending on the market. The real revolution in theatrical AI will therefore come not when playwrights use it for character profiles, but when someone from outside theatre makes productions that eliminate performing arts experts' participation. Whether this will become widespread is debatable, because theatre today has very low financial stakes, at least in Romania. Why use AI to generate a production that can almost never be financially viable without star names? With very few exceptions, we cannot speak of commercial theatre in Romania, and

I do not think such an undertaking would be lucrative in other markets either.

The third way AI is used in theatre is as a tutor. In his TEDx talk on AI and education,[31] Sal Khan argued that AI could save education worldwide, provided it is used not to spare students their tasks but to accompany them as an individual tutor through learning. AI thus compensates in Romania for a lack of specialists, particularly in theatrical technical work. At Teatrul Re-Act, I have used AI alongside technical colleagues to learn photo-, video-, lighting- and mapping software, or to adapt to new technical solutions. For *Hedda Gabler* in 2025, I used AI to create Python scripts automatically transforming text into surtitles mapped onto the set. I have used AI to find technical solutions and learn to implement them.

I believe this third use has the greatest potential to change the cultural system, because it does not eliminate theatre artists' expertise, but gives them further specialist capabilities and radically increases their capacity to act. And, as described in the previous chapter, it increases their potential to influence and almost completely author their future production. The lower the ratio of prompts such as 'Write me a text' or 'Design me a set' to 'Help me

[31] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJP5GqnTrNo&t=4s – accessed 4 October 2026.

understand why the scene I wrote lacks tension' or 'Improve the colours in this costume', the more theatre will safeguard its expertise. The higher it is, the more theatre-makers will need to justify their existence. When an actor in a company writes 'Tell me how to construct this scene on stage in Silviu Purcărete's style. Give me specific action instructions for every actor. Here is a set sketch', directors will have to start justifying their existence, something they have not had to do for roughly a century. When directors themselves constantly resort to 'Please tell me what to do in the scene between Hamlet and the Ghost; I have a creative block', the profession and audiences will increasingly have to decide where theatre production ends and AI slop production begins.

One of the earliest and most notable uses of AI in theatrical processes was the Czech THEaiTRE project and the resulting play, *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play* (premiered by livestream on 26 February 2021). It marks a turning point in exploring algorithmically generated dramaturgy, consolidating a *human-in-the-loop* creative methodology. Although promoted as the first play conceived by AI—with approximately 92% of its lines generated automatically in English through GPT-2 XL and subsequently translated into Czech—the production demonstrated that computational autonomy remains dependent on human

intervention.[32] As Juan Pablo Cruces stresses, defining the roles involved continuous dialogue between machine and human creators:

> *THEaiTRE's creative process begins with initial instructions developed by human playwrights, who establish the central theme, narrative tone and relationships between characters. From these instructions, the system—based on an adapted version of GPT-2 XL—generates a structural synopsis [...] The model then segments the plot into sequences and produces dialogue [...] Finally, human playwrights and directors intervene to polish fluency, work on emotional nuances and add cultural references, completing a cycle of co-creation between human and algorithmic agency.*[33]

In the dramaturgical laboratory's actual practice, generation worked not holistically but fragmentarily: human dramaturg David Košťák supplied sequential prompts, curated, moved and restructured raw lines, manually assembling scenes to overcome contextual memory limits (1,024 tokens) and the model's propensity for circular redundancy or stylistic discontinuity. This hybrid assembly questions the very

[32] Imke van Heerden, Çağdaş Duman, and Anil Baş, "Performing the Post-Anthropocene: AI: When a Robot Writes a Play," TDR: The Drama Review 67, no. 4 (2023): 104–7, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204323000448

[33] Juan Pablo Cruces, „Teatro y tecnología: creatividad algorítmica, ética e innovación en la narrativa generativa de Improbotics y THEaiTRE," Apuntes de Teatro, no. 150 (2025): 105.

ecology of theatrical creation, shifting traditional authorship towards co-creation and continuous negotiation. Within this framework, the human artist no longer acts as exclusive author, but as a curator and dramaturgical architect, directing, selecting and correcting material supplied by the neural network, establishing a '*dance of agency*' between algorithms and human sensitivity.

In 2026, as I write, using AI to write a text is no longer remotely impressive. Yet this production's psychological impact on theatre was profound, demonstrating that theatre too, coming from the privileged realm of craft and always able to avoid 'keeping up with the times', merely reflecting them instead, is moving towards an ontological reconfiguration of performance and a poetic transition into the post-Anthropocene. At the same time, THEaiTRE forces theatre to revise its legal, ethical and institutional frameworks concerning intellectual property, co-authorship and transparency, showing that the performing arts' future involves not replacing human creators, but the emergence of distributed dramaturgy in which AI functions as an interrogative partner and catalyst for meaning.

The performance project *(Machine) Learning to Be*, developed within the Brown Arts Institute's

inaugural *IGNITE* series (August 2024),[34] under director and researcher Ioana B. Jucan with an interdisciplinary team (including choreographic artist Katherine Helen Fisher and feminist theorist/hip-hop artist Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo), marked a critical turn in how the performing arts approach AI. Moving beyond illustrative technological demonstrations—in which a generative model serves merely as an 'automatic writer' or spectacular visual effect—the production functioned as hybrid, embodied and performative, participatory *devised* research examining extractive data regimes and algorithmic epistemologies. Through a dense fusion of poetic text, contemporary choreography and interactive computational interfaces, it translated the mathematical abstraction of *machine-learning* models into visible bodily tensions, transforming the theatre into a laboratory of critical *data fluency*.

The project's truly innovative dimension lay in algorithmic re-embodiment and the refusal of spectator passivity. AI systems traditionally conceal their opaque infrastructure behind an immaterial appearance (the so-called 'cloud'), hiding that extracted data come from human bodies' work, gestures and language. *(Machine) Learning to Be* used

[34] Brown Arts Institute, „(Machine) Learning to Be," 24 August 2024, https://arts.brown.edu/ignite/pvd-projects/machine-learning-be.

an interactive choreographic interface treating algorithms as genuine '*embodiment technologies*': dancers' movements and direct audience interactions (both physically present and remotely connected through the digital platform) became active parameters shaping textual flow, visual space and the behaviour of AI entities on stage. Spectators were no longer consumers of a static narrative, but conscious participants in shared '*world-making*', experiencing through their senses and kinaesthetically how algorithmic surveillance extracts, categorises and constrains human identity.

Moreover, the production's political stakes made a fundamental break with Silicon Valley's dominant technocratic discourses, approaching computational systems from decolonial and feminist perspectives. Rather than accepting large language models as neutral authorities, the production exposed the digital colonialism inherent in their training: global data are centralised and filtered through hegemonic Western corporate cultural grids. Directly confronting these architectures of control, *(Machine) Learning to Be* proposed no Luddite rejection of technology, but questioned the possibility of a decolonial AI: how can the machine be retrained to coexist ethically with human and Indigenous plurality without reducing cultural diversity to quantitative metrics?

AI therefore remains a relevant medium and theme in the performing arts today. It is important to understand that not every production using AI automatically becomes what van Heerden et al. call algorithmic theatre.[35] Algorithmic theatre limits humans' role on stage, and the program itself becomes the performing entity. Spectators watch algorithms' choices, and instead of the encounter between actor and audience, algorithmic theatre creates an asymmetry in which spectators confront something unable to answer them. As AI systems advance and their theatrical integration strengthens, we will increasingly encounter productions where AI mediates interaction between audience and stage. This is a relevant artistic research theme for me as a director today. Yet I believe the reality of the interaction between AI and theatre is much less grand, with this technology inserted into almost every stage of creation and production, including preparation. I also believe legal restrictions on AI in theatre or other areas of society are utopian, at least given the industry's current development.

In 2026, I attended Theatre Networking Talents at the Marin Sorescu Theatre in Craiova. I deeply appreciate the festival's work promoting young creators in Romanian

[35] Imke van Heerden, Çağdaş Duman and Anil Baş, „Performing the Post-Anthropocene: AI: When a Robot Writes a Play," TDR: The Drama Review 67, no. 4 (2023): 108.

theatres. One production presented there was Theatre of the Future, directed by Alina Pietrăreanu. Beginning with texts by Chekhov, it imagined how theatre would look in the future. The theatrical futures imagined within the piece were generated using ChatGPT. It is too early to say AI has become integral to theatrical processes, but not too early to conclude that it has become integral to many of our lives. Seeing AI used creatively even in the working processes of very young directors just starting out indicates that the technology will be adopted systemically in theatre too. I am particularly curious to see the position of generations growing up alongside AI on this subject.

Today we can already envisage a hybrid sole author of a production. An artist, whom I will call a director in this book, assisted by AI can equal an entire creative team. I call this artist a director because they claim what I consider the director's essential function: choosing and controlling the production's ultimate meaning. The most commonly used theatrical working method will be what is called *human-in-the-loop*:

> *The user (in this case, dramaturg David Košťák) enters a human-written prompt consisting of a short scene description and two initial lines of dialogue that guide characterization and plot. Based on the given prompt, the language model generates continuous lines in an uncontrolled manner—i.e., freely, without explicit constraints on content, style, or context. The user can add, remove, and reposition*

> *lines as well as edit the text itself. The process is repeated for every scene, with a new prompt provided each time.*[36]

The methodology can be used across all areas of theatre-making, not merely writing. It can create sets, costumes and props, including by combining ready-to-buy items. This will spare the sole author's process the need for subcontractors. Given globalised trade, itself aided by digital technologies, directors can even avoid a ready-made aesthetic, having access at the click of a button to every garment currently produced worldwide. AI can create soundscapes and digital avatars and manage procurement. Terrifyingly, AI can suggest stage action and construct lighting designs and backstage organisation, or already replace almost any resource missing from a theatre. The present is far more science-fictional than we would like to believe.

In David Saltz's Tempest 2000, Ariel is a digital double manipulated in real time by an offstage performer. The performer stands in a cage wearing a motion-capture suit that transforms their movements into those of the digital avatar. Moreover, a speech-recognition system perfectly synchronises

[36] Imke van Heerden, Çağdaş Duman and Anil Baş, „Performing the Post-Anthropocene: AI: When a Robot Writes a Play," TDR: The Drama Review 67, no. 4 (2023): 107.

the actor's lip movements with the spoken text.[37] Such stage use is already much easier today than a quarter-century ago and can be achieved by a one-person team using commercial software and AI doubles, including live. *Motion capture* is no longer needed; movement can be generated, and the equipment required for the effect is now hundreds of times cheaper. What is truly science-fictional is that we no longer even need a performer whose movement we can capture. Autonomous generation systems such as HeyGen or other avatar programs can now generate characters projected on stage from scratch or from other fictional renderings (also AI-created). Until recently, these renderings could not be made live.

This barrier of latency and lack of organic responsiveness is being shattered at this very moment by cutting-edge systems such as Griffin (developed by Tavus)[38]—the first model capable of passing a real-time video Turing test (full-duplex video-to-video). Unlike previous generations, in which avatars merely passively delivered precomputed text, its Human Interaction Model (HIM) architecture allows the system to 'listen' and

[37] Steve Dixon, Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 244.

[38] https://www.tavus.io/griffin, accessed 17 October 2026.

'look' simultaneously: it processes breathing pauses, gaze, micro-expressions and the other person's hesitations, instantly generating not only speech and voice but non-verbal responses (nods, attentive looks or natural interruptions).

For theatrical practice, this qualitative leap marks a paradigm shift: in just a few months, we will no longer discuss the digital avatar as a mere mask or puppet guided from backstage, but as a genuine live acting partner, completely digital and interactive. In the rehearsal room and directly on stage, such a synthetic actor will no longer be constrained by a predetermined mechanical score, but will improvise, respond affectively to the flesh-and-blood actor's energy and offer its own creative input as the production unfolds. Instead of a mere video projection subordinated to technical operation, theatre thus opens itself to genuine cobotisation, in which a production's cast can include digital entities capable of presence, stage listening and real-time dramaturgical negotiation.

In this context, prompting itself becomes an artistic and aesthetic manifestation:

> *Kafka's messengers are shadowy figures perpetually engaged in a journey without a clear destination. As such, they seem to enact our own interactions with generative AI. We send prompts – snapshots of our intentions – towards hidden algorithms; their interpretation and execution remain as unpredictable as*

> *the pathways in Kafka's writings, often disrupting causal logic and creating tension between language and imagery. AI is our modern-day messenger. We compose textual prompts as a form of micro-ekphrasis; the AI converts our verbal solicitations into visual or sonic creations.*[39]

I am wary of equating prompting an AI system with giving a directorial instruction, but I do not really have arguments against doing so either. For me as a director, asking an obedient but creative system to deliver content is no different from negotiating with a creative partner during work. I will await the repercussions of that sentence! Interestingly, for those arguing that theatre will lose its essence because external creative input disappears, interactive systems such as Griffin show that even improvisational theatre will very soon be possible with AI input. I think it is time to move beyond the image of AI in theatre as an inept artist asking it to perform tasks they cannot do themselves, or are too lazy to do. I believe AI's theatrical use will be absolutely deliberate and acknowledged, undertaken by experts capable of bringing onto the stage all the creative possibilities these systems open. This is no longer a discussion about the future. It is a discussion about the present.

[39] Rolf Hughes, „Administering (AI) Attention: Ekphrasis and the Poetics of Prompting," ArteActa, no. 10 (2024).

Whether a production generated (also) through AI will have aesthetic value comparable to a non-AI production is debatable. Personally, I think it will, because just as exceptional creators exist, so do unexceptional ones. I believe an AI system can produce work scoring eight out of ten, in the good sense. I also think much depends on a production's purpose. Not every production, nor every place making theatre, needs to achieve excellence. AI might not create an exceptional production in Berlin or Tokyo, but it probably could for a small company in Bistrița, not because Bistrița has lower creative standards, but because purposes and audiences differ radically between locations, as do competition and resources. Small companies lacking the resources for advanced production systems, forced to fight for their audiences or even build them from scratch, will tend to adopt this method much more extensively, precisely to compensate for deficiencies and actually raise their artistic level. In this context, companies that flaunt their avoidance of AI (insofar as it can practically be avoided) and *traditional* production methods will become custodians of the theatre of today-yesterday. I hope they will not become museums of this theatre.

For now, human creators using AI to generate content hold copyright in their creations, although entirely AI-generated content is no longer protectable. A US Copyright Office report states that using

AI to assist rather than replace human creativity does not in any way affect copyright protection for the human who created the work. The Office states that whether human input sufficiently grounds copyright must be assessed case by case, since prompting does not offer sufficient control with currently available systems. Protection therefore covers only perceptible original human contributions.[40] This is a relevant step in protecting human authorship, because today 'Write me a 300-page book about directors preparing productions, based on 20 interviews and focused on technology and directorial authorship' no longer automatically grounds my copyright. What is worrying is not only technological advancement but changing law. What will happen to copyright in works no longer considered original ten years from now? Will we have laws saying all works produced with GPT 4.6 are protected, but those with GPT 9.2 are not? And what if we retain only models protected by copyright legislation? They are already powerful enough to change theatrical practice if adopted systemically. This discussion about intellectual property rights remains entirely open.

This strict demarcation of authorship finds its clearest legal basis in the US Court of Appeals for the

[40] U.S. Copyright Office, Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, Part 2: Copyrightability (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Copyright Office, 2025), ii.

District of Columbia Circuit's decision in *Stephen Thaler v. Shira Perlmutter* (2025). Seeking copyright registration for a digital image autonomously generated by his neural system, the 'Creativity Machine', inventor Stephen Thaler argued that the algorithm itself should be recognised as the work's legal author. The court categorically rejected this argument, reaffirming that, under the spirit and letter of the US *Copyright Act of 1976*, authorship is inseparably linked to human beings.[41]

The court's reasoning went beyond a mere formal definition, demonstrating that the entire architecture of intellectual property presupposes exclusively human attributes: calculating protection's duration according to biological life expectancy, inheritance by family members, the capacity to sign legal documents, own property or bear moral and legal responsibility through conscious intention (*mens rea*). As the court held, 'machines do not have property, traditional human lifespans, family members, domiciles, nationalities, *mentes reae* or signatures', so an artificial system cannot have the status of a legal subject in creative work.[42] The decision drew an uncrossable red line: everything generated exclusively by an algorithm, without

[41] Stephen Thaler v. Shira Perlmutter, No. 23-5233 (D.C. Cir. Mar. 18, 2025), pp. 3, 10.

[42] Thaler v. Perlmutter, No. 23-5233, p. 13, my translation.

creative human intervention, falls directly into the public domain.

If authorship is shared between AI and authors, we will discover how many spectators will attend a production that is 30% Alex Teodorescu, 25% Claude and 45% ChatGPT. Moreover, we will see how and by whom such transparency can be enforced and verified, and what the actual repercussions of breaking the law will be. As directors, we might therefore have to prove our authorship of a production. Our profession is all the more vulnerable because, in Romania, we have no copyright over productions, only related rights of interpretation. This radically differs from film directors' position, mainly because theatre directors' work is not fixed, unlike designers' or film directors' work. How can directors prove their creative contribution? Rehearsal itself will be insufficient because an AI production, even one with human performers whose stage actions are AI-created, will probably undergo the same rehearsal process as an entirely human one. The trace of the artistic process becomes proof of authorship in culture. Painters may find it easier to prove they painted a work by hand. (I do not wish to push the argument to extremes by mentioning robotic arms and physical objects generated with artificially produced human traces.) What can directors supply to prove their creative contribution when the Lady from the AI Anti-Plagiarism Office comes to inspect?

As Jeff Huang, Rui-Jie Yew and Suresh Venkatasubramanian argue, refusing copyright to AI-assisted creations derives from users' insufficient control over the final result, a notion closely organised around 'predictability' in copyright's logic. They stress that recognising human authorship in co-creation depends essentially on two technical variables: the configuration environment's degree of determinism (the extent to which artists' commands produce a certain, reproducible result) and reducing arbitrary or unexpected elements autonomously generated by the tool.[43] Creators who confine themselves to a simple descriptive prompt ('Draw me a cat') function like external commissioners delegating execution; a genuine act of authorship, by contrast, entails mastering, guiding and predetermining the work's architecture ('Draw me a cat in portrait orientation, using the following HEX colour codes, in style X. The cat must sit in this position and look in that direction. Here is a rough hand sketch I want you to follow. And so on.').

Directors' ability to prove authorship depends precisely on AI systems' predictability: their historical status as authors has always rested on rigorously orchestrating all sign systems, from

[43] Jeff Huang, Rui-Jie Yew and Suresh Venkatasubramanian, „Copyrighting Generative AI Co-Creations," in Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Designing Interactive Systems Conference (DIS '25) (New York: ACM, 2025), 1–2.

rhythm and space to the actor's score. Insofar as contemporary directors integrate generative AI into rehearsals or live multimedia composition, the legitimacy of their directorial act cannot derive from a 'statistical lottery' of automatic generation, but from precise technological use allowing predictable control over stage material. Rather than abandoning compositional decisions to an opaque algorithm, directors fully claiming authorship use computational interfaces as instruments of maximum precision, demonstrating that every element retained on stage results from conscious, verifiable human aesthetic intention.

Demonstrating how? By showing their initial plan. In other words, improvisational practices may cease to be recognised as directorial authorship precisely because of AI's emergence and AI-detection systems' limitations. I envisage a future I do not consider dystopian, in which directors must show their initial intention to sign a production. Beyond 'I wanted to make a production about suffering based on The Cherry Orchard.' Under the tendency of the second half of the twentieth century, such 'theatrical prompting' was possible, even praised. Directors choose a creative collective, go into a theatre, select a theme and start working with that collective on a theatrical product. If that collective also includes AI systems, considerably more rigorous preparation may well become necessary for authorship to be recognised.

We define the director's notebook as the sum of all materials recorded on any medium and produced to prepare a theatre production. Notes, essays, systematic written work, images, research, music, paintings: anything directors do to fix their future production can be considered a director's notebook. Note, however, that recording something is a step towards fixing the production, towards committing to a clear stage direction. My argument is that a director's notebook tracing preparation and, implicitly, human intention will ground the recognition of the theatre director's authorship (sole or otherwise!). What such a notebook should look like remains to be seen and discussed. As AI systems evolve and their theatrical use diversifies, technology will become an opaque collaborator whose ultimate influence on the theatrical product will be difficult to quantify.

Today we have tools powerful enough to identify AI-written passages, such as GPT Zero or the academic program Turnitin. Is theatre socially significant enough for someone to invest research and money in systems identifying human theatrical authorship? Probably not, so sole authorship will soon become impossible again. It will be distributed among human, machine and the data's authors. Interestingly, we began with the argument that digital technology in general and AI in particular can help directors become sole or almost sole authors again, only now to cancel this capacity precisely

because of AI. Perhaps a better name for this theatre-maker is 'sole maker', rather than 'sole author'. Perhaps we are approaching an age of post-authorship; who knows? If we envisage a theatre world refusing AI precisely to protect authorship, I align myself with Kate Crawford's view:

> *The common refrain for the expansion of AI systems and process automation is that we are living in a time of beneficial human-AI collaboration. But this collaboration is not fairly negotiated. The terms are based on a significant power asymmetry—is there ever a choice not to collaborate with algorithmic systems? When a company introduces a new AI platform, workers are rarely allowed to opt out. This is less of a collaboration than a forced engagement, where workers are expected to re-skill, keep up, and unquestioningly accept each new technical development.*[44]

And I believe this asymmetry of power will grow in the coming period. I think making theatre without AI will become impossible, except for a few companies retreating to the mountains for a tech detox and descending with finished productions. In Romania, the discussion of copyright and AI is far from a definitive legal answer. Romanian law, thirty years old, states: 'The author is the natural person or

[44] Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 58.

natural persons who created the work.'[45] How this law evolves, and what European international standards require of Romania, remains to be seen.

What remains beyond our collective anxieties about the future? The question of cost. Not only the financial cost of the systems used. Not only their ecological and social impact, plus their macroeconomic impact. But also the cost paid by theatre. To what extent will designers, lighting designers or even directors still exist when prompting can replace them? Certainly, the system will try to protect its people. At some point, however, I believe the question will arise: 'Why pay someone a lot of money to do something a system can do much more cheaply?' And funding will fall. And specialist numbers will fall. And the system will become dependent on technology to compensate for missing human specialisation. I believe Romania's system is particularly vulnerable because it is precarious. Cultural managers are required to produce many cultural outputs (whether projects or institutions), to perform well, without the support and resources necessary. The traditional 'why waste a nail when you can tie it with wire'. The system is also precarious because of limited cultural consumption.

[45] Romania, Law no. 8/1996 on Copyright and Related Rights, arts. 3, 5–6, republished and consolidated text, https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/198938.

If it depends on state funding, the way that funding is imposed creates coping practices. If, ten years from now, the manager of a small theatre or company says 'I want human, non-AI productions, and I want to spend twenty times more per production to bring in specialists', what funding sources will they find? Sponsorship has been on its knees for years, and sustaining a production through ticket sales is almost utopian in Romania.

1.5. Ethical Limits: Exploitation, Extraction, Colonialism

The ethical limits of AI in theatre should be discussed beyond authorship, beyond whether creators may ethically use AI assistance for cultural products, given that AI systems invariably make a creative contribution to generation. From its beginnings, AI has involved exploitation: models aggregate vast quantities of data, often copyright-protected, without crediting or remunerating the people whose data were used. Directing in particular already has precedents of failing to recognise participants' creativity, as an Open Theatre actress attests: 'I would see a text a few years later where it says, such and such a piece by so and so, and the actors aren't even mentioned! Look at The Mutation Show as an example. It did not have a writer. I

resented the fact that those writers were listed and given credit on the program.'[46]

Almost every Romanian theatre has stories of directors arriving 'without having done their homework' and actors who 'make their production for them'. Certainly, some are exaggerations, but there is a practice of failing to recognise actors' creative input into a production's structure. Public recognition of co-creators' contributions follows power structures: playwrights and directors are recognised much more frequently than designers, actors or other designers involved. Most books or articles written long after a production use the formula 'The production ..., by ..., directed by ...'. AI technology simply follows the same practices of eliminating credit. An exception to AI's failure to remunerate the work underlying its training is Adobe's practice through Adobe Firefly, which pays artists whose images it trained on. Yet even this mechanism cannot be considered equitable, because it only impoverishes creators.

Beyond Firefly's specific case, UNESCO acknowledges that many AI systems train on scraped datasets, often without data holders' consent. Their opacity almost entirely prevents identifying uses and

[46] Blumenthal, 1984, quoted in Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, Devising Performance: A Critical History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 108.

seeking legal redress.[47] Moreover, users themselves become copyright infringers. If I photograph a contemporary artwork in a gallery for personal use and then upload it to a VLM with the prompt 'help me create a work in this style', I use an artist's work for my own benefit without acknowledgement or consent. Another exploitative labour inherent in AI systems is called *Ghost Work*: maintaining and constructing AI systems throughout the production chain, work that is often underpaid.[48] It is also often restrictive, without prospects, and closely monitored by the very AI systems it serves.

The additional data AI systems currently obtain through surveillance and use to train generative systems cannot be quantified. Kate Crawford explains in detail how the AI industry justified mass data collection through the need to create intelligent computational systems, with all data forms—image, text, voice, sound and video—now treated as raw material for AI.[49] Here the concept of data colonialism emerges: the *datafication* of human life, seen as illegitimate appropriation and exploitation of human relationships, resulting in certain individuals being

[47] UNESCO Independent Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence and Culture, Report of the Independent Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence and Culture (Paris: UNESCO, 2025), 24–25.

[48] Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 71.

[49] Ibid., p. 95.

dispossessed of their rights.[50] Estimating data colonialism's theatrical impact is even harder than in other areas of human creativity, because aggregated theatre data are more sporadic. Archiving performing arts heritage, particularly in Romania, is limited both by institutional frameworks and by performance itself, which limits what can be archived. Consequently, it is very difficult to estimate what data categories can and will train AI systems and who will be harmed by their use.

Mirroring AI systems, technology in theatre also significantly affects support professions. It is not only a matter of using designers' or playwrights' works ultimately to abolish their professions, but also of destroying theatre's already unrecognised support professions. Like the support work allowing AI and data centres to exist, these professions are designed to be invisible. Theatre functions as a machine concealing the mechanism that creates illusion, making backstage life invisible and overlooking professions such as stage manager, lighting operator, sound operator and stage crews.[51] Theatrical tradition is clear: they do not take a curtain call.

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[50] Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 15.

[51] Rayner, 2002, quoted in Danny Persse, Fishing for Phronesis: A Search for Tacit Knowledge in Technical Theatre Education (master's thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2018), 80.

Moreover, with automation and AI systems, many of these professions become optional. AI taking notes on rehearsal-room discussions can do much of a stage manager's work. Integrating AI into lighting and sound operating systems significantly reduces the specialisation needed to operate them. Over time, this may dissolve these distinct roles and combine them into professions such as 'theatre technician': someone operating sound, lighting and video, taking rehearsal notes or moving scenery within the same production. This phenomenon already exists in independent theatre and will probably extend to other theatres.

This exploitation is already inherent in theatre and visible even in funding allocation, with significantly smaller budgets for support staff than artistic personnel. Professionals already feel fears of restructuring, as a Dóra Horváth interview shows: "Consequently, the fear of job loss emerges as a significant concern among theatre professionals, as stated by Interviewee 18: 'Many people around me have expressed fear about losing their jobs or having them change in ways that feel beyond their control.'"[52]

It remains to be seen whether using AI-assisted technologies will homogenise theatrical styles and, moreover, approaches. AI systems train on data, and certainly not all data are equal, quantitatively or

[52] Dóra Horváth, „Curtain call for AI: Transforming theatre through technology," Sustainable Futures 9 (2025): 100747, p. 9.

qualitatively. Romania undoubtedly has far less information for training a specialist theatre system than Western contexts such as Britain, France or Germany. Consequently, using these generative systems in Romanian theatre risks generated products originating in styles, techniques and methods external to Romania. Combined with systematic erosion of cultural professionalism, this would eventually lead to the loss of local theatrical practices. There are arguments for viewing this trajectory as colonialism, through which certain powers impose dominance and cause cultures to disappear. Nevertheless, I consider the fault to lie with minor cultural contexts that fail to record and *datafy* their theatre.

I reiterate that I do not believe theatrical practice will remain possible without AI. I believe the limits and extent of its use as creative partner, trainer, producer of elements, coach or something else are each working team's personal choice. I hope these decisions will be deliberate and informed, concerning both theatre and technology. I fear they will be determined by production and funding conditions, or a lack of theatrical knowledge (whatever its causes, including deficient theatre education). I believe each audience is responsible for choosing whether to endorse these practices through its presence in theatres.

To conclude, I propose a boundary case. I am a director who prepares productions meticulously. If I train AI on my personal archival corpus—say,

twenty handwritten director's notebooks of my own—and use it to generate entire productions, what happens to the whole ethical discussion? Certainly, the corpus is too small to generate competent AI, but let us suppose. We remove all exploitation, ecological risk and colonialism from the discussion. What remains is personal AI capable of creating my productions from scratch with minimal intervention from me. Single-prompt. Clearly, I have used 'only a tool' and harmed no one. The question is whether you would consider this product culturally valuable. And if not, why? What prejudices of ours would underlie this judgement?

Next, examining Arhiva Regizorală's materials, I propose that we assess how prepared Romania's theatre system is for this new era of cultural production. This exploration rests on questions about pedagogical relationships in Romanian directing: can the system prepare students well enough to avoid generating precisely this need for AI assistance? We also explore how directors prepare productions, precisely to protect theatre-making from the vulnerabilities to AI discussed above. And we discuss the ensemble of working techniques comprising Romanian directing's identity and distinguishing it from other cultural contexts. Why? Because when theatre's AI apocalypse is entrenched, we should see whether Romanian theatre still exists, whether Romanian directing still exists, or whether all we have is generic slop production.

2. Where the Journey Begins

2.1. A Map of the First Answers

The first question put to directors in Arhiva Regizorală asked them to identify the most important preparation they undertake before rehearsals. It would be particularly interesting to ask beginners or students the same question, because participating directors' answers tell us only what they now consider foremost: a reconstruction, not a description. Any experienced director's practice rests on internalised mechanisms. At the beginning of a directing career, there are few shortcuts: it is work adapting to the system, adapting to collaboration, anticipating difficulties that will emerge on stage. As directors gain experience, working techniques become internalised. Moreover, each can anticipate their own inability to internalise certain elements and understands what comes naturally and what requires deliberate effort. Experienced directors prepare only what they must do consciously because, ultimately, why prepare something you know you know how to do?

Because it is the first question, it always sets the discussion's tone, and this answer shapes all the others. The answers suggest four broad categories of beginnings for productions. The first is the conceptual/thematic beginning:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Of everything you do to prepare your productions before the first rehearsal day, is there anything you consider most important to prepare, a particular element you think needs preparing before anything else? And if so, how do you structure it?*
>
> **Alexandru Dabija**: *There are two. I mean, this has two sides for me. […] First would be the text. So when I'm dealing with a text, not necessarily dramatic, any text, when it's about a text, the essential preparation is to turn it over from every angle, know it by heart, engage with it as a text and an author, and a period, and everything. So, classically, the text. But there's a second part, which came in quite early for me and is now very on trend, in vogue: the theme. A theme that concerns you, concerns me or concerns all of us at some point. It might be general, human, circumstantial, political, moral, social. A theme haunting me or simply an idea in a lyrical sense. As if you felt like writing a poem. […] So there are themes haunting me, and at some point they express themselves, emerge through a combination of texts, music, actors.*[1]

[1] Interview with director Alexandru Dabija for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Belai Marcel answered the same question as follows:

> **Belai Marcel**: *It always depends on the specific material, the source material underlying the future production, whether a play, novel, longer story or even a film. That material determines the preparatory method it requires. What remains constant for me, however, is the need to identify the work's central theme. I need to formulate it and then see how it relates to the contradictions inherent in human existence. This is where the process that subsequently determines the whole production's preparation actually begins for me.*

There are two principal approaches in directing, not only Romanian directing. The first imposes a strict connection with the theme of the literary work underlying the production, if one exists. Belai Marcel illustrates this approach, in which directors construct productions from the theme identified in the work. Of course, considerable interpretative freedom remains: directors identify among the work's themes the central one resonating most strongly with them at that moment in their lives. The second approach gives directors complete freedom to impose an external theme on a dramatic text through staging. Directors control multiple languages constituting the future production, so why should the text matter more than the others? Through interpretation, directors can nuance or even contradict the text's central themes. Mihai Ranin's answer illustrates this position:

Alex Teodorescu: *Of all the ways you prepare productions, what seems the most important element, or what is the most important thing you prepare before rehearsals begin?*

Mihai Constantin Ranin: *First, I have to like the text, and I choose one. Everything starts there. Under communism, when we made political theatre out of anything, it was quite funny, because you used the system's money to make productions against the system. But that's not the point. I learnt then that the simplest way to express yourself and at the same time do something for the community is to start with a classic text and transform it according to the society you live in. If it was Molière or Shakespeare, for example, it was very easy to redirect everything towards a recognisable society. I don't know how much of it was art. Success was certainly guaranteed then, because it was like an oasis of reception from the audience, and you practically became a very important figure. As a young director, I felt very good walking through Sibiu and having people greet me knowingly. The artist became a little mixed up with the figure who had a role to play. The first play was imposed on me, Cataif, Vreau să-l văd pe Mussof, a comedy also performed very successfully at the Bulandra Theatre. I completely redirected what the production could have been, making a play with a lot of humour, but practically anti-communist.*[2]

[2] Interview with director Mihai Ranin for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

In this way of working, directors' concepts, alongside their immersion in the text's fictional world (already written or still being written), become the future production's starting point. This is the most widely taught and widespread way of making theatre in Romania, beginning with directors' status as production-makers, original 'stagers'. This is also how we are expected to begin work in a theatre: with a 'pitch' explaining our thoughts and expectations for the future production to the actors.

The second category of starting points is research processes. Here too there is a theme (a production about delivery workers' conditions) or a chosen subject (a production about femicide case X), but the theme is neutral. Directors starting from research systematically attempt to deconstruct their own views on the subject to reach a truth obtained through research. The difference in directorial thinking is maximal: directors starting from an idea validate their own conception through work, testing it on stage; those starting from research create their conception through preparation.

> **Mihai Gligan**: *Of the whole way you think about and prepare productions, what do you feel is the central element? [...]*
>
> **Gianina Cărbunariu**: *Research. And for me that's a very important moment, because it doesn't just involve interviews or archival study; while I'm researching, I also develop the production's concept*

> *and its space. And most often I don't research alone. I have done it alone, but in 90% of cases I work with a designer or a visual artist or a production dramaturg, and so, while I'm interviewing and, well, researching in every possible way. When I say possible, I mean each project actually develops differently according to its theme; the research route changes too. Right? And so, according to that research, I develop the spatial and production concepts in parallel. I don't have a text.*

In this theatrical thinking, the text can no longer become a foundation for the production. A text would already impose a perspective, whereas directors starting from research need to create that perspective themselves. The text fixes dramatic material, but these productions' nucleus is not necessarily dramatic in the classical sense. Documentary productions often use dramaturgical techniques to transform non-dramatic materials—testimonies, photographs, archives—into forms suitable for staging. I think it reductive to assume this research results in a text. I think the text is only one research output. Gabriel Sandu supports this statement:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Of everything you do to prepare productions before rehearsals, what seems the most important element, and how do you structure it?*
>
> **Gabriel Sandu**: *Given that I also write the productions I make 98% of the time, the most important part is... the concept. The production concept, which obviously involves the dramaturgical*

concept. They're very interconnected; I mean, I don't have a dramaturgy I then process.

Alex Teodorescu: *Like an external dramatic text.*

Gabriel Sandu: *Exactly. No, I don't have a dramaturgy I stage, perhaps applying another concept to it; things... they're interconnected. Sometimes decisions more to do with directing influence the dramaturgy. It's a very free process, but the conceptual part matters greatly. I mean, what do I want to say? Why do I want to say it? Why does it interest me, why does it move me at a particular moment? […] Actually, I think I write productions, but I don't think I write plays. I mean, I find it very hard to believe another director could stage a text of mine, because they're so bound to the production and the production context I worked in that I don't even know what they'd do with it.*[3]

I think a fundamental difference separates literary scholars' analysis of a text from directors' analysis: directors always subordinate analysis to their own staging intentions. The same applies to dramatic writing: playwrights write entirely differently from directors. Directors write texts inseparably bound to the stage solutions they have. For two recent productions I worked on, Albă ca zăpada at the Elvira Godeanu Theatre in Târgu Jiu and „Bine, bă..." within Teatriction, I hesitated over how to give

[3] Interview with director Gabriel Sandu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

the text to actors. Usually actors receive a text without stage directions or with the original directions. I had written both texts, and after cutting all directing instructions and rereading them, I felt they made no sense. I felt I was giving actors writing meaningless without its accompanying stage solution. Although the productions had different starting points—the story of Snow White and drug use respectively—neither began from research in the sense David Schwartz describes below.

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *I assume you prepare productions. Could you tell me a little, without my guiding you, about your preparation process? What are its stages?*
>
> **David Schwartz**: *Well, now, of course it depends a lot on the production, but I certainly do a great deal of research and investigation, and it always begins with lots of reading. I mean, I read a lot, whatever... As you know, 99% of my work has used contemporary research-based texts. Anyway, research starting from a theme of immediate interest. And before starting an interview or entering archives or the project's actual research material, I read lots of things around it anyway. I mean, history, sociology, politics, a great deal of press. That's the first stage.*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Which somehow precedes that active research. Going out, talking to people, doing interviews...*
>
> **David Schwartz**: *Yes, that's it. I'd call it pre-research. And that's actually where the theme*

> *crystallises in a way, because ultimately, okay, I have a subject, I don't know, delivery work, for example, a production I made. But ultimately, what interests me? What am I actually pursuing? It's a very broad field: you can pursue different categories, subjects, problems and so on. This preliminary research helps clarify what interests me about that subject, and perhaps I even conclude nothing interests me and... Or not that nothing interests me. That nothing challenges me theatrically strongly enough to warrant making a production myself. That too. In fact, this preliminary research should also give me a conflict or tension or contradiction, something to start from, something surprising me, making me curious to go further. That's another rule. I never begin a project when I have a very firm opinion or am convinced I know how things stand, when... I mean, for me this preparation, which of course includes different kinds of research we'll discuss later, is also self-education, a process beginning from curiosity and my genuine interest in a subject or theme I try to explore further. And this actually motivates me, so to speak, throughout, throughout the undertaking and the artistic undertaking.*

The third starting point identified in the interviews is the creative team's composition generally and the cast particularly. This is process-based theatrical thinking, which does not automatically mean collaborative work. Processes beginning with team composition assume that attracting the right people into key positions can maximise a

production's impact. Interestingly, this thinking relates neither to the company's organisational form (project theatre, repertory theatre, independent theatre and so forth), nor to production aesthetics, nor to the proposed work (collaborative, authorial, devised and so forth). Nicolae Mandea told us:

> **Nicolae Mandea**: *Making a production is actually teamwork, even when it isn't devised theatre, it's still teamwork. Directorial creation has several stages, one very important one being casting. Because when you cast an actor, you don't do so because you know they'll execute exactly what you say, but because you sense creative potential that will take the role where you want and perhaps even exceed what I experience.*[4]

Similarly, Radu Nica reinforces this idea:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Of everything you do to prepare productions, what seems the most important element you prepare before rehearsals begin?*
>
> **Radu Nica**: *Casting. I like to see the whole team. I don't like relying on productions actors appear in, because I feel I don't want simply to enter other directors' logic; I want to see and sense them according to my own criteria. Don't ask me now what they are, what those are, but it's very important to see whether I simply connect with them as people.*[5]

[4] Interview with director Nicolae Mandea for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[5] Interview with director Radu Nica for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Casting is equally important even within teams with which directors have worked before:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Of everything you do to prepare productions, what do you think is the most important part? The most important element to prepare before rehearsals begin, and how do you structure that preparation?*
>
> **Radu Olăreanu**: *I think the most important, one of the most important things, is casting the production. I mean, beyond the text, which, with which, well, you can propose it to the theatre or the theatre can propose it to you. Casting. That would be the first, that would be the first stage, I think, and the most important, because a well, well-chosen and well-found cast counts for a lot, I'd say. I mean, they can give you more than at least half the production. That's what I think. I've had every kind of cast, in theatres and here at the studio with students; with graduating years it was easier when we had very good cohorts. Because we also had years with very, very good student cohorts, many, many of them now in Romanian theatres. And, well, even if I hadn't worked with them during their undergraduate years, let's say, and met them only in year four, as it was before Bologna, now during their master's, they arrived well trained and were good too. Very good generations, and you didn't need to repeat processes at, at the studio or in the production, but could move to more advanced stages and make the entire, the*

whole production faster and more efficiently. But I think casting is one of the first keys.[6]

The fourth kind of starting point emerging from the interviews is not a category in itself, but the absence of a category in the traditional sense. These are unique starting points that cannot become rules of a theatrical system, but mark the particularities of practitioners within it. For Cristian Ban, for example, the future production's starting point is music:

Alex Teodorescu: *Of all the elements you prepare before the first rehearsal day, what is the most important thing you know beforehand, and how exactly do you structure it?*

Cristian Ban: *Music. I feel like saying music now, and certainly the text comes last. Those are roughly my extremes. Okay. And between them I have a fairly fixed, clear structure, but if I have the music at the beginning, everything's very simple. So I'd say music. Yes, that... […]*

Alex Teodorescu: *And do all the songs you identify at this stage end up in the production, or not necessarily?*

Cristian Ban: *More than I'd like end up there. I mean, often the plan is a song. It simply helps me with the vibe, and I tell myself I obviously won't use it, but then I say let's use it a little in rehearsals, and before the premiere I say, look, it's become the*

[6] Interview with director Radu Olăreanu for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

> *production now. That's how it is, somehow? But Părinți, for example, is a more telling example, somehow: there's Monica Anghel's song Spune-mi, a clichéd song everyone knows. A very beautiful song, actually. I knew exactly where it would enter the production; I didn't know the cast, I didn't know... It's based on a novel too; I didn't know what from the novel would reach the stage, but I knew that song and knew second by second what would happen during it. Simply listening to it, I made... and that was somehow the production's seed. That's where I started and everything was built from there. That apparently ordinary song, which I still hear on the radio sometimes, is sung live in the production, adapted a little, a little by Maria Alexievici. So music, to give the honest answer, yes.*

This practice of beginning a production with random elements is not unique to Romania. On the contrary, it has a lineage in devised theatre. *The People Show*, for example, began productions from diverse possible elements, from objects to an idea, a painting or a draft. Its productions thus involved reconciling seemingly contradictory ideas that forced specific aesthetic solutions.[7] Yet can we derive a specific method from such practices?

It would be eccentric, at least, to create a theatre education system teaching directors that productions must begin with a connection to a song. At the same

[7] Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, Devising Performance: A Critical History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 77.

time, it would be autocratic and unjust to say 'we must begin with a theme or text', omitting equally valid processes whose starting point cannot necessarily be theorised. We thus return to the argument at the chapter's beginning: as directors gain experience, they internalise part of their working process. At some point, a song, for example, may suffice to generate a valid process.

Returning to AI in theatre, particularly directing, one principal problem is that integration will involve existing systems. We are unlikely to see systems specially trained for theatre, still less AI systems created by each theatre-maker. Most probably, directors will use the same systems (currently most often the three major companies: OpenAI, Anthropic and Google), trained on the same datasets. I believe one healthy characteristic distinguishing human-directed from AI-directed productions will be this freedom of method and starting points. It will be crucial when discussing AI-assisted creation too, not only creation replaced by AI. I think directors who worked before the AI era will therefore have a significant creative advantage: they will use AI to support processes already shaped by their artistic practice. For directors developing professionally after AI's emergence and integration into almost every aspect of life, AI will probably influence creation more than vice versa. This argument would merit longitudinal investigation over the next ten to twenty years.

A particularly interesting situation is described by several directors concerning playing space. Botond Nagy, for example, told us: 'When I see the space from the designer, when I receive the set sketches, that's when things become best for me.'[8] Leta Popescu's position is similar: 'If I have a playing space which we can call, which we can call design, and the object or objects or the concept of the objects I work with, I've finished the production in my head.'[9] Directors also assemble teams. They choose designers, to whom they may give complete freedom, allowing the design concept to become the future production's starting point, a kind of (self-)induced creativity.

The designer's profession seems quite vulnerable to AI currently, like all visual arts professions. A generated rendering or sketch can save fees and long negotiations, especially in low-budget productions. What happens to theatre when these director-induced starting points become AI-generated? Does the quality of future productions change? Is this delegating creativity or merely innocent human–machine collaboration? Ultimately, directors here are not delegating their work to computational systems. They begin from an external, almost randomised input. If you like, it is as though directors do not

[8] Interview with director Botond Nagy for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

[9] Interview with director Leta Popescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

prompt AI and receive answers; AI prompts, and directors generate responses from that initial prompt. If today an AI-generated work can be copyright-protected because a human set the task, does using AI to stimulate an artist's own creativity diminish their authorship? Probably not, but exploring preparatory methods allows us to imagine where a technological rather than human factor might enter each director's future processes.

The conclusion of a comparative study of these twenty answers is that maps can be drawn and similarities sought, but there is no clear method of preparing a production in Romania, although the theatre system as a production system is fairly uniform, even across independent and state sectors. Directors' solutions for preparing and starting productions are not uniform even within individual practice. Each director's practice changes between productions. Sometimes this paradigm shift is imposed by themes, production conditions or particular concepts. In other cases, changing method becomes a method itself, as for Florin Caracala:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Of everything you do to prepare productions before the first rehearsal day, whatever that preparation looks like, what seems the most important part or element, without which you perhaps can't begin rehearsal day zero?*
>
> **Florin Caracala**: *I've never thought of it that way. Or, well, I have, but it isn't very fixed. It's... For me*

> *it's much more important, well, or if there has to be something, I think it's research, background research. Research on two levels which actually determines the route and the way, the starting point. I remember once saying I'd like none of my productions to resemble each other, none of mine. To resemble another. I don't know whether I've kept to that, but I can say my research methods before rehearsals are very different and contextualised from one, from one moment to another. I don't feel like saying from text to text or story to story or production to production or project to project. I think, I think it has a great deal to do with me and how I am at a particular time and place. I've developed some tools, but I don't want to stay tightly bound to them, so preparing a project becomes very fluid. I had a project where the only thing I, I did was develop three hours a day, whether together or broken up, three hours a day sitting in a dark room with nothing, I mean, with noise cancelling, doing nothing. I was trying to understand internal mechanisms, and that was the preparation.*

Regarding uniform practice across the system, Romanian state theatres still stage texts that directors come to put on stage. These are predominantly plays written by playwrights, staged in state theatres with comparable organisational charts, budgets and production systems. The profession therefore has an impression of uniform working methods. The image persists of directors choosing a text (or being offered one), then giving it a concept and staging it. Yet the interviews show extremely clearly that uniform

directorial methods and relationships to theatre texts are an illusion. Nicolae Mandea proposes placing the text at the end of creation, invoking Molière, Shakespeare and commedia dell'arte.[10] Delaying the final text until rehearsals or even the premiere is historically documented in eighteenth-century commercial theatre, as Sheridan's plays also show.[11] A text written in another era and originally staged by a director is a twentieth-century invention.

For interviewees who also author their performance texts, the dramatic text is merely a concluding element transforming work on the production into a concrete artistic product, as with Gianina Cărbunariu or Gabriel Sandu. Similarly, for directors working with dramaturgs, such as David Schwartz, the text is an outcome, not a starting point. Yet relationships to text are not uniform even among directors staging existing texts. For Cristian Ban, text comes last in preparation. Directors do not write it, but subordinate it to another beginning. For Belai Marcel, text comes first. For Mihai Ranin, it remains central to creation. For Florin Vidamski, textual analysis is fundamental:

[10] Interview with director Nicolae Mandea for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[11] Tiffany Stern, Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241.

> **Florin Vidamski**: *Analysis is fundamental, yes. Regarding your question. I have. But not as a separate operation. And not as the only tool, because it's very misunderstood. […] For example, this production Hoții in Odorhei, on which I worked a great deal and which had force too. There, for example, I went for two and a half weeks and worked only on textual analysis, because dramaturgically I'd made radical changes in meaning and needed to get into it and make it very concrete for them. That's why the material I take into rehearsals sometimes needs to be done at the table.*

Interestingly, different relationships to text do not seem to result from different schools or generations. We see different relationships among members of different generations, trained at different schools with different teachers, demonstrating that directing pedagogy transmits skills, not necessarily concrete working practices. Because theatre directors author contexts, they have the freedom to define their own working methods, since different methods can produce different aesthetic outcomes. Certainly, significant differences appear between directors writing their own texts and those staging existing ones, but this is not inherent in directing: it comes from directing and dramaturgical functions overlapping within one production. Regarding the possible return of the sole author, it would be interesting to study how the relationship to text changes when three functions overlap: playwright, director and

actor. The need for certainty accompanying stage performance could radically change this paradigm. Or, conversely, the total theatre author might open the door to much 'freer' production forms:

> *Many improv theater groups perform scripted sketches in addition to their improvisations, and many of these scripts originate in a particularly successful improvised scene. A scene that worked particularly well may be improvised again the next night, and refined through successive rehearsal improvisations. Several theater groups use improvisational processes in rehearsal as a way of generating script ideas—including Chicago's Second City, and the British film director Mike Leigh. The natural tendency of improvisation to result in the emergence of collective group patterns can thus be used productively to develop scripted material.*[12]

What does improvisation look like when director, dramaturg and actors are one person? How can a production evolve when authored by one person? And how does everything change when AI analyses the cultural product, supplies information and modifies a production in real time or between performances? As always, answers are few. Nevertheless, I am certain we will witness increasingly interesting theatrical forms.

[12] R. Keith Sawyer, Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 62.

2.2. The Table and the Stage

At university, I learnt that theatre begins at the table. Actors seem not to regard table work as integral to rehearsals, so I preferred to give it a separate subsection between preparation and stage work. In theatres, some actors look forward to table work; others cannot wait for it to end. Yet the whole system assumes it: particular spaces are allocated when work begins precisely for these readings. Production is structured so access to costumes, sets, props and stage comes late in rehearsals, as if one assumes you will begin at the table. I wish to stress that I am not against table work and in no way consider it outdated or useless. It has a place in my own directing, depending on the project. Nevertheless, I think we should examine whether it remains uniform practice across the system. On one side of the table are directors for whom table work is indispensable, such as Radu Olăreanu:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *On the first rehearsal day, what do you know about the future production?*
>
> **Radu Olăreanu**: *Some things I know, others I don't, I only intuit, and some, some I really don't know at all. And I like that, because I'll see where I go. No, I don't believe in a journey known from the outset millimetre by millimetre. I don't believe in that. Because many things can emerge along the way, interesting things that surprise you in a good sense,*

> *and then because, because you've constructed everything so precisely, these pleasant surprises you might have, you might, might not, not see them, miss them. […] But if I do a play, say Goldoni as I'm doing now, let's say, all... the complete text comes in, and I work on cuts, on absolutely everything, together with the actors at the table. Table work is very important to me. It is, I think it's the most important phase, this, these, these table rehearsals, which, mind you, mustn't go on too long, but some, some time is needed, and that's actually where I build the whole story with them, starting with the text.*[13]

For Belai Marcel, preparation means the director going through the dramatic text sentence by sentence before the first reading. Florin Vidamski has spent two and a half weeks at the table in some processes. For Radu Apostol, table work means searching for subtext:

> **Radu Apostol:** *After that I prefer spending a lot of time reading, at the table, let's say, but it's table work that isn't, because we relate to concrete reality, but what matters is having thoughts, having subtexts. We're always looking for subtexts. I'm obsessed with subtexts and this kind of acting where behaviour, thought, emotion and verbal utterance aren't all. They aren't. They aren't alone in one direction. I mean, nothing in life should be redundant. Even when we talk like this, we say things to each other. We don't*

[13] Interview with director Radu Olăreanu for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

> *say 100% of what we think. It isn't just one thing happening; many things happen simultaneously.*[14]

On the other side of the table are directors for whom text can be understood only within the future production's context. Leta Popescu believes text is understood much better standing up, so she avoids table rehearsals. Cristian Ban says he puts the text aside when rehearsing. He no longer looks at it, only at actors and what they do. There are also processes where conventional textual analysis is impossible because no finished text exists, as with Gianina Cărbunariu. Here, however, I would add a relevant qualification: not analysing a text's words does not mean there is no textual analysis. Dramatic text is more than words: it contains dramatic situations, conflicts, relationships and narratives. Collaborative processes construct precisely these elements traditionally conveyed through theatre texts. Researching and constructing together, improvising, textual analysis becomes unnecessary because the text is built on constructive elements already known to the creative team. Oana Leahu captures the idea of verbal action when discussing analysis:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Okay, and given that you write your texts in most cases, do you still do some kind of textual analysis?*

[14] Interview with director Radu Apostol for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

> **Oana Leahu**: *There's the textual analysis I do with actors. Because from the first reading you propose a scenario almost like in Commedia dell'arte, but how it fits the actors you want to cast, how you feel the text should be spoken, makes you change things and always analyse the text at the level of spoken action too. Because ultimately a word is a spoken action, not merely a way of stringing words together, but also at the level of characters, situations, things understood or things I need to emphasise more, or...*

In processes where text is written alongside production development, whether by playwright or director, analysing actions is no longer necessary. We need not seek subtext when production itself creates it, only then translating it into fixed text. Another reason I think table work is becoming less of a norm is the changing kind of text written for the stage. We still predominantly see classical narrative structures, but postdramatic theatre's influence is increasingly felt.

In 2025, writing „Bine, bă...", I realised in astonishment that it contained no conflict. I was going to make a production without conflict, though not without playable situations. Thinking in terms of realistic staging, I had to hold spectators' attention for an hour without a conflict. I chose this textual construction to illustrate an imploding system, how drug use's consequences flow into a 'normal world' without an outsider's intention being necessary. Moreover, I wanted to distract spectators—

adolescents—from the theme, drug use. I wanted it to seem merely 'another play about teenagers'. How could I analyse a conflict-free text at the table? What could I analyse in a production whose tension emerged between repetitive gesture and almost mechanically spoken text? Changing acting techniques also contribute, with Stanislavski's influence less felt in many theatre circles and alternative systems, such as Sanford Meisner's techniques, gaining popularity.

Whether conventional table work takes place or not, directors and, implicitly, creative collectives clearly work towards understanding dramatic material in depth. Whether this rests on analysing a performance text or a life situation only later converted into theatre, some dramaturgical analysis exists in almost every theatrical process. No interviewee contradicted this. On the contrary, for some, analysis concerns not necessarily text but understanding the world in which a production occurs. Éva Patkó told us:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *You spoke a little about research; you said it was incidental research. I happen to encounter different artistic or artistic products relating to the production I'm going to make. But regarding very deliberate research, I go to read, I go to search, I go to see, what materials do you consult, what research process do you have?*
>
> **Éva Patkó:** *One, I have to know that text's space very well, meaning whether that text has other texts*

too. Whether that author wrote more texts. At a minimum, I read, if possible, all their texts, as many as possible in the original language, not only translation, and learn as much as possible about the author, because we also bring our personal lives into productions, whether we want to show, whether not just very personal problems. You can talk, or very personal interests, likewise. And the author can do nothing else either. And then you find. Or at least I find very important elements I can, can have. Not necessarily implement in the production. Perhaps it isn't even necessary, but. But a universe becomes clearer, not only the text's universe I work on and the universe of that. I don't like saying the author's universe, but a universe where that text lives and that text can be as much, a universe where it can be as organic as possible, not just taken out or from. From this larger context. Then the themes it addresses, the text, or the themes I'd like to emphasise in this text or production: how is this theme seen today, for instance in contemporary music or literature? Okay, and how was it seen years ago? But I'm most interested in how it's seen today, and I'm given perspectives I probably, I wouldn't have thought of. So somehow in continuous dialogue with documents and research, it's continuous dialogue for me. That's why I need lots of time to. To prepare. Or that? I realised I need lots of time.

Today all this work of researching and understanding text can be outsourced to AI. Certainly many of us directors do so to some extent, from transcribing interviews or work journals to archiving

and retrieving information from our own databases. *NotebookLM* can analyse complex research collections and is an absolutely phenomenal research assistant. Almost every major AI's research functions are extremely competitive and increasingly shorten information searches. We wonder whether this practice has an impact. First, it will create a rupture between directors and the primary material generating information. Research will be AI-mediated, and AI in turn *subjective* about what it extracts and how it arranges it. Second, I think research becomes increasingly focused. Much directorial work understanding text/situation and conceiving productions is incidental: the chance of encountering materials or being in certain places while seeking information. Not only the book I read matters, but passing a statue or a square while reading it. Some chance encounters disappear with AI: we seek information facing the same screens and interfaces. Possibly obtaining similar answers because of how AI indexes information and sources.

At the same time, research has never been more interesting. Every major AI system lets you speak live with data you want to access, ask questions and receive answers from an apparently human voice. You can summarise immense quantities of data to prepare a production. And regarding table work, you can make this information extremely accessible to actors. In Romania, it is a familiar problem that

directors ask creative collectives to do particular readings which ultimately go unread. This is especially pronounced in theatres working 'classically', with directors delivering a solution and ultimate truth found 'in the text'. With AI, however, you can create infographics, presentation materials, podcasts (see NotebookLM), animations and presentations enormously helping overcome traditional barriers to transmitting information.

AI's impact on preparation and table work will therefore be enormous. I believe it is up to the system how far it exploits the technology's advantages rather than the 'simplification' it offers, the convenience of single-prompt answers. Perhaps this book's secondary argument should be 'no single prompts in artistic production'... Regarding table work specifically, how far could AI be used? It is clearly capable of depth, of genuine formalist textual analysis. It would be very easy to train AI on the performance text and one's own vision, enabling it to work at the table with actors, even multimodally. How much production time we could save! How easily each actor could personalise their process!

Yet textual analysis is more than understanding a text. It is a way of collectively formulating a shared production vision. Analysis at the table is artistic negotiation among creators. If this work were delegated to AI, where would negotiation move? Perhaps it would simply become impossible. AI

might therefore not only allow the 'sole author' to emerge in productions where directors absorb more traditional theatre functions, but even facilitate a single production vision more extensively in group processes. Unlike technological systems, when I introduce a director's notebook as a prompt into a creative collective, it imposes its artistic personality and significantly modifies the initial intention. Once AI, a system good at following prompts, mediates this encounter, things change. And having raised director's notebooks and working methods, let us look at how these production prompts, director's notebooks, are or are not present in Romanian theatre today.

3. Preparation That Erases Itself

3.1. The Paradox of the Denied Method

The method of directorial construction denies itself. Watching a production, you rarely see how it was built. There are exceptions, from Brecht onwards, through which theatre reveals its own means. Particularly in social or documentary theatre, it reveals the project's construction mechanism itself, not merely the cultural product's. In other words, creators and the means of creation are both shown, not only the stage mechanisms behind specific effects, as with Brecht.

Each stage of constructing the future production negates its predecessor. Research is negated by preparation, when directors seemingly put information aside and focus on the text or future construction. Preparation is negated by rehearsals' beginning, when directors put prepared material—the director's notebook, if one exists—aside to shift attention to the creative team. The creative team is negated by the production, when collaboration's

threads become hidden behind the finished construction. Arhiva Regizorală's interviews reveal three distinct mechanisms for negating constructive method: outright denial, forgetting and concealment.

Outright denial of method takes several forms. Florin Vidamski's interview is extremely telling, particularly given his closeness to David Esrig, a director who not only helped establish directing pedagogy in Romania but also strongly formalised his working method. **Forgetting** method is always retrospective:

> **Florin Vidamski**: *I start from this idea that, you know, I have no clarity about this preparation. What do you prepare beforehand? Everything differs from moment to moment, age to age, as you say, production to production, project to project. But at the same time you need something to come before the others with, you know? And mostly for yourself, most often.*[1]

Forgetting one's own method and preparation is not a failure of preparation. It is precisely a normal stage of preparation and knowledge. Mihai Ranin discusses this at length:

> **Mihai Ranin**: *However much I want to do new things, ultimately, when someone sees my productions, I've been told this, they're recognisable. I don't realise it, because I know everything new I*

[1] Interview with director Florin Vidamski for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

> *put into them. Research is constant. I don't think I'd go to the library, people don't really do that now we have the internet, but research can come from every direction. I mean, you take elements from everywhere possible, practically exhaust every information source before beginning to dream. Then you forget. This forgetting matters. When you start working on a production and feel you're an innocent. Everything is born when rehearsals start. Everything is new and you're amazed. Another teacher of ours, Dem Rădulescu, spoke about wonder. Theatre is wonder. I think he was very right, because if you lose this capacity to be amazed, to marvel constantly, to discover creation like a child, you practically become a theatrical functionary, which I don't want.*[2]

Creating a production is a form of knowledge transfer. Directors preparing learn their own production, or at least the path towards it. On the first rehearsal day, directors alone know their future production. They pass this knowledge to their actors. It is natural to forget preparation. No professional working reminds themselves: 'Here I apply Pythagoras' theorem, then I'll do X and Y...', because the process becomes intuitive. This intuition rests profoundly on knowledge, as Éva Patkó also stresses: 'But actually I know nothing. But to know nothing, I may end up knowing absolutely everything. But this knowing really concerns the surroundings, the

[2] Interview with director Mihai Ranin for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

context, the content, so practical work can be born there together.'[3]

Florin Caracala describes this path of forgetting in detail: 'Florin Caracala: And I began to feel, to feel I could shake off rules. So I think it's essential to the process, where nothing is compulsory, but it's part of the process: knowing nothing, knowing as much as possible, and at some point feeling you can, can stop depending on very firm structures.'[4] In his interview, Radu Nica said it is all right to say 'I don't know', because this brings the team closer. Depending on the collective's response, this directorial vulnerability becomes relational credit within it.

Theatres have an image of directors not being allowed to tell actors they do not know. Convention says directors unable to answer every question 'haven't done their homework'. This requires at least an impression of preparation. Yet preparation must not be too rigorous or visible, lest directors be called authoritarian, denying others creative freedom. The proportion of visible to invisible preparation varies significantly between state and private theatre, and even within the same theatre type, depending on organisational culture.

[3] Interview with director Éva Patkó for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[4] Interview with director Florin Caracala for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Forgetting preparation also protects directors against changing theatrical power structures. This by no means suggests Arhiva Regizorală participants dissimulated; rather, directors often deliberately give the impression in rehearsals of not knowing their destination, allowing the collective's sincere creative intervention. Cultivated not-knowing must not be confused with unpreparedness. Leta Popescu told me one cannot arrive completely unprepared. Botond Nagy said he does not know what his future production looks like, but always arrives with the playing space conceptually finalised. Katie Mitchell stresses the risks of working without prior preparation:

> *If the director goes into rehearsals with an unprepared script, they are reliant on the discoveries they or the actors make, and this way of rehearsing strikes me as somewhat precarious, over-reliant on in-the-moment chance discoveries. If those chance discoveries are not made, there is no fall-back position, and the production could end up reflecting the somewhat chaotic and uneven discovery (or nondiscovery) procedure where one moment is solved by a great discovery and the next moment is unclear because there was no strong discovery.*[5]

Forgetting concerns memory, and I believe very few directors cannot remember exactly the steps leading to their productions. Sometimes forgetting is

[5] Katie Mitchell, *quoted in* Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 55.

insufficient to 'escape method', leading to outright **denial**:

> **Florin Vidamski**: *Of course I wrote a doctoral thesis on Esrig's method. Honestly, even then I didn't think it was only that method, you know? It wasn't the method saving me and bringing me to genius. And ultimately, you know, method is a great danger, this word in theatre. Method, you know? Look, let's work according to my method. Or let's take 'the method'. And we know so many names we're tired of hearing. The same ones, you know, for hundreds of years, worn out. And you think carefully. Fine, yes, we know them cover to cover. Very good, they did their work well, were professional, but look what's happening with me, you know? What's very important for me, not necessarily for the actors, the actresses I work with, not for the creative team I bring into theatres. Not for students, women students in, in the schools where I've worked. Simply for myself alone.*[6]

There are jokes about directors not performing various bodily functions because 'it's been done before'. I cannot reproduce them in an academic book. The profession fears repetition, reaching the same results as our predecessors. Ultimately, this is the director's search for a way of working that creates the productions we want. That is why actors deny their masters much less than directors do. That is

[6] Interview with director Florin Vidamski for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

why far more formalised acting methods exist than directing methods. For actors, following Declan Donnellan's thinking, method is a safety net against performance stress. For directors, accepting a method means accepting 'craftsperson' status, which in a still romanticised artistic culture means cultural death. Yet I firmly believe no director lacks a method and all these methods have clear shared lineages, however original they claim to be. Florin Vidamski acknowledges his own method in the interview:

> **Florin Vidamski**: *I think every profession has a kind of research and learning things you can't explain. At this level where you think, search, read, research, you know. And for me this method reduces to one operation. If you want something extremely distilled. You know, I construct conditions and work with defences. Do I eliminate them? Whose? The defences of those I work with? Okay, theatre is hard, you expose yourself. And what does school teach you? First and foremost, and theatre afterwards, to create defences. But they're terrible. These defences, because they empty and negate you, negate you as an artist. And these conditions I propose in different situations and defences I work with, I eliminate them or make them visible as a choice, so people know that if it becomes beautiful, this moment is false. We must, must work on it again, cut it. It cannot be beautiful.*[7]

[7] *Idem.*

I would also clearly distinguish working method/technique from our perception of it as creators. Many directors identify different media they work with. Florin Vidamski says he works with defences. Brecht said he worked with tensions and contradictions. I say I work semiotically, composing signs. Florin Caracala says:

> **Florin Caracala**: *Now, I think theatre, which is a feat of strength through the capacity to make the artist vulnerable, depends greatly on our memories, and actually, when you launch a discourse, it depends precisely on your experiences and memories at that moment. So not repeating myself begins exactly from, from this point where I'm more interested in learn what I feel and understand how I feel. […] And I like surprising myself every time, learning, learning to read differently too. And I think that keeps something alive in... or, well, it works for me because, you see, every household has its customs. […] The technique is to have no technique and develop one every time.*[8]

Florin Caracala says his medium is his own techniques and working processes. Yet I would be very curious about an experiment observing and documenting externally every minute of work on several productions: one by Florin Caracala, one by Florin Vidamski, one by Alex Teodorescu and one by

[8] Interview with director Florin Caracala for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Bertolt Brecht. I think objective differences would be far less radical than our differing perceptions. Method is a set of techniques, and directing is fairly restrictive in this respect: we give actors instructions through physical actions, metaphors, situations and thoughts, trying to stir something in them, reaching an intelligible construction—not necessarily intellectually intelligible—using improvisation and construction techniques until we fix the final production. Sometimes we rearrange this sequence's pieces. Sometimes we focus more on one constituent part. Sometimes we use different aesthetics. But I think technical and methodological variations are practically small. What varies significantly is directors' perception of their own ensembles of techniques.

Beyond outright denial of technique comes the third operation erasing preparation: **concealment**. Concealment always begins with denial. Mihai Ranin told me: 'I don't believe in the director's notebook. Mathematical directors work like this, but their productions lack soul.'[9] In the same interview, he confided that he keeps a notebook by his bed to record ideas, particularly dreams, at night. I hide my dreams and ideas in specific solutions in my director's notebooks. Is there any real methodological

[9] Interview with director Mihai Ranin for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

difference? Both preserve inspiration in writing, one in something called a 'director's notebook', the other in a journal.

Alexandru Dabija's position is similar. On the one hand, he told me he abandoned director's notebooks after university. In the same interview, he elaborated:

> **Alexandru Dabija**: *And then all the preparation for a... all the preparation for a production, which is immense, so from this perspective roughly 80% of, of what I want to do, what I do, the work, consists of preparation, assimilating the theme, the text, contextual preparation, call it what you like, inspirations, ideas, but always coupled with working with actors. I think leaving traces in this profession, I don't want suddenly to enter metaphysics, but leaving traces in this profession is a vain attempt. So it's full... the vain is beautiful, connected with vanity too.*[10]

Is there an essential methodological difference between compiling a director's notebook involving textual and contextual analysis, structuring research and so forth, and what Alexandru Dabija proposes? Or between a notebook containing book extracts and a library full of books (or links, songs or anything else) read and underlined by directors, generating productions? I think denying the notebook is

[10] Interview with director Alexandru Dabija for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

concealment merely because most mature Romanian directors' preparation differs from how university taught them it should be structured.

The director's notebook is simply a name for an element of intangible cultural heritage. It cannot be confined to a recipe, because it is only the written record of a process that does not need to be recorded. I write in the director's notebook only as a mnemonic aid. I need to bring together all the preparatory materials I produce. The director then calls this material a production dossier, or a director's notebook. No process that the director has internalised needs to be recorded. If I have internalised the processes of situational analysis and character analysis through my training as a director, I will no longer have character profiles in my director's notebook. And as the notebook comes to contain fewer and fewer structured elements, I begin to say that I no longer keep director's notebooks, that they are dangerous, that this method does not work for me, that it kills my creativity.

This is why, in archival terms, I argue for preserving all of an artist's materials, not just their director's notebooks. I believe that when Romanian directors die, their materials should be archived and preserved, because together these materials bear witness to their artistic practice, under the particular circumstances in which the work itself cannot truly be preserved, even on film. Theatre is more than

what a camera recording the premiere in a wide shot can capture, but it is also more than the fragmentary recollections in artists' memoirs or theatre reviews. In 2022, following Lucian Giurchescu's death, I managed to bring all his director's notebooks to Romania. They are now held at the Faculty of Theatre and Film at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj. A great deal of material was left behind in Denmark. Lucian Giurchescu had piles and shelves full of magazines. Of every kind. Looking back, I realise that I did not even open them, regarding them as no more than an interesting detail of the director's life. What if he had underlined passages in them? What if they were part of his working process? What if, unlike Cristian Ban, who starts with music, he started with magazines? And I left those materials there out of ignorance, assuming that a director's notebook, as an archival document, ought to look a certain way.

If forgetting the process is internal to the director, concealing the preparation is directed outwards. Eugen Gyemant describes this concealment of preparatory work:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *What I hear you saying, and what I find very interesting, is that your working process is very... I don't want to say intuitive, but non-explicit, in the sense that you choose certain elements to prepare, but never set them down in writing. I've chosen an image, I've understood why I chose that image, but I don't write down why I chose it. Or you choose a piece of music that takes you*

close... for you, somewhere inside, it's very, very clear what you're looking for, but not necessarily... I mean, it isn't written down. I find this idea of an audiovisual director's notebook very interesting, but also very interesting to... interested to see how... what it looks like.

Eugen Gyemant: *That's also because, I mean, that's why I don't, I don't write things down any more, or not like that... so that in rehearsals it looks as if I've just thought of them on the spot. People appreciate 'Wow, how did he come up with that on the spot?' much more than 'Well, he's conscientious, he's done his homework.'*[11]

Concealing method is a specific process of sprezzatura, described by Paolo D'Angelo as characteristic of art precisely because of its wish to appear spontaneous.[12] Denying method has a significant history in world theatre. Stanislavski himself made it seem he did not know what he would construct, to force actors' independent decisions, something Maria Knebel calls his 'pedagogical ability'.[13] Peter

[11] Interview with director Eugen Gyemant for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[12] Columbia University Press, description of Paolo D'Angelo, Sprezzatura: Concealing the Effort of Art from Aristotle to Duchamp (2018), accesat la 18 September 2026, https://cup.columbia.edu/book/sprezzatura/9780231175821/

[13] Maria Knebel, quoted in Sharon Marie Carnicke, Stanislavsky in Focus (2009), discussed in Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 91–92.

Brook, for example, says: 'I can describe an exercise or a technique, but anyone who attempts to reproduce them from my description is certain to be disappointed. I would undertake to teach anyone all that I know about theatre rules and technique in a few hours. The rest is practice – and that cannot be done alone.'[14] Ivo van Hove describes preparation as a backpack kept in case of problems: his safety net, not something intended to intimidate actors.[15]

Eugenio Barba categorically concludes: 'Therefore I cannot, nor do I wish to, pass on a style, create a school or a method, or – to use a word that I don't like – define a personal aesthetic that others might share.'[16] At the same time, Barba and Odin Teatret conduct artistic research and teach courses and seminars. There is certainly transmissible content, even if not doctrinal. Barba uses a set of techniques and concrete attitudes towards them, including in his productions. Certainly they vary between productions. Certainly this does not make them imitable, but neither does it mean they do not exist. Denial of technique is therefore always metaphorical. Perhaps even a technique itself.

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[14] Peter Brook, The Empty Space (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 100.

[15] Ivo van Hove, interview in Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 95.

[16] Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), XV.

A special category of concealment is illustrated by Gary Stevens: 'I probably have an approach but I haven't formulated it.'[17] I think this concerns a natural avoidance of theoretical accountability. Ultimately, theatre directors are artists doing artistic work. Visual artists are asked about their processes much less often and less often required to defend them. Yes, both are asked about artistic products and may or may not answer, but directors lead a collective art and must answer questions—explicit or merely sensed—about their chosen method. Painters failing a painting waste only their own time, unlike directors. Painters exhibiting poor work publicly expose only themselves, whereas directors barely expose themselves, exposing actors much more. Directors must therefore justify methods and face theoretical accountability. 'Oh dear, look what that director said. A tyrant/Doesn't know what they're doing/Clueless.' So they say: I work as I work; I haven't formulated my method. Michael Polanyi says in this regard: 'We can know more than we can tell.'[18]

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[17] Gary Stevens, interview of 3 July 2003, quoted in Alex Mermikides, Negotiating creativity: an analytical framework for the study of group theatre-making processes (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2006), 254.

[18] Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 4.

Concealing method, particularly preparation, has its subtleties. Radu Nica says:

> **Radu Nica**: *No, I don't write things down, don't prepare very much. Don't initially prepare... Maybe... That's why I say... Perhaps our interview will be extremely short. No, I don't make a notebook, a director's notebook. Of course I prepare things, but not a notebook recording line by line... No. Rather, likewise. The preparing part is... very intuitive. Intuitions, images that may or may not relate: that's the first, first reading. Then, of course, I also divide scenes into micro-scenes, put in conflicts, define relationships, and roughly, roughly that's it. But often little remains of that. Still, this sense of Transylvanian duty makes me... do this operation too. But a director's notebook in the true sense, honestly, I no longer make one.*[19]

Minimisation is also concealment. Relationships, conflict, micro-scenes: this is already extremely concrete textual analysis. I cannot help wondering whether Romanian directing has a systemic complex about preparation, as if an overwhelming majority feel they do not do it well enough or meet certain standards. I have no statistical information, but this is my general impression after twenty Arhiva Regizorală interviews and four more for my doctorate. We must emphasise that denying working

[19] Interview with director Radu Nica for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

and preparatory methods is neither lying nor coyness. It is knowledge that cannot be formalised, or is thought not to require formalisation. It is tacit knowledge in an artistic system created by Esrig and Penciulescu, which Penciulescu himself called a *via negativa*:

> *Education in theatre can only follow a via negativa: learning what you must not learn (because what you must do cannot be learnt) to achieve an exceptional state of vigilance, equal to every possibility that can be grafted onto reality.*[20]

I think this is also why directing as a profession in Romania is shrouded in mystery for the general public, a 'something' practised behind closed doors.

Although seemingly cerebral, theatre directing is embodied knowledge. Schmidt and Deppermann argue that embodied knowledge is ineffable and strongly resists translation into conceptual categories.[21] Perhaps it becomes mysterious even to directors as they practise. At some point, skills coincide so closely with professional needs that practice becomes mystery: productions happen and

[20] Radu Penciulescu, „Implicarea actorului," Teatrul 12 (1968): 86–87.

[21] Axel Schmidt and Arnulf Deppermann, "Showing and Telling—How Directors Combine Embodied Demonstrations and Verbal Descriptions to Instruct in Theater Rehearsals," Frontiers in Communication 7 (2023): 4, https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.955583.

directors know how to make them. Romania has sufficiently few directors for this to be possible: a profession of at most a hundred active people can remain mysterious within a marginal cultural sector. Could this exclusively embodied knowledge give the system, or at least the profession, resistance to AI? Ultimately, abundant acting materials exist, but I do not know AI systems' competence in analysing and coordinating acting. Considerably fewer directing manuals and treatises exist. Perhaps these sources are insufficient to train systems 'to replace us'. If directing knowledge is not transmissible through formalisation, the profession itself is fairly secure against AI. Robin Nelson also writes about this knowledge:

> *It may not ultimately be possible—and it should not be the aim—to make the tacit thoroughly explicit (that is, expressed as propositional knowledge in writing). That would constitute an attempt to transpose practices into words which practitioners rightly resist on the grounds that if they could write it they would not need to animate, paint, perform, construct...*[22]

Baldassare Castiglione calls *sprezzatura* the nonchalant attitude concealing effort, making a task

[22] Robin Nelson, Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles and Methodologies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 47.

seem almost unconsidered.[23] Sprezzatura is not this book's epigraph by chance. It precisely embodies interviewees' attitudes: either no method exists, or it is unformalised, mysterious or something to conceal. Paolo D'Angelo demonstrates that *sprezzatura* is an artistic quality traceable throughout art history, from Aristotle to Duchamp.[24] Directors' concealment of preparation is therefore eminently artistic. Concealing method itself demonstrates this procedure is part of the director's art. Perhaps this makes Katie Mitchell's title *The Director's Craft*, rather than *The Director's Art*, all the more inspired.

Reasons for concealment are many: avoiding formalisation and desiring originality, even in relation to oneself; wishing to grant others freedom; and wishing to escape the authoritarian director's image. Emma Rice speaks precisely about the impression 'visible' preparation can have on actors: 'I tell them what to do a lot; we don't sit around. I run the first bit of the process quite tightly. [...] I've worked out quite a careful process. Which I know, if I was an actor, I'd go 'OK, I'm not in control of what

[23] Baldassarre Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, quoted in Paolo D'Angelo, Concealing the Effort of Art from Aristotle to Duchamp, trans. Sarin Marchetti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 7.

[24] Paolo D'Angelo, Concealing the Effort of Art from Aristotle to Duchamp, trans. Sarin Marchetti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), passim.

happens, somebody else is in control', and then they have a space to be free.'[25]

I believe the opacity of directors' methods and preparation makes theatre vulnerable to unethical AI use. There is no professional consensus—and there cannot be—on how productions should be prepared and made, so professional oversight methods cannot establish that technology is being abused in preparation or construction. Its use can be concealed as easily as the process itself. Today tools can identify AI-written text. Likewise images. I do not think we will have such a tool for productions. If, as a director, I ask ChatGPT to write my director's notebook, nobody will know, because I will rehearse it and produce a performance. If I go home and ask Claude to make each day's rehearsal plan, this will remain invisible.

I am not saying directors' lack of consensus is bad, nor that it can be resolved. I do not think the solution is for all Romanian directors 'tomorrow' to make theatre 'THIS WAY', whatever that might mean. Yet this does make AI use easy to conceal and its limits difficult to enforce. I cannot help noticing how directorial *sprezzatura* resembles AI. Managers approach directors to request productions on themes

[25] Emma Rice, interview in Duška Radosavljević (ed.), The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 101.

or texts mutually agreed—or not. They approve materials, casting, allocated resources and personnel, then attend the preview/premiere. Somehow the production appears between these points. Users enter prompts into AI chats, allocate resources through subscriptions or credits, and await results. The generation process is opaque; the result 'happens' between prompt and viewing the output. Could we cut out the middle person? Could managers enter prompts directly and ask participants to rehearse autonomously from AI output? This is a major vulnerability.

3.2. Countervoices: Preparation That Liberates

The tendency towards *sprezzatura* identified in interviews is, ultimately, only a tendency. It is not a general rule of Romanian directing. A whole range of directors not only acknowledge preparation but expose it. For David Schwartz, serious preparation makes freedom and spontaneity possible:

> **David Schwartz**: *Because whether you like it or not, in the very short time we have to get to know one another and quickly make something, we'll resort to first-thought solutions. I mean, solutions we know. And if directors don't, actors and actresses certainly will, because they know they must finish a production in a month, panic sets in, we must*

> *quickly make something, so they'll do what comes most readily, without question. Even something apparently experimental and risky becomes a collection of clichés, because everyone works in desperation to finish quickly. Actually, it's the other way round. The most serious preparation possible allows us to be free and creative and as spontaneous as possible in rehearsals.*[26]

This is the old paradigm of freedom through constraint. It resembles thinking in poetry, whose rigid structure demands greater creativity and technique. In the same interview, David Schwartz considers solutions prepared at home emergency solutions, not disclosed to actors immediately but used when things do not go to plan. This is the experienced director's attitude: knowing they can generate real, valid stage solutions, while conscious of their responsibility as process leader.

Similarly, Oana Leahu continues making director's notebooks, though differently from what she asks of students:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *I'm your first-year student, asking what a director's notebook should look like. What must it contain?*
>
> **Oana Leahu**: *A director's notebook must have a concept. Elements of directorial vision, meaning images, and most importantly directorial segments.*

[26] Interview with director David Schwartz for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

The text must be broken into stage actions, because we see words on stage, we see life, stage. I'd certainly like character profiles for every character from the director's viewpoint, because sometimes actors help by making their own profiles, another kind of research within the team. And I'd like to know how you want the production to look spatially, the costumes, what music, what light, how you'd like it to be. And if you can put that into words, it means a great deal, because meeting actors, you must explain it in words first of all. And you aren't always, well, on ChatGPT, or always waiting for AI information and... No. You must say in your own words what situation you put them in and what you expect.

Alex Teodorescu: *And now I'm no longer your first-year student, Oana, how do you realistically make your notebook now? After working on productions for so long and ultimately internalising many mechanisms inherent in notebooks, what has it become for you?*

Oana Leahu: *It remains a director's notebook, no longer so neat or balanced, not a student notebook, but certainly containing the production concept. Often set, costume and puppet sketches, lighting and sound suggestions and character profiles, even very, very short ones; those certainly, it contains the performance text, and on that I make directorial segments.*

Oana Leahu's position certainly also owes something to her particular theatre practice. She specialises in children's theatre and writes her own

texts. I think rigour as a playwright imposes a certain rigour on the director in turn. If neither director nor playwright knows exactly what the production will look like, where does production begin? Moreover, children's productions tend to have shorter production periods without necessarily less difficulty perceived by teams. On the contrary, many require numerous props, musical theatre and technical coordination, even if character construction's depth differs. Short production periods therefore impose much greater preparatory rigour on directors of children's theatre.

The director's notebook can contain more than a written account of the future production or research materials. It is primarily an organisational tool: it can anticipate the structure of rehearsals, working tasks, assignments for the designer, composer and actors, requirements lists, and so on. For Cristian Ban, for example, preparing a production means estimating how many hours and rehearsals it will require. At the beginning of a project, he negotiates the number of rehearsal hours with theatre managers, rather than focusing on the date of the premiere. The reason is that three months of rehearsals may amount to only forty actual rehearsal days, because the actors are touring, performing and doing all sorts of other things. Significantly, Cristian Ban seemed almost embarrassed by this way of working:

Cristian Ban: *Because that way you can rehearse for three months, but you actually do forty rehearsals, because the actors have seven thousand shows and there's a festival as well and all that, so it's more honest to negotiate the number of rehearsals, because, you know, forty-five rehearsals, I need this much... And then I try to divide it up as well: five rehearsals, no more, for readings, ten rehearsals to work out the structure, ten rehearsals to try improvising, five rehearsals for run-throughs. I try, to try to have control over...*

Alex Teodorescu: *The structure...*

Cristian Ban: *Over the structure, yes, yes... over... I know it's not very romantic and artistic and that it's better to be bohemian and to say...*

Alex Teodorescu: *Do you think it's better? Or do you think it's a narrative that...*

Cristian Ban: *I think it's nicer, more bohemian somehow. I mean, it's not romantic, to put it no more strongly, but it helps me, and I have the number of rehearsals in all my notebooks, and that's also taught me to work out roughly how many rehearsals I need when I'm doing a classic text, or a text I write with the actors in rehearsals, or when I'm rewriting a text, and then, looking back at the number of rehearsals as well, I know roughly how long a particular production takes me. So I'm quite an engineer, quite mathematical about this, about organising rehearsals.*

The impression persists in Romanian theatre, then, that the director is an artist and, like any other artist, is subject to the romantic myth of the

bohemian attitude and the anti-scientific stance. I am sure this is a subconscious current of thought, which nobody articulates explicitly, but from the interviews I sense this fear among directors of admitting to their 'engineering' side, as though preparing a production were something to be ashamed of. At the same time, not preparing a production is also something to be ashamed of. We are caught in a systemic paradox. Răsvana Cernat's attitude is relevant here in relation to *sprezzatura*:

> **Răsvana Cernat**: *Yes, for me the director's notebook. I think it's an extraordinarily, extraordinarily useful tool, provided it's done properly, I mean... because when I was a student too, and I still see this with lots of students, I was terrified, terrified of having to produce this director's notebook. I couldn't for the life of me understand what it was for, and it just seemed like a chore where I had to write, churn out pages and pages, fill up all this space, I didn't really know with what, but it had to be there. […] It's a useful tool as long as everything you do, from research and then analysis, characterisation, breaking down the theme, the conflict, the subsequent analysis of the play, all of that is useful to the extent that it then helps you realise it on stage. Otherwise, it's a very good and useful exercise, but it remains an intellectual exercise. And you always have to bear in mind that, how shall I put it? The ultimate aim is to construct a, a... a scene, an act or a production?*

Sprezzatura means that directors conceal precisely this trace of the necessary preparation, of the constructive elements they need to practise their

profession. Is it not, to some extent, absurd to feel ashamed of a pragmatic need your profession creates? It is as though painters were ashamed of needing to draw lines beneath a painting before they could paint it... Several voices in the interviews advocate preparation. Radu Olăreanu, for example, considers it important to retain and record the first instinct one has about a play. This is a middle position, advocating neither forgetting nor erasure. I venture to say that all the directors interviewed prepare their productions, although to different degrees and described differently. Nevertheless, there is no consensus about the idea of preparation or directors' obligation to prepare productions. And this brings the dangers described in the previous subsection. Perhaps this preparatory practice deserves to be placed in an international context:

> **Simon McBurney**: *...a producer has an idea and goes to a director and designer, who help to shape it, then they find an actor and they fill in the rest of the company around that actor. I'm not saying that this system can't work but on the whole it squeezes the lifeblood out of theatre and it works against the natural origins of the piece. [...] [directors who] work out everything in advance [...] produce theatre that is constricted by a straitjacket of ideas and concepts, having no natural relationship to itself, no natural growth.*[27]

[27] Simon McBurney, interview in Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (ed.), On Directing (1999).

Katie Mitchell: *Directing is a job that requires considered and careful preparation before rehearsals begin.*[28]

Max Stafford-Clark: *Yes, behind you on that shelf there are a number of scripts, pull down any one with a little white label on. That's Top Girls, that's the play I have yet to work on, rehearsal starts in May. Just open it, and you'll see that I have actioned an intention behind every change of thought.*[29]

The old dream of the actor is to do without the director. The old dream of the director is to transform the actors into marionettes. Fortunately, such dreams do not come true. It is difficult, and inadvisable, to present oneself to the audience without first having been seen by an outside eye. And a human is not a puppet, but a breathing, thinking being.[30]

[28] Katie Mitchell, The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

[29] Max Stafford-Clark, interview in Duška Radosavljević (ed.), The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 68.

[30] Patrice Pavis, Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theatre Today, trans. Joel Anderson (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 262.

4. Discreet Authority

4.1. Authority Recognised, Not Imposed

One principal reason cited above for directorial *sprezzatura* concerns authority before the creative collective. Directors preparing productions, thinking through characters and bringing stage solutions 'from home' can easily be perceived as imposing a theatrical product that completely negates other co-creating artists' creative identities. The extensive discussion of directorial authority in specialist literature and theatres can be reduced to two simple questions: who decides what, and how are decisions made? My position here is certainly defensive: a plea not only to protect directing's function but to preserve directors as production authors, whatever power structure each team uses. In other words, I vehemently oppose dissolving the theatre director.

I also wish to make an extremely simple argument: directing will always involve authority. The directing function involves deciding and taking responsibility, whether it belongs to one individual—the classical director-author—or is distributed

among several through collaborative practices. Directors' power and authority divide into three key elements: (a) contributing creatively and having those contributions recognised; (b) the collectively recognised capacity to give instructions others follow; (c) deciding which elements remain in the public production.[1] Point a is negotiable within the team. I believe even the most authoritarian processes allow every artistic team member creative contributions. Points b and c, however, belong exclusively to the directing function. Note: this does not mean directors cannot delegate authority. It does not mean they cannot democratically decide whether to retain an element through voting or discussion. It does not mean their capacity to decide what remains and indicate what must be done becomes aggressive or oppressive.

Eugenio Barba discusses his directorial power in these terms:

> *What is the particular trait of a director? A personal need which makes him choose a role of power: the ability to make decisions, to implement them and take responsibility for them. This entails commitment and effort. I know I have great power. Everything I do leaves traces: how I speak, with whom I speak, if I*

[1] Alexandra Mermikides, Negotiating creativity: an analytical framework for the study of group theatre-making processes (PhD diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2005), 71.

> *keep silent, if I smile or am serious. With a word or a grimace, I can depress a person for a whole month. [...] Power, or authoritativeness, is necessary for the director to incite, not subdue. To create mutual stimuli.*[2]

Thus, authority is not something that happens to directors. It is something they must negotiate, manage, earn and charm into being. Authentic authority arises from deciding and taking responsibility, functioning not as subjugating force but as energy moving production forward. In contemporary political theories, this authority can become oppressive, something both actors and directors experience. Gary Stevens considers directing authority no more fascist than painters painting or sculptors sculpting. He describes himself as a benign dictator wearing a paper crown, his authority's benign character arising from personal charm.[3]

Similarly, Mike Alfreds discusses directors' enormous power, conferred simply by status. Flattering as it is, this power must not be taken too seriously, taken for granted or exploited. It must be taken with a pinch of salt. Power over actors is reinforced by some actors' view of directors as omni-

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[2] Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House (London: Routledge, 2010), 152.

[3] Gary Stevens, quoted in Alexandra Mermikides, Negotiating creativity: an analytical framework for the study of group theatre-making processes (PhD diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2005), 260.

potent and omniscient, which may lead directors themselves to believe they possess these qualities.[4] Authority can be managed in several ways within collectives. One is to see directors as facilitators rather than bosses. Kimberly Senior describes facilitative directing as redistributing power within hierarchy, not denying hierarchy; this supports moving from force to recognised authority without equating charisma with democratic method.[5]

Authority concerns relationships. Nobody wants to be told what to do; we all want freedom, up to a point. Our perception of authority figures, however, depends on factors including relationships with power within social structures we have belonged to—family, education, training, jobs—and society's systemic relationship with power, where formerly totalitarian Romania has particular sensitivities, but especially specific relationships within each power structure. Leaders who assume leadership rather than merely boss status, who are fair, share their teams' values and possess charisma, will be accepted much more easily than those relying strictly on office. Their authority will be more readily recognised and tolerated. Attitude and behaviour indicate tolerance of authority more strongly than the objective freedom a

[4] Mike Alfreds, Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007).

[5] Kimberly Senior, "Facilitative Directing Centers the Art," HowlRound Theatre Commons, June 1, 2026, https://howlround.com/facilitative-directing-centers-art.

system permits subordinates. This is equally true in directing, as Răsvana Cernat stresses:

> **Răsvana Cernat**: *On the other hand, if you start from 'I'm the boss and I want to...' and immediately behave like the boss, the game is lost from the start.*
>
> **Mihai Gligan**: *Especially at twenty.*
>
> **Răsvana Cernat**: *Especially at twenty, because ultimately this is precisely about being clever enough to establish yourself without saying 'I'm the boss!' And to...*
>
> **Mihai Gligan**: *Manage to...*
>
> **Răsvana Cernat**: *...earn that status.*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *And how do you transmit that? At university I had many experiences where teachers said, this is how you must... manage here, you know? A vague transmission of 'convincing actors'. How? How do you transmit this soft skill... It is a soft skill.*
>
> **Răsvana Cernat**: *Well, that's exactly it. I think, I think... and it's something we keep discussing with... every time, with colleagues teaching, teaching together, we discuss it with students: it's a profession where you depend on soft skills like air, and the ability to, to know how to, how to... knowing how to work with people is fundamental because, although it's a profession... Well! You'd say... directors are a point in the middle... the universe's centre; without, without knowing how to work, to build a team, they're dead.*[6]

[6] Interview with director Răsvana Cernat for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

Romanian theatre's present situation complicates recognition of directing authority. Some directors indeed manage power unpleasantly, creating tension and rebellion among actors. On the other hand, young directors, as we discussed with Răsvana Cernat, struggle to establish themselves constructively. I speak from experience: my first state-theatre production was Under (re)Construction at the Marin Sorescu National Theatre in Craiova, starring Natașa Raab. Every actor had more theatrical experience than I had years of life. Even this year, aged twenty-nine, I entered a state theatre where a stage manager was indignant: 'Who is this to tell me how to do my job?! I have forty years' theatrical experience!' Even a head of production offered directing advice because 'you're young, don't take offence'. Of course I take these events with humour, but they show institutional theatre's attitude towards very young people placed in power by their profession. Ultimately, directors coordinate all departments when staging in a state theatre.

A third vulnerability concerning authority is the tendency for actors to direct. Causes include low cultural funding, overambitious management plans and short production lifespans in provincial theatres. When actors without specialist training direct in their own theatres, or directing authority comes from a distance-learning master's, directors' status before actors is compromised. Why listen to you when I

could do what you do? Please do not misunderstand: I advocate multiple specialisations and everyone's right to develop professionally. Yet being a carpenter is hard when everyone feels expert because they assemble Ikea furniture. This does not mean that among self-declared specialists without 'papers' there are no genuinely talented carpenters making memorable productions. Nor does it mean directing authority is not weakened. Mihai Ranin speaks of authority needing recognition rather than imposition:

> **Mihai Ranin**: *Another teacher of ours, Dem Rădulescu, spoke about wonder. Theatre is wonder. I think he was very right, because if you lose the capacity to be amazed, to marvel constantly, to discover creation like a child, you practically become a theatrical functionary, which I don't want. I entered this profession for joy, pleasure, a kind of hedonism. And I continue that way because I'm not authoritarian. Authority certainly comes from culture and self-confidence and others recognising you as such; authority is recognised, not imposed along with... I really like my age, because over time things have settled very clearly in my head and I work very easily. I work better with actors and am more interested in that than when young. Then I was more interested in form, the production's form. I cared less about what actors did within these forms, provided they didn't destroy what I proposed as the production.*[7]

[7] Interview with director Mihai Ranin for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Directors' attitudes towards productions and collectives will vary with their age. The same will happen to the recognition of their authority. At the same time, through work, directors further internalise the *soft skills* Răsvana Cernat discussed. Moreover, their status within the system solidifies as they work. As they become known within the profession, the collective's attitude towards them becomes predictable. The same rehearsal will be tolerated from Silviu Purcărete but might not be tolerated from a beginner, for several reasons. First, Purcărete has demonstrated the quality of his productions, and the collective wants to be part of 'a Purcărete production'. Second, his status means actors will tolerate certain tasks more readily from him. Purcărete can train me, an actor with twenty years' experience, but you, a beginning director, should not waste my time with useless exercises: I know how to do the job. Third, concerning predictability, when Purcărete comes to work in a theatre, people know how he usually works. Everyone is prepared for that kind of process. Beginners must define this process, and it must be accepted. How do beginners secure that acceptance?

> **Leta Popescu**: *I think directors have power and absolute power, unfortunately. Too much power, I think things aren't limited to that power. I always think, look, what great power do directors have? Like managers' great power, or your great power, it's*

> *others listening. If they don't, you have no power. That's probably why war happens... If nobody listens, I shoot you; that's where it leads, you know? If you disagree, out comes the machine gun. That happens in undemocratic forms nobody wants. So before shooting, which nobody wants, actually we're, we're sharing our universe, and others must subscribe to it. Our great power isn't force or power itself, 'because I said so', but the charisma making people listen. So that power equals charisma, somehow. And charisma differs: you can fall for someone outgoing, intellectual, shy, all kinds of things, ways of being. That's why directors and actors have different relationships. I work very well with certain actors. Others don't work well with that category. Colleagues have recommended actors, and when I began working with them I thought, heavens help me!*

Perhaps we should not divide directors into those with and without authority, autocrats and democrats. Perhaps not even charismatic and uncharismatic directors. Perhaps we should distinguish processes in which directors meet suitable or unsuitable actors. We seem to return to casting's importance, as in Chapter 2. Here casting does not mean choosing the best actors for each role, having the 'most talented', experienced or versatile directors. It means identifying, among the choices available, actors suited to the project you want, not only the future production but its process. It is interesting to ask whether authority can be separated from power:

> **Éva Patkó**: *My work is directing a production. That's my job, naturally, and what I want to do. But that's my job. Bringing structure and decisions depends on it. But not, not because I'm cleverest or somewhere high up a pyramid, but simply because that's my job. If I relate that way, we all have this freedom. To create the maximum possible in our work. But I must be super prepared in mine. And roughly that. That's what I expect or hope from collaborators too: actors very prepared for their role or process. Whether we use a fixed text or one developed during the production, not during rehearsals, doesn't matter, it's a detail. But I must be very prepared in my work.*

If my authority must be accepted because I am the director, because otherwise I cannot practise, that does not make me superior or more powerful. I like the idea of not sitting at a table for a conversation, because it usually puts you on opposite sides, in opposition. Walking together is recommended, so both face the same direction and do something together. Why does it matter if I called the walk, or know our destination while you do not? I think directing authority should be like that. Yet I know this idealises theatre's reality naively. Directors enter theatres that are not tabula rasa: they carry internal conflicts, tense histories and unwritten protocols that too often return discussion to power.

Éva Patkó also discussed expectations that directors play a role. I developed this argument in

several Archive interviews and repeat it here: actors prepare in rehearsals and play roles in performance. Directors prepare before rehearsals and play roles during them, having no function in the finished performance. This role can vary: performing unpreparedness, concerning *sprezzatura*, or performing preparedness with every answer. I can perform gentleness or authority, fear or confidence. I do not think this is manipulation, but creating a process, an artistic rather than institutional one. Creating a process means creating states, atmospheres, rhythms and relationships feeding into the finished production.

When we describe directing in these terms, it seems the safest profession in the world in the face of AI. How could an AI system acquire these soft skills and perform the director's rehearsal role? I believe the transition towards AI systems in theatre will be gradual and subtle, with systems integrated into different production stages without other participants being aware of them. Recently, during a working process, actors supplied character proposals recognisably written with AI. I too have had scenes where I used AI to draft text sequences—although it fails miserably—or research processes where I used AI without considering it appropriate to disclose this. And informal discussions with colleagues tell me this is absolutely widespread, regardless of directors' age or experience. What is interesting is that we will not be able to speak of AI taking over

theatre as happens in marketing today. For many small firms, entire marketing departments can now be replaced 100% by AI systems (I do not know how this statement will age).

Directors are unlikely to disappear and theatres ask AI systems to stage productions. Human soft skills will probably remain directors' province, though significantly influenced by AI throughout preparation and production. Certainly, this is a forecast. Only sixty-nine days before the Wright brothers' flight, a New York Times editorial, 'Flying Machines Which Do Not Fly', on 9 October 1903, claimed humans would take between one and ten million years to fly. All this book's forecasts, however grounded in archival material and current technologies, may be brutally and rapidly contradicted.

If AI influences directors' creative path, is this not also delegating power and authority to AI? If I enter rehearsals with an entirely AI-built director's notebook, who retains authority? And power? I will use my skills and charm, but all rest on knowledge not mine. I become the emissary of an artistic product I did not author. A means, almost a tool, a set of social skills realising another force's artistic product. Before surrendering to this posthuman scenario, let us consider another hypothesis.

One research theme that would interest me would be to create a complete director's notebook and distribute it among several directors, asking

them to realise its production as closely as possible to the original theatrical intention within several creative collectives. What happens to directing power in this case? Is power mine as the initial author of the original notebook, or theirs as those managing rehearsals? Is directing the art of the final production or of rehearsal? Is the director an author, a stager or an organiser of the project, following the Hungarian term? I do not think there is a precise answer, because this is an experimental situation, although AI may soon make it a real theatrical encounter. I do think, however, that it matters that we can separate directing power from directors' position as production authors. This complements *sprezzatura*, where authorship is retained but the process's traces disappear along with the effort of conception. Power, by contrast, manifests only in relation to the process, independently of authorship, sole or otherwise. Perhaps the directing function is therefore not single but dual: semiotic authorship and process coordination.

All these positions are reinforced by Archive interviewees. For David Schwartz, 'directors are coordinators. Whether they like it or not.'[8] Florin Vidamski also distinguishes coordination from authorship: 'directing does not mean imposing an

[8] Interview with director David Schwartz for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

idea, but simply being able to organise this collective energy.'[9] Without wishing to quote Spiderman, authority entails great responsibility, as Oana Leahu remarks: 'Directors have power and freedom, but in my view a great deal of responsibility.'[10] Radu Apostol too prefers responsibility to power: 'I think someone must assume the task of deciding, not from authority or force, but simply as responsibility.'[11] Then Radu Olăreanu returns us to attitudes towards power: 'People must be encouraged, not whipped.'[12]

Within the author–coordinator dichotomy around which directorial authority revolves, Nicolae Mandea's perspective merits mention:

> **Nicolae Mandea**: *Beyond this dialectic of conflict between the play's two versions comes a second reading, the contemporary person's reading. And this intersection produces performance. Ultimately we're interested not in how well it's understood, but sometimes how well it's misunderstood because someone thought of something else. But they convey what, what they thought; how much they use the text comes second. To the subordinates of this*

[9] Interview with director Florin Vidamski for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

[10] Interview with director Oana Leahu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

[11] Interview with director Radu Apostol for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[12] Interview with director Radu Olăreanu for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

> *dictatorship, the dictatorship being that of the production's idea.*[13]

Drawing a corollary from Nicolae Mandea's formulation, it is precisely directors' status as production authors, as those formulating the production's idea, that places them in power. This returns us to the argument above: what if the production's idea is no longer the director's? I too have treated the directing function as a whole in this book, because coordinative authority, power and responsibility are offered to me for two reasons: I have an idea that I stage, and I am assumed to possess the means to coordinate a team towards that result. Returning to this, directing cannot therefore be divided into authorship and coordination: it remains a unified function realised through two directorial means, authorship and coordination. Only here can directors delegate. They can co-author through collaborative practices, remaining production coordinators. Or they can delegate authorship to an external idea not their own—through AI, pastiche, copying or any other means, including systematically delegating this attribute to other co-creators, among them dramaturgs, designers, composers and actors. Conversely, they can delegate coordination to stage managers, directing assistants, répétiteurs and

[13] Interview with director Nicolae Mandea for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

so forth, retaining authorship exclusively, similarly to how Renaissance painting schools functioned.

Because directors' authority and power are not objective features of production, as I have shown, but depend on attitudes, charisma and the conventions of the system in which a production is made, we can conclude the following: power and authority behave similarly to preparation. Directors have the same capacity to deny power ('but I am only another creative team member'), conceal it ('What a good idea you had'—when the idea had already been prepared and induced) or forget it ('improvise, and I'll see what I choose afterwards'). Although power and preparation are different aspects of directing, both can be subordinated to *sprezzatura* as a way of concealing the means of production and the effort involved.

4.2. Other Masks of Power

We should acknowledge that directing occurs not only in cultural production institutions, but in other cultural contexts with other purposes. The remarks above generally concern traditional production, a director and creative team making a finished product. They do not concern collectives collaborating over long periods, where long-term coexistence and members' deep knowledge of one another can more readily erase project-team bounda-

ries. There are also contexts where the performance itself is not the ultimate aim. In forum theatre or cultural interventions, directing power is drastically limited because the aim is no longer exclusively theatrical. Education too has a particular power structure:

> **Florin Vidamski**: *And in my case, you know, I use this authority, but simultaneously give absolute freedom. Yet in school training I withdraw my power as much as possible. So there, you see, you too say you tell your students. It's another perspective, because students have no defences of their own yet. There I become only a companion, not an authority. You know?*[14]

Even when directors work with acting students, as in Cluj's Hungarian-language school, where semester examinations are prepared with acting students by 'real' directors rather than directing students, as in the Romanian-language school, performance can no longer be this process's primary aim. Performance and production become subordinate to students' training needs. What I stage as a director and the tasks I impose during work concern not my desire for authorial expression, but students' need to pass through particular stages. To some extent, this happens in theatres too.

[14] Interview with director Florin Vidamski for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

It is particularly interesting to enter a theatre and recognise the traces of those who directed there. Actors are trained, autonomous artists. At the same time, they experience processes from within rather than outside. How they are exposed to techniques, directorial demands and tasks can therefore significantly affect their general state and receptiveness, perhaps even more than their organisational culture. Working in a state theatre, and elsewhere too, directors always fulfil a pedagogical function. Alongside production tasks, they undertake training tasks with the team. Rarely, however, will the pedagogical task jeopardise or significantly affect production. Within education, these priorities are reversed.

Directing authority gives the working process security. At school too, I was taught this idea of directors whose clear direction allows actors to express themselves freely. Actors carry the stress of public exposure. Without security, they resort to the defences Florin Vidamski discussed, to their own previously successful solutions. Mihai Măniuțiu told us in a class that actors are like horses: if they sense their rider's uncertainty, they throw the rider off, because they live with the awareness that injury will mean death. In this sense, responsibly exercised directing power can be translated into care for the team through the predictability and security it creates:

> **Gabriel Sandu**: *Once I know what I want and where I'm going, the stages are somehow very clear. Of course they adapt to results; perhaps one day we fail, leave it until tomorrow, and instead of progressing must fix what didn't work. But I've noticed people and teams really appreciate predictability. I know that from working under other creators, depending on... depending on performing and so forth, one of the most distressing things is... not knowing what's happening. When I tell people: look, this week we do this, next week we try that, the final week is run-throughs, adjustments, whatever, people understand and they come with you. Giving them the impression you don't know even from moment to moment creates a little anxiety and panic, not necessarily good for the process.*[15]

I believe this care for collectives and actors lies at the heart of present power relations in Romania's cultural context. As theatrical reality, not necessarily theoretical discussion. I also think an equilibrium has emerged: few now advocate directors' complete disappearance. David Schwartz told us even teams explicitly working without directors have 'an informal director, the team's strongest personality'.[16] I ended the previous chapter with an international perspective on Romanian themes through a volley of

[15] Interview with director Gabriel Sandu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

[16] Interview with director David Schwartz for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

quotations. I consider discussion of dissolving directors imported rather than home-grown. I therefore asked Archive participants about directing's future in the current theoretical context. I want to end this chapter with a volley of their answers, alongside other interview positions on collective creation.

> **Alexandru Dabija**: *Discussions of this profession have been problematic from the beginning, so nobody knows what kind of animal it is. So yes, it will disappear as such. The absolute creator, the dictator, the end of everything, the one who knows everything, cuts, hangs, proposes. Want to propose? Make a statue. Want to make productions with video? My, my obsession with video. Want to make productions with video? Make a film? Sit down and make a serious video, called Film. Video is called film. Spare me... We're speaking into microphones at the front, while you project pelicans eating themselves at the back. Right? The Christian symbol. So yes, I am... and I'm also for yes. I mean, I think it's something... but it won't clarify things somehow, if clarification means anything, because it means nothing, it doesn't mean things finally become clear, but that this is the natural process. A creative collective represents precisely the same thing. A bunch of people who cannot express themselves alone. And it will end the same, I mean, end the same with a replacement.*[17]

[17] Interview with director Alexandru Dabija for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Radu Apostol: *I don't really believe art is a democracy. I mean, okay, it works. Dialogue, exchanging ideas and dialogue are absolutely fundamental.*[18]

Gianina Cărbunariu: *I'm saying that at some point someone assumes the role of, of writing, someone else assumes directing. You know? I mean, somehow democracy's risk is that we don't arrive at a product. Yes, that happens. I mean, you come honestly, you know? Okay, we sit, we talk, write. Well, I don't know. Well then let's talk, and in the end of the day! I go home and tomorrow I come with a proposal, but that doesn't mean you can't say the next day, 'yes, but here we could do this'. I mean, this working together involves continuous feedback, but not necessarily my writing one fragment. You one, you one... You know? Someone takes responsibility for gathering it all into something...*[19]

Radu Olăreanu: *I have almost forty recorded productions. I have never, ever started a project saying let's all make something together now. No! I don't believe in that. I believe, believe in directors equal to actors, there in the same boat, the same ship. I don't believe in all-knowing directors. No, I don't believe in that. I believe in directors who become, I don't know how to put it, creators alongside, alongside, alongside actors, alongside... and not only them, everyone who belongs to theatre. I believe in theatre that... I believe in everyone there, from the*

[18] Interview with director Radu Apostol for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[19] Interview with director Gianina Cărbunariu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

person at the gate to anyone in the theatre, everyone is very important.[20]

Mihai Ranin: *I don't believe in collective directing. It's been done. People have discussed this dissolution since my student days, and the director's role too. Directing has a written history, but directors always existed. People forget Shakespeare and Molière were directors too. There was always a company head. A catalyst. Something, someone to connect things, otherwise they go every way. Certainly, a famous Italian school practises collective directing and writing. It's possible, but people attending theatre want a production by a particular creator, not a collective. Generally, we don't love a collective of women. We love a woman.*

David Schwartz: *What's certain... sorry, to conclude, I certainly don't think directing will disappear, because coordination cannot disappear.*[21]

Leta Popescu: *You can, can find decision-making forms, but that decision, the accumulation of decisions in whatever form, is directing. I mean, you can... directing cannot disappear. Like saying organisation disappears.*[22]

Radu Nica: *I don't know whether we can speak of, of the death of directing, right? To quote an*

[20] Interview with director Radu Olăreanu for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[21] Interview with director David Schwartz for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

[22] Interview with director Leta Popescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

important book in Romanian directing or, well, Romanian theatre criticism. But I think it's rather the death of that director, while directing does not die anyway. I mean, whatever the context, the directing function obviously survives, even if it perhaps moves among several individuals. This kind of hybridisation and mixing belongs to the world we live in, doesn't it?...[23]

4.3. P.S. – The Sole Author and the Cost

I began this book with the idea that AI opens the way to theatre's sole author, who can, assisted by AI, take over many tasks belonging to other co-creators. In the last subsection, I discussed dissolving the directing function and other team members assuming directors' attributes. We must stress, however briefly, that this process works in both directions, with directors frequently assuming other theatrical roles. The most commonly assumed function is design:

Mihai Ranin: *I have worked relatively little with designers. I decided to design my own productions when a designer won a design award for my design in Romania in the eighties. Alexander Hausvater said I was a Renaissance man. In a way he was right, because Leonardo da Vinci's attitude inspired me greatly: a great deal of theoretical and practical*

[23] Interview with director Radu Nica for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

> *study, experiment, things others do not seek. I was not satisfied with the result I found. Research matters more than creation itself. I have worked with Valentin Codoiu as designer; I worked with Maria Miu on Antigona, a great designer. She is the only one who surprised me with a design, I mean, did everything better than I would have.*[24]

For Mihai Ranin, taking on design does not arise from an enabling technology, but from a particular problem of recognised authorship and his own profile as a visual artist and designer. Today, directors taking on design is both an aesthetic option and a production condition for some. Theatre budgets sometimes require limiting the list of collaborators; directors are therefore sometimes obliged to assume designers' attributes. Assuming the playwright's function is also particularly common. I will not discuss taking on the dramaturg's function separately because, in my view, dramaturgs are among those to whom directors delegate some tasks. We therefore cannot speak of directors taking over dramaturgy, but of recovering their own function from the dramaturg.

Many interviewees write their own texts, including Gianina Cărbunariu, Catinca Drăgănescu and Gabriel Sandu. Sandu considers writing his own productions unsustainable long-term. Éva Patkó

[24] Interview with director Mihai Ranin for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

believes in creative teams and considers doing everything alone unhealthy. Leta Popescu's remarks on the sole signature are relevant: 'generally, I do things because very clever people surround me, help, advise, comfort and love me, and I sign. But the work is others'.'[25]

This process happens often in theatre. Directors author the production's concept and sign its ultimate meaning. Yet many co-creators contribute to that meaning. This is all the more relevant to AI, where we discussed one unethical aspect: failing to recognise creations used to train AI and ultimately generating what AI generates. Theatrical processes already contain an initial layer of non-recognition through theatre's inherent power structure. With generative systems' emergence and integration, this layer will become double: first the immediate production team, then AI training materials. We can thus observe that authorship and authority cannot be confined exclusively to theatre, but arise at a societal level, as Bélai Marcel remarks:

> *I think today's question about directors' positions is not actually about directors themselves, directing or even theatre's internal structure. We face a global discourse on authority: its moral and ethical foundations are questioned far beyond theatre.*

[25] Interview with director Leta Popescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

For this reason, I see the issue as neither appearing in a specialised form exclusively in theatre nor necessarily specifically concerning directors. Rather, it scrutinises authority within structures and the relationship between authority and structure itself.

At the same time, I believe that just as writing a novel requires a vision, making a painting requires a vision and composing a musical work requires a vision, so creating a theatre production requires a certain vision. The director's role and the existence of a directorial vision—which usually originates with the director—will, I believe, inevitably remain important in the future too.[26]

[26] Written interview with director Bélai Marcel, September 2026.

5. The Trace as Evidence

5.1. Ephemerality and the 'Vain' Attempt

Theatre performance has a paradoxical status. Of all arts except film, it probably involves the most impressive mobilisation of resources and people. Yet very little testimony remains. Peggy Phelan reinforces this, saying performance's only life is in the present:

> *Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being [...] becomes itself through disappearance.*[1]

Archivable materials include recordings, texts, photographs, programmes, posters and preparatory materials, perhaps supplemented by reviews, diary

[1] Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 146–49.

entries, social media posts and other materials generated from the production. Direct materials—sets, props, costumes—are either recycled or decommissioned and destroyed. None of what remains essentially captures performance. Two voids result: first, the artwork's perishability. Performance as a whole cannot be preserved, even through revival. Second, a void in archiving its memory, with few archival materials or research centres. We are not discussing vanished major productions, but everyday performances among the many premieres in Romanian and world theatres, leaving very few traces. This is a classical theme in intangible cultural heritage preservation.

As an aside, interestingly, this archival void might both protect and endanger theatre in relation to AI. On the one hand, very few materials could make an AI system genuinely competitive through training on theatre databases. I do not think sufficient archival material exists to create an AI director. This means theatre will prefer people to generative systems for creating productions. On the other hand, if theatre adopts these poor generative systems indiscriminately—because there will always be people wanting to simplify their work—it follows that productions will be made using weak engines and will themselves be weak.

In an already quoted interview passage, Alexandru Dabija called leaving theatrical traces

vain, directly connecting this with vanity. Radu Nica formulated the same idea more brutally:

> **Radu Nica**: *I mean, I don't know, it seems a kind of microclimate, rather like life, right? We get a few decades on this earth, then goodbye, nothing, nothing remains. Productions are roughly like that too. We work two months, they play for two or three years in happier cases, and that's roughly it. Afterwards nobody remembers you. Again, concerning the production's end, the end of last night's production, who will know what I've done now, after a few years?* [2]

Similarly, David Schwartz described theatrical heritage's archiving problem as motivation to make productions rooted in the present:

> **David Schwartz**: *I think theatre is the only art that is, or perhaps not, one of the very few arts of the present. I mean, we don't have film directors' luxury of saying: my production will be discovered in 150 years. I mean, not to mention Van Gogh. I mean, we don't, we don't have Van Gogh's luxury, you know? And without Van Gogh's luxury, we must make productions relevant here and now.*[3]

The perception within the system is the same. Theatre seems to activate artistic forms more rooted

[2] Interview with director Radu Nica for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

[3] Interview with director David Schwartz for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

in the present and specific communities. I think this concerns medium: making a film, you do not assume only one community will see it or it will survive only X months. Likewise painting or film. Yet theatre always presupposes its mortality. Liviu Rusu's *Eschil, Sofocle, Euripide* (1961, Editura Tineretului), contextualising surviving Greek tragedies, was revelatory for me. First reading tragedy, I felt these almost sacred texts were written for posterity. After Rusu, I understood Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote like today's theatre: rooted in everyday problems, large and small. Beyond style, beyond how little we actually know about performance two thousand years ago. Our impression of canonical texts results from ossification, separation from their then-present. Contemporary staging therefore tries to bring canonical texts into the present. Historical staging as theatrical museification may have great archival value, but as cultural consumption is dead and uninteresting.

Catinca Drăgănescu discussed theatre's present and the responsibility it creates for directors:

> **Catinca Drăgănescu**: *Theatre directors' ethics and responsibility in particular, creators' in general. We live in a world with so many messages that you must genuinely ask whether what you want to say needs saying and whom it helps. And secondly, how you position yourself in a muddy world: you must establish your own frame of reference for good and*

> *bad, which no longer pre-exists, no longer religious morality, no longer morality imposed by society. Well, artistic responsibility is something discussed too little, I think. Look, our discussion too began with what the world can do for artists. What should theatres do to pay them? What should schools do to teach them? Regarding the question... actually, fundamentally for me: first, what takes you from director to actor, designer, to artist? I mean, what really defines artists? Second, what responsibility do you assume when launching messages into public space? All the more experiences, all the more opinions, all the more value judgements. And third, who cares about teaching teamwork ethics? The ethics of performing before audiences? Where are all these things? We don't discuss them, and they are beyond the means, but within their texture and everything we do. Ultimately, what do artists have? An intuition, seeing a little more clearly, a little ahead of others, trying to illuminate something for them. It is a responsibility too, not only a privilege.*[4]

In an earlier chapter, I discussed directors' responsibility through the lens of their power within theatre. Theatre's rootedness in the present, linked precisely to its unarchivable character, creates a new responsibility: towards audiences. Theatre catalyses social presence and speaks about the present, making it responsible for the narratives it generates about that present. Theatre is a coherent act and one that,

[4] Interview with director Catinca Drăgănescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

as Brecht observed, suspends spectators' consciousness. I witness a story that makes me understand something about the world. I am much likelier to believe it when with a group, watching a group rather than reading a single individual, within an institution such as theatre. Perhaps what is unarchivable is therefore neither theatre itself nor even the sincere actor–spectator encounter, but precisely the unmediated understanding of audiences living at the same time as the production's authors. When actors play a scene, they share spectators' lenses on the world because they occupy the same time and place, creating a tacit understanding that remains special to theatre. ... And cannot be contained in recordings or reviews. Diana Taylor discusses archival forms' limits, particularly recording, through another kind of presence:

> *The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself [...]. Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it.*[5]

For directors, archives are even more complicated. Actors see their traces in photographs and

[5] Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

recordings, designers in sketches, photographs and films. Nothing objective in performance belongs to directors, yet everything does. Nobody can know whether an actor's gesture was conceived by the director or proposed by the actor. Nobody knows directors' contributions to sets and costumes. Directors are no longer present when performances begin being fixed archivally through recordings, reviews or photographs. Apart from a few mainly research-related exceptions, directorial work is not consistently documented. Radu Olăreanu told us:

> **Radu Olăreanu**: *This is actually, how shall I say, the saddest thing that happens to us. You know, actors are happiest, I think, because they receive this gift, a toy, let's say, a production, and it remains theirs. They enjoy it. We no longer enjoy it. Once we hand it to the theatre, it belongs to the theatre, them, the actors, technicians, lighting staff, wardrobe, anyone in the theatre. No longer yours, because you can intervene in absolutely nothing. And returning after a while, certainly the first two or three performances are usually fine. But if you return after a year, or are fortunate enough to have it performed longer, then you truly see what you planted there, what you left in those actors, in that theatre's creative collective, whether they really enjoyed everything you gave them.*[6]

[6] Interview with director Radu Olăreanu for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

If the profession directors must learn at school concerns soft skills more than actual theatrical knowledge, archiving directing also concerns the intangible much more than anything a recording can capture. Directorial work remains in bodies and memory, not documents. Directors' scepticism about preparation, and the system's scepticism about prepared directors, may derive precisely from theatre's unrepeatable and unarchivable character. Erasing performance traces merely continues preparation's erasure. Yet theatre does not begin with us. Nor does it end with us! (A subtle message to younger and older colleagues taking themselves too seriously.) Some form of archiving therefore remains necessary. What might a theatre archive, specifically a directing archive, look like? Perhaps theatre's archive should be performed. Just as using Brechtian theatre archives Brecht more than collections of his model director's notebooks do. Trisha Brown offers a dance example:

> *In 1966, Trisha Brown danced with a film projector strapped to her back, sweeping footage of herself dancing all around the space (Homemade, 1966) [...] During a retrospective of her work thirty years later in 1996, this duet between past and present was repeated when Brown donned the projector again and danced while the same 1966 footage beamed out in all directions. [...] In the first performance, past and present met, but since the two images appeared visually to be of the 'same' Trisha Brown, the media*

> *was the primary element that separated her live and recorded forms. In the second, the crucial factor differentiating the two dancers was no longer media, but time.*[7]

Yet Romania barely has the spaces and resources to make the productions that need archiving. A performative archive of the performing arts would be absolute utopia—but how beautiful it would be! A group of artist-researchers making productions that archive productions currently happening in Romania, travelling to the theatres where the originals happened to perform the memory of productions no longer playing. But is this an archive? Is anything preserved? I find Matthew Reason's idea particularly valuable: discourses of ephemerality and documentation are independent, and partial documentation attests precisely to performance's unarchivable character, while ephemerality becomes visible through documents about performance.[8]

Perhaps complaining in a research book is unprofessional, but I ask: if we cannot decide how to archive theatre productions, which are, after all, clearly delimited cultural products, at least

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[7] Steve Dixon, Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 541.

[8] Matthew Reason, Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27.

temporally and spatially, how can we agree on a directing archive when directorial work remains so difficult to delimit? Is the notebook in which Mihai Ranin records dreams at night part of every production's archive? Is Alexandru Dabija's reading about Caragiale's life at twenty part of the working process of every later Caragiale production? When does directors' work begin and end? What materials can be archived, and what limits govern the interpretations we can draw from them?

5.2. Perceptions of Archives

Archiving is the project's principal theme, as its title suggests. This book has followed two distinct directions: directorial *sprezzatura* and directorial authorship before an AI-dominated era. Both ideas rest on archives, because preparation and its traces are elements that could and should be archived in theatre, preserving directors' work and a cultural system's directing techniques, which give it artistic identity against a slop culture generatable non-specifically anywhere in the world. Nicolae Mandea discusses archives' importance:

> **Nicolae Mandea**: *Archives are ultra-important. [...] But there needs to be a nest, I don't know what to call it, where they can gather.*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *That's what we're trying to make.*

> **Nicolae Mandea**: *I don't want to discourage you. That wasn't, wasn't the point. But institutionalisation must also be an objective. [...] What I meant is creating, creating a mechanism protecting memory: depositing them somewhere institutionally guaranteed. If a painting enters the National Museum of Contemporary Art's (MNAC) collection, say, it enters heritage. [...] And if they disappear, those people go to prison.*[9]

Our project seeks to begin a systematic archive of Romanian directing in all its forms. Unfortunately, the present institutional framework does not allow an 'institution' in Nicolae Mandea's recommended sense. Nor are there concrete means to initiate systematic archiving of preparatory materials. The two simplest systemic solutions would be, first, a directors' guild whose statutory rules help directors archive materials and redirect them to a central research point. Second, collaboration with all Romanian theatres through an extensive protocol committing them to archive, collect process materials, make recordings and require directors to supply preparatory materials. This opens a long discussion of freedom and autonomy, except that I believe directing is currently endangered: by production conditions, AI, lack of public visibility, apparently declining theatre interest in Romania, and more. I

[9] Interview with director Nicolae Mandea for Arhiva Regizorală, June 2026.

believe this situation demands a shared attitude, a quasi-unionisation of the profession.

Unfortunately, archives currently—including this year's—depend on directors' personal collections, sometimes heirs'. Widespread wariness surrounds handing materials to others and publishing them. Cristian Ban describes his notes:

> **Cristian Ban**: *In my notebooks, on the last page, on the first I always write the actors, and on the last what I learnt, and leave myself...*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Wow, brilliant!*
>
> **Cristian Ban**: *Well, they're things...*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Won't you let us archive them?*
>
> **Cristian Ban**: *I'll, let me reread them, but often they're embarrassing. Nothing literary or... But I learnt, for example, to... I don't know, to, to rehearse something less or... whatever. Anyway, what was the question?*[10]

Directors feel this embarrassment about showing preparation because it is non-public, intimate. It is shrouded in preconceptions and self-judgements: I should have prepared more, differently, less; perhaps nobody cares about this; what if I embarrass myself? Just as actors do not expose warm-ups, make-up and searching to audiences, directors do

[10] Interview with director Cristian Ban for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

not expose preparation, particularly before their audience: the other creators. What would these creators say if they saw what I wrote while preparing? Matthew Reason discusses creators' lack of control over archives:

> *For once in widespread circulation, performance photographs are no longer under the control of the artist (or indeed always the photographer) in terms of how and where they are reproduced, nor in terms of how they are framed and contextualised. Instead, the photographs have to stand alone, with the performances perceived according to their photographic representation alone – or even within the context of deliberately censorious framing.*[11]

If this lack of control can be felt about photographs, it will be felt a thousand times more strongly about notebooks recording directors' private searching, hesitation and thoughts. Just as theatres announce 'photography and filming prohibited' precisely to control publicly distributed materials about their productions, directors say of preparation: 'archiving and research strictly prohibited'. Consequently, obtaining materials after directors ceased working was often easier, as with Lucian Giurchescu. Yet this is unsustainable. Archiving and access should be almost synchronous with

[11] Matthew Reason, Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 127.

production, anchoring current research and public interest in productions still available to watch, question and explore.

A systematic and systemic directing archive therefore cannot merely collect and store materials. It must also be a communication centre, justifying relevance to general audiences by showing preservation's importance, and to directors themselves, reassuring them and earning their trust that archiving and publication are not predatory. Securing systematic access to materials directors consider intimate will take a very long time. That time must build trust that entrusting archival elements will not harm the contributor's reputation. For now, just as Arhiva Regizorală's archiving relied on directors' goodwill and personal collections, earning trust relied on the delivery team's relationships and *soft skills*. It is a miracle it happened, but cannot be a model. Only internally is it known how many archival opportunities the project missed through distrust of the initiative.

Florin Vidamski discussed our initiative in the interview:

> **Florin Vidamski**: *I think you are taking a serious step towards discovering a kind of communication through you with directors. You with them and them among themselves, when they find themselves in this archive. Because it's an indirect dialogue. Nobody has done this before, and it seems powerful that you*

> *felt this need. And I think the need has existed a long time, but you dared say it now. I think what can be archived are these launch ramps into the unknown, into, into, into inspiration, into. Into these moments, you know, discovering spaces, entering a kind of reflection about... [...] what lies beyond. Because these notebooks [...] we discuss, which come from school as assignments, the director's notebooks, actually don't describe productions, but also. Mine at least, these, no. These notebooks don't describe the productions, they describe what productions must not be. Do you need a ramp? And that ramp is this archive, where you can archive all kinds of impulses to see yourselves mirrored, to see. 'He did exactly what I did. Well yes. And now apparently he's won all sorts of awards.'*[12]

I believe another danger of archiving directors' work is turning archives into superficial curiosities. Archives cannot adopt an attitude of collecting intimate materials as if storing diaries, because then they serve no purpose. They must actively return knowledge to the profession and convert it into concrete working techniques and tools. There is also the risk of unethical publication, in which internal notes reveal sensitive information or judgements about individuals and institutions, potentially harming those people and directors themselves.

[12] Interview with director Florin Vidamski for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

Selecting archival materials also raises a question: what should survive time? Interviews make clear that we will not obtain beautifully organised dossiers from the entire profession, with proposals, photographs, sketches, underlining, notes and so forth. This is not systematic practice, and archives cannot and must not impose agendas restricting the profession itself. How, then, do we archive related materials: phone notes, search-engine and LLM entries, songs, drawings and so forth? No protocol exists, and I do not think one can yet be made. Too few archival materials and models exist worldwide for a rational decision. Directors' processes, although organisational, are often chaotic. Preparation no longer happens between notebook covers but across many devices, platforms and forms. Until archival consensus emerges, I believe the best policy is a complete archive seeking to contain ANY material obtainable. Only time and research will separate relevant from irrelevant. Diana Taylor says objects become archival through selection, classification and presentation for analysis.[13] In other words, archives define their own object.

Moreover, archiving cannot function without testimony, at least in the arts. Arhiva Regizorală's

[13] Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

intentionally dual structure combines notebooks fixing particular practical elements with interviews contextualising archiving and work. Without this, research will be general. My doctoral research, for example, forced me to interpret notebook structures without directors' direct testimony about those materials. Similarly, Robert Marsden interprets Rourke's notebook:

> *When examining Rourke's rehearsal script for the 2006 production of Hall's play The Long and the Short and the Tall, annotated prior to rehearsals, we see that the ground plan is vital for her. She has broken down the script into Stanislavskian bits with titles, with the script to one side of the page and her notes to the other. Sometimes, the notes relate to actioning such as 'to patronise', but there are also words and events that she feels are important, which are circled and underlined, and so we glimpse the specific foundations that hold up her work.*[14]

Ironically, although researching director's notebooks and these archival materials means working on primary sources, I do not believe it can add real value without specific interviews in which directors can be asked about working techniques generally and the supplied archival materials particularly. Directing history should be written alongside directors.

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[14] Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room: Process, Collaboration and Decision-Making (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 11.

We should also discuss which researchers could undertake this preservation. I believe they need their own directing experience, because writing about dentistry without being a dentist is very difficult. Otherwise, we risk interpretation, overinterpretation or dry data instead of capturing processes' essence. Director-researchers, however, raise other significant risks: their own practice always creates a particular interpretative lens. Research should therefore probably involve not one person but different specialists: directors, actors and theatre scholars working together to preserve and contextualise archival materials. These researchers' voices cannot be omitted, as Alessandro Portelli remarks about interviewers:

> *The final result of the interview is the product of both the narrator and the researcher. When interviews, as is often the case, are arranged for publication omitting entirely the interviewer's voice, a subtle distortion takes place: the text gives the answers without the questions, giving the impression that a given narrator will always say the same things, no matter what the circumstances—in other words, the impression that a speaking person is as stable and repetitive as a written document. When the researcher's voice is cut out, the narrator's voice is distorted.*[15]

[15] Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 54–55.

And returning to the AI argument: directors may soon need to demonstrate their authorship. Perhaps not all directors or in every context. And without identifiers detecting AI in productions, archival materials may remain the only concrete means of proving preparatory work and personal input into development. Depressing? Certainly!

5.3. Pedagogy as Archive

There is a subversive form of archiving Romanian directing practices: directing pedagogy. By this I mean not only formal theatre education but informal learning through workshops, watching productions, directing assistance and even intimate conversations. This is the classical transmission of theatrical knowledge generally and Romanian directing knowledge particularly. Romania has no directing manual, but micro-pedagogies developed by individual teachers. Directors develop pedagogical tasks almost unintentionally whenever students attend rehearsals. Catinca Drăgănescu discussed David Esrig's method and its dissemination in Romanian theatre, including through his post-Revolution workshops:

> **Catinca Drăgănescu**: *David Esrig is a director who always kept the secret. You feel he gives you, gives you certain things, certain means, but doesn't take you to the essence. I like that. I like a guiding mentor*

> *who takes you so far and says jump, from here you reach the summit, or perhaps discover another summit, because he implicitly offers that possibility too. And this seems extraordinary pedagogical generosity: not presenting the road to Mecca, but saying I reached my Mecca by disintegrating everything behind. Look, I'll show you how. You can do it too and reach your Mecca too. That's why his method seems actually, through dramaturgical analysis or disintegration, to reach the essence, no longer the initial one but the one you discovered, because how you reassemble the puzzle pieces is original.*[16]

Discussing this archiving and knowledge transmission is not this book's object. I merely wish to anticipate Mihai Gligan's research, which I hope will complement this subsection much more exhaustively. I also believe theatrical pedagogy and micro-pedagogy must be treated not merely as transmission of techniques and methods but as genuine archiving. Working in theatres, we usually do not say 'I know this exercise from so-and-so' or 'Director Y inspired this construction'. Likewise, in our notebooks, especially because they are intimate, we do not write 'I borrowed this construction from...'. Sometimes we do not realise; sometimes saying/writing serves no purpose; sometimes we fear

[16] Interview with director Catinca Drăgănescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

being accused of 'stealing'. How wonderful if these filters disappeared and we could find the sources. How wonderful to map information in Romanian theatre: lineages, techniques, uses of everyday words.

Directorial pedagogy and knowledge transmission occur not only through workshops and courses, but productions:

> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Which directing teacher influenced you most, and do you think you inherited techniques or specific things from them?*
>
> **Alexandru Dabija**: *Unfortunately, no. I don't think I inherited. No... I inherited enormously from... but not my teachers. The productions I saw. Productions... the productions I saw became lessons.*
>
> **Alex Teodorescu**: *Some examples?*
>
> **Alexandru Dabija**: *Yes, certainly. So there was a period, to establish a marker... The marker is that I didn't manage to see Revizorul, a pillar in Romanian theatre's legend, Lucian Pintilie's Bulandra production: it was banned exactly when we entered school. So that's when misfortune began, so to speak, in Romanian theatre. But I caught Esrig's productions, Pintilie's D'ale carnavalului, which I saw and which for me was perfect. If you want a model, yes, that's it, that is the model, of freedom and deterioration too, because I knew the backstage legends, where yes... Pintilie went mad. He didn't attend, didn't come to see it, but he said, and legends circulated among students, that the production*

deteriorated: actors made comic moments, sketches in the production absolutely delirious, delirious. A complete departure from the production, Caragiale, whatever, delirious performances, but in the auditorium a miracle. On the other hand, Nepotul lui Rameau had absolute rigour. These are my schools. I must mention Cătălina too. Cătălina Buzoianu, who was in a way my teacher, teacher... she came to school to teach. Almost our age. By ours I mean mine and Mihai Măniuțiu's... there were two of us. And Cătălina was a little older, a little older than us [...] Cătălina worked when... we were already working and were colleagues in a way, because we didn't have this master relationship. The masters were in productions; none was in the country, everyone had left. How did we get there? Everyone had fled. Everyone. Pintilie had fled... I still saw D'ale carnavalului.

Alex Teodorescu: *That was in '73–'74...*

Alexandru Dabija: *Yes. And that's when we entered school. Ciulei. Ciulei remained, with Bulandra productions which were another school for me and which I knew. You left as from a good party. You left, so... From the reactions, and I knew them by heart... and still do, I can reproduce the production. So Ciulei, Esrig, Pintilie, Penciulescu—only from legends, from stories. But again, the stories about Penciu from... and I say Penciu because we met afterwards when they returned, and it's... a subject, this is a subject for my generation, this relationship with great people who were away. Andrei, Andrei Șerban, with whom now, now he's Andrei... makes*

> *plays, you turn up your nose, this is good, this isn't... Andrei was a kind of god. Andrei Șerban was a... We listened on tapes, listened to the tape... Someone brought a tape of the ancient trilogy from New York. Can you imagine what it was like? We listened... there were roars like Maia Morgenstern's, roars in ancient Greek. We listened spellbound. Totally psychedelic. We listened to Andrei Șerban's tapes. A kind of god. Andrei... When I first saw him, like rock stars, like great performers, like anything. So those were roughly the people. And I think I built myself very much, and I think what matters greatly for directors and the young generation, whose duty is to deny their masters, true, but before denying them, before denying them, right? There's rebellion. Before rebellion it matters to assimilate, to pour out. Today assimilation cannot happen through transmitting... Teaching, I think, as with any craft, through practice.*

This informal memory of Romanian directing cannot be archived without directors' direct testimony. We should speak much more about models, where ideas and techniques come from. Offer more tributes to our lineage without fearing damage to our originality's aura. In writing, notes, public statements and work. It is beautiful for today's actors, never able to work with Penciulescu, to know they practise an exercise he created or inspired.

Two further archival notes. The first concerns this book. I admit that the initial plan was to focus on actual research materials, the archived notebooks. Nevertheless, we decided to leave them out,

although they underlie conference papers and articles already published or forthcoming. I use the plural to refer to my Archive research colleagues. This change had two reasons. First, we had twenty interviews with radically different directors documenting an unusually broad segment of Romanian directing. For me, analysing this corpus, however partially and limitedly, was an offer impossible to refuse, allowing an almost systemic diagnosis. Second, archival materials are much more concrete than interviews. Analysing a notebook is specific and takes considerable writing space to permit real depth. I felt such an undertaking would reduce the work of directors included and distract readers from the general situation through overly concrete examples. I will devote a separate, much larger work to detailed analysis of the collected archival corpus, viewable and researchable on the platform.

The second archival note I wish to underline is that directing is an internal–external process. The ultimate difficulty of archiving directorial work goes beyond *sprezzatura* and directors' tendency to erase preparation. It arises because directing involves intimate internal preparation materialised only through meeting the team. How does one archive an internal, individual process simultaneously external and collective? Archives must follow directing's two levels: authorship and process coordination. A single archive must contain both processes, using different

archival materials. Catinca Drăgănescu discusses notebooks and creative teams:

> **Catinca Drăgănescu**: *Certainly school advocates something I believe in, yes, the notebook, but I don't know whether it remains something with a standard formula, or a logbook, or notes meaningful to you but not others. Alongside that, the team is again absolutely fundamental: how you build your team, how you build your team, by what criteria, how, how you manage it, how you understand the place you're in, its needs, problems, truths? But none of them gave a scheme. That's another thing, I think. They presented methods, and to me, well, less Pintilie, whom unlike Esrig I never encountered pedagogically, only read and interviewed and so forth. But they said preparation comes from within. Preparation comes from within. An important lesson. From inside yourself, then methodologically, yes, indeed... What do you want to discuss? Why? Is it relevant? For whom? Whom do you need around you?*[17]"

[17] Interview with director Catinca Drăgănescu for Arhiva Regizorală, July 2026.

5.4. Sava's Trace. A Small Tribute

Entirely subjectively, Romanian directing history begins for me with Ion Sava. Certainly no historical truth, merely subjective. Romania's earliest notebook I have seen is Sava's masked Macbeth, thanks to Virgil Petrovici. It belongs to the Archive despite not being collected by us, precisely as tribute. Every attempt I made to find notebooks or relevant materials from this theatricalising generation failed. I mean not photographs or testimony, but primary materials of the kind we collect. This is why the Archive logo is based on Jules Perahim's sketch for his production.

Directing history begins with Sava also because he wrote. *Teatralitatea teatrului* offers more information than an interview could: systematic testimony of his thoughts on directing and theatre. For me, Sava is therefore not only an aesthetic or human model but an ideal model for my dreamed archive, a starting point interweaving personal testimony and documentary sources. It is imperfect; much was lost. We lack originals and materials from other productions to validate or invalidate research conclusions. Yet having even this much from every Romanian director would create a wonderful archive and deep understanding of directing today. Only utopia, of course.

In tribute to Ion Sava as director and model of preservation, this book's cover depicts a Kikibur director as he imagined one. It is AI-generated, to underline this book's ideas. Sava's essay describes Kikibur as an ideal state with an ideal theatre system. I reread it periodically, wondering whether I help establish a Kikiburian institution in Romania.

Conclusion

Romania's theatre system, and not only Romania's, faces systematic changes driven by changing production structures and new technologies. Drawing on the research corpus, I have tried to show that the system does not envisage directors disappearing, or at least not the directing function. One starting premise was therefore that directors would stand at these changes' centre. I predict they will be obliged to assume additional production functions, with some additional work fulfilled through generative AI. At this stage, theatrical AI use is benign and can reopen the question of the sole author: someone assuming every relevant meaning-making level and exercising almost absolute control over the production's ultimate meaning.

Nevertheless, I believe this moment will be transitional, with people—directors or otherwise—using AI to compensate for their own lack of knowledge and missing skills. This will systematically erode professionalism and shift sole-author directors' status towards executing AI-slop productions. Directors may then need to justify their authorship,

something possible also through preparatory materials. In anticipation of this erosion, the need to archive directing practices within each creative environment will grow. I have discussed the forms such an archive might take and the principal obstacles to establishing this institution. We believe, however, that without such a large-scale project, Romania's theatre-making system is eminently vulnerable to generative systems trained on general data, and local cultural identity faces disappearance, especially given the significant methodological difficulties of documenting theatre itself.

The historical premise from which I began was also supported within the corpus: stage complexity produced directors, as we discussed at length with Cristian Ban. Mihai Ranin even maintained that directors have always been a stage reality, viewing Shakespeare and Molière as incorporating the directing function. Present technological change comes not to simplify theatre production but to dematerialise it, to move it towards digital, as Nicolae Mandea also argues in his interview. With digital intervention, particularly through generative systems, theatrical production becomes much more accessible. Many coordinated pairs of hands are no longer necessary to create a production.

Specifically, the historical perspective was validated through interviews without independent historical sources. Such analysis was not this book's

object. It seeks to capture Romanian directing's principal narratives and compare them with production reality. This does not ignore historical truth, but allows oral sources what Alessandro Portelli calls a creative interpretation of history:

> *The discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections [...] but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in order to make sense of crucial events and of history in general.*[1]

Simplification and digitisation open the way to fewer artists participating in theatrical production. Theatre views combined functions with reluctance. For Gabriel Sandu, combining roles is dysfunctional; for Éva Patkó, unhealthy. Marcel Belai discusses artificially creating authority without aesthetic necessity. Yet many interviewees' practice directly contradicts these objections, combining playwright functions—Catinca Drăgănescu, Gabriel Sandu, Gianina Cărbunariu—or design—Mihai Ranin, Radu Olăreanu, myself. Moreover, many Romanian processes lack artists considered essential elsewhere: lighting designers, sound designers, dramaturgs and so forth. These positions are redistributed within

[1] Alessandro Portelli, quoted in Lynn Abrams, Oral History Theory (London: Routledge, 2010), 81.

production teams, often assumed by directors in state and private sectors alike. The contradiction is natural and can be attributed to the distinction between historian and narrator:

> *In fact, it has been suggested that it is almost impossible for the historian to really represent the point of view of the narrator, the insider's perspective, because their interests are so often in opposition: the historian often inserts the oral history evidence into a pre-existing historical framework whereas the narrator has provided a version of the past as it was experienced in all its complexity [...]*[2]

The historical reality is that many Romanian directors combine functions. The research corpus, through interviews with 'narrators', reveals how the system perceives this overlap. The sole-author director's re-emergence therefore does not arise exclusively through generative AI. Several interviewees discuss production writing as their responsibility. AI discussion is almost entirely absent from the corpus; testimony can neither confirm nor refute the essay's technological part, which remains a working hypothesis. The book uses AI to highlight systemic changes and intensify the need to resolve particular questions within the profession and prepare it for changes in the coming years.

[2] Lynn Abrams, Oral History Theory (London: Routledge, 2010), 28.

AI's absence from the interviews owes something both to the protocol's structure (see appendix) and to AI not being perceived as part of directorial creation. AI is emergent within the emergent process of creating a production. Following G.H. Mead, Keith Sawyer discusses the difficulty of theorising emergent processes such as group performance, since a natural rationalising tendency arises once the product is finished, creating a false process narrative through the lens of the final product.[3] Similarly, capturing how this practice is adopted systemically while theatrical AI use remains taboo becomes an intrinsic corpus limitation.

I consider Chapter 1's essay, a personal argument, supported by the corpus despite the acknowledged distance between them. I also intended to show such a corpus can serve research themes somewhat removed from initial questions. In this sense I consider the undertaking successful and valid. Creatively confronting the corpus also revealed something more general: directors' tendency to erase preparation, understood as *sprezzatura*, dissolving artistic effort. This naturally artistic tendency must be overcome to create effective theatre archives.

The book also demonstrated what it intended concerning *sprezzatura*. Across the corpus, we identified three attitudes erasing preparation's traces:

[3] G. H. Mead, quoted in R. Keith Sawyer, Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 77.

forgetting, concealment and outright denial. We stress, however, that this is only a tendency, not a systemic rule. Numerous interviewees advocate and acknowledge extensive preparation, including Radu Apostol, David Schwartz, Oana Leahu, Cristian Ban, Răsvana Cernat and myself. We must underline that some answers follow questions that may direct responses; since unpreparedness is also taboo, some responses may be circumstantial. For some directors, such as Leta Popescu and Radu Apostol, we possess documentary materials—confirmed non-exhaustively when writing—attesting how productions are prepared. Documentarily, these are the most relevant cases.

The hypothesis that preparation can attest human authorship in an AI era remains a hypothesis. No verdict is possible without systematically analysing AI's theatrical impact, and at current technological and adoption rates such analysis may prove superfluous and at most temporary.

Returning to this book's purposes, there were three: (a) documentary, attempting to establish what the interview corpus can make visible concerning the research themes; (b) pedagogical, mapping Romanian preparatory practices, resulting in documentary tension between directors requiring clear methodology and those seeing method as a creative danger. The tension remains open. (c) Reflexive, testing personal research hypotheses against twenty responses from

colleagues. We consider all three purposes fulfilled through this work.

Future research directions are numerous. First would be systematising archiving within Romanian directing and creating an institutionalised system for this activity. Second, exploring the materials such archives should preserve and communicating extensively with directors and general audiences, advocating the need for archiving and earning professionals' trust. Third, I believe researching archiving as a creative process and creative uses of research materials remains relevant. Making archives accessible to researchers, grounding theatre scholarship in valuable corpora, is also key. Moreover, researchers should correlate existing documentary materials with elements of the new corpus. A real, universal indexing system would greatly facilitate research. Imagine a bridge between projects such as Arhiva Regizorală and databases such as DMMTR.

Particular care should also be given to rehearsal processes, which could serve as practice as research studies compared with archival findings. This would follow the methodology Gay McAuley opened in the 1970s, allowing researchers to deepen their understanding of theatre-making.[4] Training a specia-

[4] Robert Marsden, Inside the Rehearsal Room: Process, Collaboration and Decision-Making (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021), 5.

list group of researchers for these archives is also relevant. I do not believe theatre scholars' training alone sufficiently represents directing in genuinely practice-grounded research. At the same time, archiving the profession's activity cannot be directors' exclusive, potentially biased task. A new class of researchers is therefore missing for this exploration at the boundary between practice as research, ethnography, archiving, theatre studies and technology.

Balancing research corpora is another interesting theme, given that Romanian directing still has significant gender imbalance. Ensuring balance between genders, directors working in Romania and the diaspora, different national minorities and different creative generations is key to future research.

Perhaps Romanian theatre should not systemically award itself the prize of forgetting, received through tacit knowledge:

> *Forgetting is oddly a kind of prize at the end of the day – a skill, the hard-won step in the work of learning that enables becoming. When some things, like reading, or even modes of critical thinking or patterns of analysis, become habit-memory, they are skills, fully learned, available to call up as research tools or artistic craft."*[5]

[5] Rebecca Schneider, Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment (London: Routledge, 2011), 41.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview Protocol Arhiva Regizorală

Interviews on the Creative Process and Preparing a Production

We would like to thank you again for your interest in Arhiva Regizorală. For us, this project is not only research, but a very personal attempt to preserve what is often lost: how directors actually think about, prepare and construct productions.

We feel the need to offer a very clear key to reading these questions:

These interviews are not a test or intended to become a competition between working methods. What matters is not who 'works more', uses more techniques or has the most sophisticated process. On the contrary, the project celebrates how differently productions emerge between artists and even between productions.

The aim is for directing students, young artists or researchers, Romanian or international, to visit the

platform and discover as many real theatre-making methods as possible. We seek no 'correct model', but multiple models, methods, intuitions and practices.

Perhaps someone will discover an inspiring relationship to character in an interview. Perhaps someone else will adopt a research method, an exercise, a kind of analysis or a relationship with designers and production teams. Or perhaps they will understand that other directing methods exist beyond those encountered in their own training and practice.

Unfortunately, directing is too often 'secret'. Directors do not cross the stage's boundary, their art remaining shrouded in participants' stories. Too rarely do directors themselves explain how and perhaps why they work.

Please read the following questions in this spirit: freely, openly and without assuming right or wrong answers.

Equally important: all materials we publish—video, audio, transcripts, images/documents—will appear only after your explicit approval. We do not want to publish anything unrepresentative or that you consider not for public circulation.

The interviews are conceived as extended conversations about practice and process rather than conventional interviews. Arhiva Regizorală is designed by directors for directors, with directors.

Indicative Questions. Preparation and Analysis of the Production

- Of everything you do to prepare productions you direct, what is the most important part/ element? How do you structure it?
- Is textual analysis during preparation fundamental to the future production, or only part of working with actors on stage?
- When analysing a performance text, what elements do you analyse?
- What kinds of research do you undertake in preparation?
- Have you ever used character profiles, or is this an unnecessary concept for directors?
- How do you prepare the production's idea—an essay, bullet-point notes, a collage? What does this conceptual level contain?
- If none of these elements represents your preparation, what does your own process look like?

Collaboration and Structuring Rehearsals

- How do you collaborate with designers? How much of the design concept directly answers your requests, and how much changes through designers' work?
- Do you plan rehearsals and interactions with other co-creators—dramaturg, choreographer, composer and so forth? If so, how and in what order, if applicable?

- Besides the preparation dossier, do directors have any other concrete working instrument to rely on?
- What other preparatory techniques do you use—directorial improvisation, improvisational structures, structured exercises and so forth?
- Is there a difference between how directors relate to costumes and sets and how designers or actors do? What difference?

Training, Pedagogy and Influences

- Which directing teacher influenced you most, and what techniques did you 'inherit'? How were you taught to prepare theatre productions?
- Do you remember a workshop, course or production during training when something 'opened up' for you? What happened?
- Did you learn directly from an older director informally—assisting, observing rehearsals or conversing? What did you adopt?
- How do you see Romanian directing pedagogy today compared with your training? Has anything been gained? Lost?
- What do you consider directing's 'ABC'? What should directors leave university with?
- Can your working method be taught, or must it be experienced directly alongside someone?

Artistic Practice and the Future of Directing

- How do you choose actors for productions? According to what criteria?
- Do you frequently use an exercise or practice in constructing productions? Where did you acquire or develop it?
- Have key productions created 'aha' moments for you and your directing? Have encounters offered concrete techniques?
- How do you envisage directing's future amid contemporary discussion of directors' positions within creative teams? Why?

These questions are, of course, indicative, and the conversation may take other directions you consider important or relevant to your artistic journey.

Thank you again for your openness and the time you have given the project.

With gratitude,
The Arhiva Regizorală Team

Appendix 2 – List of Interviews

Arhiva Regizorală brought together twenty directors for interviews between June and September 2026. The interviews conducted were:

Video Interviews

1. Radu Apostol
2. Cristian Ban
3. Florin Caracala
4. Gianina Cărbunariu
5. Răsvana Cernat
6. Alexandru Dabija
7. Catinca Drăgănescu
8. Eugen Gyemant
9. Botond Nagy
10. Radu Nica
11. Radu Olăreanu
12. Éva Patkó
13. Leta Popescu
14. Mihai Ranin
15. Gabriel Sandu
16. David Schwartz
17. Florin Vidamski

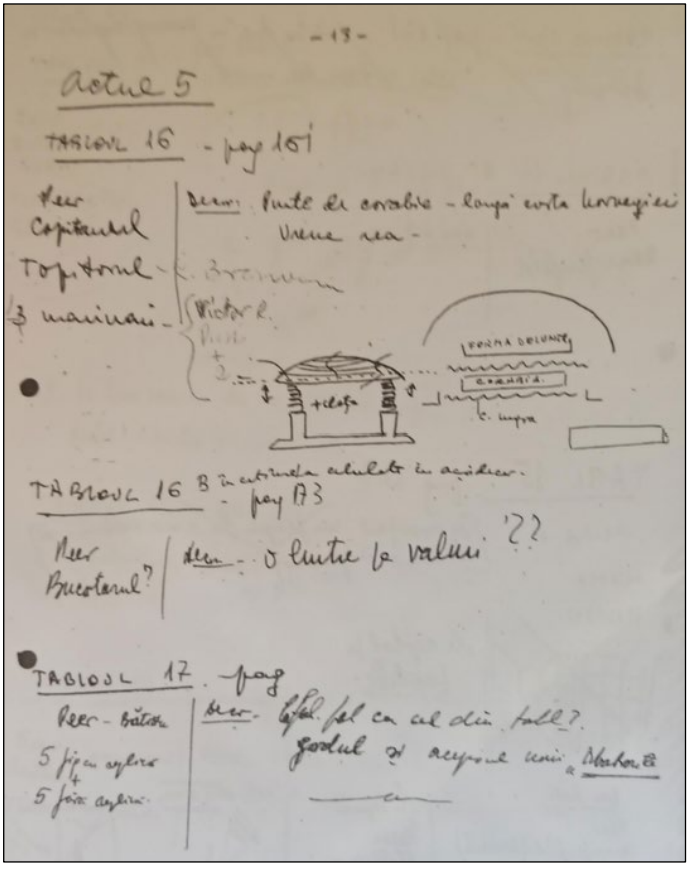
Audio Interviews

18. Oana Leahu
19. Nicolae Mandea

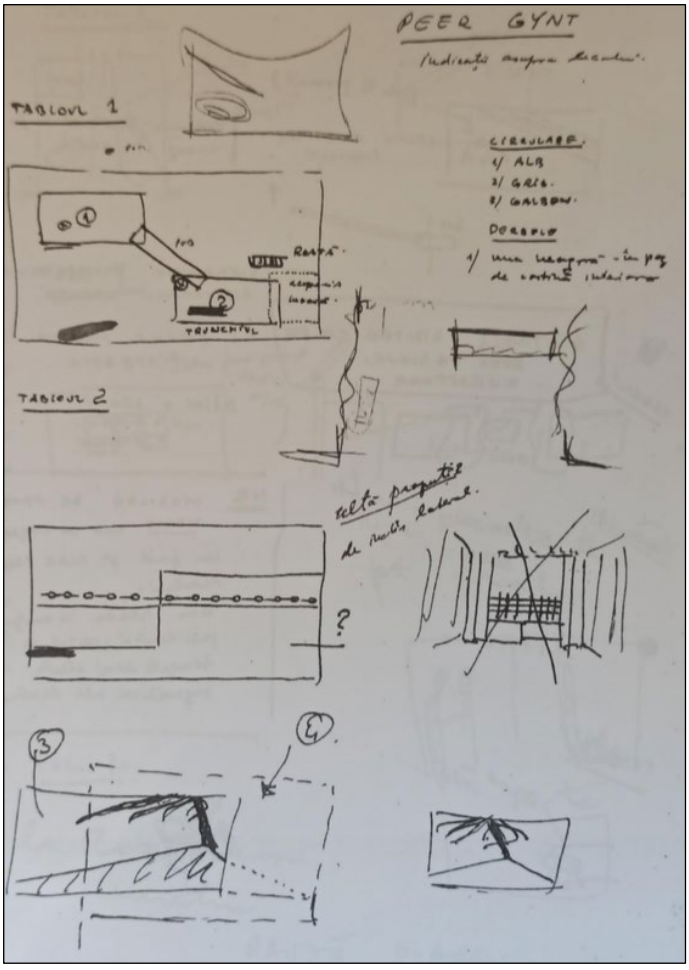
Written Interviews

20. Bélai Marcel

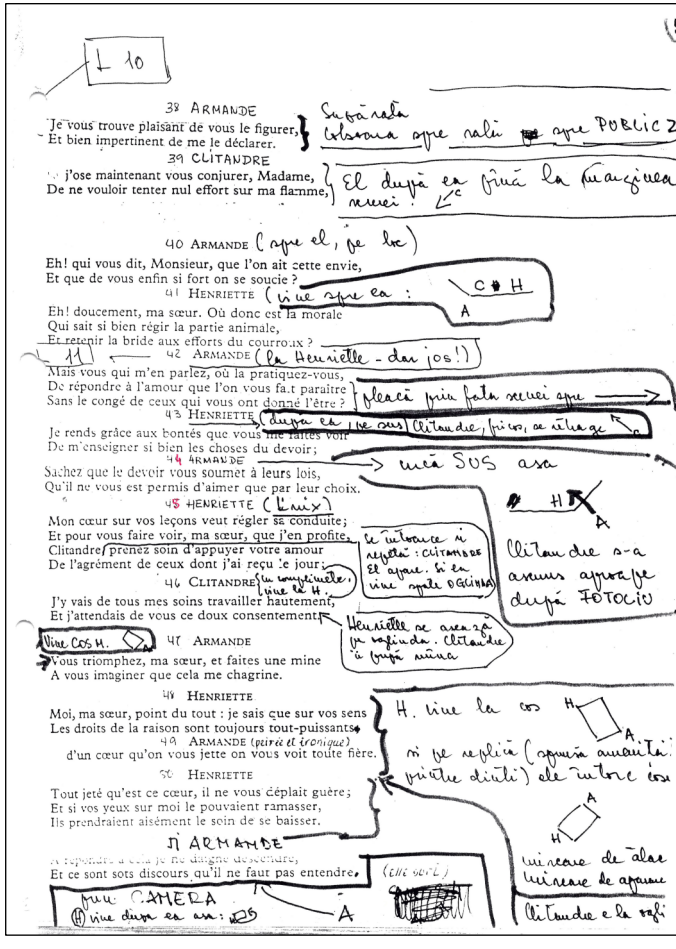
Appendix 3 – Extracts from Director's Notebooks in Arhiva Regizorală



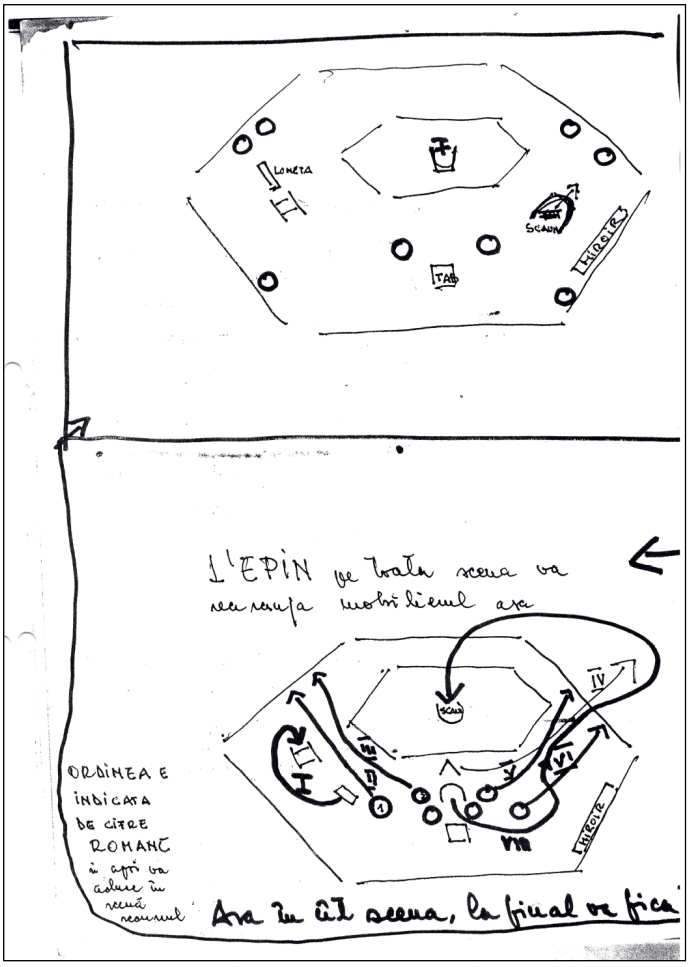
1. Facsimile from Dinu Cernescu's director's notebook for *Peer Gynt*.



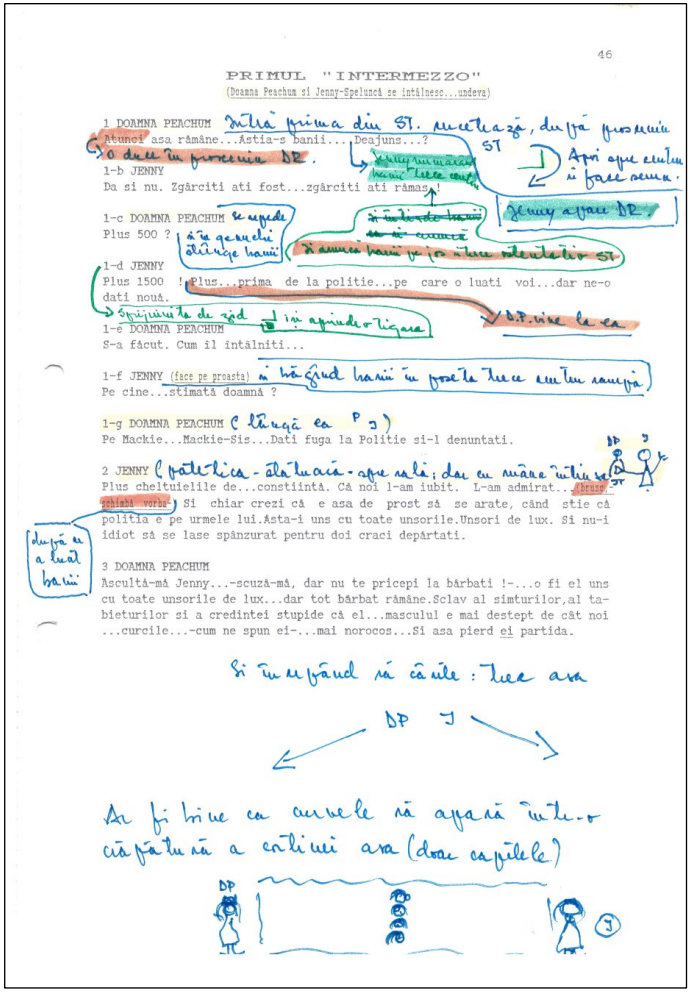
2. Facsimile from Dinu Cernescu's director's notebook for *Peer Gynt*.



3. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Femeile Savante*.



4. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Femeile Savante*.



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PRIMUL "INTERMEZZO"

(Doamna Peachum si Jenny-Spelunca se intâlnesc...undeva)

1 DOAMNA PEACHUM
Atunci asa rămâne...Astia-s banii....Deajuns...?

1-b JENNY
Da si nu. Zgârciti ati fost...zgârciti ati rămas!

1-c DOAMNA PEACHUM
Plus 500 ?

1-d JENNY
Plus 1500 ! Plus...prima de la politie...pe care o luati voi...dar ne-o dati nouă.

1-e DOAMNA PEACHUM
S-a făcut. Cum il întâlniti...

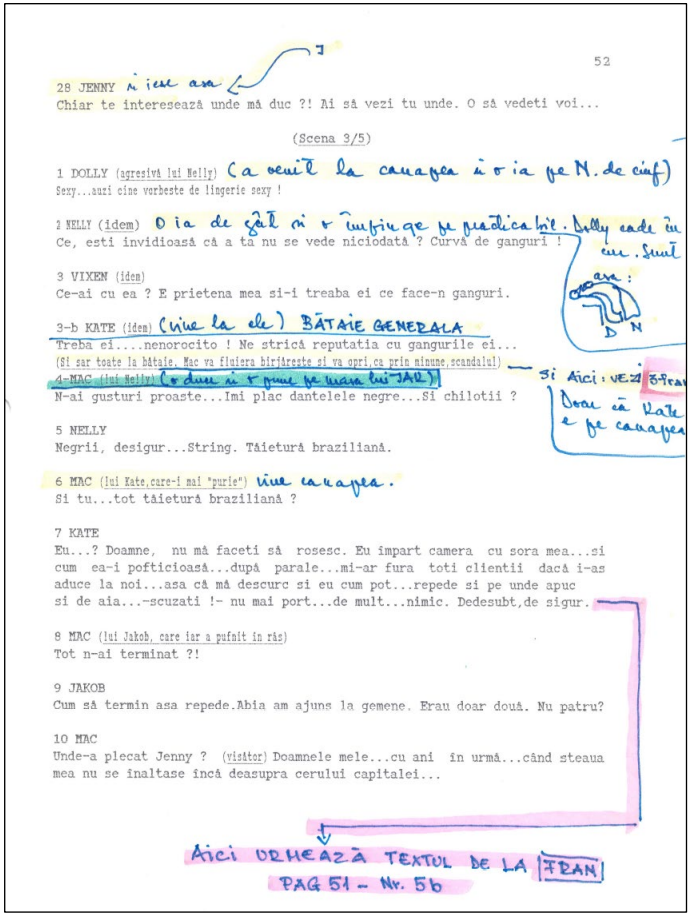
1-f JENNY (face pe proasta)
Pe cine...stimată doamnă ?

1-g DOAMNA PEACHUM
Pe Mackie...Mackie-Sis...Dati fuga la Politie si-l denuntati.

2 JENNY
Plus cheltuielile de...constiintă. Că noi l-am iubit. L-am admirat.. (brusc schimbă vorba) Si chiar crezi că e asa de prost să se arate, când stie că politia e pe urmele lui.Asta-i uns cu toate unsorile.Unsori de lux. Si nu-i idiot să se lase spânzurat pentru doi craci depărtati.

3 DOAMNA PEACHUM
Ascultă-mă Jenny...-scuză-mă, dar nu te pricepi la bărbati !-...o fi el uns cu toate unsorile de lux...dar tot bărbat rămâne.Sclav al simturilor,al tabieturilor si a credintei stupide că el...masculul e mai destept de cât noi ...curcile...-cum ne spun ei-...mai norocos...Si asa pierd ei partida.

5. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Opera de trei parale*.



52

28 JENNY *i iese asa*
Chiar te interesează unde mă duc ?! Ai să vezi tu unde. O să vedeti voi...

(Scena 3/5)

1 DOLLY (agresivă lui Nelly) *(a venit la canapea i o ia pe N. de ciuf)*
Sexy...auzi cine vorbeste de lingerie sexy !

2 NELLY (idem) *O ia de gât si o împinge pe practicabil. Dolly cade în cur. Sunt*
Ce, esti invidioasă că a ta nu se vede niciodată ? Curvă de ganguri !

asa :
D N

3 VIXEN (idem)
Ce-ai cu ea ? E prietena mea si-i treaba ei ce face-n ganguri.

3-b KATE (idem) *(vine la ele) BĂTAIE GENERALA*
Treba ei....nenorocito ! Ne strică reputatia cu gangurile ei...
(Si sar toate la bătaie. Mac va fluiera birjăreste si va opri,ca prin minune,scandalul)
4-MAC (lui Nelly) *(o duce si o pune pe mara lui JAK)*
N-ai gusturi proaste...Imi plac dantelele negre...Si chilotii ?

Si Aici : VEZI 3-fran
Doar că Kate e pe canapea

5 NELLY
Negrii, desigur...String. Tăietură braziliană.

6 MAC (lui Kate,care-i mai "purie") *vine canapea.*
Si tu...tot tăietură braziliană ?

7 KATE
Eu...? Doamne, nu mă faceti să rosesc. Eu împart camera cu sora mea...si cum ea-i pofticioasă...după parale...mi-ar fura toti clientii dacă i-as aduce la noi...asa că mă descurc si eu cum pot...repede si pe unde apuc si de aia...-scuzati !- nu mai port...de mult...nimic. Dedesubt,de sigur.

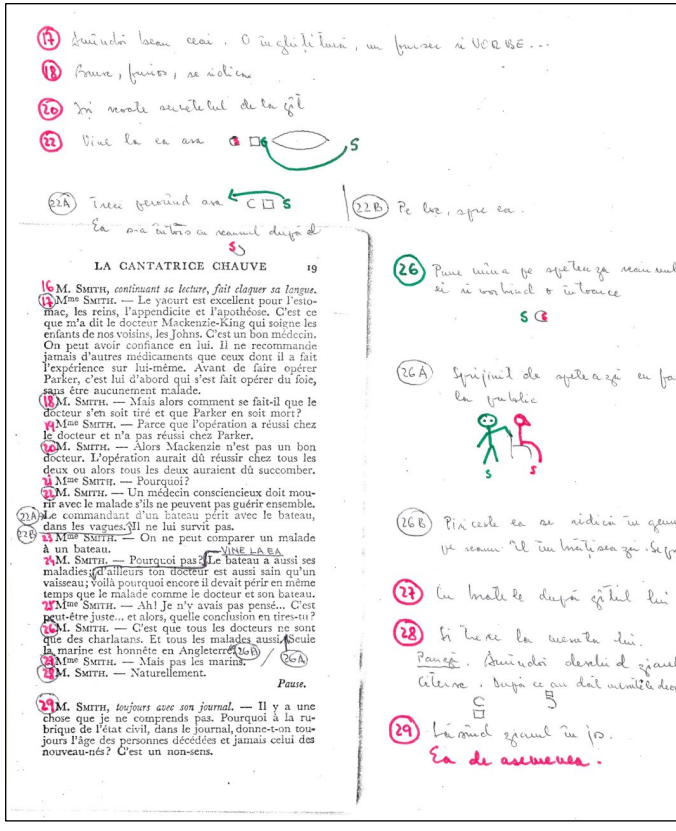
8 MAC (lui Jakob, care iar a pufnit în râs)
Tot n-ai terminat ?!

9 JAKOB
Cum să termin asa repede.Abia am ajuns la gemene. Erau doar două. Nu patru?

10 MAC
Unde-a plecat Jenny ? (visător) Doamnele mele...cu ani în urmă...când steaua mea nu se înaltase încă deasupra cerului capitalei...

Aici URMEAZĂ TEXTUL DE LA FRAN
PAG 51 - Nr. 5b

6. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Opera de trei parale*.



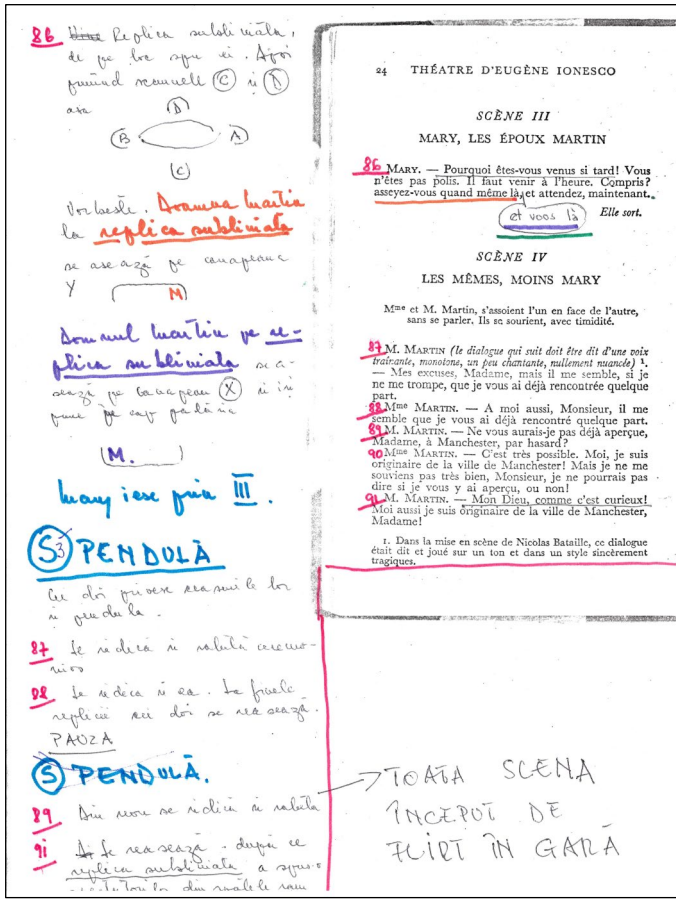
LA CANTATRICE CHAUVE 19

16 M. SMITH, *continuant sa lecture, fait claquer sa langue.*
17 Mme SMITH. — Le yaourt est excellent pour l'estomac, les reins, l'appendicite et l'apothéose. C'est ce que m'a dit le docteur Mackenzie-King qui soigne les enfants de nos voisins, les Johns. C'est un bon médecin. On peut avoir confiance en lui. Il ne recommande jamais d'autres médicaments que ceux dont il a fait l'expérience sur lui-même. Avant de faire opérer Parker, c'est lui d'abord qui s'est fait opérer du foie, sans être aucunement malade.
18 M. SMITH. — Mais alors comment se fait-il que le docteur s'en soit tiré et que Parker en soit mort?
19 Mme SMITH. — Parce que l'opération a réussi chez le docteur et n'a pas réussi chez Parker.
20 M. SMITH. — Alors Mackenzie n'est pas un bon docteur. L'opération aurait dû réussir chez tous les deux ou alors tous les deux auraient dû succomber.
21 Mme SMITH. — Pourquoi?
22 M. SMITH. — Un médecin consciencieux doit mourir avec le malade s'ils ne peuvent pas guérir ensemble.
22A 22B Le commandant d'un bateau périt avec le bateau, dans les vagues. Il ne lui survit pas.
23 Mme SMITH. — On ne peut comparer un malade à un bateau. VINE LA EA
24 M. SMITH. — Pourquoi pas? Le bateau a aussi ses maladies; d'ailleurs ton docteur est aussi sain qu'un vaisseau; voilà pourquoi encore il devait périr en même temps que le malade comme le docteur et son bateau.
25 Mme SMITH. — Ah! Je n'y avais pas pensé... C'est peut-être juste... et alors, quelle conclusion en tires-tu?
26 M. SMITH. — C'est que tous les docteurs ne sont que des charlatans. Et tous les malades aussi. Seule la marine est honnête en Angleterre. 26B / 26A
27 Mme SMITH. — Mais pas les marins.
28 M. SMITH. — Naturellement.

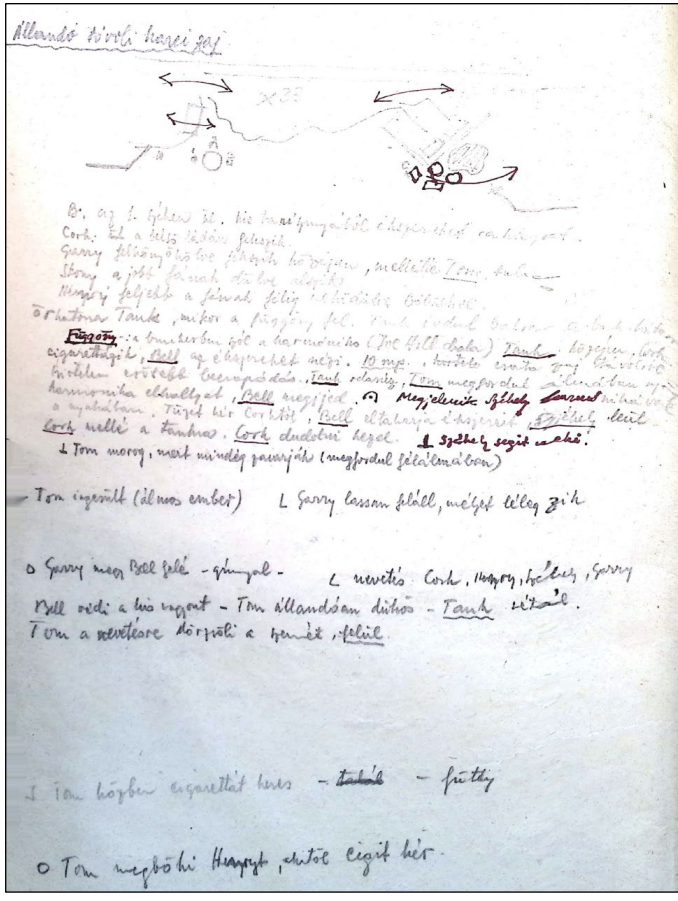
Pause.

29 M. SMITH, *toujours avec son journal.* — Il y a une chose que je ne comprends pas. Pourquoi à la rubrique de l'état civil, dans le journal, donne-t-on toujours l'âge des personnes décédées et jamais celui des nouveau-nés? C'est un non-sens.

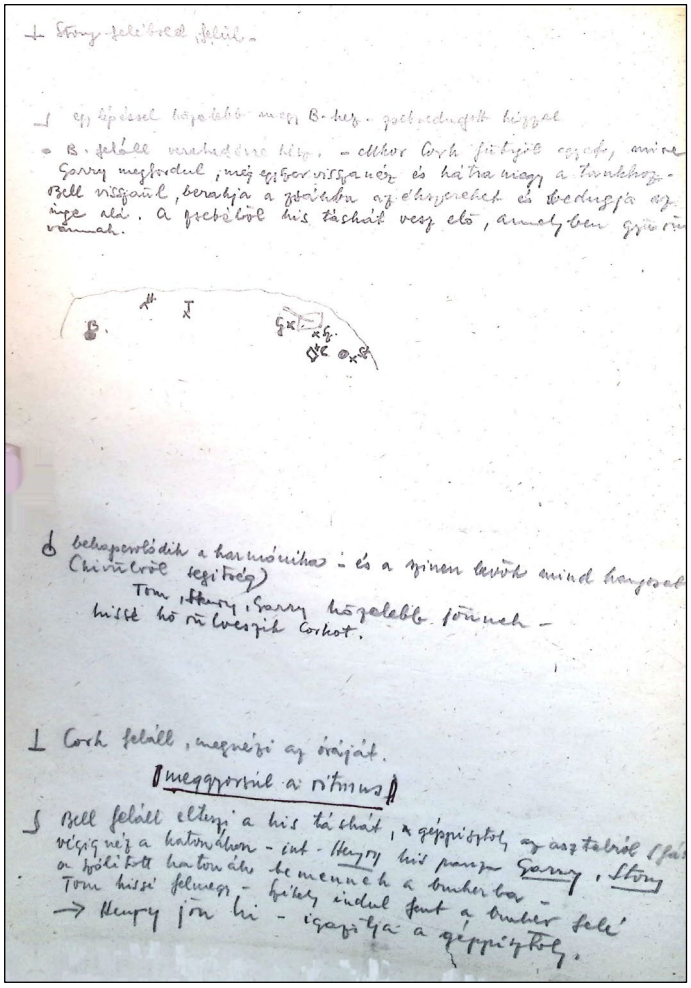
7. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Cântăreața cheală.*



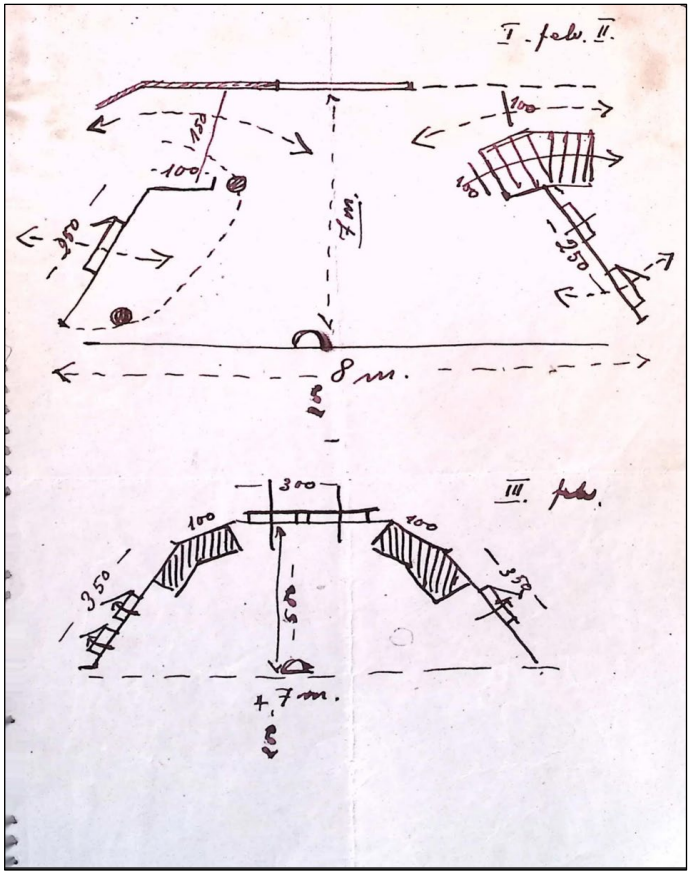
8. Facsimile from Lucian Giurchescu's director's notebook for *Cântăreața cheală.*



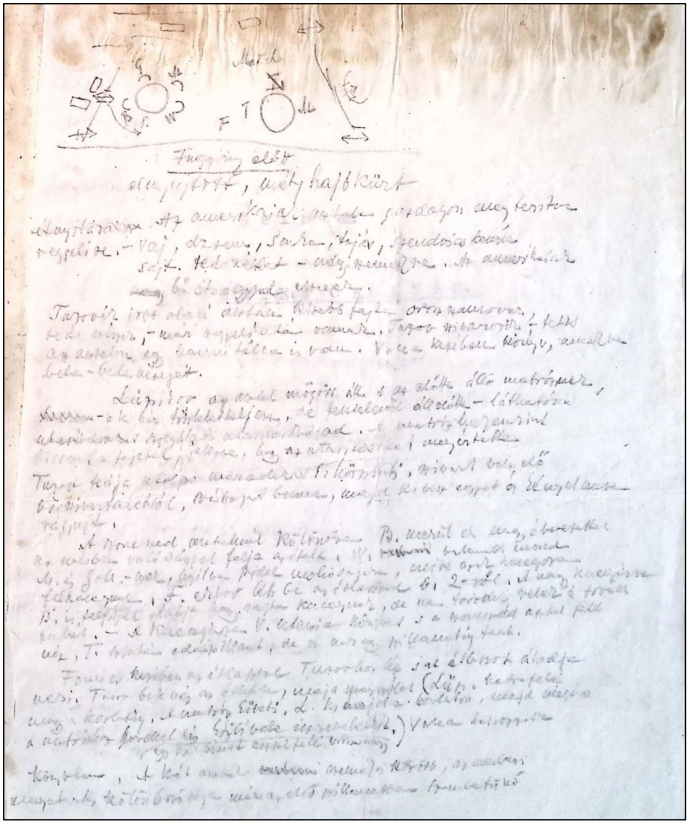
9. Facsimile from György Harag's director's notebook for *Martin Rogers, from the Hungarian State Theatre Cluj-Napoca Archive*.



10. Facsimile from György Harag's director's notebook for *Martin Rogers, from the Hungarian State Theatre Cluj-Napoca Archive*.



11. Facsimile from György Harag's director's notebook for *Végzetes Örökség, from the Hungarian State Theatre Cluj-Napoca Archive*.

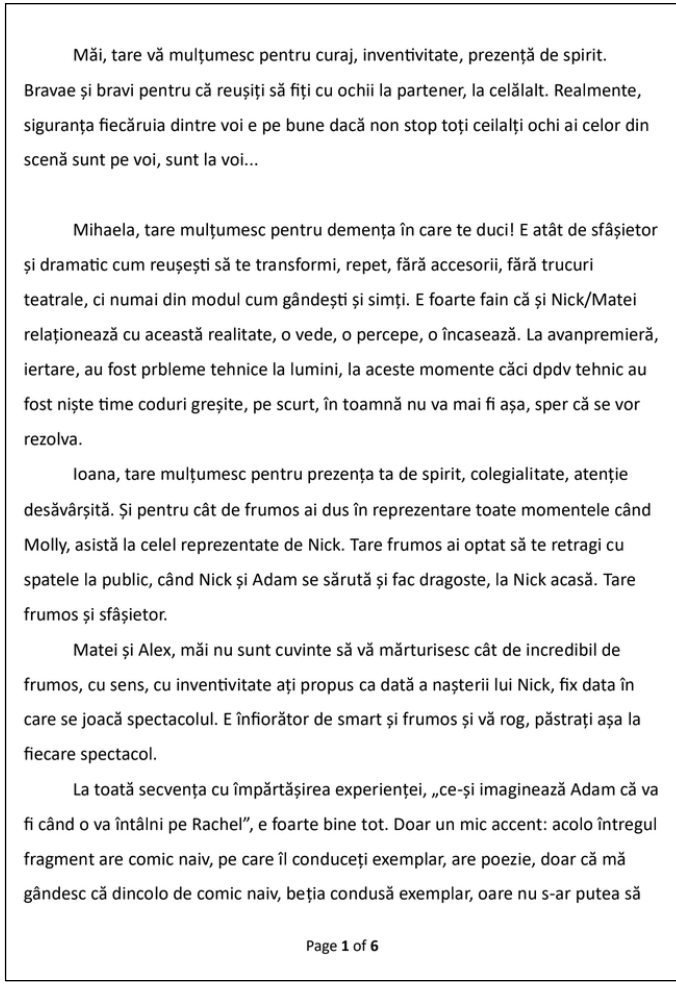


12. Facsimile from György Harag's director's notebook for *Végzetes Örökség, from the Hungarian State Theatre Cluj-Napoca Archive*.

Decupaj Joc Întunecat

TEXT. REPLICI.	REPREZENTARE
Inventez chestii. Mereu inventez chestii. În primul rând pentru că îmi ies... Și apoi, pentru că... Pot s-o fac! Asta nu înseamnă și că nu sunt afectat de consecințe. Jesus, știu că există consecințe! Te trezești într-o situație naspa, înghesuit, fără scăpare, și e nevoie de dexteritatea în gândire a unui Super Erou de Comic Books, ca să ieși din situația asta. Și să rămâi fără parte, curat ca lacrima. Și dacă totuși rămâne ceva ce te poate trage în jos, tot ce ai de făcut e să speri că ceilalți sunt destul de creduli ca să nu te bănuiască vinovat de ceva... La asta mă gândesc acum. Pentru că Păi Sunt într-una dintre cele mai naspa situații! O situație din care doar dexteritatea unui super erou ar putea să mă ajute să scap. Sau nu...	Cred că este esențial ca debutul spectacolului să lanseze structura pe două planuri: planul tridimensional, fizic, concret și planul imaterial, video&sound care este criptat. Mai exact să asociem acțiunii verbale și comportamentului fizic/concret, care este sub ochii noștri un soi de „traducere" criptată tipic online-ului, dar care să fie ne-explicită nici chiar pentru cei mai înverșunați internauți. E esențial ca debutul spectacolului, acest prim monolog al lui Nick să fie reprezentat în ambele planuri. Nu toată lumea va înțelege exact despre ceea ce este vorba. Foarte bine. Pentru unii, așa ca mine, ar fi mai degrabă doar „o reprezentare estetică interesantă", în care corpul actorului pare că este urmărit de planul imaterial. Dacă actorul s-ar deplasa în dreapta scenei, „aglomerarea" asta ermetică, cool, dar de neînțeles, de reprezentare a mediului online „s-ar deplasa" după el, pe nesimțite, oriunde s-ar deplasa... Poate chiar un material, un content care să fie acționat de vocea actorului atunci când spune anumite cuvinte... Actorii vor fi sigur amplificați, mereu. Sigur. Nu-mi place foarte tare chestia asta, e mult prea outside-tech pentru mine, pentru relația cu corpul actorului, dar cred că la spectacolul ăsta e necesar. Poț apărea emojiuri care să comenteze ceea ce zice el, să fie ironice, sarcastice. Dar toate să se insereze treptat, pas cu pas...
Vedeți... O fată stă lângă mine, în pat. E întuneric, suntem la mine în cameră. Fata e goală. Tocmai am făcut sex. Cred că o puteți numi „prietena mea". Pentru că da, E goală, Stă întinsă lângă mine Și tocmai am făcut sex?	Aici este pentru prima dată când codul de reprezentare a scenelor în care personajele se întâlnesc fizic, concret ar trebui activat. Ceilalți trei actori vin pe scenă cu panoul verde (chroma), un microfon boom pe stativ, o cameră de filmat pe stativ, un cearșaf. Probabil, tot „la vedere" vor arunca în spațiul de joc: chiloți țaca-cool de fată, un tricou țaca-cool de fată... Se vor institui, „la vedere" și treptat vom vedea pe Nick și în filmare. Dar în filmare pare că este realmente undeva în proximitatea patului din camera lui. Își dă jos tricoul (nu știu ce facem cu firul de la headset și cu emițătorul să nu se vadă așa de neam prost). „să fiu cu fata asta" — e prima dată când o vedem pe Ea, acoperită cu cearșaful, dar îi vedem doar spatele capului, o claie de păr, ieșind de sub cearșaf. Nu știi, are părul dăt peste față, e spatele capului?

13. Facsimile from Radu Apostol's director's notebook for *Dark Play*.



Măi, tare vă mulțumesc pentru curaj, inventivitate, prezență de spirit. Bravae și bravi pentru că reușiți să fiți cu ochii la partener, la celălalt. Realmente, siguranța fiecăruia dintre voi e pe bune dacă non stop toți ceilalți ochi ai celor din scenă sunt pe voi, sunt la voi...

Mihaela, tare mulțumesc pentru demența în care te duci! E atât de sfâșietor și dramatic cum reușești să te transformi, repet, fără accesorii, fără trucuri teatrale, ci numai din modul cum gândești și simți. E foarte fain că și Nick/Matei relaționează cu această realitate, o vede, o percepe, o încasează. La avanpremieră, iertare, au fost prbleme tehnice la lumini, la aceste momente căci dpdv tehnic au fost niște time coduri greșite, pe scurt, în toamnă nu va mai fi așa, sper că se vor rezolva.

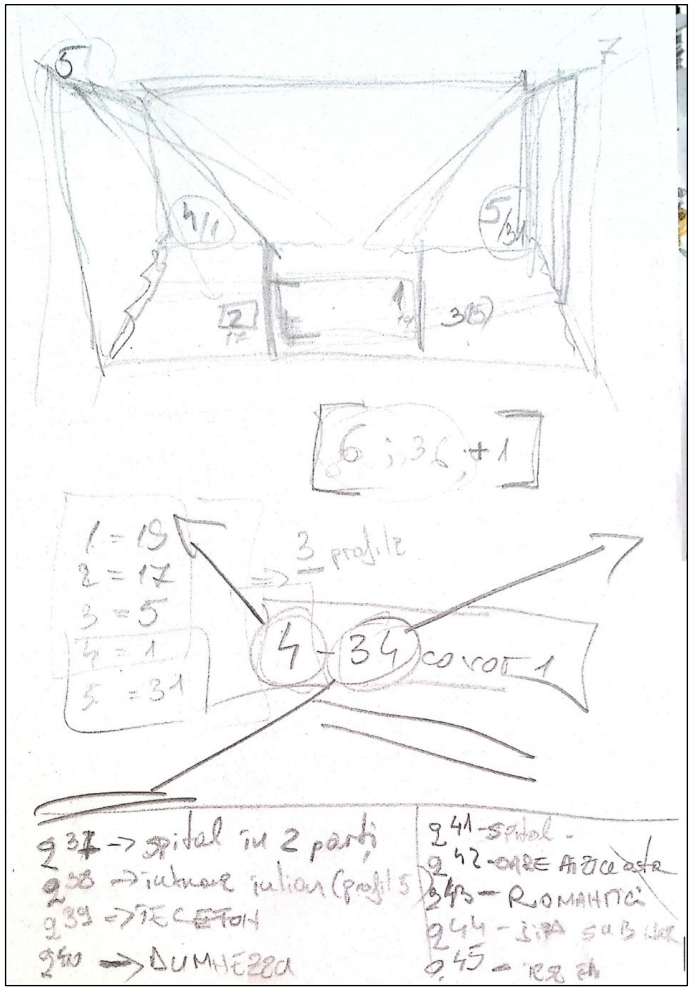
Ioana, tare mulțumesc pentru prezența ta de spirit, colegialitate, atenție desăvârșită. Și pentru cât de frumos ai dus în reprezentare toate momentele când Molly, asistă la celel reprezentate de Nick. Tare frumos ai optat să te retragi cu spatele la public, când Nick și Adam se sărută și fac dragoste, la Nick acasă. Tare frumos și sfâșietor.

Matei și Alex, măi nu sunt cuvinte să vă mărturisesc cât de incredibil de frumos, cu sens, cu inventivitate ați propus ca dată a nașterii lui Nick, fix data în care se joacă spectacolul. E înfiorător de smart și frumos și vă rog, păstrați așa la fiecare spectacol.

La toată secvența cu împărtășirea experienței, „ce-și imaginează Adam că va fi când o va întâlni pe Rachel", e foarte bine tot. Doar un mic accent: acolo întregul fragment are comic naiv, pe care îl conduceți exemplar, are poezie, doar că mă gândesc că dincolo de comic naiv, beția condusă exemplar, oare nu s-ar putea să

Page **1** of **6**

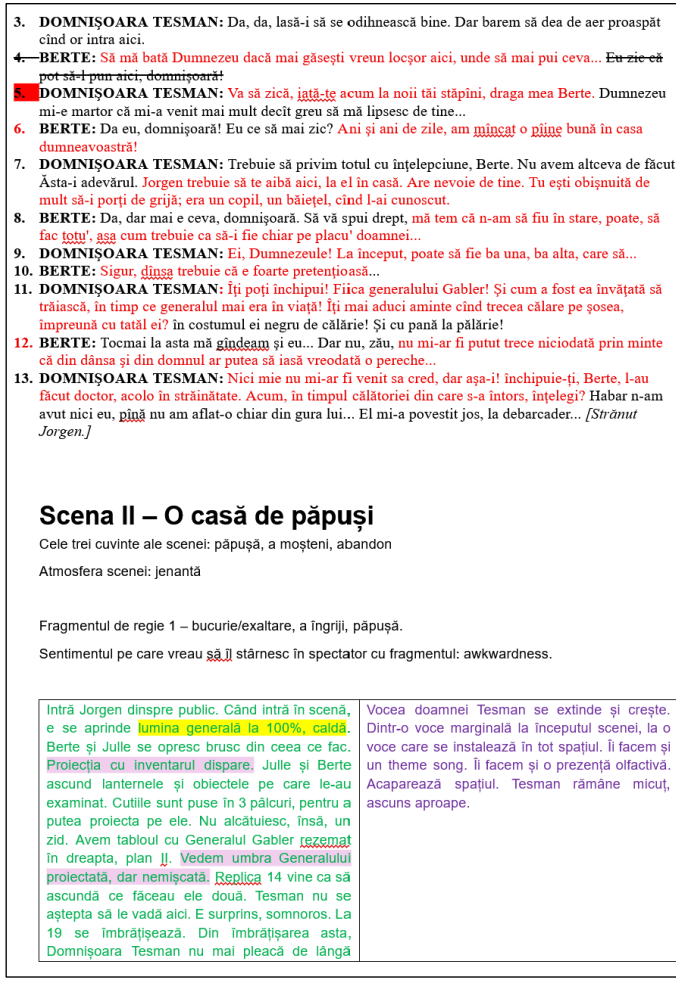
14. Facsimile from Radu Apostol's director's notebook for *Dark Play*.



15. Facsimile from Leta Popescu's director's notebook for *Un râs de pomană.*



16. Facsimile from Leta Popescu's director's notebook for *Un râs de pomană*.



3. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Da, da, lasă-i să se odihnească bine. Dar barem să dea de aer proaspăt cînd or intra aici.
4. **BERTE:** Să mă bată Dumnezeu dacă mai găseşti vreun locşor aici, unde să mai pui ceva... ~~Eu zic că pot să-l pun aici, domnişoară!~~
5. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Va să zică, iată-te acum la noii tăi stăpîni, draga mea Berte. Dumnezeu mi-e martor că mi-a venit mai mult decît greu să mă lipsesc de tine...
6. **BERTE:** Da eu, domnişoară! Eu ce să mai zic? Ani şi ani de zile, am mîncat o pîine bună în casa dumneavoastră!
7. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Trebuie să privim totul cu înţelepciune, Berte. Nu avem altceva de făcut. Ăsta-i adevărul. Jorgen trebuie să te aibă aici, la el în casă. Are nevoie de tine. Tu eşti obişnuită de mult să-i porţi de grijă; era un copil, un băieţel, cînd l-ai cunoscut.
8. **BERTE:** Da, dar mai e ceva, domnişoară. Să vă spui drept, mă tem că n-am să fiu în stare, poate, să fac totu', asa cum trebuie ca să-i fie chiar pe placu' doamnei...
9. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Ei, Dumnezeule! La început, poate să fie ba una, ba alta, care să...
10. **BERTE:** Sigur, dînsa trebuie că e foarte pretenţioasă...
11. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Îţi poţi închipui! Fiica generalului Gabler! Şi cum a fost ea învăţată să trăiască, în timp ce generalul mai era în viaţă! Îţi mai aduci aminte cînd trecea călare pe şosea, împreună cu tatăl ei? în costumul ei negru de călărie! Şi cu pană la pălărie!
12. **BERTE:** Tocmai la asta mă gîndeam şi eu... Dar nu, zău, nu mi-ar fi putut trece niciodată prin minte că din dînsa şi din domnul ar putea să iasă vreodată o pereche...
13. **DOMNIŞOARA TESMAN:** Nici mie nu mi-ar fi venit sa cred, dar aşa-i! închipuie-ţi, Berte, l-au făcut doctor, acolo în străinătate. Acum, în timpul călătoriei din care s-a întors, înţelegi? Habar n-am avut nici eu, pînă nu am aflat-o chiar din gura lui... El mi-a povestit jos, la debarcader... *[Strănut Jorgen.]*

Scena II – O casă de păpuși

Cele trei cuvinte ale scenei: păpuşă, a moşteni, abandon

Atmosfera scenei: jenantă

Fragmentul de regie 1 – bucurie/exaltare, a îngriji, păpuşă.

Sentimentul pe care vreau să îl stârnesc în spectator cu fragmentul: awkwardness.

Intră Jorgen dinspre public. Când intră în scenă, e se aprinde lumina generală la 100%, caldă. Berte şi Julle se opresc brusc din ceea ce fac. Proiecţia cu inventarul dispare. Julle şi Berte ascund lanternele şi obiectele pe care le-au examinat. Cutiile sunt puse în 3 pălcuri, pentru a putea proiecta pe ele. Nu alcătuiesc, însă, un zid. Avem tabloul cu Generalul Gabler rezemat în dreapta, plan II. Vedem umbra Generalului proiectată, dar nemişcată. Replica 14 vine ca să ascundă ce făceau ele două. Tesman nu se aştepta să le vadă aici. E surprins, somoros. La 19 se îmbrăţişează. Din îmbrăţişarea asta, Domnişoara Tesman nu mai pleacă de lângă	Vocea doamnei Tesman se extinde şi creşte. Dintr-o voce marginală la începutul scenei, la o voce care se instalează în tot spaţiul. Îi facem şi un theme song. Îi facem şi o prezenţă olfactivă. Acaparează spaţiul. Tesman rămâne micuţ, ascuns aproape.

17. Facsimile from Alex Teodorescu's director's notebook for *Hedda Gabler*.

*[El își pune jos cana de cafea. **Să nu uităm să îi dăm și ei cafeaua!** Alege un alt disc pentru pick-up. Pune discul. Se aude „Bob Dylan's 115h dream" – Bob Dylan. Se revine la lumină generală la 100%.]*

16. **Bătrânul**: Știi ce mi se pare ciudat? *[El își lasă pe jos cana de cafea. Trage unul din cuburi în centrul spațiului, fix în spatele ei. Ea rămâne tot în genunchi, dar nu mai spală pe jos. Ideal ar fi să nu mai fie prea ud pe podea.]*
17. **Fata**: Ce?
18. **Bătrânul**: Că în toată aventura asta nu ai dat drumul pancartei.[24] *[El își aduce ligheanul și buretele și le pune pe podea. Se așază în spatele ei, astfel încât ea să ajungă între picioarele lui, cu fața la public. El începe să o spele cu buretele pe gât și pe brațe, astfel încât să ajungem la un citat plastic din Pieta.]*
19. **Fata:** Nu știu de ce. Poate de asta mă făceau curvă? Cred că mă țineam de ea când mă loveau, și ei mă loveau că mă țineam de ea. Ce e ăsta feed back negativ?[25] Acum când îți povestesc, mi se pare că e ca un vis. Doar trupul amorțit și ochii care mă ustură mă conving că nu a fost un vis.
20. **Bătrânul** Cum ai intrat în povestea asta?
21. **Fata:** O spui de parcă aș fi fost târâtă de cineva, fără voia mea.[26] Poate chiar am fost târâtă, mai știi?[27]
22. **Bătrânul**: Nu mi-ai răspuns, cum ai intrat în povestea asta?
23. **Fata:** Mi-e greu să-ți explic. Probabil tu ai trăit aici toată viața. Între cărțile tale, care te-au apărat de lumea de afară. A pătruns vreodată până la tine ceva din lumea de afară?[28]
24. **Bătrânul**: Te cam grăbești să tragi concluzii. Te-ai uitat puțin în jur, probabil te-au speriat toate cărțile astea și le-ai crezut un zid între mine și lume. Cărțile nu te separă de lume, dimpotrivă te ajută mai bine să o înțelegi.[29]
25. **Fata**: O spui de parcă nu am citit nimic în viața mea. Știi cum am intrat în povestea asta? De la cărți.[30] Și de la un băiat, recunosc. Dar una nu se exclude pe alta. Dimpotrivă. El mi-a spus că

[24] Ești curajoasă. Tumultul de emoții al fetei. A minimiza. **Reușește.** Să facă totul să pară mai puțin grav. TOTUL O SĂ FIE BINE.
[25] Ai dreptate. Dacă putem încă glumi, e în regulă. Șansa pe care i-a dat-o Bătrânul de a se opri din rememorat. A fugi. **Să se mintă că a scăpat.** Să scape de propria poveste. MULȚUMESC.
[26] Sunt mare! Nu mai sunt un copil! Simte că îi este anulată complet participarea la revoltă. A se mândri. **Își dă seama că e un pic ridicolă.** Să nu permită ca eșecul ei să îi anuleze participarea. EU AM FĂCUT CEVA! NU SUNT COMPLET INUTILĂ.
[27] Iarăși alții sunt de vină. Faptul că nu poate să își continue argumentația. A se retrage. **Să ducă în derizoriu tot ce se întâmplă afară.** Să arate că nu avut control, că nu a fost de vină. HABAR NU AM CE CĂUTAM ACOLO, PÂNĂ LA URMĂ.
[28] Tu ai fost complet izolat. Știe că urmează să fie adusă într-un punct dificil de apărat. A se răzvrăti. **Să pară crudă.** Să se protejeze atacând. CINEVA CA TINE NU ARE CUM SĂ MĂ ÎNȚELEAGĂ VREODATĂ.
[29] Nu sunt complet desprins de lume. Atacul direct al fetei. A-și expune superioritatea. **Să pară arogant.** Să pară competent. M-AM SĂTURAT DE PĂRERILE VOASTRE DE REVOLUȚIONARI IMBERBI! HABAR NU AVEȚI NIMIC.
[30] Și eu citesc. Reacție la superioritatea aparentă a bătrânului. A se apăra. **Pare ușor ridicolă.** Să îl facă să nu o mai considere inferioară lui. NU SUNT PROASTĂ, SĂ ȘTII! SUNT DEMNĂ DE BĂGAT ÎN SEAMĂ.

13

18. Facsimile from Alex Teodorescu's director's notebook for *Fata, bătrânul și Biblioteca.*



19. Facsimile from Mihai Gligan's director's notebook for *Untitled no.7*.

MIHAI **GLIGAN:**

Lucrăm la un spectacol care are ca temă doliul, moartea. Lucruri grave, mari, solemne, iar eu am 26 de ani și sunt în al doilea an din viața mea în care mă simt cumva adult. Nu cred că știu și nu mă interesează momentan să vorbesc despre acest monolit, așa cum îl avem plasat în mentalul colectiv. Deși moartea e adeseori ceva spontan, ceva inexplicabil. Și în același timp cred că și doliul e ceva mult mai ramificat, mai nuanțat. Și da, am pierdut niște tovarăși foarte apropiați, dar nu mă gândesc la ei decât cu speranța că au ajuns într-un loc mai bun. Însă mă surprind deseori gândindu-mă la micile pierderi din viața mea despre care nu prea vorbesc. La versiunile de viitor pe care, la un moment dat, le-am considerat sigure și care nu s-au mai întâmplat. La relațiile care nu s-au încheiat printr-o despărțire clară, ci au devenit încet altceva, până când un om pe care îl vedeai zilnic a ajuns cineva căruia nu mai știi ce să-i spui. Nu există un moment precis în care să poți spune că ai pierdut lucrurile astea și nici un ritual prin care să-ți iei rămas-bun de la ele. De cele mai multe ori, continui pur și simplu să trăiești, fără să-ți dai voie să recunoști că ai pierdut ceva.

Dar ceea ce a activat întregul proces e o poveste pe care mi-a spus-o o amică. Tatăl ei a murit la o nuntă, în timp ce dansa cu soția lui. A făcut infarct și a căzut acolo. Imaginea asta m-a urmărit foarte mult timp, probabil și pentru că el era cunoscut ca fiind o persoană care iubea enorm viața. Mi s-a părut aproape absurd că a murit chiar așa, dansând. Am început să mă gândesc la ce se întâmplă cu un om după un asemenea moment. Dacă își amintește de cine a fost sau de oamenii pe care i-a iubit, sau dacă uită totul la fel cum nouă ni se întâmplă să uităm detalii esențiale despre cei care nu mai sunt lângă noi: vocea, trăsăturile feței, cuvintele importante pe care ni le-au spus.

Încercând să îmi imaginez cât mai exact nunta asta, care de fapt e un context în care suntem împreună pentru a celebra, mi-am dat seama că aveam nevoie de un spațiu foarte concret pentru spectacol. Un spațiu care să nu-ți aparțină, dar care în același timp îți permite să fii vulnerabil. Camera de hotel mi s-a părut că are exact contradicția asta: rămâne impersonală, deși pentru câteva ore găzduiește viața intimă a cuiva. Stau destul de mult prin hoteluri și am, în continuare, un sentiment extrem de straniu atunci când intru într-o cameră de hotel în care înaintea mea au stat sute de necunoscuți, dar totul e aranjat în așa fel încât să creeze impresia că nimeni n-a fost acolo. Nu știi dacă omul de dinaintea ta a dormit douăsprezece ore, a făcut sex, s-a certat cu cineva sau a primit cel mai prost telefon din viața lui. Pentru tine rămâne doar camera, ca un palimpsest, în care urmele vieții fiecărui oaspete au fost șterse ca să facă loc următorului, dar fără să dispară însă cu totul.

20. Facsimile from Mihai Gligan's director's notebook for *Untitled no.7*.

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This book is the result of research based on 20 interviews with theatre directors from Romania. It does not seek to offer a comprehensive portrait of Romanian theatre directing, but rather to take a first step towards using the Directorial Archive for the systematic study of Romanian directing and the preservation of the work of theatre directors in Romania. In an increasingly precarious cultural landscape, in a world where patterns of consumption are drifting ever further away from theatre, in a world where AI is replacing so many professions, the time has come for directors to protect their craft.

Alex Teodorescu directs productions, writes plays, leads workshops, and listens to stories. He believes that theatre begins where certainty ends and questioning begins. He works with children, actors, people with disabilities, and emerging directors. For him, archiving the work of theatre directors is not a matter of pride, but an act of responsibility towards the profession and its ability to safeguard the means through which performances are created.

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