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Theatre Research, between to Be or Not to Be...

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Abstract: This communication intends to approach a number of shortfalls Romanian theatre research has been and is still confronting with. More than other forms of research of the Romanian culture, theatre research has been addressed and practised with superficiality, rather formally than as a fundamental component necessary to the theatre art. In what follows, we are going to describe a few features/ aspects we consider relevant for this subject matter.

Key words: theatre, research, researcher.

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- ***Accidental character*** – in the last century, there never existed, as far as I know, a long-term theatre research, assumed and supported from the budget of an institution of the Romanian state. Theatre research was left to the decisional level of the universities and of the theatres. They failed/postponed, decade after decade, the elaboration of an ‘integrated system’ of research.

- ***Fragmentary character*** – in the last century, every researcher in the theatre field felt on his/her own the object of his/her research being assumed as a fragment of a larger cultural landscape, the general perspective of which never interested him/her. The reflex of the generic vision disappeared. The individual researches float like some islands which will never join in a continent.

• ***Lack of recipient*** – for whom did the researcher in the theatre field research and researches? The most frequent answer to this question is: for himself/herself.

• ***Excess of research pragmatism*** – after all, why do they research, the ones who do research? For the archive of a past? To feed a future? To justify a present? In the Romanian space, my impression is that theatre research always had too pragmatic answers to such questions. Any PhD project – a limited (from the time and theme point of view) form of research – has the PhD title at stake, therefore a personal purpose, there being few PhD students who really think they study for the Other, by Other meaning not neighbouring things from the same culture, but exactly the neighbouring cultures. Almost all research programs of the Faculties of Theatre meet, more than an honest tendency to research, the necessary requirements to be accredited and reaccredited. In other words, the pleasure of the research itself disappears, the research being always conditioned by the exterior elements such as: scores, grants, institutional visibility. The conferences, the communications, the symposiums have most of the times a formal character. Most of the times, at their end, as a conclusion you are not revealed anything else but the research failure.

• ***The unclear profile of the researcher*** – how does a researcher in the theatre field look like? What kind of studies does he/she have? How does he/she earn his/her living and what does he/she do when he/she doesn't do research? Personally, I don't know in the Romanian space any person I can point to: this is a theatre researcher!

• ***The hobby character of research*** – to most of the ones who persist in calling themselves researchers, research is, at best, a hobby, a pastime among other pastimes. There is a similar situation concerning the position of the theatre critic, the critical act related to a play having stopped long ago being a *professional* one and it takes forms similar to fishing, walking in the park or feeding the pigeons in Unirii Square.

• ***Absence of originality aspects of the researches*** – at least once in a hundred years, we should be honest and admit that our theatre researches didn't change with absolutely anything the course of European theatre. In our country, research always tried to fill gaps compared to other cultures, and not at all to produce something new. When, in 1925, one of the erudite actors of the National Theatre of Iași, Aurel Ghițescu, went on a study trip to Paris, he had a cultural shock. When he came back to Iași after a year, his experience would not be used to open new paths for the Romanian theatre, but to apply what he had seen in the French theatre. At best, the research becomes a comment of something already studied.

• *The limitative understanding of the theatre research as a philological exercise* – traditionally, in the Romanian space the ones who initiated theatre researches were philologists. Therefore, the results of their research didn't have a practical character, but a purely theoretical one. A philologist who writes a book about, let's say, Liviu Ciulei, will focus much more on how Ciulei read a theatre play than on the show universe of the director-theatre designer. Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Vahtangov, Grotowski, Eugenio Barba weren't philologists, though. They did research from within the inner-nucleus of the theatre phenomenon, not outside of it or from a marginal area of the theatre. In other words, theatre research is not just the theoreticians' 'business', but also (and particularly) the practitioners'.

We can talk about theatre research in Iași and anywhere in Romania, but on one condition: to accept a relaxed redefinition of the term 'research' and to accept that within research there should (also) be included the preparation of a part, following a university course, writing a theatre chronicle or a review of a theatre book. But if we persist in defining research with its rigorous, programmatic, long-term meaning, then this concept will have in the Romanian space as many intersections with reality as the mythologies of the ancient Greeks...