MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF ARTS TÂRGU-MUREȘ

DOCTORAL THESIS

# FORCES ACTING ON THEATRE: FROM THE CENTRIFUGAL DISSOLUTION TO THE CENTRIPETAL CEMENTATION

## ABSTRACT

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## THE STRUCTURE OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

The doctoral thesis *Forces acting on theatre: from the centrifugal dissolution to the centripetal cementation* is divided into ten chapters, including introductory section, conclusions and references.

Chapter I – *Introduction. Deployment of forces* – presents the approach of the study and aspects of scientific research in the field of theatre.

Chapter II – *The axiom of theatre as a monolithic phenomenon* – presents the necessary conditions for the proposed model in order to be operational, in other words presenting the theatre phenomenon as a coherent structure that has developed its own tools with which it refines its creation.

Chapter III – *State of facts: the network society and the centrifugal dissolution* – presents the current society as a networked structure whose needs require expanding the individual potential by assuming multiple credible roles. In this context, the actor remains an operator of fiction, while the civil individual, disenchanted of the transcendent nature of theatre, seeks to acquire the tools with which the actor builds the character. Identifying theatre tools in other manifestation areas of the Being (psychological, educational, social), the thesis argues for the existence of a centrifugal force that decomposes the theatre monolith into instruments subordinated to extra-aesthetic approaches.

Chapter IV - *The applicability and verification of the proposed model* – illustrates theatre instruments identified in educational theatre, according to the Anglo-Saxon practice in which the author has expertise.

Chapter V – *Case Study: the relevance of drama for Romanian teenagers* – presents the results of the study undertaken by the author, a study showing differences in the perception of theatre and daily theatricality among three samples of students in different levels of contact with drama. By correlating the results with similar studies, the chapter confirms the importance of theatre and its tools in the educational process.

Chapter VI – *Theatre tools in other spaces: Psychodrama and Theatre of the Oppressed* – identifies stage tools in the subordination of therapeutic or social approaches. Therefore, the centrifugal force that decomposes theatre tools is explained both by the presence of theatre elements in other manifestation areas of the Being and by recognizing the effectiveness of the identified instruments.

Chapter VII – *Centripetal force as a response: Cementation* – considers that, despite the decomposition of the theatre tools and their use in other areas, the theatre phenomenon does not remain disabled, but continues to produce performances and to attract interest, consolidating its mythology. The present chapter attempts to identify cementation sources of the theatre mythology: through a reverent view based on the ritual dimension of the phenomenon, through a semantic and phenomenological expansion of theatre to include contemporary agendas and by strengthening meritorious elements of the guild identity.

Chapter VIII – *Dynamic balance of the theatre phenomenon* – relates the discussed forces (the centrifugal force that breaks the theatre monolith and the centripetal force that cements the theatre mythology), highlighting the reduced possibility of action for one of these forces in the absence of the other, giving the phenomenon a dynamic balance.

Chapter IX – *Conclusions* – summarizes the previously discussed elements, highlighting the viability of the proposed model.

Chapter X – *References* – presents the literature that has been consulted in preparing this thesis.

# INTRODUCTION:

# DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES

If we could see the contemporary society as a large cultural import bazaar, populated, among others, by teachers, therapists and school coordinators, a question as *Will you bring theatre tools again?* would easily find justification, as we already noticed specific actors' training tools in other manifestation areas of the Being.

Improvisation, emotional memory, role playing, protection inside the role, debate prove their effectiveness beyond the theatre stage in educational theatre, psychodrama or community theatre. Does the theatre phenomenon remain poorer or disabled, following this dissecting of tools? Apparently not, since it continues to produce and to dream of important performances, which, along with interviews, photos, biographies of great actors, cement a mythology of greatness, artists arrogating the merit of repeating the primary act of creation.

Therefore, we could identify, on one hand, a tendency to break the theatre in order to use specific elements of training elsewhere (but without affecting the phenomenon), and, on the other hand, we could identify a contrary tendency, a cementation of memory and greatness of the theatre art and its importance for the community.

The question that the present research is addressing is whether these trends, empirically identified by the author, could find a clear argument in terms of forces and, if so labelled, can be integrated into a coherent model with a practical verification, thus providing possible explanations for how theatre manifests itself in society.

Although *the humanities* are places where rhetoric feels comfortable, the current thesis aims to identify forces acting on theatre by converging research tools with speculation insights, placing literature, as well as quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods of research as grounds for the theoretical argument.

There are authors (Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1987) who question the methods of scientific research, arguing that these methods work in particular cases, specific scientific knowledge being dependent on the culture and the historical circumstances in which it appears. The issue raised by the relativism of the research methods is the paradigm. A new paradigm, a new way of looking at things, even if it generates scientific revolution, can neither be approved, nor disapproved by the scientific community that generated the initial paradigm. The new paradigm generates scientific revolution until it is replaced by another paradigm. Thus, calculations and formulas are valid within a research paradigm and are not representative for other perspectives. This is explained by Kuhn (1962):

> Though each may hope to convert the other to his way of seeing science and its problems, neither may hope to prove his case. The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs. (Kuhn, 1962, 148)

According to Kuhn, conflicting theories can not be judged with an impartial language, considering that certain concepts may have different connotations depending on each theory in question. Kuhn's final demonstration regarding the evolution of scientific theories is that this evolution didn’t occur as a consequence of the accumulation of knowledge, but as a set of circumstances and intellectual possibilities: one of the goals of science is creating templates applicable in broad contexts. Kuhn's emphasis is not on the impossibility of scientific progress, but on the frequent changes of paradigm, valid only within certain ways of thinking:

> [...] no theory ever solves all the puzzles with which it is confronted at a given time; nor are the solutions already achieved often perfect. On the contrary, it is just the incompleteness and imperfection of the existing data-theory fit that, at any time, define many of the puzzles that characterize normal science. If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times. (Kuhn, 1970, 146)

Another critic of the research methods is Paul Feyerabend (1975), who puts the premises of research - the search for truth - into question. Feyerabend asks whether *truth* is not just an ideological concept serving science. Is there any obligation to follow the truth? Human existence can be guided by truth, but it can also be guided by freedom. If freedom and truth

do not overlap, we have to choose: we can abandon freedom, but truth could be rejected as well.

> Scientific "facts" are taught at a very early age and in the very same manner in which religious "facts" were taught only a century ago. [...] Society, for example, and its institutions, are criticised most severely and often most unfairly... But science is excepted from the criticism. In society at large the judgement of the scientist is received with the same reverence as the judgement of bishops and cardinals was accepted not too long ago. [...] Wherever we look we see that great scientific advances are due to outside interference which is made to prevail in the face of the most basic and most "rational" methodological rules. The lesson is plain: there does not exist a single argument that could be used to support the exceptional role which science today plays in society. Science has done many things, but so have other ideologies. (Feyerabend, 1975)

Nevertheless, Stove (1982) notes that there is more knowledge today than 50 years ago and a lot more compared to 1850, resulting in an information volume accumulated over time. At the same time, Feyerabend's (1975) ideological nature of science is justified in the light of the unique concept: in the attempt to find answers, any theory returns to itself (within its own paradigm). Contradictory arguments indicated above feed the lack of consensus within the scientific community regarding goals and methods of research. Personally, I resonate to the idea that research can be done, that knowledge may be increased through conjugation of validated research methods with creativity, honesty and critical judgement.

Theatre research might seem an elitist speculation if the creator-performance-spectator triad would not continue to exist outside the scenic event. If we talk about theatre after the performance is over, the phenomenon is still reverberating in the shadows of memory. Moreover, if you feel the need to recognize actors, directors, performances, does this not contribute to the mythology of theatre and to the *cementation* of theatre as Theatre? How solid is this cementation of greatness while theatrical tools are also found in educational theatre, community theatre or psychodrama?

The paradigm defined by the current thesis is that, in society, theatre is subject to the action of forces. This paradigm was based on the attempt to explain the different paths taken by

theatre today: on one hand as a sum of tools for exploration in pedagogical or psychological spaces, and on the other hand as a continuous artistic and managerial consolidation of the prestigious cultural entities. How can these tendencies coexist? The work comes from the need to include these contradictory, chaotic, directions in a coherent whole, providing an opportunity to explain their possible links and consequences.

As mentioned above, the thesis will also present other manifestation spaces of the Being (social, psychological, educational), where theatre tools can be identified. If the centrifugal force which disperses instruments would be the only force acting on the phenomenon, theatre would lose itself as a coherent structure. Because this does not happen (theatre phenomenon manifests itself as a functional whole in institutions, performances, rehearsals), there is a response to the centrifugal force, an opposite centripetal force that strengthens and cements the theatre unity and greatness.

In conclusion, the thesis will try to demonstrate the possibility of seeing the trends acting on the theatre phenomenon as two major forces, centrifugal and centripetal, one that breaks down the theatre in its own tools, and the other that cements the theatre mythology, both generating a dynamic balance of the phenomenon. This is a possible reason for which theatre does not lose itself in instruments used in other manifestation areas of the Being (except for those who deny its monolithic structure), neither becomes a mystical fetishised veneration object (except for those who need a profound legitimation of the art they practice or admire).

## THE AXIOM OF THEATRE AS A MONOLITHIC PHENOMENON

The use of *forces acting on theatre* takes as axiomatic the monolithic character of the theatre phenomenon, as there is also an opposite vision, where the syncretic art of theatre can be seen as an accumulation of connections, trends, relationships between various art forms that, from time to time, meet under the *theatre* term. The discussion can be simplified in terms of the maturity of the phenomenon and its ability to produce a sufficient number of working tools: does theatre became mature enough to be considered *per se*, or on its own feet?

The demonstration becomes consistent if the answer to the previous question is *YES*. A *NO*, perhaps as justified by the differences between events with theatrical nature, would stop the proposed model in the details: if we consider theatre arts and other tools, movements and achievements, artists and productions, the formulation *forces acting on theatre* becomes inaccurate. Although it is not the only way of theorizing the phenomenon, the thesis starts axiomatically from theatre as a monolithic structure encompassing theatre, its history and its subsequent reports.

Such a characterization, despite the generosity it proposes, may seem lax, being able to mix in the same tool kit what we call theatre with tools and working methods of other fields. Therefore, to see if a force acting on theatre can be defined, it becomes necessary to accept the monolithic character of theatre, as well as to make a minimum separation between theatre instruments and the rest of analogue instruments.

In this case, the thesis traces the boundary between theatre tools and other tools (psychological, pedagogical) on the principle of paternity: it is proposed that a tool, whatever areas of human events is used, belongs to theatre if its theatrical origin is recognized either by the creators or by those who use it in other areas.

*Forces acting on theatre* defines tendencies of a certain origin (over which different scenarios can be tested), in order to modify the position of the phenomenon in society or to adjust other phenomena using theatre elements taken from coherent whole.

The assumption that current trends in society (which are reflected on theatre) could be classified as forces comes from the empirical observation that theatre tools, techniques encountered in actors' training end up being used in other manifestation areas of the Being: psychology (psychodrama), education (theatre in education), social activities (forum theatre, theatre debate) etc. Formulations as: *theatre tools are used* or *come to be used* in other manifestation areas of the Being, a priori put us with a fait accompli: *they are there*, *they got there*, but forgetting to ask *how did they get there*? *Who brought them*? Perhaps an intuitive explanation is that social actors in those areas felt they could increase their results by applying theatrical techniques. But the existence of psychodrama or specialized master programmes in educational theatre weaken the explanation that curious practitioners or theorists began to look in the secret locker of theatre.

What the thesis will try to explain during the following chapters is that the way we act in the contemporary society determines a sustained endeavour to increase the potential to be more than ourselves, not only to perform but also to be perceived as performers, and surrounded by social actors, economic actors, political actors, we transform the stage actor in a collective reference for someone who is himself, and at the same time can be more than that.

## SOURCES OF DISSOLUTION, SOURCES OF CEMENTATION

For the individual part of various networks, the problem of reliability and repeatability arises in terms of prerequisite for the embodiment of the expanded potential. Thus, if in the first phase increasing the potential has a fictional nature, generating favourable emotions when the individual mentally projects his enlarged capacity, in the second phase, when the individual wants to assume the new role, when the individual wants to transfer the capacity of being more than itself into reality, the problem of reliability is encountered.

The reliability and repeatability of the social role may be regarded either as native, or as acquired components.

If the reliability and repeatability are not native attributes of the individual part of the networks, the look at the actor who holds these attributes has an aspirational nature. Coagulating the aspirational component with the sceptical gaze at the *magical* and *miraculous* exercised by actor on viewers (a postmodern scepticism), it can be said that the individual, disenchanted by the theatre transcendent, is interested in learning the actor's tools in order to increase its own potential in analogous situations. This way, the individual's skills and confidence within the network could be increased.

Out of the approach of a sum of individuals (who tend to gain the ability of assuming credible and repeatable roles in order to increase their relevance within the network) emerges a force for which the theatre monolith is a source of tools. This centrifugal force tends to break the theatre, dismantling the Dostoyevskian *beauty who will save the world* into beauty-like props used in utilitarian purpose, supports that will help the individual to cross the credibility road within the network.

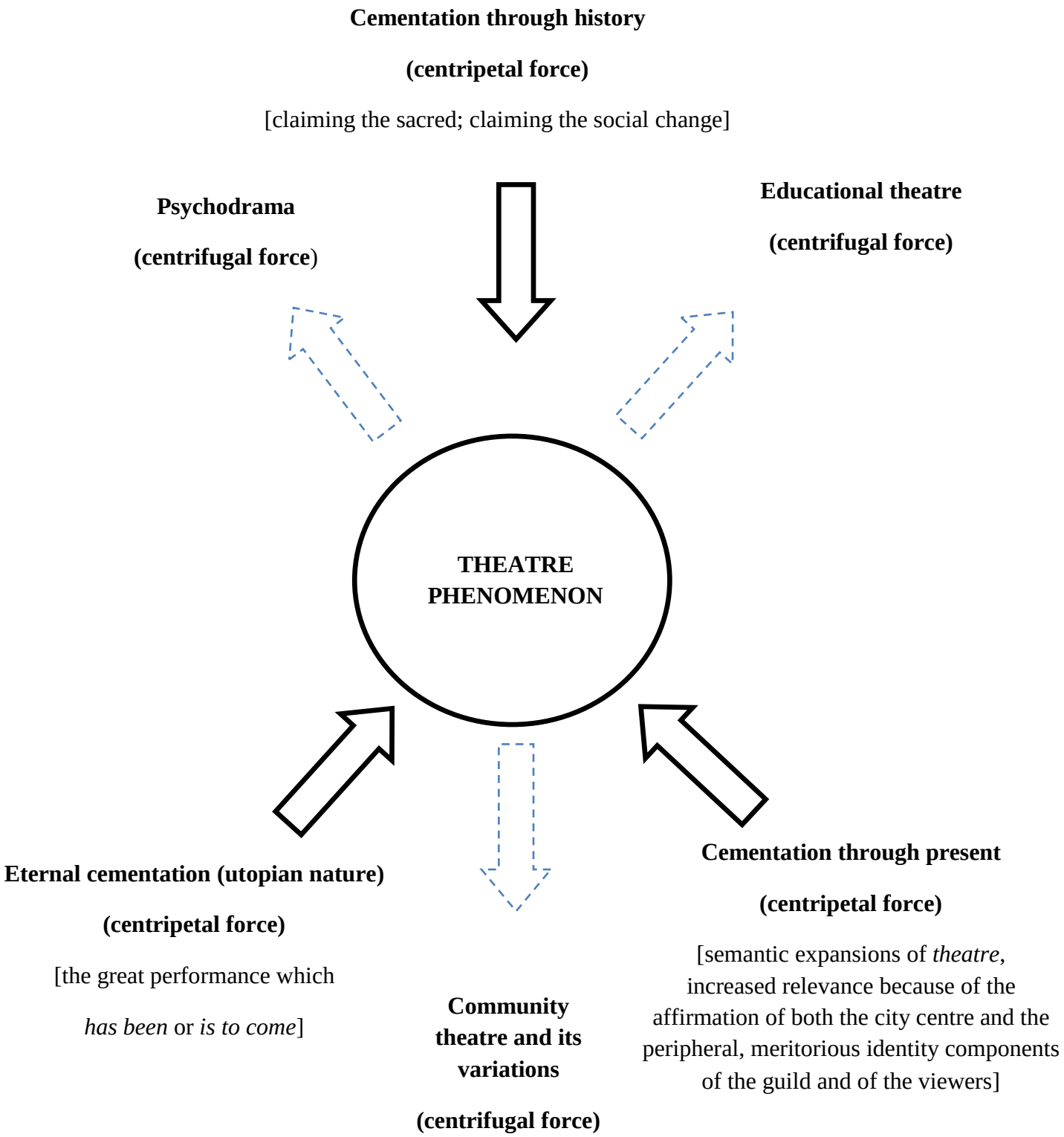
On the other hand, if there are contexts or historical periods in which theatre is revered, if theatre intersects utopia, projecting its great performance and later leaving its greatness to memory, it means that the phenomenon not only indulges its dissection, but also responds to

the centrifugal force with an opposite one, a force that cements theatre mythology, helping to transform the actor in *Actor* and the theatre in *Theatre*. The difference is not just a pretentious capital letter, but a series of steps that place this art form over other activities and its creators in recognized holders of outstanding ability.

Theatre mythology, the reverence with which theatre can be considered *Theatre*, develops in response to dissecting the phenomenon. The current thesis proposes three sources of the centripetal force: a historical cementation or a cementation with the help of the past (via a convenient recomposition of theatre history), a cementation through the present (by expanding the semantics of the term *theatre* and its associated words and by juxtaposing the social agenda to the art form - gay / lesbian / black theatre), alongside an eternal cementation: the call to the great performance which *has been* or *is to come*, a cementation related to the utopian side of the phenomenon.

Considering that theatre can not be separated from its memory (which, by the mental projection of its great performance has utopian valences), but neither can remain immune to the seduction that it exerts on other manifestation areas of the Being (through the actor and its extended potential), it can be said that the result of the centrifugal (decomposition) and the centripetal (cementation) forces gives theatre a dynamic balance in seeking its own position in society (see figure below).

**Theatre phenomenon in dynamic balance**



## CONCLUSIONS

Talking about forces acting on theatre means, first of all, to look at theatre as a monolith over which actions are exercised in order to change the position of the phenomenon in society. In other words, to paraphrase Susan Sontag (2000), to discuss theatre under forces articulates a new refusal to leave the phenomenon alone.

A number of practitioners and academics continue to rake a phenomenon that has evolved with civilization, a phenomenon worshipped and blamed alike, yet shiny but *removed* of the importance it once had, domestic or foreign, full or empty, commercial or experimental, sacral phenomenon that repeats the act of creation or only means for social action. Thus, due to its lax definition and divergent manifestations, it can be said that the theatre phenomenon is not foreign to contradictions.

The question that the current thesis is trying to answer is whether these contradictions, as well as others that characterize theatre, could be included in a coherent whole, with the possibility of a practical check. Starting from the identification of empirical theatre tools in other manifestation areas of the Being, the model defines a centrifugal force (having its source in the diligences of the contemporary society) which breaks down the theatre monolith in instruments subordinated to other areas. The fact that the theatre phenomenon does not dissipate in its own tools, but continues to assert its sacred dimension, its relevance to contemporary and its worthy identitary component converges towards the existence of a response force, a centripetal force which cements the theatre mythology.

There are authors (Castells, 2000; Dijk, 2006) who differentiate the current society from other organization models taking into account the electronic component of interactivity and communication, components which have changed the structure of social action from a pyramidal model (having its top identified in gods, leaders or domineering class) to a network structure similar to the online social networks. Thus, individuals and organizations are interconnected by the electronic environment, decisions having often a collaborative nature.

The more technology penetrates the social strata, the less differentiation in terms of access to information will be made. The new differences lie in the ability to assume multiple credible roles within the network, in order to anticipate others' decisions and to increase individual relevance.

For the hyper-consumer (as described by Lipovetsky, 2007), for the individual part of the network society, to be yourself and also a bit of the others implies extending the potential, an approach which remains as projection until its materialization in credible and repeatable roles. Because of its profession, the actor remains a model of the extended potential, mainly because of the ability to be himself and even more than that. The increased potential of the actor can be viewed from two perspectives: as native abilities through which the actor manages to be more than himself, or as acquired skills in order to assume the character.

In the absence of the native skills for assuming the multidimensionality of roles, the individual tends to take over the character building tools from the actor. Once taken, the individual uses the instruments for the augmentation of self in order to assume credible and repeatable roles within its networks. Retrieved in other spaces, the theatre tools change their aesthetic subordination with new subordinations required by the spaces they arrive in.

By its syncretism, theatre monolith is not only dissected for its actors' toolkits, but also for elements of dramaturgy (text structures with conflict), directing (choice of the appropriate tools), stage design (construction of the necessary sets) etc.

For example, through the two practice models of educational theatre, *Drama in Education* and *Theatre in education*, one can speak of theatre tools that change the aesthetic subordination for the subordination of education. In this case, the relevance of theatre tools can be checked according to the differences between students who practice a form of theatre and students for whom this art form is unknown. Regarding the relevance of theatre for Romanian teenagers, the outcomes of the current study are correlated with similar studies from abroad (Deasy, 2002; Gervais, 2006; Catterall, 2009), indicating that students who attend theatre clubs or drama/ theatre classes not only have better communication skills, but also perceive better the constructed components of the human relationships, as forms of daily theatricality (Goffman, 2007).

By checking the paternity and the relevance of theatre instruments, it can be said that the presence of the theatre tools in other manifestation spaces of the Being is a result of the centrifugal force, which, as a diligence of the contemporary, decomposes the theatre monolith.

If the centrifugal force which decomposes theatre would be the only force acting on the phenomenon, the end of theatre as a coherent whole could be easily predicted. However, this does not happen, moreover, theatre art being given credit and relevance inside the cultural field. In response to the centrifugal force of decomposition, the thesis identifies a similar force with opposite action, a centripetal force that strengthens theatre mythology, having historical claims, city coagulation and meritorious identitary components as sources.

With the help of the theatre history, creators can claim the ritualistic origin of the phenomenon, thus legitimizing their searches and experiments (Artaud, 1958; Grotowski, 2014), they can combat the sacred dimension of theatre (Schechner, 2009) or they can claim a theatre which coagulates daily problems (Boal, 1992, 2008; Kuppers, 2007).

If history has the capacity of cementing the theatre phenomenon through retrieval of past ritualistic elements, the presents cements the theatre mythology through the relevance within the city, theatre being a medium of expression for both the central and the peripheral, the canonical and the undesirable. In this case, the theatre does not only perpetuate spectacular practices, but is also looking for ways in which groups with marginal issues could capture the stage centre, generating their own denomination (feminist / gay / lesbian / queer / black theatre). By joining political agenda with the form of expression, as well as by aesthetically articulating the voices of the peripheral, theatre expands in the social strata, looking for the best means by which peripheral claims have the desired effect.

The guild can also be considered as a present source of cementing the theatre mythology. The meritorious identitary components of the guild are perpetuated through individual aspiration to the extended potential of the actor. In a postmodernist spirit, "self-sceptical and yet curious, incredulous and yet seeker, benevolent and yet ironic" (Călinescu, 1995, 233), the individual, on one hand breaks the theatre monolith into tools in order to enhance its potential or activates the tools in other manifestation areas of the Being, and on the other hand cements

the theatre mythology through a reverent look at this art form, legitimating it with every purchased ticket and every appreciative speech addressed to the guild.

> Who is addressing the spectator, the actor or the embodied character? Placing itself (affective, or, conversely, rational) in the scenic character, the spectator responds (via deep silence, laughter and applause) the actor. In fact, the one hidden in the anonymity of the hall satisfies (with a vague awareness) its need of identification (of reaffirming the ego, of self-mirroring or of self-retrieval), by the protection offered by distancing and theatre denial. (Crișan, 2008, 13)

Further, the guild uses theatre history to claim its *beyond human* origin, but it can also arrogate utopian merits, balancing between the great creation that *has been* (having a utopian character through its remembered perfection) or *is to come* (projecting the future great performance).

In such a structure, the centrifugal and centripetal forces acting on theatre, although they may be seen as separate, they rather tend to form a whole which gives theatre a dynamic equilibrium.

The proposed model is intended to answer a question that every generation of theatre graduates should ask themselves: *why doesn't theatre disappear?* Apparently, the question might be *why do we keep doing theatre?*, but without voluntary placing the extinction sword above, the reasons for which the phenomenon remains relevant for today would prove futile. The spectrum of disappearance comes into clear focus as no court has declared the eternal nature of the theatre phenomenon (on the contrary, perishability is often a common label applied to the theatrical universe), as either the disappearance was not fully declared (except for those interested in establishing other terms or models).

Perhaps this dynamic equilibrium as a way of seeing the relationship between the theatre phenomenon and the exterior can be an explanation for which theatre is not regressing nor progressing vehemently. There are ways, models and fashions of making theatre but, as we see in the theatre history, they do not change the global position of the phenomenon (the theatre was ousted and taken back in the city without dissoluting itself and without being the engine of evolution).

The proposed model as a set of forces provides an answer for which theatre is not dissoluting in its own tools, as neither becomes an object of collective adulation, but is kept in a dynamic balance while questioning its position inside the manifestation areas of the Being. Such a model would not only facilitate those studying theatre to acquire a *cause-effect* structure for which theatre is not wasted, nor becomes central in the area of human manifestations, but allows them to be aware that there is a dynamic balance of the phenomenon and they have the chance to validate certain movements and projects over others in trying to recover the state of equilibrium for which theatre and its audience are yearning.

Finally, as with any model that has a degree of practical verification, a coherent coagulation of tendencies acting on theatre provides a working model for clarification the divergent contemporary trends, containing as much truth and application as it can inspire other academics and practitioners:

> We have seen that that someone as theoretically astute as Bonnie Marranca has questioned the relevance of much theoretical work to the practices of the performing arts. Theory and theatre can be irrelevant to each other. But there is nothing inherent about them which means that his must be so. Nor is there anything about them which guarantees a productive relationship. The question of their usefulness for each other will have to be answered over and over again always in new and particular circumstances. (Fortier, 2002, 220)

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