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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Directing for Devised Theatre**

*From practice, to theory, to practice again*

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## **D e c l a r a t i o n**

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## **Abstract**

### **Directing for Devised Theatre**

#### ***From practice, to theory, to practice again.***

In this thesis I will reflect on my creative journey of being a director for groups working with Devised Theatre. From the first attempts at creating a play and the awareness of the satisfaction I feel during the creation process, to the years at 'TeArt' when I learned the hard way what it means to be a director in a group of equals; On my studies in two schools, DAMU and RESAD, and what I learned there improving my skills, to the latest project in which I believe I put all the knowledge I acquired into practice. A reflection that juxtaposes theories on Devised Theatre and Collaborative Creation with my own personal experiences.

## **Abstrakt**

### **Réžie Autorského Divadla**

#### ***Od praxe k teorii a zpět k praxi***

V této práci se budu zabývat svým kreativním procesem jakožto režiséra souborů, které se věnují autorskému divadlu. Od prvních pokusů vytvořit hru a pocitů zadostiučinění, které jsem během kreativního procesu pociťoval, až po roky v „TeArt“, kde jsem si na vlastní kůži vyzkoušel, co to znamená být režisérem skupiny sobě rovných kreativních jedinců; Dále se budu věnovat svým studiím na dvou školách, DAMU a Resad. Tomu, co jsem se během těchto let v průběhu prohlubování mých dovedností naučil, až k poslednímu projektu, ve kterém věřím, že jsem převedl do praxe všechny své získané znalosti. Jedná se o úvahu, která klade vedle sebe teorii autorského divadla a mojí vlastní dosaženou praxi.

# 1.Introduction

## 1.1 The first contact

One of my very first vivid childhood memories is of the first time I went to the theatre. I wasn't much more than four years old and my parents took me to the National Theatre of Rhodes to see a play for children. The play was a child-friendly version of the 'Odyssey'. At some point, the actors, dressed as creatures of the sea, went down into the audience and walked through the seats where kids would scream, either of fear or excitement. I cannot recall if I was afraid or excited, but I remember very clearly a huge blue medusa coming towards my seat. I think that was the moment I fell in love with theatre.

During my kindergarten year, I got my first role ever. In the dramatization of the fairy tale "The bad wolf and the seven goats" I was given the role of the youngest goat, who wasn't eaten by the wolf and instead hid inside a cupboard, waiting for him to leave. While inside the cupboard, I remember my heartbeat quickening at the possibility of being found, but also a strange feeling that I had to fulfil my role and be good for the play.

And then came the homemade performances in my room. My brother and I would use sheets as scenography, flashlights for lighting and we would put on plays for an audience of two, our parents. I don't remember what these performances were about, but I remember how happy I was making them and acting in them.

Theatre is very present in the school life of Greece, and even though we didn't have it as a subject during my school years, it was common for every class to present a play for different occasions, national holidays or the end of the school year. I was not a shy kid and could easily memorize texts and song lyrics, therefore, I would be always given parts at school plays.

I participated in every theatre play I could, in and out of school. I loved to learn my lines, dress up and play with other kids; pretending to be someone else. Back then the only profession I could identify with theatre was of an actor, so that was my answer to the question "What will you be when you grow up?".



## 1.2 The early years

When I turned seventeen, after few years of being out of theatre because of intense studying, I felt the urge to stage a play about what was going on in my life. Since I didn't know any play that dealt with the struggles of a senior high school student or about the social pressure to enter University, I decide to create one.

I had an idea of what I wanted to talk about and I asked some of my schoolmates to participate. Nobody had high hopes neither stress for the result. I wrote the dialogues and put together the play and the videos we included without ever feeling like I was "the director", and also acted as one of the characters. The result, even though it was my first attempt ever at creating theatre, got good comments from teachers, schoolmates and relatives who came to visit.

This play was not simply a nice memory or a self-esteem boost, but also a revelation and the beginning of my creative journey. It made me realize that participating in a theatre play as an actor who follows orders wasn't enough for me. What really fulfilled me was the creative process; being one of the creators of the game, not just a player in it.

The only option to study theatre in Greece back then was to enter a drama school and become an actor. There were also university departments, but their focus on the field was mostly theoretical.

Greek society, despite what may be assumed by foreigners, is very strict and demanding when it comes to choices for the adult life. It is commonly believed that by the time you are eighteen you should know what you want to do with your life, get in the university to study, for that, finish your studies on time and start working as soon as possible.

I grew up in a working-class family where art is not believed to be a professional choice that can provide you with a decent living, but just a hobby that you can do in your free time. Therefore, when the time came to decide what to study, I did not choose theatre.

Many different reasons made me choose a different path in studies, but theatre never left my life. Greek Universities are very active and politically engaged and theatre plays a big part in that. Every department has its own group which prepares and presents a play every year, most commonly with a political/social theme.

I became a member of multiple theatre groups both in and out of University and I began considering the option of studying in a drama school. However, my wish for adventure won out in the end and I ended up going abroad to continue my studies in Journalism. Theatre would always be the place to feel at home, though.

### 1.3 Copenhagen and 'TeArt'

When I moved to Denmark in 2008, one of the first things I did was to look for a theatre group, and a few months later I was member in one. This group was international, but its focus was to find an English play and act it out with the appropriate accent.

It was the first time after school that I was in a group where I didn't see the reason behind doing a play. Since this purpose was just to stage an English play, the group soon got lost in miscommunications, lack of motivation and finally was dissolved.

The year after I got involved in a new group. It was a newly established group looking for people with a passion for theatre. It was soon named 'TeArt' and it became a space where I felt safe and accepted, free to play and create. Since our first play, we would create everything from scratch, a process that many years later we found out was called Devised Theatre.

For the next four years we experimented with our own scripts and different techniques, always creating while rehearsing and always talking about themes that we felt connected to.

'TeArt' became a big part of my young adult life and a milestone in my journey as a theatre artist. Apart from finding 'my place' in a foreign country, I also felt I had found 'my place' in theatre. Soon became clear to me that the way we were working in that group, which was challenging and also immensely creative, was the way I wanted to work in the future.

I will not go to any further detail about the way we worked with 'TeArt' at this point, since a whole chapter is dedicated to this subject later. This group also made me admit to myself and others that theatre was not just a hobby to me, it was what I wanted to dedicate my time to and the way I wanted to make a living.

It also made me realize that if I wanted to evolve in theatre, I would have to combine my practical experiences with some theoretical background and learn new forms and ways to create.

Four years after being member of 'TeArt' and putting myself through different roles in both the creative and administrative part, I started the process of applying for theatre schools.

My decision for this was very clear in my mind at that point. I wanted to become better and learn new techniques, new ways of making theatre that I would later apply to my work. At the same time, I needed a little distance from being active in the process, some time to rest and see my experience and my way of working from a distance.

As I wrote in my motivation letter applying for KATaP: *"Why do you stop running if you want to get better? So, my body can forget the old habits and run better and faster afterwards. This is how a sporty friend of mine explained his decision to completely stop running for a year and this is the best description I can give about my relationship with theatre right now."*

*After a period that I was involved in many projects I was drained. I needed a break for my body and mind to forget old habits. Now, I am ready to run again, faster, better, but I need coaches to further nurture my skills and knowledge. I need to get involved in individual projects, get inspired and co-create with other artists and discover new methods and ways to express my creativity".*

Three years after that decision, I am trying to see this whole process with distance again. The aim of this thesis is to reflect on this journey before, during and after my studies.

How did I used to work as a director previous to my studies? What did I learn from my studies in KATaP and RESAD as well my internship in THOC, and how can I implement it in my future work? Has my way of working changed in the current project I am in? These are the questions that I will try to investigate with this thesis.

Me as director of Devised Theatre, from practice, to theory, to practice again. Reflecting on a personal trajectory through theories about Devised Theatre.

# 1. Devised Theatre

## 2.1 Definition of Devised Theatre

Interestingly, some 70 years ago there wasn't any type of theatre called 'devised'. Today though, 'Devised Theatre' is not only common as a term, but in many countries already offered as a subject or even field of studies in theatre schools. But what exactly does it mean?

The simplest explanation for Devised Theatre is: a play or performance that is created from scratch. The starting point can be anything, a picture, a poem, a historical document, an idea or even a dramatic text that can be used as an inspiration, be distorted, changed or even turned into a parody.

As Alison Oddey explains in her book 'Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook': *"Devising is about thinking, conceiving and forming ideas, being imaginative and spontaneous as well as planning. It is about inventing, adapting and creating what you do as a group"*<sup>1</sup>

A group in Devised Theatre is defined as a group of people that is not interested in just putting a written play on stage, but people who set an initial framework and are disposed to explore and experiment within it. This is what differentiates devising from the more traditional way of making theatre.

There is no single correct way of devising theatre, but every way should include the following parameters, in order to be considered Devised:

- a. Process: finding the ways and means to share an artistic journey together. In a devised process the questions that arise about why this performance is being made are of equal, if not more importance than the questions dealing with how to make this performance.
- b. Collaboration: working with others. Devised Theatre is not about some few individuals shining, but about all the members of the group getting equal opportunities and responsibilities. Each person participates in the

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<sup>1</sup> Oddey, Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1.

process according to their interests and capacities and offers their own unique view to the group.

- c. Multi-Vision: integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events. Every participant in the group comes from different background. The devising process is not just about these individualities meeting, but also about them finding common ground in the way they collaborate, and a common vision for the final result.
- d. The creation of an artistic product. The final goal of a devising process should include the creation of an artistic product. This does not necessarily mean a finished theatre play; it can be an investigation piece, work in progress etc. Another characteristic of devised theatre is that the creation process is considered to be of equal or bigger value than the final result.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Devised or collaborative theatre? A short history.

It becomes clear that the creation process is the fundamental part of Devised Theatre. Then why not just call it 'creating' instead of 'devising'? 'Creating' implies a single vision but 'devising' implies that more individuals are given the opportunity of being involved and collaborate in the process.<sup>3</sup>

'Devised' is the British term for this kind of theatre. In the USA, groups that use similar practices to create a piece call the process 'Collaborative Theatre' or 'Collaborative Creation'. Seeing this name it becomes even more clear that the performance can emerged from nothing (ex-nihilo) in comparison to the term 'devising' which, when used outside of the theatre world, indicates a creation that is based on something pre-existing.<sup>4</sup> In this case however, 'Collaborative' and 'Devised' theatre are considered synonyms, and in this paper they will be treated as such.

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<sup>2</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* ( London: Routledge, 1994) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 54.

<sup>4</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 3

When the word 'devising' first appeared, it was in the fringe and underground milieu, describing an alternative to a writer-led theatre. It was about doing something different, experimenting with the form, finding new ways of relating to audiences and new ways of collaboration inside a theatre group. There was no single aesthetic or ideological objective.<sup>5</sup>

The devised or collaborative process itself however, is not something new, in fact it is the way theatre always has been made. The term itself started to get popular during the decades of 1950-60s, when it was used to separate this practice from the dominant way theatre was functioning until then, both creatively and economically.

On the one hand, one has to consider the economic situation of the period. Many theatre groups were opposed to the post-war economic system in general, and to the way the theatre market was functioning in particular. Their decision to turn to devised techniques was not just ideological but also practical. This way they wouldn't have to pay expensive royalties and could also differentiate themselves and create a niche in the market.

On the other hand, was the need for creative freedom which was arising at the time. Opposing the leading belief at the time that the author is God and the director the prophet of the text, many actors felt the urge to be part of the creation process. They wanted to be decision makers in the plays they were participating in and not just apathetic executors.

Devised performances from actor-centred groups began to emerge; using personal stories and beliefs as the material and the body of the actor as a vehicle to narrate them. All this developed in an era that was changing and discovering that personal is political.<sup>6</sup>

As Chris Baldwin and Tina Bicat explain in the introduction of their book 'Devised and Collaborative Theatre', what has changed over the last sixty to seventy years is "*a fluctuating activity intending to draw into the creative process all the various*

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<sup>5</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 140.

<sup>6</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 19.

*talents of those members of the theatre ensemble, who have been disenfranchised by the concentration of the power of decision in the hands of a few key members...*

*The main alternative has been to find some way of working in which the imaginative potential of each of the members of the ensemble can be utilized to enrich the performance.”<sup>7</sup>*

In this way, making theatre has changed both ideologically and creatively from an oligarchical process to a more democratic one. As time went by, devised could not only be found in the fringe or underground, it became popular and institutionalized and many groups began to gain government funding. By the 1990s, the term ‘devised’ began to have less political connotations and instead was associated more with skill sharing, division of responsibilities and flat structure hierarchies inside the theatre group.<sup>8</sup>

Devised Theatre demands time and participation from every one of the members of the group, not only for the artistic product, but also for all the practicalities of the process that will lead to it. The group operates as a company and decides how they will manage, time, space, money and resources and in which way it will work towards the goal of the performance.

### 2.3 The creation process in Devised Theatre

Any definition of Devised Theatre must include process, a process that remains open to be rethought and modified even after the presentation of the project.

As mentioned before, there is not a single unique way for devising. There are as many devising methods as devised performances, but there is a process that can be followed not as rule but as a guide, being the result of practical needs.

Before starting the creative process, it is important for the group to discuss why they want to make this performance. Even though no concrete beliefs or themes need to be expressed, it can be useful to have a first idea or stimulus in order to start working. Of course, this first idea could completely change during the process.

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<sup>7</sup> Bicat Tina and Baldwin Chris, *Devised and Collaborative Theatre* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2002)

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<sup>8</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 9.

Many companies use text (a book, a scrip, a philosophical treaty etc.) as stimulus for their devising, while others use a vague idea or even an object as their source of inspiration. In some community theatre companies, words of witnesses or even whole interviews of people related to the theme being examined are used, theatricalized and as a collage.<sup>9</sup>

Once the initial stimulus is chosen, a period of laboratory work for the group begins. In this early stage of the creation process, improvisation plays an important role. In devised theatre, improvisation can be found in different forms.

It can be used in the more traditional form, where actors create a scene according to input coming from the director, or it can be used in its other extreme, where actors are on stage for a long period, with or without external stimulations (like music) until things start happening. The interesting parts of these improvisations will be noted down by the director(s) and can be used later on as stimuli or entry points for further improvisations, or even modified directly into scenes and situations to be used in the performance.

Improvisation is only a part of the process for creating material, other parts of which might also include editing, designing, structuring, choreographing, writing and rehearsing. To create a performance through a devising process usually takes longer than the usual rehearsal period of more traditional script-based theatre.<sup>10</sup>

Once a good amount of material has been gathered, it is often useful to design the dramaturgy of the piece. The dramaturgy does not have to follow any specific rules but serves as a commonly agreed structure that allows the group to have something they can all refer to whenever needed.

As Simon Pittman, director who works with devised companies explains: “*There has to be a point in the devised process where one shifts from developing and exploring to structuring. A point where we say to the actors we are writing and structuring a play that has come from you, is related to you, is guided by us (the directors) and is written for you and made for you to perform. In this way it might*

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<sup>9</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 7.

<sup>10</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 9.



*become a more traditional relationship between director-writer- actors, but with a shared history of related experience and exploration supporting it.*<sup>11</sup>

The creation of a script or a score can occur at any point in the devised process. There are companies that begin writing before the improvisation period and others that transcribe the improvisations and turn them into theatrical scripts. Again, any score of text is useful to be used as reference whenever is needed. However, texts in Devised Theatre usually get modified, often even after premiere or well into the run.

Something that could become unclear during the devising process and could even create problems inside the company is the copyright of a devised play. In the publishing world, scripts are usually attributed to a single writer, but in a creation process which everybody contributed to, it is very hard to keep track of who said what in order to fairly share the rights.

A way to avoid misunderstandings, especially when there is no writer or dramaturge in the group, is to make an agreement giving everybody the same share of rights. This is not necessarily a fair agreement, but it enhances the sense of collaboration and team spirit inside the group.

Things can get even more complicated if there are actors who are replaced during the process, because in Devised Theatre each actor is a collaborator and an author.

Collective creation is not an effortless process, quite the opposite. It has multiple additional difficulties, especially every time that an actor enters the process, maybe causing everything to be revised and reinvented. When the actors improvise, they know everything has to come from them - and if they don't collaborate with those they are performing with, nothing will come from anyone involved.<sup>12</sup>

The director(s) as well as the whole company must ensure that everything is focused towards a coherent whole, while at the same time making sure that the group came to this result with a certain freedom, empowering everyone's ownership and participation into the work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 145.

<sup>12</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 75.

<sup>13</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 146.

Devising is a live practice located in time and space, therefore inseparable from the contexts of its production. Variables include cultures, economics, geographies and people.<sup>14</sup>

The process and the result should remain open and revisable. The members of the group are not the only ones shaping the performance and having an impact on it, another important factor is their relationship with the audience.

The audience in Devised Theatre is not (usually) treated as a passive observer. It is taken in consideration during the creation process, it can shape the performances by being an integral part of them and even decide the outcome in some of them.

The relationship between the artist and the spectator is so much more central to Devised Theatre. The idea of theatre as an event becomes important; it no longer is about going to a conventional environment to watch actors reciting an existing text and instead becomes about how someone experiences the performance.<sup>15</sup>

A devised piece doesn't allow the audience to just sit back and enjoy. Neither is it meant to have a merely pleasing and amusing effect for the audience the way many commercial companies still practice theatre. The goal is to make the audience think, to make them uncomfortable and unsure of what to expect.

Devised Theatre is not conventional theatre therefore it should not be assessed by the same criteria. It is a contemporary reflection of culture and society. It addresses new theatrical forms, making innovative contributions to the existing interests and considerations of the time.<sup>16</sup>

Devised companies are often accused of having poor quality scripts. Scripts that are written by many people and are created with the intention of being open and revisable, tend to lack the coherence that is found in texts written by a single author. On the other hand, a devised text has the advantage of always being open to modification, therefore to improvement.

Many companies transcribe their scripts to preserve them for the future. Even though one of the characteristics of devised theatre is its ephemerality, a documented

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<sup>14</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 231.

<sup>15</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 141.

<sup>16</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 23.

performance is more credible while it helps the group to keep track of its ideas. Copyrights and popularization of the group are additional reasons for documentation.

Those scripts though can be difficult to read and to stage by others, people that were not present while the original was created. Theatre companies tend to adopt their own ways of communication over time, sometimes even developing their own vocabulary, commonly understood by its members but entirely incomprehensible to an outsider.

Devising Theatre is a hard, frustrating process but at the same time full of joy and satisfaction. It is a new experience to create with every group, with every performance. The need to express own ideas, giving a voice to many more people and the pleasure of working with others overcomes all the difficulties and makes people willing to create theatre instead of simply putting an existing play on stage.

#### 2.4 The role of the director in Devised Theatre

Some may think that the role of a director in a Devised Theatre group could be eliminated but, on the contrary, here the existence of a director is even more crucial. However, instead of an omniscient-director, many times even tyrant-director that can be found in a traditional group, Devised Theatre needs a director who is very flexible and capable of multitasking. Directing a devising group requires a lot of diplomacy, management skills, personal appeal and a cool head in times of crisis.

At this point it should be clarified that Devised Theatre needs a collective vision rather than a collective character. It is not about eliminating the roles of individuals in the group, but about respecting the functions of the different roles and positions.

Collective decisions can be made for the practical or essential matters of the group (how to manage money, space, what beliefs the group needs to express) but a director or directors are needed to make fast and effective decisions during the creation process. Someone needs to be the 'eye from the outside'.

As Ariane Mnouchkine, director of Soleil Theatre, a collective group based in Paris, explains: *"I don't think we will achieve collective work only when I am no longer anything, because this is also an incorrect attitude. I believe it's a mistake to say that*

*collective implies the suppression of the specific place of each individual. I am not talking about hierarchy but about function.*

*The only thing and this is fundamental, is the dialogue between directors and actors should become increasingly rich, increasingly equal, but it remains a dialogue between people who fulfil two different functions. With our way of working, talent is easily shared, so there's no talent hierarchy, we are equal but not identical.”<sup>17</sup>*

Creation can be collective, even with a director making decisions, but it is essential to ensure that all the voices of the group will be heard during the process. It is almost impossible for everyone to create all together at the same time. Collective creation happens when people create one after another, that way they have the space to put all of their ingenuity into the process.

A collective it is not the nullification of the individuals of which it is composed. *“It would be risky to think that a collective can exist without eyes, without mouth, without hands. A collective is an alliance of several creators.”<sup>18</sup>*

In a devised process where usually the material comes from improvisation of the actors, the director may be the only person not producing, in the physical sense of the word. Still it can save a lot of precious time in the process if the director has the last word when needed. At other times no last word is needed, because the whole group can see the ‘evidence’, a collectively recognized fact because the base of this kind of work process is the creation rather than the competition.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 57.

<sup>18</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 60.

<sup>19</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 219.

## 2. From Practice

*“We wanted a theatre different from the one we were being shown at the time, a theatre created by us, together. We knew nothing. Is that a disadvantage?”<sup>20</sup>*

Ariane Mnouchkine (Director of Soleil Theatre)

### 3.1 ‘TeArt’ the first steps

When I moved to Denmark to study for a master’s in Film and Media, I found myself in a very different social environment. After some months of a so called ‘honeymoon period’ in the new country, I felt lonely and needed a place to belong.

I realized that, up until this point the place where I felt the most comfortable and where I made most of my friends had always been theatre groups. Therefore, I started looking for a group in Copenhagen.

After the initial experience of an English-speaking group that I felt disconnected from and almost discriminated against because of my non-native accent, I replied to an ad looking for theatre enthusiasts to form a group.

This ad did not specify any requirement for previous experience or studies so at the first meeting we got eight people together, all from different countries, fields and experience with theatre and all with different expectations toward this group. But, as we realized years later, we all had one thing in common: we were all looking for a place to fit and feel accepted.

Sunny Sharankova, the person who put out the ad and was officially the founder of the group, made sure to mention at the first meeting that she was not looking for actors for a production, but for people who were willing to create a performance.

When we started our weekly meetings, there were no discussions about a director or leader of the group. Since not all the members of the group had previous experience with theatre, those of us who did tried to incorporate everything we knew in the rehearsals.

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<sup>20</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 23.

Every session would start with some warm up exercises, both for the body and the mind, would continue with exercises for group dynamics and end with improvisations. The impros were both spoken and non-verbal. Without really being aware of what we were doing, we had created our own routines, which without any effort to make them so, ended up similar to the routines of any established theatre group.

A group coming together for the first time may find games, concentration and trust exercises useful to develop a sense of discipline, fun, and spontaneity. These activities encourage skills of communication, confidence, trust and sensitivity, all contributing to the training of the group in terms of founding its identity, realizing its own dynamics, and improving basic skills of performing.<sup>21</sup>

When the time to decide on our first performance arrived, discussions began regarding the way we should work towards it. Up until that point we were working under a flat structure in theory and in practice. In every session one of the eight would be responsible to organize the working plan of the day by bringing theatre games and exercises. As the sessions would finish with impros, there was no need for a director.

The way we wanted to decide on the first performance would be flat and democratic as well. Any member of the group could come up with an idea and we would all vote on the idea that we most wanted to work with.

When the founder of the group came up with an idea that was rejected, she was surprised because as she commented, she had been thinking of herself as the leader/director of the group. The group was in turn surprised at this, since the idea of a flat structure had always been present. The main question for the next years emerged: Should we have a director or not?

As the time for the first performance was approaching, we realized we needed an 'eye from the outside', and so the group decided that the founder should be this eye. Soon became obvious that the subject of the director was something we seriously had to consider for the future of the group.

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<sup>21</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 172.

The outcome of the first year's work was a street performance called 'Maharaja on Fire' based on the Arabic fairy-tale 'One Thousand and One Nights'. It was presented in Copenhagen and in the same summer we were also invited to perform it and collaborate with another theatre group in the south of Spain. This experience made the bonds within the group stronger and all of us came out of the experience more determined to work harder on the next production. While building an ensemble, shared activities are very important. They do not have to be directed related to performing, they can be any social activity that will bring the group closer in a fun and entertaining way.<sup>22</sup>

The following season found the group minus two people that had to leave the city and plus seven new members that had either seen our production and got interested or heard about us as being a group making theatre in English. The new members brought fresh energy and challenges.

At this point I would like to mention that throughout the years 'TeArt' existed as a group, numerous people manifested their interest in being a member. In the first three years especially, the group was very open to new members and we never refused anyone. There was a very organic way in the selection process, where potential members decided for themselves whether they wanted to stay or not.

It was especially interesting to see that anytime someone would decide not to continue the group would also feel it was the right decision. I think this is a very interesting fact and I was surprised to read something similar in the book about 'The Theatre du Soleil'. In one of the chapters the director of the group Ariane Mnouchkine comments: *"We never used to turn any applicants away. We would say come tomorrow at 7.30, there's this set to be moved and that would discourage at least eight out of ten. The company is made up of the people who stayed."*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane. *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 179.

<sup>23</sup> Williams David. *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 26.

I believe that in these kinds of group, determination and a strong desire coming from the members is essential, especially when, at least in the beginning stages of the company, payment cannot be guaranteed or included. The strength and power of these groups lies in collaboration and the combination of the knowledge and talents of every individual.

Whatever the specific role of an individual in a devising group is, the members who are often multitalented have to be versatile and flexible. Their involvement is required in multiple processes including research, improvisation, management and discussions.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 Directing a group for the first time

The decision on the theme of our second play emerged in the same way as it did the first year. We were divided in small subgroups and each one had to come up with an idea/theme for the project. The winning proposition was a play about a building with dysfunctional neighbours who came closer, joining forces to shut down a bar at the ground floor.

We had already agreed to have a director with an overview of this years' project. As I was in the subgroup that had thought up the winning idea and I had a little experience with directing and a lot of desire to work with this project, I offered to be the director.

The group accepted, but little did I know at that moment about the difficulties that were to follow. I took this project very personally and I saw myself as a superhuman that could and should solve everything. This simply ended in disaster.

Chaotic directions coming from me trying to please everybody, deadlines that were pushing for a final result and lack of experience on how to manage a group and how to direct were part and parcel of these difficulties. We had also decided to write the full-length play with complicated stories and many characters ourselves, and I had to deal with a group that I could clearly feel was united against me.

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<sup>24</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 65.



Whenever I would be accused for something during that process I would try to immediately change it and satisfy that specific member that pointed out the problem; actions that would lead to even bigger confusion and misunderstandings.

I took on too many responsibilities which I could not fulfil as back then I imagined a director was someone who takes care of everything. I soon realized that this approach was not heroic but actually dangerous for the balance of the group. The more responsibilities I would take on, the less freedom and participation in the decisions the rest of the members would have.

That became especially obvious as soon as we started writing the play. There was a line of dramaturgy, a series of characters and stories that we all had agreed on, but the dialogues of the individuals scenes should be a result of improvisations.

Due to lack of time and trust in others' work, I took over the writing of many of them. The result was members of the group feeling dissatisfied and disconnected from the text and their characters. Of course, there were other members feeling relieved they didn't have to write any lines.

At the end of the process I started shouting during rehearsals, as the only way I could see anything working was by imposing power. I was trying to give the impression of an authoritarian director who knew what he wanted and how to demand it from his crew. I was actually disappointed to see it was working in many cases because I knew this was neither the way I was nor the way I wanted to work.

Despite the many discussions, tensions and problems, the production moved on and the result, even though it looked 'homemade' in many aspects, surprised the audience and even us.

This almost traumatic experience taught me a lot about theatre and life in general. I learned that good communication skills are important, and that a director must listen to the actors, something I often was accused of not doing in that project. At the same time, I realized you have to stay faithful to who you are and to the way you like to work as a director.

As Michael McCafferey writes in his manual about 'Directing a Play', the director is essential to the success of the production. The responsibilities of the position include making decisions which will affect the artistic and often the financial future of the entire production. "*The long-gone image of an authoritative, irrational but genius dictator who*

*wants to direct mainly because of the power involved, will have difficulties functioning in a group that relies on team work.”* The importance of the position of a director is reflected in the trust the colleagues place in him or her. By screaming and demanding a director can win some small battles but will lose the goodwill and the trust of group which are needed when difficulties arise and have to be dealt with.<sup>25</sup>

It took us and myself some time to realize that a very important duty of a leader in a group is to delegate correctly, offering freedom and trust to the work of the colleagues.

When people do not have enough experience or education, they look to examples of what they have seen or worked with in the past for guidance. This fact was creating a lot of confusion in our very international group, as our members had such a wide variety of different experiences and different ideas of how things should be done in theatre.

Through this experience a lot of collective lessons were learned. The group understood that after they had made the decision to have a director and who that should be, they should also support whoever was chosen for that role. We also realized we need a better time schedule, especially for ambitious productions for which we also wanted to write the script. This experience also demonstrated to us that groups tend to grow slower than individuals do, but the results of a collective maturation are more satisfying.

### 3.3 The blooming years

The third year the group had grown to fourteen members, four of them new. Before we integrated them and began planning the new season and performance we had a long talk about everything that had happened in the last two years. What worked, what didn't, how we felt about the group and the productions and what we could do to make things better.

The process of choosing a play was the same again. Anyone could present either a play or an idea for a play. Three proposals were presented, two ideas for devising a play and one already written. The idea with the most votes was the one I

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<sup>25</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited 2008) 7.

proposed. A devised play about a love story acted in reverse; from breaking up to falling in love, portrayed from the viewpoints of different kinds of couples.

From the beginning, one of our main considerations was to make sure that all of us would have more or less equal parts in every play. Therefore, we either had to find a play with fourteen characters of similar importance or create one for all. This is what we did.

Devising a play is way more exciting and creative, but also a bigger challenge. Writing a play enables you to speak directly about the themes that matter to you. However, a creation made by many people is not only logistically difficult but can also affect the quality of the result.

The danger with a devised piece by a collective company lies in the attempt or desire to please everyone by giving out equal parts, resulting in an heterogenous piece.<sup>26</sup>

Even though I really wanted to work as director again, since I had a vision for this play and I also wanted to redeem myself after the previous experience, I had learned my lesson from the year before. Therefore, I asked for help from the group to form a directing team.

After some internal negotiations we ended up with a directing team of three people: Sunny Sharankova, the initial founder, who also had experience with theatre and leading a group, Elena Perez, an active member with creative ideas and leading skills, and myself. We decided that this team would also be a 'creative team', taking care of the coherence in the dramaturgy and the text, at the same time keeping in mind the overall artistic direction of the production.

More directors can share responsibility for rehearsals, play quality, organizing meetings and the final form of the performance. Working together for some time, the members of a group develop awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and how to help each other.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 116.

<sup>27</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 44.

We distributed the rest of the responsibilities to different subgroups: costumes, scenography, music, lighting, PR and economy of the group. The rest of the members manifested their preferences and got involved in the group they were interested in. We planned the rehearsal period out well in advance, including what would happen in each phase, as we were given the big stage of the theatre space we were associated with, along with a set premiere date.

The months to follow were full of creativity and hard work from everyone. The production which was named 'EVOL: Love Backwards' was a hit with every performance selling out and garnering positive comments from the audience. The performance was repeated some months later with four more shows, all of them selling out again.

For a group made up of foreigners to be able to fill up a stage in Copenhagen was a big deal. At the same time people who had seen all of our productions so far were commenting that this one was not just a step forward in quality, but a leap.

Amateur productions can be quite outstanding. In fact, some of the differences between the amateurs and the professionals are in the amateurs' favour as they can draw on many more human resources for both the cast and crew, something that most professional companies cannot afford. On the other hand, non-professional groups are limited in money, time, space and materials.<sup>28</sup>

Our hearts were full of pride, it was the moment I thought we made it. I imagined we could now function as a professional group that would take the theatre scene of Copenhagen by storm. We could make a living from what we loved, working with a flat structure and making every decision democratically.

For a very long time I had this idea in mind. The 'success' of "EVOL" blinded me to the problems that this production created within the group. Long hours of rehearsals, pressure for a 'professional' result and all the extra tasks that came along with a bigger stage and production divided us in two groups of different speeds.

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<sup>28</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited 2008) 6.

On one side were the people, including myself, who wanted to invest even more time and effort into a better and more profitable result, while on the other side were those who suddenly saw their 'hobby' taking more time than their full time paid jobs. In the meantime, some of the members felt their creativity and participation in the group were suppressed by the directing team, as we had the last word in every aspect of the production.

One decision in particular we had to make during the making of this performance made us question whether the weight we had put on ourselves for a more polished result was against our initial group ethics.

The whole show was closing with a group choreography in which all the actors participated. The three directors were not part of this scene, as we had agreed early on that the three of us would act only in a limited number of scenes. As this choreography was created just days before the premiere, it had to be learnt fast and still be precise. One of the actresses could not hit the right steps though, so a new dilemma appeared for the group. What was more important to us: perfection or inclusion?

We finally decided to replace the actress with one of the female directors. That decision, combined with a tailored mini play we got paid to perform two months later, made us realize how things work in professional reality and caused us to re-think how we wanted to function.

Regardless all the problems that I am able to reflect on years later, the production of 'EVOL' gave us a great opportunity to grow as a group, and to me a second chance to direct a play and put into practice everything I had learned from the past mistakes.

Of course, my work as a director was again not flawless, but I realized that by putting more trust in the work of my colleagues, being better prepared for rehearsals, coming up with planned themes for impros and having a general idea of the result, I gained the trust of the group. Being a member of the directing group and not the main director also took a big deal of the workload and pressure away.

As Frank Hauser and Russel Reich advise in their book *'Notes for Directing'*, a director “*doesn't have to know everything he/she might be the leader but is not alone in the process*”. The other artists are there to help and their contribution should be accepted.<sup>29</sup>

Creating a performance is essentially teamwork that depends on the creativity of the performers, the directing team, but also the stage crew. “*The team can best succeed when tasks are shared, and lines of communication are always open, direct and pleasant*”.<sup>30</sup>

The success of the play and the appreciation of the work we did as a directing team gave us a dissimilar status in the group. It was also very interesting to notice that different people would turn to different directors for notes. This probably happened due to personal relationships we had built throughout the years. Most of us were friends and some of us even housemates.

These personal relationships and intimacy were not always working in favour of the group. They were complicate things when the time came to give feedback for example and it was sometimes hard to not to bring home to theatre, nor theatre to home.

The position of the director comes with a measure of authority but also with the responsibility for the best possible result, so when unpopular decisions were to be made, I learned to firstly take the grumbling, secondly to deliver comments in the mildest and kindest way possible and thirdly to make it clear that the choice was never personal.

### 3.4 Last play with 'TeArt' and new beginnings

The fourth year of the group found us with seven members less. Suddenly our numbers had dropped by half. Some of the members had to leave because they moved out of the country, but some other made the conscious decision not to be part of the group anymore. One of the main reasons for their decision was the direction we were trying to take, which no longer interested them.

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<sup>29</sup> Hauser Frank and Reich Russel, *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the director's chair* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003) 11.

<sup>30</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008) 6.

These people were founding members of the group and had become dear friends in the time we all spent together. Even if we did not agree with their decision we had to accept it. As Ariane Mnouchkine explains: *“It’s a great pity, but people leave for thousand reasons, when one no longer gets anything out of it, either thinks no longer has a place, or one simply wants to go somewhere else. Or we no longer love each other”*.<sup>31</sup>

In groups that work together for many years, becoming personally involved is inevitable, and sometimes the personal and the professional spheres become so muddled that decision making becomes less clear. In any case, every group has its own organic life that continues even after individuals step out. The group decided to open for new members; this time to a limited number and by audition.

We organized a workshop/audition and collectively decided to admit four new members, just before our new productions that we were planning in the meantime. We went with a similar process of choosing an idea, but this year we in fact simply all agreed to the only idea that was proposed, deciding to make a play about the challenges of being a foreigner. This time we wanted to investigate the essence of our group, a group consisting of foreigners.

One important reason why groups devise theatre is to express interests or anxieties, to say something about a specific situation. An actor in a devised group has personal input and commitment to the creation of the performance from the beginning, which subsequently means that the needs of this actor are also considered, in contrast to a theatre-text play where the actor will be most likely be cast according to their physical appearance or their previous work.<sup>32</sup>

Devising groups often ‘recycle’ material, *“starting where an earlier performance left off, or developing further an interest in a concept, or an idea not fully explored in an earlier piece. The ‘sensitivity’ of one performance often continues into the other”*.<sup>33</sup> This new performance called “Homo Immigrantis” was the continuation of a shorter play called “Black Christmas” with the same theme, performed some months before.

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<sup>31</sup> Williams David, *Collaborative Theatre: The Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999) 125.

<sup>32</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 7.

<sup>33</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 199.

The working process would also be similar to the previous productions. An idea that would be developed into a structured dramaturgy, coming up with the content of the various scenes through improvisations. As we had already worked with each other for quite some time, we evolved a style of dramaturgy, that of situation plays, which became the signature of the group, and of course we had also gotten to know which member of the group was best suited to which area of the production.

Since the very first production we learned from experience that the members of a group that works with devising practices must be open to each other, building relationships that are based on honesty, trust, and of course diplomacy. *“It is crucial for every member to be able to feel comfortable in exposing the personal, knowing that there is support from the group”*.<sup>34</sup>

This knowledge had saved us precious time when it came to setting up a new production because we would use the best asset of each member, while avoiding friction and misunderstandings we had at the beginning. The price we would pay for this ‘synchronization’ however was the lack of new challenges as well as the crystallization of roles within the structure of the group.

Working as a group can be challenging when individuals have conflicts, but conflicts are a fundamental part of creating a group identity. In time, the members build relationships with each other and with the group, but also with the product of their work. And even though it is not possible to achieve unanimity towards a common objective, in the collaborative process the group reaches a line of agreement.<sup>35</sup>

In this last production of ‘TeArt’, the members of the directing team were no longer working according to their instincts only, as the experience we had gained, and the success of the previous play granted us the trust of the group.

The directing challenge of that year would be more on a personal level than on an artistic one. With the new members arriving and not being part of the established relationships inside the group, there would be a lot of questions regarding the goals of the group and the established hierarchy.

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<sup>34</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 24.

<sup>35</sup> Oddey, Alison. *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. London: Routledge, 1994. 24



A hierarchy which even though it was still considered a flat structure, had turned into an oligarchy with few people, the most engaged members, making decisions.

This criticism made me seriously think about my future role in the group and what else could I achieve and offer by being a member. Even though the success was repeated in “Homo Immigrantis”, both in feedback and audience attendance, it became clear to me that there was nothing else I could offer to the group for it to move forward, nor would I be able to evolve further.

Leaving the group was one of the hardest decisions ever and I kept postponing it for some time due to my emotional attachment. Meanwhile, the other two members of the directing team and I created a new devised play and participated in a festival. What I had expected to be the next step in my theatre path proved to be a play created at the wrong time, as one of them got pregnant and the other went abroad to conclude her studies.

It became clear to me that it was time to make a new beginning. I was feeling burned out by constantly creating in the past four years, but also from living in the same city for seven. I needed to learn new ways of making theatre, gain professional tools and meet other artists and new places that could inspire me.

To study theatre was not only a professional move; it was a life dream that I have been postponing for some time. I sent applications to three schools and was accepted in the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

“Authorial Acting” (which I misheard as “Ethereal Acting” the first time someone introduced me to the department of KATaP), would be my reality for the next two years and would change many things in the way I was seeing theatre up until then.

## 4. To Theory

### 4.1 To study or not to study

David Mamet, the American actor, director and proclaimed writer is very critical about actor training and higher education in general. Even though he has been teaching acting on and off since the 1970s, he declares that most approaches to actor training are confusing and unhelpful and being a student forces one to think like a child.

He has stated: “*there are not correct schools on artistic thought but there are incorrect or useless schools, those that do not serve the purpose of communion between the artist and the audience*”. According to him an actor (or director) should avoid ‘professional training’ and instead go directly into a career in the theatre. “*The best teacher is the audience*” he claims, “*doing the play for the audience is the best training*”.<sup>36</sup>

I had various reasons for why I hadn’t applied to a theatre school until I was thirty years old. On the one hand, I had my doubts on whether art is something that can be learned through institutionalized education. Traces of theatre go back as far as the beginning of human history, when people were trying to imitate nature, way before they were able to put words into structured plays handling their concerns about human existence. What could a theatre school, with specific and often closed ideas about art, teach me better than practice could?

On the other hand, it was fear. Fear to be told that I was not good enough at something I really loved. Even today I feel stressed and terrified during auditions; a process in which a specific group of people decides in a limited amount of time whether or not someone has the aptitudes to be ‘in the theatre’.

When I turned thirty years old I had no more time for postponing. I was mature enough to handle fear and rejection and ready to find out whether a theatre institution could offer me knowledge and tools that I could not acquire myself.

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<sup>36</sup> Wilmeth Don, *Mamet and the Actor*, The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet edited by Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: University Press 2004) 146.

The decision to go abroad and study was conscious but not easy. When I got accepted in the MA of “Authorial Acting” there wasn’t only the adaptation to a new country (again) that I had to consider, there were also practical concerns. I had to make a big investment of time and money for something that I had doubts about.

For the first time ever, I had to pay a tuition fee for my education and, next to the practical aspect, this fact created an internal moral conflict. Growing up in a country with free public education, I had been indoctrinated with the idea that you pay for education only if you have not worked hard enough to pass the entrance exams.

Eventually, with the possibility of a scholarship and the reassuring idea that I could at least try studying for a year to see how it would go, I packed my bags and moved to Prague in September of 2015.

#### 4.2 KATaP: deconstruction and reconstruction

The website of the department of KATaP currently described its master course thusly: *“the study of acting not in the classical sense of interpreting an assigned role, but in the authorial sense. The student is guided to become a creative personality capable of guaranteeing her/his authorial work. The student personally presents and develops the work in a dialogue with the environment into which it enters”*.<sup>37</sup>

The department has a psychophysical approach, cultivating creativity in individuals and paying special attention to authorial creativity and pedagogy. The master program includes subjects such as voice training, speech, movement and dialogical acting, while also containing more theoretical subjects, such as psychology, philosophy and analysis of theatre plays, among many others.

Its focus on non-traditional acting (traditional in the sense of a psychological approach when interpreting of a role, the approach taught in most western theatre schools) as well as its implication with the creation of the whole performance, made it look very suitable to my interests and not far from my theatre experience.

Furthermore, before I made my final decision to begin my studies, I was told by the then head of the english program that this master should fit me perfectly due to my previous studies in journalism and my practical profile of an actor-creator involved in directing.

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<sup>37</sup> August 15th, 2018: < [www.damu.cz/en/department-branches/department-of-authorial-creativity-and-pedagogy/](http://www.damu.cz/en/department-branches/department-of-authorial-creativity-and-pedagogy/)>

Before coming to Prague, I kept asking myself and the department if these studies would be the right choice for me. I kept being reassured that this program, part of the public and very prestigious Theatre Academy in Czech Republic, could offer me the education that I needed as a person who was interested in creating and directing as well as acting (acting in the sense of performing, being on stage).

When I first started the school, a mix of emotions overtook me. I was motivated and excited to finally fulfil one of my life dreams, but I was also feeling confused and irritated.

I was confused by the understanding of theatre from people studying and working in the department. Was it a theatre school? Was it a philosophy school? Or was it a mix of both?

I was irritated mostly by myself. I was finally in a theatre academy after many years of practical experience, but whatever I thought I knew and whatever I would try doing would lead to frustration.

I had never studied music or singing before; I could not read music scores (I still cannot) and whenever I would sing it was based on imitation, therefore it wasn't a surprise for me that I could not hit the right notes in the singing classes, but it was surprising to be told that I didn't know how to breathe. Nor did I know how to walk, to stand, to act, to talk, to pronounce, to make a performance, to communicate with the audience, not even how to communicate with myself.

After many years of creating theatre I was basically told I knew nothing. My irritation and frustration would take over and the more I would try, the more classes I would attend from different departments, trying to connect the dots between theatre and me, the more I would fail.

At the same time, during the first year of my studies I had a big competitor. Someone who would wait for my smallest mistake, would only keep the negative aspect of the feedback and remind me of it for days, someone who made me feel insecure and who was convinced that I should constantly be proving myself. That someone was me.

I was feeling blocked. I felt like not only I could not learn anything new about directing and acting, but I was even losing my previous capabilities. Thankfully this fear proved to be wrong. It took me three months to realize it; the three months of the first summer break.

I could write many pages analysing the methods and techniques I learned in the many and interesting classes I took during the first year in KATaP and in the whole Academy of Performing Arts. Subjects, teachers and classmates gave me many creative tools, but what truly helped me to realize I had acquired these skills was time.

Like pretty much everything else in life, things do not change from one day to the next, especially when previous experience has crystallized habits and ideas. As was underlined by my professors, with time and experience I had gained habits which I knew they were working, so I would easily pull them out of my hat in my acting and directing.

The frustration I was feeling, they said, was part of the deconstruction process of these old habits. A process which would get me back to basics, to a blank body and mind, as much as that is ever possible.

One of the phrases that stayed with me from the feedback of the first year, was that the department was not trying to take away what I already knew, but to give me new knowledge on top of what I already had.

The second year found me open and relaxed to continue my studies. During summer break I had taken time to rest, reflect on and digest everything I had learned the year before. I also found out that being stressed and hard on myself does not help me at all with the learning process.

I tried to resist and not enroll in too many classes or projects that year, in order to have the time to digest everything but also to keep a balance with my personal life, which had been non-existent during the first year.

At the same time, I decided to be less demanding on the school, others and myself. I realized there is no such thing as perfect education, especially for the sheer amount of things I wanted to learn and improve in such a short time. I started seeing the school (and every school) as a place where I would be offered knowledge and tools which I would later decide on if they were useful to me or not.

I became less critical when it came to colleagues and myself. I comprehended that people are in theatre schools (or any schools) to learn and improve, not to prove themselves. Furthermore, I stopped believing in the concept of talent and began appreciating the continuous learning that comes with failing and trying again.

Thanks to my studies in KATaP, I came to appreciate mistakes, both my own and others', because I saw the opportunity to learn from them. As Admiral Human G. Richover said *"It is necessary to learn from others' mistakes. You will not live long enough to make them all yourself"*.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, being at a theatre school was not always pure joy and inspiration, not even during the second year, the redemption year. There were many times I would feel misunderstood and frustrated.

Studying in my thirties meant that I had already established many aspects of my character and my vision about life and art. Even though I had consciously put myself in the position of a student, I would still show resistance to theatre approaches I did not agree with. Some of them would prove to be very useful in the future and some remain approaches that I have tried and just do not work for me.

By the end of the second year of my studies, I was feeling 'attuned' to the department and I would utilize everything I had learned to the maximum. I came to understand that studying was not only changing my perception about theatre, but also my view on life and myself as a person. The practical subjects I would do, like voice and movement, would give me tools for creation but would also improve my daily life. I was learning to use my voice and body in a correct and economical way. The theoretical classes would broaden my knowledge, give me inspiration and the theoretical foundations I was missing.

I learned that inspiration, instinct, technique and good planning go hand in hand in the process of theatre creation. It is what Michael McCafferey explains in his book 'Directing a play': *"Inspiration may be rare, but creativity can be supplemented by technique. Effective organization coupled with careful forward planning can result in*

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<sup>38</sup> Hauser Frank and Reich Russel, *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the director's chair* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003) II.

*impressive productions. Experience has shown that good preparation will actually free the creative imagination and give it room to flourish”<sup>39</sup>*

When I was approaching the end of my studies, it found me longing for more. Being in a protected environment with other students constantly creating was providing me with inspiration and motivation, but at the same time I was conscious that this was not ‘real life’. Despite knowing that, I still decided to ask for a year of Erasmus in a different school, but before I left for Madrid I took an internship for the summer in the Theatre Organization of Cyprus (THOC).

#### 4.3 Intern at THOC

Being an intern is a position between student and professional. Many companies take advantage of the large offer of students looking for some professional experience, who end up working many hours unpaid while at the same time occupying positions which would otherwise be filled by paid specialists. However, that was not my experience with THOC.

Through the International Office of DAMU, I got the opportunity to go on an internship with an Erasmus scholarship. The only condition was that I had to find the company myself and go through all the necessary procedures for the agreement. Since I could choose to go anywhere I wanted within the European Union, I decided that Cyprus could be a good option; a European state that has Greek as an official language and a stable economy with job opportunities.

I thought that Cyprus, a country that had become the destination for many emigrating greek theatre artists (and other professionals) during the crisis that hit Greece, would be a good place to speculate and make some useful contacts for the future while earning some professional experience. THOC kindly accepted me as intern, so I moved to Nicosia in June of 2017.

Even though summer months are not a vibrant period for theatre in any Mediterranean country, I was lucky enough to arrive while all the auditions for the next season were taking place. Thankfully all the directors of the upcoming productions gave me permission to be inside the room and help with anything they would need.

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<sup>39</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008) 6.

After years of working with 'amateur' groups, I was inside a professional theatre, the State Theatre of Cyprus even, and although I was still a student I was treated with respect and in many cases was asked to give my opinion within the audition process.

I got to witness first-hand how a professional theatre works on stage and behind the scenes. I learned valuable lessons on how to behave as a director and an actor in an audition and I met friendly professionals who treated me as an equal.

But it was not only auditioning insights and professional experience I earned during that internship. Being a part of the country's biggest theatre, financed by the state and the only one remaining with good working conditions, I got to see how things move in the professional milieu.

I saw that public relations are equally as important as talent. The chemistry between the director and the actors as well as the chemistry between the actors themselves was taken very seriously. A first impression is essential; a degree from a respectful drama school can make a great impression, but the decision on whether someone will be in a production or not is mainly done via the audition. Decisions are also made according to external reasons, like proportion of nationality or gender in the production.

Some of valuable lessons I learned during my internship in THOC about how a director should behave in an audition process are:

- Each director has a different approach to auditions. Some do a formal audition asking for a prepared monologue and a song while others work individually with every actor, using improvisation. Each approach reveals something about the working style of the directors.
- The director should give equal opportunities to every candidate. Even when you are sure that someone is not suitable for your production, you should give them minimum the indicated time of the audition. That will give a sense of tranquillity and fairness to all the candidates.
- There should only be the necessary people present in the room. The director, the assistant director and the movement or music director, in case they are needed for the production. The more people are present, the more stressful the experience becomes for the candidates.



- The way you place yourself in the audition room says a lot about the hierarchy of the production. Directors sitting behind a table during the whole audition usually tend to have a more hierarchical relationship with the actors while those who work with the actors on the floor from the beginning give the impression of a flat structure.
- Do not ever look bored during an audition even when you really are. Always be polite. Actors are not the only ones being judged during an audition. Negative rumours can be easily spread about a director after a traumatic experience.
- If you have already decided on some of the actors of the production, it will be helpful if they are present during the audition process. That way you can check their chemistry with the candidates on stage, as well as gaining useful insight from their comments. A scene is perceived differently from inside and outside.

Another life lesson I took with me from my internship is that wherever you go to work, you must invest time to gain the trust and respect of the locals. Before I moved to Cyprus, I thought it would be easy to work in the theatre there, simply because I speak the language. Soon I realized it was not.

While I was seriously considering prolonging my stay in Nicosia and start building my career there, I was notified that my Erasmus application for the Royal School of Performing Arts in Madrid (RESAD) had been accepted. A new journey and my last year of studying theatre was about to begin.

#### 4.4 RESAD the journey to freedom

The idea of doing an Erasmus exchange at a different school had been present ever since my first year of studies. After my experience living in Denmark, where I understood how hard it is to work in theatre as a non-native speaker, I knew Prague would be a stop-over of two years in my life. To work in theatre, I needed to be in a country where they speak one of the languages I best command.

Spain was an obvious choice. I have lived there before, it is a country with a familiar lifestyle to Greece, and I spoke the language. Furthermore, RESAD is a theatre school with good reputation across Europe and Madrid, as does every capital, offers the most job opportunities.

During the first year of my studies in DAMU, I asked one of the Erasmus students coming from RESAD about his opinion about the two schools. He told me that he was very grateful for all the hard work and the technique he acquired at RESAD, but he was happy to be in DAMU and to finally have the freedom to use these creative tools the way he wanted.

Two years later I would realize that freedom was not dependent on any school, but on the fact that exchange students have a different status, as I found my experience of having creative freedom to be the opposite of the student I had spoken to.

Due to my studies in DAMU where I took classes in different fields (acting, directing and dramaturgy) and due to my previous practical experience, I was placed in the department of Physical Acting for the duration of the exchange.

This department does not only teach the students to act for physical theatre, but also how to be actors-creators and work in solo and group pieces created in devised way. Once I arrived there, I was placed together with the fourth-year students and took part in their classes and their final performance.

Since the final year in the RESAD focuses on the final performance, the senior students have fewer classes, all of which work towards the needs of said performance. This fact gave me some free time for extra classes and, thanks to my Erasmus status, I was able to take subjects from other departments. I was surprised to find out that this was not the norm, as each full-time student must complete a very specific curriculum and is not allowed to take classes from other departments.

Suddenly I found myself free to choose whichever class I found interesting. After careful consideration I included subjects from the departments of Acting for Physical Theatre, Directing and Dramaturgy to my schedule. My third year of studying looked like a year in my dream school where I had only classes that I was really interested in.

Obviously, there were teachers in the school who were not happy with this outcome, as they believed that every learning process should have a clear structure going from the basics to more complicated material and not a mix and match of

subjects. While I understand this standpoint and I agree to some extent, I couldn't be more grateful for the freedom I experienced and the multiple tools I acquired from all these different subjects.

Being able to attend classes from various departments did not only give me different points of view regarding theatre creation, but also gave me the opportunity to meet many students, way more than I would have done with just a single class, so I had the opportunity to work in many of their projects and gain practical knowledge and friendships.

At the same time, it was very interesting to experience how education in the same school can vary depending on whom is addressed to. In the acting departments, the (usually younger) students were expected to show way more punctuality and obedience to the decisions of teachers and directors while the generally older students of directing and dramaturgy would be treated as independent adults, although creativity and general knowledge of art were required from them in a higher degree.

Commanding the Spanish language at a high level permitted me to have an inside look as I was able to be part of any class or subject I wanted. Something that I was not able to do during my studies in DAMU, because they had a limited number of classes offered in English outside of the two main masters of Authorial Acting and Directing for Devised Theatre.

Undoubtedly, I wouldn't have had the same experience in RESAD if I hadn't been through my two-year education in KATaP. Coming to Madrid with many practical and theoretical skills from Prague permitted me to feel comfortable and to be perceived as a positive asset for the rest of the class.

But what I really think made the biggest difference in this experience was my mental state. I went to RESAD with a completely open mind, with no specific expectations or demands and no worries about grades. My only goal was to learn from the school and the stay in general without the need to prove anything, and I can testify that this attitude worked greatly in my favour.

During this year, I had the opportunity to work in many projects inside and out of the school, both as actor and director. I got to try myself out in different positions and put into practice everything I had learned during my studies in both academies.

Simultaneously it was a great opportunity to reflect on and reconsider the way I had previously worked as a director with the group 'TeArt'.

Three years after the last play we created as a group, I could now see what was working and what not, adding to my working style not only my newly acquired knowledge but also old life experience.

Out of all the projects I did, the one I consider had the biggest difference in the way I work as director in Devised Theatre is the project called "Hoy es Ahora" (Today is Now) which I will analyse in detail in the following chapter.

## **5. To practice again**

### **5.1 All the pieces fall into place**

'Hoy es Ahora' (Today is Now) started as an exercise but ended up being a piece that we all wanted to keep working on. In the class of scenography in RESAD, the professor J.L Raymond assigned us each a different artist to inspire us and create a small performance.

The Greek director and choreographer Dimitris Papaioanu was assigned to me. Papaioanu studied in the School of Fine Arts in Athens and started working as a painter and cartoonist. His first contact with dance was at the age of 18 but his career as a dancer took off when the director Thodoris Terzopulos cast him for one of his performances. He then left for New York where he studied butoh dance, and when he came back to Greece, he formed the dance-theatre group 'Omada Edafus'.

He rose to international fame when he directed the Opening Ceremony of the 'Olympic Games 2004' in Athens. He describes his work as political; not in the sense of belonging to a party or ideology but in the sense of treating universal themes concerning human life and destiny. Openly homosexual, he often investigates the social, sexual and emotional life of men while using naked male bodies in his performances. Music, light and scenography play a significant role in his creations.

Papaioanu works in a devised way and creates pieces of physical theatre. As Heddon and Milling explain, physical theatre *“in variable degree mixes dance, mime, visual arts, circus and drama together, to create what has become one of the most recognizable forms of contemporary devised work”*<sup>40</sup>.

Even though I was inspired by his piece “2”, which I saw back in 2006 in Athens, I was not interested in creating a copy of his work or even a piece that would heavily remind of his style. I took this exercise as an opportunity to create a performance that would reflect my own interests, but most importantly, a performance where the participants could work and create in a safe and nourishing environment.

Having worked as an actor myself in performances where I was not satisfied with neither the process nor the result, I wanted to experiment on how it could be possible to change this. For that, I would take in consideration everything I had learned during my practical experience with ‘TeArt’ and my studies.

Just a few months earlier the final performance (taller) of the department of physical department had turned into a traumatic experience for some of my younger colleagues, so I sought to create a piece with them, this time under different conditions.

Since the beginning of the process in the ‘taller’<sup>41</sup>, there had been some comments from professors I did not appreciate. For example, in the very first meeting one of them commented that not all students should expect to be protagonists in the performance, because this would never happen in the professional world. In the professional world, he further explained, there are few protagonists and many secondaries.

Furthermore, whenever the process would become difficult because of stress and limited time, there would be orders from the director we had to follow. The creativity required would suddenly disappear and we would have to re-enact his way of doing things. Rising from this was always the same excuse: “this is the way things work in the professional world”. According to him actors should obey the decisions of the director without question.

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<sup>40</sup> Heddon Deirdre and Milling Jane, *Devising Performance: A critical Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 157.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Taller’, a Spanish word that translates to ‘workshop’ in English, is the way final performances of every graduate year of the departments of acting are called, in Resad.

I don't overlook the fact that a big part of the professional theatre world works in this way, but because of my age and my experience in different kind of projects, I knew there are other possible ways of working and creating. This is what I wanted to show and share with my younger colleges.

For this project, I approached different actors from the Physical Theatre department. Finally, David Arévalo, Nacho Benito and Chemi Hitos, students of the 3rd year of Physical Acting, as well as Mario Patrón from the 4th, became part of the team.

## 5.2 Laying the foundations

In the first meeting I made few things clear to the group. First, I admitted I was not sure what exactly the performance would be about or look like. I had a general idea, some images in mind and a lot of space for them to contribute. In the devised process one may start with the idea, but then other artists are engaged to go on this creative journey together. I emphasized that the way we would be working was more important than the result of that work.

I explained to them that, whenever it was needed, I would have to make some decisions. Not because I was the director, but because I would be the 'eye from the outside', which sometimes sees things that are not seen from the inside.

I also clarified it would not be possible for all ideas (theirs or mine) to enter the structure of the final piece but I promised we would try out all the ideas that would fell on the table.

From my previous experiences with 'TeArt' and classes in both schools in which we had to collaborate in groups, I learned that the creative process has no space for big egos, but neither does it have space for disappointed participants. A director should be a strong leader, inspiring and not imposing, while his key role is to always listen to the rest of the group and make them feel heard by taking their suggestions into consideration.

Actors and technical staff will follow a director who is not afraid to lead, even if they disagree with the direction. A clear, confident presence and strong direction are extremely comforting to the whole group.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hauser Frank and Reich Russel, *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the director's chair* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003) 14.

I also clarified that my role of director was just another role in the group. My ideas were no better than theirs and I did not have any special rights. They, on the other hand, had to respect my role and understand that inside the rehearsal space I would be the one giving guidelines in order for the work to progress.

It is important to always to be clear about the different stages of the process and the roles of the people in it. In the devising process things can go wrong because the group did not understand the hierarchy and the roles correctly. False expectations can be created by people who are not sure what is expected of them.<sup>43</sup>

The rehearsal space was important as well and had to be respected, as well as the punctuality of the whole group. Even though we did not have the same room for every rehearsal, the rule was to treat every room as a special universe. We would enter the space with working clothes and attitude (by 'space' meaning the part of the room we worked in) while objects that were not related to the rehearsal (mobile phones, everyday clothes) were to be removed.

An action I took in the first rehearsal that became a habit for the whole creative process was to lock the door. An act that the actors thought was funny at the beginning, born out of practicality so we would not be disturbed, created a ritual where every time the door would lock, a separate universe would be created. It was just us, cut off from the outside time and space, being focused and working creatively.

This universe was precious and fragile, therefore we had to preserve it beyond the end of the rehearsals. Something I had learned from a workshop with Professor Jana Pilatova in KATaP, was to discuss everything before finishing the session, so nobody leaves the room with the necessity to talk about what happened there. What was happening inside that room, especially during the initial delicate rehearsing period was only for us to know.

The talk at the end of every session was also working toward my aim of wanting the whole group to have input in the process, especially the members who did not have the loudest voice or the strongest personality. They could talk about everything they liked, disliked, felt or would like to try in order for there to be no misunderstandings,

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<sup>43</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 145.

while I would write their valuable ideas down and come up with some exercises to further elaborate them in the next session.

In devised theatre, artists have less defined roles. It is expected of actors to be rounded creative artists, contributing their ideas to the content and to the form of the play, while being in a continuous dialogue with the process. *“The ‘self’ of the artist becomes in this way more implicate and visible; it gets integrated in the performance”.*<sup>44</sup>

As I knew all four actors from the school, having socialized and worked with them in different projects before, I was concerned whether this previous relationship would affect the equilibrium in this project. My preoccupations were proved wrong and all of them showed punctuality and professionalism during the process. I also believe that the fact I was older than them and they knew about my directing experience helped them see me as a leader and accept my role in the group.

Being a director doesn't mean being everybody's friend all the time, even when you are outside of the rehearsals. A director needs to swiftly deal with unpunctuality or anything else that could affect the rehearsing process in a negative way, as rehearsals require discipline from everybody.<sup>45</sup>

Last but not least, we also removed the uncomfortable economical part of the equation by agreeing that as soon as this performance would start generating income, it would be equally divided into five shares.

Once the rules about the way the group would work were set and approved by everybody, we were ready to embark on this creative journey together and start working on our piece.

### 5.3 Building the performance up

Taking into consideration that the rehearsal period was unpaid and we all had a very full schedule, we agreed on meeting once per week for three hours. Thanks to punctuality and active participation shown by everybody, the rehearsals proved to be very effective.

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<sup>44</sup> Swain Rob, *Directing: A handbook for emerging theatre directors* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011) 141.

<sup>45</sup> Hauser Frank and Reich Russel, *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the director's chair*. (New York: Walker & Company, 2003) 27.



Each session would start with twenty minutes of relaxation. I would lead this part, helping them clear their heads and bringing body and mind into the working space. Acknowledging they knew their own bodies better than I did, I gave them space to relax the way they wanted.

Obviously, I knew they were all educated in theatre and were already warmed up due to the classes they were doing throughout the entire day, but I also noticed that by the time this project happened, I had learned to trust my colleges more and not to think that a director's job is to take care of everything.

A director is the creative and organizing epicentre of the play but cannot be the expert at everything. A good director is able to spot strengths and limitations of the group and guide them to creative results in the most economical way.<sup>46</sup>

Once the actors were focused and warmed up we would proceed to exercises and games. I would focus especially on group dynamic games and exercises that would augment the communication between them and free their imagination and creativity while simultaneously leading them towards the themes we were working on.

For this part of the rehearsal in particular, I counted on my education resources. I have a notebook where I write down every exercise I found interesting and useful for me as an actor and director. This way I have gathered material from classes and workshops I attended throughout the years, all of which I know are effective as I have tried them myself.

Games and exercises are useful in rehearsals, they relax the actors and build trust between them. Exercises are more specifically related to performance and interpretation skills, they require more technique than games. Playing games is indispensable in theatre though. Not only is it the first skill we develop and a way to relate to others, but also a useful reminder that whatever happens in a play is not real. Additionally, transforming challenging acting situations to games can help the actors to better understand a scene.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008) 7.

<sup>47</sup> McCafferey Michael, *Directing a Play* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008) 72.

The exercises would lead to improvisation. Basically, I would create a setup or an atmosphere in the room and I would let them interact, providing minimum guidelines. Most of the time, the result would be so interesting that I would just note down things I spotted and fit the general idea.

Something that I owe to my studies in KATaP in particular is to not be afraid of time. When actors are left on stage for a longer time without a constant stimulation from the outside, they soon pass the stage in which they think they have to 'produce' something, and that is when the most interesting things start appearing.

In this project we were lucky enough that all the actors already knew each other, and three of them were classmates. Their synchronization and communication were fast and natural, so we had more time and space to experiment in the rehearsals.

Before we began the creation process, I knew I wanted to work with the idea of manhood and the journey from being a boy to be a man. As the rehearsals were moving on, I could see new themes popping up; competition, pride, duties, masculinity, need for freedom, all of them related to the initial idea but enriching it way more.

During our discussions after each session we would talk about their impressions and any ideas they would like to try. I was happy to see they were engaged with the theme, while still open to experimentation. The safe environment we had created was working; I would constantly remind them that they didn't have to prove anything to me during rehearsals (a typical dynamic in the relationship actor-director) and that we were there to enjoy and experiment.

I would ask them to bring different objects or pieces of clothing and tell them not to reveal their choices to the rest of the group. That way they could surprise their colleagues but also themselves when these elements would meet on stage.

Slowly but steady we started putting the different pieces together. The concept we worked with was still about masculinity, but it ended up being about modern time hunters who try to survive in the capitalistic system.

The performance investigated what it means to be a man nowadays. A hunter who carries an office bag with a computer and a phone instead of a club, but he stills needs to provide food for his family; if he does not, he is not man enough.

Four kids that become adults in front of the eyes of the audience in a very short time, the opportunity of their life waiting for them - but there is room for just one. Who will get it and what is he willing to do to be the winner. A game, their last game with only one winner. Or maybe none?

A system of competition and hierarchy that doesn't even allow you to refuse to be part of it. If you don't win, you are a loser, but if you don't want to take part in the race, you are a loser too.

#### 5.4 Today is Now: Coming to light

*"What are you waiting, you hunter? The time is now, you must feed the family; you have to make your tribe proud. No more games to play, it is time to work"*

After two months of rehearsing and experimenting we presented a first scheme to the class; a thirty minutes long physical theatre performance. With lights and sound controlled by us working through technological difficulties, the audience could still see and appreciate the result, our intention and our way of working.

A 'work in progress' can be beneficial to take stock of the work up until that point and spot any specific problems. A small invited audience is useful to test the material, and a discussion after the performance could provide crucial feedback from external and more neutral observers.<sup>48</sup>

The group, happy with the outcome and motivated by the encouragement of the audience for a longer and more polished performance, decided to keep working on the piece. With the same structure of rehearsals and with a clearer idea of what we were doing, "Hoy Es Ahora" (Today is Now) was born three months after its first work in progress session.

An abstract and often surreal passage from being a boy to a man, from carelessness to preoccupation, from being free to being obedient; a race, the end of which can only be reached by the best. A performance that plays with time: the present, the instant, the obsession of modern society with fast times.

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<sup>48</sup> Oddey Alison, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 199.

Its intention from the beginning was to stay open in the moment and even its most rehearsed parts are open to improvisation. The play uses humour as a vehicle to point out problems of modern times. Every rehearsal was an opportunity to discover new moments, and this is also our intention with every performance. We want to keep it open for the audience and us to meet and discover something new each time.

The performance starts with the four actors entering the stage one by one with tranquillity, as they would enter life. No stress, there is time to discover and play. When the light brightens, they realize they are not alone in the room; they are not alone in this world. Regardless of if they feel unique or not, there are many like them on this planet.

The Voice greets them with: *“Good morning, you champion! Today is your day”*, they are special again - at least one of them is.

The radio is playing while they are going through their morning routines, preparing for this special day. Everyday moves are used to relax them and to also threaten the others. *“What are you waiting for? The time is now!”*, warns the Voice.

Each one discovers a briefcase with clothes inside. A suit for each one; their uniform to wear and go ‘hunting’. Once they are ready, the Voice reminds them “Today is your turn”. Forming a row, they go towards this special place. They become hunters, they become animals, they become hunting animals, nothing can stop them, there is not enough meat for everybody and they need to feed their families.

“Only the best can get it” says the Voice. In a line, like good soldiers, they go and get a table and four chairs and set them in the room. The waiting room. They have to wait and speculate until they receive new instructions. The briefcases open again and their objects, their personal universe, are set out on the table. The desire to be carefree again, to play like when they were children, proves stronger than their discipline. A chaotic, orgiastic feast will bring them to the limits. How does a man have fun and what are the limits of masculinity?

When the party is over they remember their goal. They are there to be selected, for one for the them is The One. When a big briefcase falls from the sky, they know they have to do everything to get it. The treasure lies inside and so do four weapons, a knife, a bat, a rope and a pair of nunchaku, all of them made of plastic, toys. Can games with toys kill them?

As nobody gives up the treasure, they understand they must do something more drastic, kill. When the first one is killed, the Voice approves. "Congratulations, but there is one left" it will say every time someone dies, until there is only one left. "Congratulations, you made it"

The winner goes and gets his prize, a clean white wedding dress. The rest of the losers come back to life just to serve him. With a ritual preparation between a wedding and a funeral, they undress him and exchange the suit for his new uniform. An office chair appears, and the wedding ceremony begins. The winner will be forever bound to his trophy, the chair, until death do them part.

The Voice is the voice of the Google Translate software, played out live and in the language of the place we perform. The same is true for when the radio is playing; local stations live at the time of the performance. In this way, we are not only playing with the idea of time, an idea, present throughout the whole play, but we all get a little reminder of how ephemeral theatre is.

The order in which the actors enter the stage, what objects they carry in their briefcases, what will happen during the out of control party and who will be the winner is up to them and changes in each performance. In this way they keep surprising their colleagues, the audience and themselves, while they live the performance at the time that is happening. Especially the scene in which they must kill each other to get the prize is the moment they forget that is a performance and not a real-life situation, as they have commented.

"Today is Now" is a project that I am especially proud of and I would dare to say all of us are, not only of the result but mainly of the way we have worked towards it. Five people coming from different backgrounds and different experiences with theatre managed to put their egos aside and create a performance that they all feel part of.

For me personally this is the project I have worked the best so far, putting into practice all the acquired knowledge from schools and previous experiences. Hopefully this creation is the beginning of many more projects like this. The performance has already been presented in Spain and Portugal and soon will travel to more festivals, meeting with different kind of audiences.

The recording of the performance 'Today is Now' in 'Sala B' of RESAD on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 can be watched in the following address: <https://vimeo.com/278211331> using the password: hoyesahora , while some pictures from the representation during SET Festival of Porto on July 9<sup>th</sup> , 2018 are to be found in the Appendix.

## 6. Epilogue

Someone reading this thesis may wonder why a student of "Authorial Acting" would decide to write his final paper on Devised Theatre and directing. In my opinion and according to my experience, Authorial Theatre is more or less synonymous to Devised Theatre as both have the characteristics of a creation based on personal interest, implying a creative process open to change, therefore making the process itself more valuable than the result. Authorial Theatre is however more connected to solo performances (especially at the department of KATaP with the psychosomatic side of experience) whereas Devised stands for the work of a collaborating group and always has been what I was more interested in.

Without neglecting my actor self, I decided to write about directing because I believe I have had a more interesting trajectory in this particular role and could feel the evolvement in my craft. At the same time, acting and directing are interconnected in Devised Theatre as roles are more diffused in this kind of work. I also believe I have become a better director by studying acting. Through having experienced an acting education myself I can understand actors better and have empathy, but also bigger expectations from them.

"Why do you make theatre?", is a question that I am frequently asked by others and myself. "Because I feel the urge to" I used to answer, but now I know it is way more than a need. With the years I realized that theatre teaches you many aspects of life, from philosophy and psychology, management, economics, to public relations and human interaction.

So, is it theatre the mirror of life, or life the mirror of theatre? I cannot answer with certainty, but I am sure theatre can be a fun side of life, a playful one. Even though people tend to forget when they start working professionally with theatre, the verb 'play' accompanies theatre in the most occidental languages.

I undoubtedly have come a long way since the homemade performances in my childhood room, where my only preoccupation was to enjoy. It was a long but cyclic way, as I feel that after many years I have come back to this enjoyable initial point, this time richer in knowledge and practical experience.

My years working with 'TeArt' taught me that theatre is hard work but becomes pleasurable if you share it with others. It taught me how to be a better director and actor but most of all how to be a better colleague. Through collaborative theatre an individual learns to work in group; to negotiate and recede whenever necessary, while empathy is cultivated to a high degree.

Devised Theatre strives for more than just beauty and harmony on stage. It is created here and now, therefore understands and expresses actuality in the best way. It is a theatre without space for big egos and where the group work is more important than the individual's genius. Likewise, the creative process and the transformation of the group are more important than the product.

Despite my initial hesitation to study, my education in theatre was a choice that I now treasure. Of course, I am still sceptical about the holistic approach that most schools have, wherein they believe they are teaching the one and only true theatre, but I appreciate all the experience, the collaboration and the knowledge I have gained.

Over the years I also came to comprehend that it will not be possible to learn everything about theatre. I accepted that and made peace with myself as long as I learn something minor every time I am in a class, a rehearsal, a performance that I participate in either as a collaborator or as part of the audience.

An additional reward education gave me was confidence. Even though I am not obsessed with titles, nor do I think that only 'certified' people are allowed to make theatre, I now realize I was feeling uncomfortable for not having a theatre degree. On one hand was my perception of people accepted in theatre schools as of superior talent and on the other hand was the way others perceived me.

Being a foreigner without a theatre degree, I could feel I was not taken seriously enough; there was a restricted place for us in the theatre milieu. We could do whatever we wanted as long as we labelled it 'amateur'. But now, having combined practical experience with academic education, I have more confidence and faith in my potential.

It took me years to strip the word 'amateur' of its negative connotations. What in my mind used to mean 'theatre made with less means and quality' is now equivalent to 'theatre made with freedom and purpose'.

As Brecht wrote in 1940 in his "Two Essays on Unprofessional Acting", while exiled in Scandinavia and cut off from all professional theatres, *"it is worth to speak about the amateur theatre if one is interested in the social function of theatre"*. Amateur theatre was intriguing to Brecht for its potential to change the world, something that professional theatre *"with its bourgeois aesthetic and cultural values"*, could not do.

I now prefer working in an 'amateur environment', for I know there is more space to imagine, to create, but also to fail. As Bales explains in her book "Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure": *"There's pedagogy in failure, we learn by mistake, by accident and by getting things wrong"*. When we fail is when we develop mechanisms of coping and recovery.

My education and the years that I have spent in schools have changed me, but I also saw changes in the schools I attended. My first-year studying was the also the first year the department of KATaP accepted international students. I remember how numb people were in the beginning, not exactly knowing what to do with this bunch of foreigners. But we grew together, we learned to comprehend each other and collaborate. I believe these two years was an enriching process for both sides.

RESAD has also changed its curriculum and two years ago included a subject called "Week of Interrelation". All the departments collaborate for a week, staging different performances where students get to try different roles in the creation process than what their originally studies would put them in.

This subject has all the characteristics of the devising process. The roles in the group are diffused and there are no set hierarchies. Each group decides what kind of performance they want to create and through which way of working. Even though the subject is compulsory, and the students get a grade, the evaluation doesn't depend on the result. It considers the participation, the punctuality, team spirit and a written reflection on the whole process.



I was surprised to realize this subject and attitude was fairly new as I consider this kind of collaboration between departments of a theatre school to be natural. What made RESAD reconsider its program and implement this kind of subject was the realization that power in theatre lies in groups.

Every year there are numerous graduates from every department fighting their way to professional success individually, going through the processes of auditions and applications, all the while nobody really knows how they work. Instead, a group formed by people who already know each other and have worked together will not only be stronger, but also has a bigger chance at interesting results.

This is what I tried to do with our latest project 'Today is Now', joining forces with creative individuals and rediscovering the joy of playing in theatre. This is also what I want to do in the future, co-create a group and be able to work with amateurish freedom and enthusiasm, while having professional remuneration.

## 7. Literature

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## 9. Appendix

Pictures from the performance 'Today is Now' (Hoy es Ahora), Festival SET, Porto  
July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. © SET Festival, 2018





