

*To curate a part of one's soul.
Transplanting a performance in three (radically) different spaces*

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Abstract: The curating process of a performance like *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane constitutes a reflection of a round, back and forward act of doubt and belief. A suitable or a malicious managerial decision in chancing a given data in the performance can determine the path and the course of the show. Every act or management action can alter the channels of communicating with the audience and its perception and reception of the performance.

Keywords: curating, interaction, independent theatre, space, distance, audience

Contemporary Romanian theatre succeeds in making room for new aesthetics and in meeting its audiences' expectations both in state-financed institutions that provide a cultural offer satisfying the needs of a broad, multicultural audience, and in an independent sector which focuses mostly on social and documentary theatre, exploratory performances, musicals and theatre-dance.

Transplanting a show designed for a state institution onto the stage of an independent theatre implies major changes in the curating methods of that production. Most of the time, the independent companies use non-conventional spaces, and by this we understand any space from cafe to apartment or industrial hall, whose main use is not, in itself, cultural, and this directly influences the relationship between the actor and the audience. An independent theatre company can provide and generate a large palette of performative shows and products.

Moving a show meant to be performed in a state institution in an independent company means redefining it. Trying to re-brand a theatrical product in transition requires a coherent curating program from its producers,

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which consists in keeping active and efficient the actor's and director's resources in a precarious medium that lacks the credibility of a long-established cultural institution. It is this lack of credibility that makes the local or county administration treat independent companies unfairly. Still, it would be unjust not to mention their support in the last two years. The plays designed and performed by the independent companies are becoming more and more present on the map of the national and international festivals, as well as in the marketing strategies of the local cultural institutions or of those supporting cultural events.

The need for this transition arises from the artistic team's desire for the survival of their product. Most of the cultural marketing plans aim at the longevity of the product. This kind of work, which intends to develop the show and keep it on the market through personal limited means, resembles a curator's work.

When curating a show, things happen following a different set of rules than in the case of another works of art. The procedural framework is conceived according to the audience's needs and expectations, as well as to the actor's intellectual availability and his physical and mental energy, according to the material resources, space and time, all these being under a continuous financial pressure.

Even though the coherence of the message that the show delivers is based on a pattern, a set of rules, the type of interaction changes in order to offer the audience a different experience. The forms of interaction in a show from the independent field can contain a multitude of performative frames.

The spectator of the independent theatre expects to experience something different. That is why the set of rules changes depending on the public attending the performance. This usually happens mainly in the case of cafe/club theatre.

Theatrical context 2009-2011

Being formally introduced in the artistic field as a theatre actor, I was trained and conditioned to work in a state institution. Starting from Sarah Kane's text, *Psychois 4.48*, I created a one-woman show for my master dissertation at the Theatre Department. The show has the pattern of a product that can often be seen in a state institution. Performing it in an independent company was not viable since the theatrical field in Transylvania lacked in alternative spaces and this type of institution. Given the circumstances, together with the director, Alexandra Felseghi, we decided to focus on creating

a show “as if it were” in a state institution, though the main aim was the *In-Yer-Face*² dramaturgy. In that period, Sarah Kane’s writings were up to the minute. In the 2000s most of the Romanian directors, and not only, expressed their preference for the playwright of “blood and sperm theatre”.

The dramatic style named by Aleks Sierz, *In -Yer-Face*³, the new type of theatre that came into being in Great Britain in the 90s arrived in the Romanian theatrical background after a decade. We could even say, theatrically, that *the British were coming*.

Among those who considered that the “plays of blood and sperm” are worth seeing by the Romanian audience, we would like to mention: Tudor Țepeneag who puts on *4.48 Psychosis* with Maia Morgenstern, at Act Theatre (2004), Mihai Mănuțiu who directs *Phaedra’s Love* at Ioan Slavici Theatre, Arad (2006) and *4.48 Psychosis* at Lucian Blaga National Theatre (2008). Răzvan Mureșan approaches the same *4.48 Psychosis* differently from his colleague and presents it the same year, 2008, at Lucian Blaga National Theatre. In 2009 Andrei Șerban puts on *Cleansed* on the stage of the same theatre. Theodor Cristian Popescu (director) and Eugen Wohl (translator, essayist and professor) start translating more texts by Sarah Kane. In order to highlight the newly discovered dramaturgy and its mark, Sarah Kane is dedicated a three day festival at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca - *Sarah Kane’s Days*. Despite the critics’ controversial feedback and the audience’s reaction (some of them leaving the hall feeling disgusted), Andrei Șerban’s *Cleansed* was both awarded national prizes and praised internationally.

It is obvious that the number of directors who have stood the risk of putting on Sarah Kane’s plays in Romania is relatively small in the international theatrical context. For the Romanian economic, social and cultural background of that period (2000), these approaches were true acts of courage. As an instrument of the culture you are part of, it is extremely difficult to change the mentalities shaped by a socialist-communist history, liberating them.

It is within this context, confronting with a precarious economic reality, that in 2011 we started to create a show-exam-research based on Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis*.

In order to outline the moment of transition and structural transformations of this show-exam-research directed by Alexandra Felseghi we need to analyze the process of creation from the very beginning.

2. “What Is in-Yer-Face Theatre?,” In-yer-face Theatre, accessed July 9, 2017, <http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/what.html>.

3. Termen introdus de Aleks Sierz in cartea sa Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

The analysis of the show, the research-exam on Sarah Kane, the interpretation of a crucial text, the examination of the means of training and of acting methods, all took place along the preparation and performance of the show.

The steps that we took to take the practical part of the exam were the following:

Master student - directing department: Alexandra Felseghi

Master student - acting department: Raluca Lupan

Constructing the show - the university version

a) Choosing the text and sending it to the professors (Professor Mihai Mănuțiu, Professor Laura Pavel).

b) Getting the permission to put on the show.

c) Deciding on the theme and message of the show: man's reshaping/reconstructing himself in the absence of love in all its forms. Severe depression and its consequences. Suicide – from intention to decision.

d) Deciding on the theme of the research. The actor opted for the *In-Yer-Face* type of actor, the viscosity, the organicity and performativity of an actor formed by this type of text, patients with suicidal tendencies and patterns of behaviour, means of incorporating an *essence-text*.

e) Research and documentation: the reading of all Sarah Kane's texts (both in English and in Romanian), readings on the *In-Yer-Face* phenomenon, watching live and online shows, reading national and international critique; documenting the psycho-emotional processes of the people prone to suicide.

f) The actor's training: reshaping the body. The concept of movement belongs to both the actor and the director. The theme chosen for the choreographic scene: the effect of antipsychotics and anti-depressants on the patient's body and mind. The expressionist body-language of these moods.

g) The set of methods and exercises needed to construct the role will be detailed later in this paper.

h) Scenographic elements: corner of a room, a watch, 7 pieces of white chalk, 9 pebbles/stones, one cigarette.

i) Time: a 4-6 hour rehearsal/day/ 33 days.

j) Costs: 21 €.

k) Rehearsals: depending on the available rehearsal spaces of the Faculty of Theatre and Television (Babes-Bolyai University), the rehearsals took place between 10-14 and 16-20.

l) Choosing a date when the examinations committee could watch the show: 6.05.2011 (practical exam).



Fig. 1: Scene from 4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane directed by Alexandra Felseghi, one woman-show with Raluca Lupan, Maican Hall (FTT), May, 2011

The actor's perspective on the show

a) Research on *In -Yer-Face* theatre or "the individual's legitimate strangeness". Debates on "How do you plead for an *In-Yer -Face* play?" What would be its aim in the theatrical context? Which are the performative means that help you perform an essential -text?"

b) The *essence text* had Greek tragedy influences. Reading the text. Choosing the paragraphs meant to support the director's idea. Choosing the theme of the play: lack of love and its consequences. Final text: 30 pages. The re-arranging of the text was possible after both the actor and the director agreed on the idea of a one woman-show.

c) Research on the psychological difference between mental disturbance and mental disorder. Analysis of BPD (borderline personality disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), bipolar disorder, personality disorder, anxiety, dysphoria, dyskinesia, severe depression.

d) Analysis of the physical and cognitive degradations in the case of the diagnosed patients, as it follows: body, nervous system, mood, thoughts, behavior, social relationships, self-esteem, sexual impulses/ libido, emotions and feelings, addictions, suicidal or self-mutilating behavior.

e) Documentation on the type of used medicines: typical antipsychotics given to patients in psychiatric or normal hospitals.

f) Defining the character: he/she (the lack of name reinforces the idea that any of those present could be the character they see, the gender being the director's choice and depends on the concept) – suburban individual diagnosed with severe depression. Dramatic situation: 48 minutes before committing suicide or the last 48 minutes of life. Since there were no biographical references in the text, both the director and the actor decided to build the character identifying with it. Key moments in the actor's personal life were chosen and superposed on the stage situations. The actor's trial to completely identify with the character was based on Stanislavski's concept of "affective memory". Choosing to dig deep inside the actor's affective memory was not the best choice. By the end of the rehearsal the actor's social behavior was severely affected. Outside the rehearsal space, the actor developed an obsessive-compulsive type of behavior. Both the actor and the director noticed this.

g) Character memorandum and journal, rehearsal journal.

h) Exploiting themes like: physical isolation, social isolation, chronic depression, suicide in theatrical improvisations.

i) Corporality: body deformation –main reasons: severe depression and medication. The elements of theatre-dance were meant to describe the body transformed by isolation, medication, violence, weight loss, alienation, lack of human affection.

j) The attempt to build the character's body grammar (gestural semiotics): lethargy, excess, physical violence, spasm.

k) Space: the corner formed of 2 walls 2m/2m. The exterior limit is marked with chalk. The choice of the space insinuates, physically and fictively, a patient's padded cell in a psychiatric hospital.

l) Soundtrack: the ticking of a clock, Venetian Snares- Szamár Madár, Radiohead-No Surprises.

m) Costume: grey men's shorts, white T-shirt, the right wrist is bandaged.

n) Scenography: clock, rocks, chalk.

Theatrical context 2011-2017

It is after 2000 that the first independent theatre companies make extravagant changes in the Romanian cultural market. Cultural associations formed by actors, directors, playwrights who wanted to create or could not find a position in the state institutions, appeared as small associations. Young and enthusiastic, they started founding an independent sector. Still, the bigger institutions did not meet this openly, calling it a "trifle", a refuse of applying for a position in a state institution. It was seen as "unemployment"⁴ a probationary job, until the position of actor - service provider - was available. The freelancer actor stood out. The alternative space becomes necessary for an independent company to survive. The stage can be a cafe, a street, a disabled industrial zone. Any space may become a stage.

The members of Create.Act.Enjoy, the independent association invest their own resources in the company and try to rent low-priced shabby spaces. Most of the marketing strategies of the independent companies are online, on different media platforms and social networks. Since the aim is to sell and not to identify the target audience, most of the independent companies appeal to incoherent marketing strategies. The cultural offer of these companies is diversified offering documentaries, sport theatre (improvisation theatre), personal development workshops for all ages, shows for children, theatre residences, performances, art therapy, happenings, exhibitions with performative insertions, concerts, etc.

Some of the independent companies present on the local market in Cluj Napoca are: Reactor de Creație și Experiment, Varoterem Project, Colectiv A, Reciproca, Create. Act. Enjoy, GroundFloor, Shoshin.

Reconstructing the play/ show in the independent area

Starting with 1995 and continuing ever since Romania adopts the international models and the first independent shows appear in the west of the country as club or cafe theatre. Thus, for the first time, the alternative spaces offer the graduates a new possibility to manifest their talent and creative energy. The alternative space welcomes everyone who is willing to reconsider their artistic product.

4. Sandu Gabriel, "De ce teatrele românești sunt conduse de actori și regizori cu mandate infinite [Why Romanian Theatre Institutions Are Managed by Actors and Directors with Infinite Mandates]," *Vice*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/de-ce-teatrele-romanesti-sunt-conduse-de-actori-si-regizori-cu-mandate-infinite-577>.

Without being familiarized with the aesthetics of the independent theatre, independent companies or alternative spaces, together with Alexandra Felseghi, we tried to understand the new form of performance. In this theatrical context the independent theatre becomes the opponent of the traditional state institution. The message of the independent companies was one of opposition.

The show-research-exam 4.48 *Psychosis* by Sarah Kane had an unexpected trajectory. After my finishing the master studies, the show was put on and played in an alternative cultural space: Fabrica de Pensule - The Small Hall.

Fabrica de Pensule - The Small Hall

The first re-location of the play took place in 2012. It left the university space to be performed as a co-production with Fabrica de Pensule.

Transition- Stage 1

- a) Evaluating the costs
- b) Evaluating the auxiliary costs (sound, lights)
- c) Promoting costs
- d) Strategy costs
- e) Copyright costs. The actor's intention was to continue the master research with PhD studies. Since the project turned into a PhD thesis included in an educational program, there were no copyright fees
- f) Setting-arranging the room/hall
- g) Rehearsal program
- h) Date of performance

Due to the lack of space (the Small Hall being less than Maican Hall of the Faculty of Theatre and Television) there were some curatorial changes. The corner of Maican Hall was on the left, whereas in the Small Hall we had to use the right corner because of the windows. Changing the space meant altering the whole form of the performance.

Windows are perceived as elements of the space that allow access. The concept of the play was based on a closed space that did not permit the way in and gave the impression of a claustrophobic space. The actor's training, direction and movements change in a different setting. The space will influence the actor's performance. In this regard, we have moved the space from left side corner to right side corner. The shift of sides made the actor's training modify. The duration of rehearsals changed by increasing the amount of time of the actor's understating, doing and processing every move. I, myself am a right handed actor, and transporting the performance

from left to right transformed the time of rehearsal. The distance between objects changed and the actor's point of view had to vary. Every turn of the head, every eye-contact, every move, every meaning that was in the original performance had to be reviewed and modified.

As for the audience, since they were seated at a bigger distance from the stage than in the initial performance, there was an alteration in the reception of the show. We could say that those who saw once again the play in this context had the experience of a different performance, a different play. First time the performance was played, the audience had the possibility to seat on cushions in the first row, at approximately 50 cm from the delimited stage. But in the new space, at The Small Hall, we had to distance the audience from the stage even more and also lift the seats higher from the ground by using 10, 15 and 20 cm platforms on which the chairs were placed. By distancing and using a higher point of view, the visual perspective of the audience shifted the degree of intimacy between the actor and his spectators. By doing these modifications, the voice training, volume and diction suffered and therefore the facial expression, masks and movement had to be reinforced by exaggeration. So we can say that distancing or rising the surface on which the public sits on has an effect on: the level of intimacy, acting (body image, mind, thought, voice). The first idea of the performance endured an alteration, the concept of telling and intimate story about a girl's last 48 minutes of being alive has been amended. It became a story told by afar.

Since the production costs would have increased, because the auxiliary personnel should have been paid, the director decided to do the light and sound technician's job.

The strategy and marketing costs were covered by the actor and the director.

The rehearsals were established according to the other productions taking place in the Small Hall. The arrangement of the acting zone and the steps for the audience became part of the actor and director's job, the co-producer not taking part in this process. Since the hall had recently been renovated, both the director and the actor had to clean it which affected the rehearsals, the actor's mental and physical mood. Having to move these steps daily prolonged the time the acting space was used. The actor and director's tiredness and exhaustion prevented them from being efficient, as they also took care of the technical part. We had to reconsider every day and every rehearsal. We had to calculate exactly how much it took to: move the stairs for the audience from the back of the room to the stage, how much it took to clean the space- stage and audience, how much time was left for actual physical training, rehearsal for 45 minute, how much time to clean floor

and walls after rehearsal, how much time to move the platforms back in their initial space. The pressure of time and space improved our technical abilities, but with the cost of the lower quality of the performance.

In transitioning and curating a delicate performance like *4.48 Psychosis* we need to pay attention to time, space and how we manage them. The internal (body and mind) and external resources of the actor and of the director have to be spent with the diplomacy of a business manager. The management of resources needs to be trained and as a freelance actor and director you need to have a clear vision on the possible turns that performance will endure. Aspects like this have to be envisaged by the entire team that is part of the curating process.

Transition Stage 2

Second re-location was from The Small Hall (The Paintbrush Factory) to The Box Hall (Create. Act. Enjoy) in 2013. This re-location process was a bit different from the proceeding one. The management process had similarities, but the artistic stage underwent some big transformations.



Fig. 2: Scene from *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane directed by Alexandra Felseghi, Raluca Lupan, The Box (Create. Act. Enjoy) Hall, 2016

The curating process involved this steps:

- a) Evaluating the costs
- b) Evaluating the auxiliary costs (sound, lights)
- c) Promoting costs
- d) Strategy costs
- e) Copyright costs. The actor's intention was to continue the master research with PhD studies. Since the project turned into a PhD thesis included in an educational programme, there were no copyright fees
- f) Setting-arranging the room/hall
- g) Rehearsal program
- h) Date of performance

In 2013 the show became part of the repertoire of *Create. Act. Enjoy* - Independent Film and Theatre Company where both the director and the actor worked. The place that this theatre company had to offer at that time was a 30 square meter Hall called –The Box. The Box was actually a room in an early 20th century bourgeois townhouse with white walls and parquet on the floor.

We have to mention that in 2011 and 2012, the Maican Hall from FTT (Theatre and Television Faculty) and the Small Hall from The Paintbrush Factory both had walls painted black. So the first transition was made inside the scenography of the performance, because we had to change the objects used by the actor: the white chalk was replaced by a red one. Therefore shifting from a black walled studio to an immaculate white stage made a difference in approaching scenography, lighting designing as well as the acting process.

The color of the walls could not be changed because other shows were played there so, in order to keep the white features intact, we had to come up with a solution. We made the decision to glue on the walls 12 1mx1m pieces of white cardboard. This decision was approved by the *Create. Act. Enjoy* manager. But this decision increased our production costs and understated our promoting resources. Can we say that distorting the space can influence the costs and resources? The answer is definitely yes.

A little element changed a lot. A small change that was voted by the whole company corrupted the management and the creative process.

The color and the density of the chalk interchanged the relation of the actor with the object and with the space. The moves that the character made to sketch the people on the walls and on the floor had to be made with a

bigger physical effort so that the chalk could remain on the wall and floor. The unblemished image of the character- the suicidal girl- was marked with red chalk at the end of the performance. This new image generated by a change in the means of production made a stronger impact on the audience. If in 2011 and 2012 you could see the character with small white dots on her skin and cloths, in 2013 you saw an all- red covered body of a girl shouting her last words in 48 minutes. That is a powerful image that suggested the mess of a dead body and the struggles of a human that fights for his/her last breath.

Regaining the public's empathy by reducing the distance between the actor and his audience had a huge outcome on both sides. The actor's interaction was more condensed and focused, and the audience's attention was sharper. Even though the performance was produced as a one woman-show, minimizing the distance between actor/performer and audience reconfigured this relationship. The public became a partner in the actor's stage moves, thoughts, actions, decisions. The need of interaction with the audience grew as the actor was performing. The glimpse of someone else's eye intensified the scenic thought and action. Eye-contact was a significant acting unit that the actor played with. Involving every member of the audience and engaging them to keep the eye-contact for more than a few seconds made them a part of the story, a partner in developing the character's emotions and actions. Although there were people who rejected a deep eye-contact with the actor, their refusal was, for the actor, a positive response. It meant that the new scenic situation pictured by the actor and designed by the director was a "loud" and heavy one, just like in any respectable *In-Yer-Face*⁵ play.

From the actor's perspective, this tiny change intensified the spectrum of the imagination. Every picture created in his imagination had another meaning than in the performance from 2011 or 2012. Changing the space influences the image flux or flow of the imagination. For me, moving from a black room to a white wall room took on another conceptual meaning. The room I was imagining as the character's room in 2011-2012 became in 2013 a clinical, psychiatric hospital room in which the character was put in and could be watched like an animal at the zoo. Thus we can say that space can sway the act of imagination, on what the actor chooses to see and his operating means and also what the audience will see. Of course, in the context of an independent theatre company, space is a temporary asset and it must be regarded as so.

5. See Ozana Budău-Tunyagi, "The Psychological Mechanism of Trauma and Its Effects on Sarah Kane's Experimental Theatre," *Studia UBB Dramatica* LIX, no. 2 (2014).

The harsh change of spatial location intervened in the heart of the artistic re-adaptation and the re-creative work. This step was taken when the slam of the door in one of the rehearsal time drew the actor in another set of images sliding before his eye. So the flunk of the door created the final picture of a tragic finale. In this regard, the director and the actor made the decision to replace the last song that the audience would hear at the end of the performance: The Heart Black Procession- When you finish me.

Space and “audible space”⁶ was a magnificent element that allowed the actor’s playfulness to rejoice in new body shapes and plastic images. A white wall or the sound of the slamming door made the grains of imagination blossom. A freed imagination was reinstated and the creative process was linked to a wider view. After the first performance the audience sat in silence for almost 3 minutes. No applause, living the actor and the director in a state of an immense surprise. The initial intimacy concept was reinstated and the original interaction with the audience was taken to a different level.

Just because the painting on the walls was white there were a lot of alterations inside the artistic and creative shape of the performance.

As an actor when you are faced with a close interaction with the public you will have to reconstruct your own training and acting method. A major face and body exaggeration can emotionally distance the audience from the character you are embodying. The choices you and the director make could reform the plastic and aesthetic composition of the performance.

Every step you take as an actor in curating a performance is essential and it can take you on a different artistic path. The managing and curating process can make you reevaluate your training and active acting just by taking a small decision as changing the space or the color of the object that you character is interacting with.

At the end of a professional day, every commitment or managerial modification could rebuild a lost sense or meaning of a show, could make the audience “see” and “feel” a diverse point of view. You could retrieve, revive, resurrect or resuscitate a stray conceptual idea that you or the director had at the beginning of your work.

Curating 4.48 *Psychosis* by Sarah Kane was a tough and delicate act assumed by both the actor and the director. The director’s aim was to: a) prolong the “life and the idea” of the performance; b) to find fresh ways

6. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre, Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 359–65.

to resurge an old form; c) curate a part of one's soul. On the other hand, the actor's purpose was to: a) find new ways in communicating the message of the play; b) to learn how to bear the burden of such a character; c) curate a part of one's soul.

Curating a performance is an action made upon the soul of the artist.

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