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***Rudolf Steiner - towards a theater of spiritual forms***

**Summary**

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Antonin Artaud / Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. Mircea Eliade / Peter Brook / Andrei Șerban

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In this era of millenniums confluences, atomization of spirituality in a variety of spiritual projects, religious proposals, art shows etc. there's a need for some viable unifying benchmarks.

The PhD thesis entitled *Rudolf Steiner - towards a theater of spiritual forms* aims such an intergrating cultural perspective on the theory of anthroposophy with some of the main theatrical poetics of the twentieth century.

Rudolf Steiner's conception about man (man - consisting of a physical body, etheric body or the body of life, body of soul, soul sensation, soul of reason or understanding, the I, spiritual self, spirit of life and human spirit) linking cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism can be considered as the dominant paradigm of the work.

In the first part of the theses, I try to define the concept of anthroposophy and clarify the term – the occurrence of anthroposophy, its development from a different spiritual science (theosophy), the relations with theosophy, the causes of apparition, an attempt to debate the importance of theater in anthroposophy and how this manifests itself through theater.

Anthroposophy is a modern spiritual trend, a "knowledge about knowledge", which combined harmoniously the mystic based on inner experience with scientific thinking about the spirit. It is based on the principle that any material facts in the universe accounts for a spiritual reality and viceversa. But anthroposophy remains not only at the state of theoretical knowledge being a living knowledge, developing solutions in various fields: medicine, biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf school, society (society is seen as a social organism which for working perfectly has to be established in a tripartite way, so that the economics do not suffocate judiciary and spiritual), organic architecture.

Then follows an evocation about the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, who emerged from the Theosophical current of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century putting the foundations of a new doctrines in 1912. Theosophy became a current marked by Buddhist influences, who see in Christ only a great teacher of mankind.

For a mind accustomed to rigorous scientific research in conscious investigation of the spirit – *the will* released from *desires* and *the thinking* by *sensory influences* – the outward forms of Theosophy and its equivocal atmosphere no longer met. But the anthroposophy's sources remain essentially the theosophical ones, besides those of the old mysteries of western and eastern humanity.

Another part of the thesis is the approach of the concept about *Organic Architecture* and integration of the Goetheanum, the building designed after a project of Rudolf Steiner, in the stream. Starting from the idea of harmony between man and environment, this form of architecture is composed of wavy lines, which follows the pattern of the human body, every part, color, shape, being in a twinning with the whole.

This concept was embodied in the construction of Steiner's Goetheanum, universal headquarters of the anthroposophic society. Here is a school of spiritual science which, besides general sections of anthroposophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy, natural sciences, biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf pedagogy, social sciences, there is also a fine arts section, art of word, music, theater. Goetheanum has four show rooms, having its own set of theater and eurhythmy. The first Goetheanum, a building entirely of wood, inaugurated in 1920, burned down entirely on the New Year's eve of 1923. Construction of the second Goetheanum began in 1924 and the rough opening of the building took place five years later. Work continued for another seventy years.

Mysteries of Antiquity and Middle Ages brought to the fore heroes and gods. They narrate sacred histories. At Steiner, individuals appear to be started on the road of spiritual conquest where they meet with the divine entity, a thing possible only through initiation. His characters are people seeking to overcome themselves, on a strictly inside path. The scheme adopted by Steiner is the one of the cosmic drama. The first two dramas have focused on the interaction between love and wisdom. In the third one, past trends reappear in the midst of traditional models, shaping the present. In the fourth drama we are witnessing the development of some mental processes through which beings chained to their karma, subject to temptation, doubt, despair, are able to open the gates of the spiritual world, reliving in temples and shrines stages of their past lives. The fifth drama was going to be written in 1914, but World War I ended this project. -Mystery dramas were played in Munich, as they were written: *The portal of initiation* in 1910, *The Soul's probation* in 1911, *The guardian of the threshold* in 1912 and *The soul's awakening* in 1913.

In the first mystery-drama, *The portal of initiation*, the characters find destinal links for each other, which will allow them to discover their past life. They will want to put aside personal desires to reach a real vision of their previous existences. Such report will come to understand the reality of karma and past lives of everyday life, from the Middle Ages and even in ancient Egypt. This mystery-drama finds inspiration in the story of Goethe, *The Green Serpent and the lily flower*. The language used by Steiner is a lyrical-mystic one, in order to play the complexity of the characters and that of the world in which they move, a world half-delirious, half real. In this world, man is the eternal essence of his spirit, situated in the vicinity of myths and legends.

*The portal of initiation* contains a prelude, in which two female characters, Philia and Sophia reveal the "conflict" of the entire cycle - bending over the superficial aspects of life versus its spiritual side, supersensible. The technique is the one of setting into the abyss. The central character in all four drama-mysteries is Johannes Thomasius, the dreamy artist whose female counterpart is Mary. The two attend a conference on spiritual science held by the spiritual master Benedictus, which will change their whole destiny. Participants to this conference: are also Capesius, a representative of the official science, but drawn to spiritual matters, but opposing them; Strader - a kind of agnostic Faust, who believes mystical feelings and spiritual science to be dreams and irreconcilable utopias with science, then the clairvoyant Theodora. There are two characters able to touch the spirit world without the aid of sophisticated spiritual science: Felix Bald and his wife, Mrs. Bald. There are allegorical characters, Theodosius, Romanus, Germanus and characters belonging to the spirit world, Retardus, Lucifer and Ahriman. In the preface of the mystery-drama, Simonne-Rihouët Coroze observed the existence of "destiny nodes" between characters, which can be opened only if they will return to the thread of their former lives, which is possible only if "stripping" from any personal selfish desire.

Only then it will disappear any doubt regarding the current relationships. "Karmic threads" link characters together - Mrs. Bald, through her stories, awakening the imagination and ingenuity in Capesius's arid thinking, the materialistic scientist Strader is confused by Theodora's clairvoyant forecasts, Johannes Thomasius, is faced with his better self, contemplating desperate the sterility of the life he led.

This happens at the meeting with Mary, the spiritual guide who leads him to awaken the forces of compassion, with which Johannes will be able to enter the souls of others, this understanding, taking him to the border of his own being. Maria is on a higher level of initiation, the one of inspiration, while Johannes is placed only on the level of imagination. Philia, Astrid, and The Moon are allegorical figures symbolizing the archetypal soul, sensitivity, awareness and understanding.

Capesius and Strader are passing through extrasensory experiences, the second even gets to meet the Guardian of the Threshold<sup>1</sup>. Johannes goes through successive stages of evolution, starting with that whisper of the nature that he perceives - "Man, know thyself" - and then walking up from the lowest levels of imaginative thinking, where he meets Lucifer and Ahriman - the vital forces of the physical self: instinct of survival and sexual desire, on the one hand, and intellectualism, on the other.

The materialist thinking of the two scientists, Capesius and Strader, triggers forces of nature, because their ideal is to deny the spirit. The one that leads the two to the threshold of the spiritual world is Ms Bald who through a "natural magic", hidden in her stories, ignite nostalgia for absolute, present in a dormant way in the souls of the two scholars. Johannes arrives to an imaginary place, an underground temple dedicated to the mysteries of the hierophant, where he is forced to sacrifice the illusion of personality.

The karmic connection between him and Maria is revealed to them by Theodora, thought "vizationalization" of their past lives. Their souls are completing each other. What Johannes learns from the twinning of the two forces that guide him - love and wisdom - is that universal love, to

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<sup>1</sup>.. The first stage of the rosicrucian initiation involves separation of the disciple from the physical body. He thus comes to know its essence and the action that the physical body exercises by "living" in it, like in a shell. The feeling that the disciple senses from this separation can be bitterness or resentment towards the physical body that keeps him chained. If occult education is sufficiently evolved, this bitterness will be defeated. On a higher level of spiritual evolution, our individuality, already reincarnated, is responsible for what the flesh became. Once overcome this feeling of bitterness it (may) get to the stage where we are aware that "I myself-I am one who is in the physical body. And if so far I know nothing of it, is because it was smothered by it"(see: *Dictionnaire de Christologie*, textes de Rudolf Steiner recueillis à l'intention des Etudiants en Science spirituelle par Maurice Novel, EAR, Suisse, 1999, p. 151).

which man should aim can be achieved only when instinctual love will unite with the light of wisdom.

In *The Soul's probation* we find Capesius meditating to the words of Benedictus. The pain of Faust from finding out the inability of science to give to the human a path to infinity is felt by Capesius as well, which helped by Benedictus, enters the area of spiritual clairvoyance, where he will see the events from his past reincarnation in the thirteenth century, shared with the other characters. He finds out that his present life is but a continuation of the previous. In his last incarnation Capesius, was a Knight of the Temple, who abandoned his family, the two abandoned children were Johannes and Theodora. Maria, in her last incarnation was a bitter enemy of the mystic esotericism brotherhood, who separated the two sons from their father. Felix Balde and his wife were simple peasants attracted by the Templar's esotericism. Strader was a Jew doctor, persecuted and treated like a magician by peasants. Awakening from this vision Capesius is confused. He evokes the meaning of the cosmic words that he heard, spoken by an unknown being, this being is none other than his spiritual self, the one that Steiner calls *The guardian of the threshold*. Thus Capesius admits his karma becoming aware both of the past, as well as his future.

*The guardian of the threshold* has three major themes – the task that Lucifer and Ahriman have throughout the human evolution and the nature of these entities. The choice that the man, endowed with intelligence and artistic sensibility, is bound to make between remaining in the desire zone or to move up towards spiritual heights and the importance of measure and number in the cosmos. Johannes appears here as a scholar, who, beyond the secret rosicrucian Alliance circles, spreads mysticism among people. He led the "science founded only on reason and senses" to "forms that enable an understanding of the spiritual worlds." Unlike the first drama in which Johannes was in a desperate mood, here all hopes are directed towards him. He will unite opposites in order for all endowed with different gifts to come together at some point in a common activity. Johannes united art with science, thought with act, the idea with reality. Moreover, both Felix Balde, as well as Johannes Strader see the character able to unite the spiritual knowledge with the empirical one. The successive states that Johannes passes can be characterized as a journey in several stages, though absolute solitude of the "ice fields", an

"escalation of an unknown world, which, however, you know that you carry it in you."<sup>2</sup> From the sphere of Ahriman, field of calculable, Johannes passes in that of Lucifer, the empire of the lower self's desires.

Overcoming the two spheres means for the future initiated, transition to *Imitatio Cristi*. Capesius says about the nature of Lucifer, that is a neutral person in whose area the man is able to transform evil into good and vice versa. The task of uniting love with the three forces of the soul - imagination, inspiration and intuition – goes to Mary, who, in the temple of the mystical alliance, speaks of Christ who teaches people to love.

Capesius, reaching spiritual maturity, becomes aware that in the entire course of cosmic evolution there is a trinity – the luciferic, master of solitary thought, the ahrimanic, head of writing and, between the two, the pure divine – a middle state. Reaching the conclusion that number three must be looked for everywhere, Capesius feels, on one hand "the number of the being in the becoming of the world", and on the other "it appears clearly to him, the being of the measure - he understands that in each triad, two act opposite and must be brought into harmony"<sup>3</sup>. "And Strader faces the number.

He has seen the pain in the kingdom of Ahriman, the spiritual burden, the petrifying of the thought, but also the series of the twelve people to whom he felt tied up through destiny. He is guided by Theodora, as long as she is alive, for seven years. She will not leave him even after her disappearance, her spiritual being showing him the path, there, in the spiritual spheres. The light mediated by Theodora will guide him to finding out that the shining belongs to the Representative of humanity, the one who unites in him the goals of true humanity.

*The soul's awakening* is the fourth mystery-drama. Here occurs the interest for the social work. Strader is found in the process of the union between art and spiritual, revealed by artistic works. His major projects will guide him to overcome egoity. Johannes, in turn, passes through disappointment in terms of his own spirit, feeling a nostalgia for the old hedonistic ego,

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<sup>2</sup> Hugo Reimann's comments based on Matilda Scholl's notes in *The guardian of the threshold*.. Events of the spiritual life in scenic images, translation from German: Onofrei Adriana, Adriana Iliescu and George Paxino, Bucharest, Univers Encyclopedic, 2000, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem* p.6.



aestheticized. Maria awakens his dormant consciousness, making him responsible for the fact that he must continue to reach the consciousness of his *self*. When Johannes accepts Maria's challenge, he sees appearing elementary beings, gnomes, trolls and silfidele, and the three spiritual forces-Philia, Astrid, and The Moon, and another entity, the other Philia, which makes him aware of the fact that those elementary beings are stopping his development. The appearance and perception of these elementary beings is nothing but the consequence of his soul's untold desires from the previous incarnation, a thing revealed by a ghostly being, from which Theodora saves him. Saving him from this ghost symbolizes sublimation of physical love and its transformation in free and disinterested love. After liberating a part of his being from the influence of Lucifer, Johannes achieve the higher-*self*, contemplating the irresistible seductive action of his low-*self*. He "sees" himself incarnated as a young egyptian in the third period of earthly civilizations, in love with a mist. For the young egyptian, the ascension of the mist to the rank of initiated, means her destruction, but during the solemn ceremony of initiation, the mist profanes the temple with his voluptuous rapture. The sacrificer, in which we recognize Capesius, does not want to prevent desecration, feeling the breath of a new humanity, in which individuality will be liberated from ignorance and prejudice. He knows that the young mist will reincarnate to fulfill the initiation stage. In another plan, Mary and other disciples of Benedictus are contemplating the midday sun - is the stage of initiation in which the man feels what is solar in him. The last level, that of meeting with God is possible only after reaching the mystery of Golgotha, when resurrected Christ unites ethereal with earth forever.

The mystery-dramas written by Steiner could play the role of spiritual exercises, having as effect the elevation of the soul to the sphere of divine, as they represent a form of the freeing pray. The timeliness of this mystery-dramas lies in how the author deals with the mystery of love and sacrifice.

This dramas are a type of theatre transition plays between old and new esoterism, their symbolic language reflecting that the spiritual world makes the object of continuous metamorphosis, similar to our perception on spiritual world. Nowadays steinerian theatre is confusing and intriguing for the non-initiated public, being static, with long monologues and evoking little conferences – a philosophical way of dialogal approach.. One can say about this dramas that they provoke a revelation of the spirit under the mask of Art.

Between the language of mystery-dramas, on one hand, and the forms of Goetheanum, on the other, it can be observed a common law, the same principle – the idea of metamorphosis. Goetheanum represents in itself a huge ritual embodied in architectural and scenic forms.. It is, a Mystery representing by itself, giving the idea of a cosmic, over-human playwright. It is normal, than, in those circumstances, for this space to be understood as a *theatre of spiritual* forms, a sacred theatre, created by the same person that conceived also the space for it. Here, as in the theatre theory, there is another connection between Steiner and his followers. When I say this, I think about the fact that Steiner has created a space for a kind of mess in form of spiritual oriented theatre. This is the same as in the case of the theatre specialists that followed him. They had – almost all of them – a special place for their ritual-spiritual-sacred theatre where they practised or still practice. Good examples are: Grotowski with the Lab Theatre, Brook with Bouffes du Nord, place for CIRT, and Andrei Şerban, with his tries to found an Institut of Theatrical Researches, that took place, for certain reasons, only in the form of an Itinerant/ Moving Academy.

Rudols Steiners vision on theatre influenced some stage directors from XXth century. Therefore, my thesis analyzes the possible links between Steiner and Antonin Artaud, concerning the theatrical double he theorised, Jerzy Grotowski and his lab theatre, where the actor performs a sacred ritual, Peter Brook and *his come back to theatre* roots, and, last but not least, Andrei Şerban, who is in permanent research for „the fragile balance between visible and invisible, between life and art, between two worlds”.

The actor’s art is called to contribute to the development of conscienceness, having to maintain awake the intuitive capacity of people, because through intellectual activity “ is lost a lot from the faculty of intuitive perception”.

During his *master* class performed in June 2005 in Cluj-Napoca, Andrei Serban continued, actually, Steiner’s affirmations saying that he is convinced that “the theatre is not a field for ideas, it does not transmitt ideas. Two thousands years before, when it [theatre] was invented, that happened not because it was meant to transmit ideas, but for evoking another reality, a different one from the one we know

In order to open a window into something where we all are on an unknown land, we know and have no desire to know, we have a desire to be in contact with another energy, which we know very little of, something that corresponds to an intelligence that is not required, that of

the brain. Because we have within us many centers of intelligence. Not only the ones we believe that we use most of the time, that, in fact, in the intelligence of the heart, which includes the heart intelligence (very mysterious word), there is a tremendous fine opening potential, subtle, sensitive and which becomes visible when the show is happening or when the relationship is happening.

And afterwards something remains or disappears forever. Something impossible to define, but very, very concrete. There is not something abstract. On the contrary, something very concrete. That is why, it is very hard to say what, maybe because it is a very transparent quality. How to define transparency? It is impossible.”

Aureliu Manea also sustained that “theatre is an art of mystery and poetry” and, in order not to fall into routine, it is needed some unexpected impulse, an “infusion of nature and breath”, a coming back to “primordial gestures and words”<sup>4</sup>, in other words, a come back towards the origins of the theatre, its sacrality. This thing appears also at Grotowski, under the face of the “saint-actor”, who “is not selling his body, but sacrifice it”. For Grotowski, the essence of the actor’s vocation is the act of “total openness of the being” who becomes “a self offering, neighbouring the barriers of transgression and love”<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, Grotowski observes that theatrical art interests us “for crossing the borders, for going beyond our limits, for filling our emptiness – for fulfilling ourselves. It is not a condition, but a process during which what is obscure in ourselves becomes transparent step by step”<sup>6</sup>. The same way, when speaking about the *sacred* theatre, Peter Brook defines it as “Invisible Theatre – made Visible”<sup>7</sup>..

The need for “invisible” is legitimated when the contemporary man understands that from his life something essential is missing; a parallel universe needs to become known, by becoming conscious that we are not only what is seen by our physical eye; on the contrary, rising to what surrounds us, we could come outside of what keeps us prisoners, limiting our movements, in spite of letting us dance and fly.. Artaud also wanted to reach the absolute. He wanted a theatre conceived as a holy place where, by the mean of violent images, the public could be shocked, amazed, raped in order to feel a strong, powerful effect.

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<sup>4</sup> Aureliu Manea, *El, vizionarul*, București, Revista „Teatrul azi” (Supliment), 2000, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, București, Ed. Unitext, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, București, Ed. Unitext, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Brook, *Spațiul gol*, București, Ed. Unitext, 1997, p. 44.

. Another meeting place between Rudolf Steiner's thinking concerning the art of theatre and some of the XXth century stage directors is the argument about the actor's body. His profound knowledge is vital, sustains Steiner, "because this own physicality (corporality), for the real man, called to perform, in fact, this is the musical instrument on which he plays. He must know his own body as well as the violonist knows its violin<sup>8</sup>. Andrei Serban sustains the same idea: "An actor, much more than a dancer, or much more than an opera singer, uses his instrument, which should become a Stradivarius. He is my body, my person. I am the instrument. The same stage director tells about an experience lived by himself at the International Centre of Theatrical Researches in Paris, when Peter Brook asked those present to try to produce a sound from their soles. "It is possible", says Serban, "but you cannot find the solution in one day or in one month". You have to let your entire body to vibrate, in order to become a resonance box.

Antonin Artaud speaks about the *affective athleticism*, the actor athlete like, – but unlike him – "the race" in which he launches himself is "thrown towards inside", and then by profound knowledge of his own body, the actor gets to perceive "his internal density and the volume of his feeling", the result being a "better translation"<sup>9</sup>. The novelty of this approach is the fact that until now no connection was established between Steiner and the representatives of the ritualic theatre. Parallellism or not, the relation is consistent and comes from that period of time. There is no exegesis yet, dedicated to that parallelism inside of which Steiner can be looked both as a forerunner and as a follower.

Steiner's lessons about stage speaking were never presented Steiner observes that, when the actor "shapes" the word, something is lost from the human being, and this *something* is to be recovered by mimic and gesture. Mimics and gestures should become instinctive, the gesture should be made by inner experience, by artistic styling.

When an actor puts his own features, his own personalities on the character, the character falls outside universality. The first request of this art consists in the force to separate you from yourself, for living on the stage outside yourself, as you would contemplate yourself from exterior, as it does unconsciously the dreamer and consciously the initiated. The physical exercises proposed by Steiner are spiritual exercises. Let 's not forget the fact that Grotowski and his disciples practised this type of exercises. Rudolf Steiner takes on this exercises from the

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<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Marie Steiner-von Sivers, *Modelarea vorbirii și arta dramatică*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Triade, 1999, p.21.

<sup>9</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Teatrul și dublul său*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Echinox, 1997, pp.104, 109.

Greek gymnastics – which expresses the best, he thinks, the intimate connection between man and cosmos – and brings them further.

By this Ph.D. thesis my wish is to promote the spiritual forms of drama in Romania, in general, according to the spiritual forms of theater, for possible future plays. Through its pioneering ambitions, this thesis can involve both specialists in comparative literature, as well as practitioners of the scene.

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