

Changes. The Rise of Theatre Studies as an Academic Discipline in Hungary

MAGDOLNA JÁKFALVI

Abstract: During the course of the 20th century, there appeared trends and schools that characterised European theatrical practice as a whole, and yet the functioning of the academic discipline would traverse different paths in small-language cultures, especially those that fell under Soviet power, than the rest of the continent did. We associate the emergence of theatre studies as an academic discipline with the emerging concept of performativity, as seen in Erika Fischer-Lichte's impactful paper. "However, the discovery of the performative dates back to the beginning of this century. It resulted, among other things, in the birth of a new academic discipline – theatre studies."¹ From the vantage point of the hundred-year-long history of German theatre studies, this statement is undeniably inspiring, since on the one hand, it allows us to glimpse the shared characteristics of performance culture at the beginning of the century, from Craig through Appia to Stanislavski, and on the other, it lets us note that decades later, the language theory research beginning with Austen derives inspiration from a completely different experiential platform when it comes to the performative character of language (and not that of bodily processes.) However, in small-language cultures we perceive a different academic practice, therefore in this paper we follow the structure of scholarship born of the discovery, experience and naming of per-

formativity, until the solidification of Sovietised academic practices in the 1960s.

In 1908 and 1909, Edward Gordon Craig posed two round-table questions to European theatre-makers on the pages of *The Mask*: what do they mean by realism, and do they need a National Theatre. From Hungary, these questions were answered by Sándor Hevesi, a director working at the National and Thália Theatres, who proceeded to exchange many more letters with Craig. This paper paraphrases the title of Erika Fischer-Lichte's work on German theatre studies to reach towards the realisation that the disciplined academic thinking that could have led to the rise of Hungarian theatre studies was underpinned by the answers to Craig's questions. We must remark that Craig never visited Hungary, never met the man who answered his letters, and he had no contact with Hungarian theatre, unless we count his acquaintance with Lajos Fülep, a Hungarian art historian who was his neighbour for half a decade in Florence. Craig's questions, his insights and his position outside the system of theatrical institutions kickstarted Hungarian discourse about theatre as an independent form of art.

1. *The Idea: Realism (Hevesi)*

The European frameworks of theatre studies are more than a century old, their institutional development can be measured through the emergence of university departments. "The first Institute of Theatre Studies was founded in Berlin in 1923 on the initiative of Max Herrmann."² German examples demonstrate

¹ Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, „From Text to Performance: The Rise of Theatre Studies as an Academic Discipline in Germany“, *Theatre Research International* 24, No. 2. (1999): 168–178, 168.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883300020794>

² Ibid. 168.

that early academic and theoretical difficulties stemmed from the separation of literature and theatre, the question of whether it is possible to create a theatrical performance without a written play was immediately followed by the question, whether it is possible to lecture on theatre at a literature department. When it comes to the major monolingual countries of Europe, the power struggles in academia took place between departments and disciplines, but Hungary was in a different situation. It is a significant aspect of the post-WW1 Hungarian state that while humanities departments struggle to redefine their positions in the academic hierarchy, they are not competing with new disciplines, but with the integration of universities that found themselves beyond Hungary's borders.³ In this geopolitical situation, the Budapest Academy of Theatre Arts holds an especially powerful position in educational policy, since some of its teachers are star directors known Europe-wide, whose possess a degree proving their academic qualifications – often a doctoral degree in the Humanities. Thus the first for theatre studies wasn't breaking into the realm of literary studies, instead, it had to define its own boundaries.

Sándor Hevesi taught at the Academy of Theatre Arts between 1927 and 1932, and starting in 1929, he created a course in theatre directing, and was the first among Hungarian theatre directors to approach the actor's work and to do so with a systemising philosophical toolset: clearly Hevesi was the one to define theatre in a new theoretical framework. Hevesi co-founded the Hungarian alternative theatre, Thália Company, with György Lukács in 1904, and also created its

³ Hungarian scholars, departments and even entire universities that found themselves outside the new borders of Hungary, in the wake of WW1 and the Trianon treaty, chose to relocate to „mainland” Hungary where they were re-established and integrated into the pre-existing academic network.

training program, Thália Academy. We believe that the determination to create a philosophical system, and the primary orientation towards German and English-language theory originated with Lukács, but we can also follow it through the decades-long exchange of letters with Craig,⁴ seeing how this collection of private, personal and academic examples tracks the developing need to create a separate academic discipline. Hevesi, as the head of the National Theatre, watched with scholarly curiosity and an analytic will, how “theatre increasingly sheds literature, the poet becomes more and more lonely on the stage,”⁵ but he believed that the text of the performance only matures into a finalised play in the next generation, in the present all performed texts serve the performance, thus from the perspective of the present, all decisions are made by theatrical practice, so it is actor training and director training that can create academic theatrical thought. This realisation leads far, since Hevesi won an unambiguously cerebral position for the director, and Hungarian theatre still considers this well-prepared, analytic behaviour the professional norm for directors. Sándor Hevesi actively participates in developing the theoretical framework of European theatrical practice, and his importance in depicting the Hungarian theatre studies discipline is undeniable.

In the first three decades of the 20th century, Hevesi built a functional and national theatre based on ideals that explore the concept of realism. Hevesi's taste as a director and analyst conforms to Craig's ideas on theatre, even though all aspects of their lives

⁴ Edward Gordon CRAIG és HEVESI Sándor, *Levelezés, 1908–1933*, ed. by SZÉKELY György (Budapest: OSZMI, 1991).

⁵ HEVESI Sándor, “Tragédia kell a népnek?”, in *A magyar dramaturgia haladó hagyományai*, ed. by CSILLAG Ilona, HEGEDÜS Géza, 317–323 (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1953), 318.

and careers diverge.⁶ Craig posed the following questions on the pages of *The Mask*:

- “1. Do you consider Realism in acting to be a frank representation of human nature?
2. In your opinion should the Actor be allowed the same liberty in his expressions of the Passions, as is permitted to the Writer or the Painter?
3. Do you think that Realism appeals to the General Public or only to a limited section of Playgoers?”⁷

Hevesi's responses to the 1908 questions signify that amongst the rigidity of formalism and a philistine audience's expectations of reality, realism is the single artistic practice, which can seize art that inevitably tends towards symbolism in its expressions, and again and again lead it back towards representation of life. “Realism always appears when Art has become fossilised into formalism”. Realist art is capable of demonstrating the extraordinariness of man. “This art consists in laying stress on what is special in the human.”⁸ The appearance of the topics of formalism, symbolism and life in the orbit of realism thematises theatre theoretical queries in the beginning of the century, and Hevesi's multiple decades as the head of the National Theatre and his years spent as a professor at the Academy of Theatre Arts served as the foundation of the academic discipline in Hungarian language and culture.

“The modern tendency in Art, and what we are all striving at, is to conquer Life through Art.” At the same time, Hevesi understands, and provides a linguistically precise answer to Craig's 2nd question. He understands the actor's toolset (his “liberty in his expressions”) to signify expression, and

⁶ CRAIG és HEVESI, *Levelezés...*, 194–201.

⁷ *The Mask*, Vol. I. No. 3–4. 1908.1. Quoted in (and published in two languages): CRAIG és HEVESI, *Levelezés...*, 176–177.

⁸ CRAIG és HEVESI, *Levelezés...*, 176.

primarily verbal expression: “In the first place his limitation is through material, that is to say, through speech.” Consequently, when it comes to speech and utterance, liberty is to be found in the words of the playwright (Writer), but the actor is never alone. “The Actor does not stand alone upon the stage. He is a part of the whole and this whole is represented by the Stage Manager.”⁹ Reconstructing Hevesi's own works as a director, this excerpt sees the actor's liberty in performative bodily processes, physically expressed events, and this liberty is curtailed by the director.

Hevesi encounters the linguistic phenomenon of untranslatability in his response to the third question, since in Hungarian he must separate the word cluster denoting realism from the one denoting reality, he must speak of *realizmus* (realism) on the one hand, and *való(di)ság* (reality-realness-verisimilitude) on the other. The audience, the playgoer “wants everything to be real... real trees, real walls and so on. These real things are always unreal things in Art, alien and hostile to Art.”¹⁰ Following Hevesi, I will hazard the presupposition that this linguistic phenomenon made the relationship between depictions of reality and realist (later socialist realist) art inherently fragmentary and in need of explanation. The academic discipline of theatre studies is concerned with the event of performativity, and discovers it in the conceptual vocabulary of the current stylistic trend, realism, and in the strategies of depicting reality. Depicting reality is not the exclusive domain of realism, Hevesi intuits this from the etymological specificities of the topical Hungarian vocabulary, and he unwittingly begins the debates on realism that often provide us with an explanation of the word, and not of the phenomenon. His own theatrical routine aimed at translating the classics, mostly Shakespeare and Moliere, as well as con-

⁹ *Ibid.* 177.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 177.

temporary Hungarian plays, into something natural, as opposed to something real.

At the beginning of the century, Craig's questions find Hevesi during the first major change in his career. In 1908, at the age of 35 he is still the founder-director of the Thália Company, the first Hungarian alternative theatre, and at the same time, the leading director of the largest private theatre, the Popular Theatre (Volksbühne/Népszínház), and from 1909, once more the director and later the head of the National Theatre. Craig and Hevesi are the same age, they were born only one year apart. Their careers entwined in 1908, when one of Hevesi's letters became the foreword of Craig's second book.¹¹ But their stories already diverge during the first world war. Their defining experiences in 1914 reshaped their theatrical practices: in 1914, Craig met Appia in Zürich, while Hevesi found himself on the Eastern front. Craig articulates his aesthetics in exhibitions, Hevesi does so in theatrical performances. In 1933, their exchange of letters ceases. Due to political pressure Hevesi is removed from the leadership of the National Theatre, and he dies in 1939, while Craig lives on for 27 more years.

The questions posed on the pages of *The Mask* in 1909 reach a Hungarian director who is acclaimed both in the National Theatre, and in the alternative theatre scene. Hevesi's answers to Craig's inspiring questions make it clear that he considers theatre an academic discipline.

"1. Do you believe a National Theatre, directed by a Committee, is advantageous to the development of our Artists?

2. Has your experience shown you that the greatest talent is to be found in the National Theatres of Europe, or in the Theatres of private enterprise?

3. Do you think greater advantage would accrue to the State if it supported the independent efforts of individual artists of great talent, rather than a collective and less talented body of artists under the control of a Committee?

4. If you had been asked the question thirty years ago, would you have voted in favour of the State supporting Madame Bernhardt, Madame Duse, Tommaso Salvini and Henry Irving, or would you have been in favour of the Nation supporting the National Theatre of France, and the proposed National Theatres in England and Italy?"¹²

The answers acknowledge that theatre is built on strong acting talents, but consider State support indispensable, however instead of leadership by committee, they are content with a managerial form of leadership: "a manager, a man of artistic sense and experience, will suffice".¹³ Hevesi considers Heinrich Laube's career and social activism as the head of the Burgtheatre to be his exemplar, as Laube held political function as a member of parliament since 1848, the year of civil revolution in Europe, and at the same time while leading the Viennese theatre, he developed a model that supported theatrical utterance in the speaker's own national language. Here's a rare moment of Hungarian theatre history, which carries on the revolutionary demand for national autonomy, the anti-Habsburg, anti-German ideal of the 1848–1849 revolution, through the harmonic and modern usage of a Viennese, Laubeian framework for popular theatre. Let us not forget that in 1909, Hungary is still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and Budapest, as the second largest city of the Monarchy, is an open, esteemed, and exciting city without European culture. Speaking of Budapest's position relative to Vienna, in Craig's

¹¹ Edward Gordon CRAIG, *On the Art of the Theatre* (London: William Heinemann, 1911).

¹² [*The Mask*, Vol. II. No. 4–6. 1909–1.] CRAIG és HEVESI, *Levelezés...*, 178–180.

¹³ CRAIG és HEVESI, *Levelezés...*, 179.

question the State signified the Monarchy, but in Hevesi's answer it referred to the Hungarian nation, and this linguistic and theoretical difference, born of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Monarchy, can lead to misunderstandings.

These are the foundations of the Hungarian academic discipline of theatre studies: actor training, director training, and training in Hungarian language, since language is one of the substantial elements of identity, since the actor is the substance of theatre, and the creator of the theatrical art is the director. Investigating the particularities of the art of acting and directing, in 1908 Sándor Hevesi writes a book for his students *On The Art of Acting*, and beyond the practical examples, the book recognises that the role of theory is to stimulate, since "the effects of theory lead to the development of practice."¹⁴ His books illuminate two extraordinary perspectives, one of them being that the development of theatre studies as an academic discipline flowed from those working in theatres themselves, not from the humanities department of the greatest Budapest university. The other is that directors occupy a national post where they exercise power, therefore their statements as the head of the National Theatre (later Antal Németh és Tamás Major) strengthen the position of the National Theatre.

2. *The network: encyclopaedia authors, definitions – "consuming the real"*¹⁵

In his introduction to American theatre studies,¹⁶ Marvin Carlson also refers to the insti-

¹⁴ dr. HEVESI Sándor, *A színhátszás művészete* (Budapest: Stampel. 1908), 5.

¹⁵ Bert O. STATES, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 46.

¹⁶ Marvin CARLSON, "Theatre and Performance at a Time of Shifting Disciplines", *Theatre*

tutionalisation of the academic discipline as a fight, as a battle, since in the North American system of tertiary education, the question of whether performance, cultural or literary studies attract more students, and thus more attention from of the university's proprietor, animates the rivalry of institutions and thus academic disciplines. In Hungary this conflict does not appear on the same scale, while in American interdisciplinary struggles, national identity does not feature as a key element. In America, major universities organise practical courses, and these feature drama and play, in opposition to classical theoretical courses, therefore the struggle for students and for funding between cultural studies and drama and speech departments happens both between and within universities. Finally, Carlson quotes Foucault to admit that eventually this might lead to a disintegration of the academic discipline, yet this is the position that allows him to ask: how can this Janus-faced academic discipline be channelled into a structure that fits the academic framework, if at one moment it prioritises the standards of theoretical humanities, and the next, practical analyses. Carlson focuses on Kuhn's paradigm theory in order to interpret the challenge of interdisciplinarity, and states as a general revelation:

"The much more normal American pattern, however, followed the pragmatic orientation of combining theory and practice, so that the normal American theatre programme would include classes in acting, directing, playwriting, and design as well as historical and theoretical study of theatre, but not, strangely, literary study of the plays themselves, since this would challenge

Research International 26. No. 2. (2001): 137–144. 138.

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the already established domain of English and other literary disciplines."¹⁷

This form of disciplinary distance was also typical of the emerging Hungarian scholarly practice.

Carlson's line of thought has a relevant insight that applies on a European scale: academic inclusion is always elitist, but especially so in places where scholarly institutions are entrusted with building a national store of knowledge. However, theatre is inherently popular, and so „in order to demonstrate its academic respectability”,¹⁸ theatre studies must emulate the framework of literary studies. The formation of the Hungarian academic discipline proceeds much like the American model until World War Two, meaning that a demand for theory appears within the courses of the practical training, and the analysis of dramatic texts is taught alongside speech and acting classes, but the elitist scholarly institutions function as a closed system, and theatre as a performative art form cannot encroach upon their territory. It is a peculiarity of Hungarian theatre studies that since a single (royal, later national) theatre academy has been in operation since 1865, the threads of individual interests within the fraying weave of educational policy are rendered visible. In the absence of institutions, the professionalisation of Hungarian theatre studies proceeds along a different path. This path unambiguously leads towards the re-constituted elite society of the interwar years, towards urban bourgeoisie, (in Budapest and other major Hungarian cities), and this process means that the second crucial event in the story of Hungarian theatre scholarship is still not the foundation of an institution, but a unique moment in publication history: two significant Hungarian encyclopaedias are published on the topic of theatre, at the same time.

¹⁷ Ibid. 140.

¹⁸ Ibid. 141.

Lexicon of Acting is edited by Antal Németh and published in 1930, as one of the most ambitious publications of its decade; it summarises all the knowledge of theatre produced by European thinkers and creatives in its two volumes and 2000 pages. And at the same time, in instalments between 1929 and 1932, editor Aladár Schöpflin puts out the four volumes of his *Lexicon of Hungarian Theatre Arts*, which focuses on the history of Hungarian theatre and playwriting. There is an overlap between the authors who contributed to the two encyclopaedias, but the generational and professional opposition between the chief editors is tangible. Schöpflin is a literary historian, a writer, and he's more than twice as old as Németh, the 27-year-old theatre scholar and dramaturge. Schöpflin understands and interprets theatre as text, while Németh thinks about it as a director does. The simultaneous publication of these two different encyclopaedias appears like a rivalry between publishing houses, but from an academic-historical perspective, it is important to note the powerful emergence of professional frameworks.

While we must accept that the encyclopaedic genre inevitably simplifies, it seems obvious that it allows a wider readership to access the type of theoretical and historiographical thinking that considers theatre as an autonomous form of art and analyses its aesthetics through the actor. In investigating the academic discipline, it is preferable to focus on Németh's efforts, with the additional reason that while at the time of the encyclopaedia's publication, Sándor Hevesi was still the head of the National Theatre, subsequently (following two short-term appointees) Antal Németh, the editor of the encyclopaedia took over his position.¹⁹ Before the

¹⁹ Németh Antal became head of the National Theatre by appointment of the Minister of Culture. In this paper I will not detail the events of 1935, one of the greatest scandals of Hungarian theatrical life, because the tensions between two great creatives, and

publication of the encyclopaedia, Németh's renown in the Hungarian theatrical profession was limited (compared to Hevesi or Schöpflin), although after his provincial directing work, he received a state grant to study Italian, German and French theatre, following the work of Reinhardt and Jessner,²⁰ and he became well-acquainted with the contemporary European art scene, but he didn't make a long-term commitment either to Hungarian avant-garde theatre, or to major theatre companies. However, in 1928 he participated in the development of the Theatre Art Studio, which aimed to "use state support to create the foundations of a permanent experimental theatre", in order to "develop the theatrical arts."²¹ It is clear that the encyclopaedia brought fame not only to Hungarian theatre studies, but also to Antal Németh himself, since this form of research project motivated the still young Antal Németh to develop a systemic view of theatre philosophy, and it gave him direct access to the greats in the theatrical world. He instructs more than fifty article-writers, and beyond the original goal, that is, a popular introduction of actors, he commissions articles on the aesthetic and historical frameworks of theatrical art. In addition to the history of the National Theatre's foundation, the trends of avant-garde theatre also receive great attention, and are assigned to multiple article-writers. In Berlin, right as he is editing the encyclopaedia, Németh writes

the results thereof, did not have a significant impact on the development of theatre studies as a discipline.

²⁰ KÁVÁSI Klára, *Németh Antal a Nemzetiben és száműzetésben* (Budapest: MMA, 2018.), 14. Note 5.

²¹ See Jenő ZÓLYOMI's article in *Magyar Színművészeti Lexikon*, ed. by SCHÖPFLIN Aladár (Budapest: Országos Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, 1929–1931), 307. Cited by: GARA Márk, "A Színpadművészeti Stúdió története", *Theatron* 14, 4. sz. (2020): 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.55502/THE.2020.4.73>

his paper *An Outline of the Aesthetics of Performance*, which may be considered the director's personal entry into academic writing. But in terms of academic disciplines it wasn't clear, either then or now, what sort of academic scene he could have entered, since while Németh's work on the encyclopaedia achieved a great response, brought significant renown, and created a community that could confidently navigate within the frameworks and conceptual vocabulary of the academic discipline, nonetheless without educational institutions, the structure and language of the encyclopaedia remained confused – undisciplined. Németh doesn't belong to an academic workshop, since in the thirties, the universities retain their autonomy, the Minister of Culture (and Education) cannot appoint anyone into the leadership of the Budapest University or the Academy of Theatre Arts. But he can choose the leader of the National Theatre, and so dr. Antal Németh²² becomes the head of the National Theatre in 1935, by ministerial appointment; according to the narrative of monographers, it was his presentation at the 1934 conference of the Italian Academy of Science, in addition to his editorial work on the encyclopaedia, that drew attention to his abilities.

The 1929 paper is more of a manifesto, an analysis inspired by expressionism that relies primarily on the shared authority of contemporary German writers. Carl Hagemann, Felix Emmel, Adolf Wins, Max Boehn have since fallen out of the scholarly canon, but they were novel in 1929, and directed attention away from the dramatic text, and towards the actor's creative work, the director's labour. The young Németh understands theatre aesthetics as a bodily processed undertaking, which leads to complete transference both for the actor and the audience. Németh believes that in the weeks of preparation, "the cause and effect relationships within the world of the real self become ob-

²² Németh has his degree at University of Pázmány, Budapest, in 1922.

scured, and the actor is clad in the destined causal relations of another self.”²³ Németh writes powerful texts in order to preserve the performances of star actors, he pens an excellent mimeograph of Károly Sugár’s facial expressions in the role of Caliban.²⁴ In 1929, on the pages of *Színészújság* (Actor’s Newspaper)²⁵ he describes German director training, the system of the German Theatrewissenschaftliches Institut, which is already training performers for a new kind of theatre in Berlin, Munich, Cologne and Kiel. He himself outlines the operation of a National Theatre College, that teaches twelve parallel courses, where modern Russian ballet and Chinese facial expressions all form part of the curriculum.

Not necessarily in Bert O. States’s sense, but Németh’s drive for theatre is “consuming the real”, since he’s taking the drive for newness that characterised early, 1910s classical avant-garde, and introducing it to the National Theatre in 1935, with the support of the minister and the state. This process is relevant to our exploration of the formation of an academic discipline, since it means that the avant-garde drive, the expressionist linguistic toolset of the new theatre appear in an establishment that moves with a glacial pace along its traditions of performance. Németh’s years as a journalist and critic reveal an active, well-informed, inspirational thinker, who prepares for his career with the discipline of a scholar, but the ambitions of a director, a theatre-maker. He doesn’t interpret theatre from a literary perspective, and

²³ NÉMETH Antal, „A színjátszás esztétikájának vázlatja”, in NÉMETH Antal, *Új színházat*, 151–205 (Budapest: Múzsák, 1988), 175.

²⁴ NÉMETH Antal, “Mimográfia Sugár Károly Calibanjáról”, *Színpad* 2. Nos. 5–6. (1936): 221–226. reprint: NÉMETH Antal, *Új színházat... 50–55*.

²⁵ NÉMETH Antal, “A rendezőnevelés és a színészképzés problémája”, *Színészújság* 3. No. 5. (1929): 12–14. reprint: NÉMETH Antal, *Új színházat... 76–82*.

possibly it wasn’t Sándor Hevesi’s teachings, but the revelations of his professors during his studies in Germany that confirmed him in his approach. It is a unique feature of the history of Hungarian academia that Németh could realise his notions as the head of the National Theatre, but he could only enter educational institutions as a guest lecturer, he wasn’t entrusted with a chair or a faculty. But in the National Theatre, he created his director training program, which, among others, started the careers of the greatest Transylvanian directors for generations: József Szabó, Miklós Tompa.

Németh’s academic activity does not stop at the fortification of the social network of Hungarian theatrical historiography: in the last stage of his career, as the head librarian of the National Library, he developed a uniform system of describing performances, he created the foundations of the Theatre Studies Collection with the material relics of the old National Theatre demolished in 1965, and so he strengthened the archival, systemising, historiographic practice of theatre studies as a discipline, and elevated it to the state’s scope of responsibility. The political experience of Németh’s career as the National Theatre’s leader seems impossible to document, but its relevance to academic history is undeniable: in creating the network and in collecting relics, he represented a drive towards systemisation in theatrical memory.

3. *Sovietisation as an academic framework*

To Hungarian theatre historians, it is clear that Hevesi and Németh are doctors and directors at the same time. The nature of their scholarly statements reveals the primacy of action over analysis. While the writings of Hevesi and Németh create the theoretical surface of the profession, due to their own actual position, they greatly distance it from the established institutions of academia. And this is the historical moment when the Soviet machinery of power casually interrupts a functional process that up to that

point retained its autonomy, despite the limitations of a small language. We agree with Postlewait's insight that "the preceding century also saw the emergence of theatre libraries and museums, both locally and nationally (though many of them lack adequate funding and some have disappeared)",²⁶ meaning that one must wait for governmental or private investors before scholarship can gain its own institutions, and in post-WW2 Hungary, this moment arrived with the Soviet takeover. Between 1949 and 1952 four institutions are founded, almost out of nowhere, to shoulder the work of historical collection, theoretical query and history-writing, in the new frameworks of academic policy. In the same year that theatres are nationalised, the Hungarian Union of Theatre and Film Arts is founded as the professional organisation of all those who work in theatres and film studios. The academic department that runs a library and announces a publishing program is organised in 1952, within the Union, again emerging from within the profession, which we can interpret as an established routine, a professional tradition. The financial and ideological support for the grand plans of the Union's academic department is provided by the Ministry of (the People's) Culture. Within one year of the foundation of this academic department, the National Museum of Theatre is created, and Ferenc Hont is appointed as its leader, who calculates that twenty-one institutions pursue concurrent theatre studies research, and so he suggests combining them (less on the principle of rational efficiency, more to adhere to the Soviet practice of authoritarian control.)²⁷ Thus on the first of January 1957,

²⁶ Thomas POSTLEWAIT, "Theatre History and Historiography: A Disciplinary Mandate", *Theatre Survey* 45, No. 2. (2004): 181–188, 186. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557404000122>

²⁷ HONT Ferenc, *Javaslat a színháztörténeti és színháztudományi munkálatok gazdaságosabb megszervezéséről*. OSZMI Archives, Hont-fonds.

the Institute of Theatre and Film Studies is created.

The institution was created in adherence to the Soviet model, and named collection as the goal of theatre studies; the controlled, directed reconstruction of the past, as Max Hermann claimed in Berlin in the 1920ies.²⁸ The effect of sovietisation on Hungarian theatre studies is brutal in its complexity, because it proffers the Soviet model with no transition, it operates on linguistic and cultural axioms that are foreign to creatives and scholars born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. We can only turn towards this period with exceptional care, because we can still perceive the exclusive use of Marxist-positivist premises in contemporary scholarly language, it became an automatism, our academic mother tongue. The functioning of Soviet scholarship was imported to Hungary by creatives who emigrated to Berlin, then to Moscow during the interwar Horthy era, and who returned after WW2, prepared for this scholarly task, but their preparation was of the 1920ies, of Alexander Gvozdev in Moscow. We have learned the most about this method from the post-war headmaster of the Academy of Theatre Arts, Ferenc Hont, who was an avant-garde director in the late 1920ies, a student of Gémier and a colleague of Antal Németh.

Hont's entire oeuvre has not yet been subjected to thorough research, and neither has the Soviet phase of the transformation of our academic life, in this paper I will provide a mere sketch: the development of theatre education, the protocol for publishing theatrical texts, the selection of authors to canonise, all this became the responsibility of Hont, who had returned from the Soviet

²⁸ „Herrmann claimed that as a first step, theatre studies should reconstruct past performances by collecting and evaluating the historic material concerning them and by applying the experiences made in contemporary theatre before proceeding to investigate them." FISCHER-LICHTE, „From Text ...", 173.

Union, but spoke Russian badly, and had no current Soviet contacts. From the perspective of academic history, individual impulses fade away, and what remains visible is a strong drive towards synthesis: let there be a Hungarian theatre history, let previous research be systemised, and in addition, Hont began an (improvised) process: let there be an ongoing contemporary archival collection of all Hungarian theatrical events as they occur. This latter decision provides the foundation of theatre studies in Hungary. Hont was a rarity, an unschooled director, an autodidact in the Humanities, who learned the craft alongside avant-garde directors, gained erudition from his friends among the 1920ies Hungarian intelligentsia, assisted Gémier when he played *Ubu Roi* in Paris, invented the Szege Theatre Festival emulating Reinhardt's Salzburger Festspiele, and used expressionist tools to direct the greatest classic of Hungarian theatrical literature, *The Tragedy of Man*. As a Jewish man, he is drafted into a labour battalion during WW2, and when he's sent to the Eastern front, he successfully deserts to the Soviet side. When he returns from Moscow in 1945, he's not a prisoner of war, he has a mission from the Party: he must restart theatrical and film production in Hungary. The example of Soviet academic policy almost reinforces Hont's professional commitment: the collection he began in 1957 as a documentation of the present serves as the core of the Institute's database even today, and curiously this became the peculiar strength of Hungarian theatre studies. All Hungarian performances after 1945 were officially, compulsorily included in the archive. Hont's work realises the narrative that began with the letters of Hevesi and Craig, which defined theatre as an autonomous performative art; the academic toolset for its adequate documentation was assembled by the network of scholars that was bolstered by years spent editing Németh's encyclopaedia, and the institutions of the academic discipline would not be the universities, but the libraries and the Museum of Theatre.

Within the framework provided by Hont's Soviet academic practices, cooperative research projects turned towards the memories of old Hungarian theatre. Hont himself wrote about the art of action, he was interested in folk mime, in popular theatre, which was in ideological harmony with the research aims of the People's Republic, but still redirected research towards performative events. And it was in the Soviet era that a multitude of books were published on one of the particularities of Hungarian national identity, our early folk theatre. Hont started institutionally organised theatre studies research in Hungary, and even contemporary researchers connect to the same structure.

Studying the rise of theatre studies as an academic discipline in Hungary, this is where we must halt, this is the step from where Hungarian theatre studies as an established institution can let its voice be heard – although in the early era, with some Soviet overtones.

The academic and theoretical summation of the Soviet era is the 10-year anniversary conference held in 1962, the papers and debates of which were collected in a special issue of the *Theatrum* journal in 1963. In Hungary, we have developed a certain skill in detaching Soviet speech modes from academic analyses, and so we must remark that this double-speak, this methodological ballast weighs heavily on researchers of the academic history of State Socialist countries. Comprehension is hindered when scholars must express their thanks not only to a sponsor, but also to the Party. In the early years of totalitarian dictatorship, in the early 1950ies, lengthy expressions of thanks were compulsory, first to the great linguist Stalin, and in Hungary also to the great theoretician Révai, the Party's leading ideologue. In the early sixties, the linguistic formulae of compliance become more subtle, but reading them is nonetheless painful. The texts celebrating the first ten years of institutional Hungarian theatre studies still retain a rhetoric that centres class warfare, the history of

anti-fascism, labour and socialism, the ontological position of struggle and vigilance, and this syrupy ideological drivel makes it impossible for a young contemporary researcher to unfold the meaning of the texts with patience and understanding. Since this has not yet come to pass, the institutional history of Hungarian theatre studies skips over these decades, and claims that a pure and free workshop only emerged after the regime change, in 1994, with the foundation of Tamás Bécsy's Theatre Studies Department, safely embedded in university hierarchy and its academic framework. However, thirty years passed in the meantime, and processing them falls to us – let us make an attempt.

Ferenc Hont made it a lifelong project to create institutional theatre studies, his work towards this goal consisted of maintaining the ideal (realism,) the network (the encyclopaedia authors) and the Institute itself. He himself was primarily a director, who saw academia from the vantage point for praxis. The 1962 conference allowed Hungarian academics to speak, after a brief (and friendly) ministerial introduction, since by this point, there was no need for the presence, the controlling and validating authority of Soviet comrades, Hungarian academia was allowed to function without overt supervision. Yet we must not forget that the Institute of Theatre and Film Studies was created as an institution of the Ministry, not the Academy of Sciences, and operates as such to this day; this bars it from ever achieving professional academic autonomy, or joining an academic field of scholarship.

Hont affirmed in his presentation that the precursors of Socialist theatre are workers' theatre and folk theatre, and in this context workers' theatre meant avant-garde. Marxist theatre studies create their own traditions, and this is how Hont elevates his own 1930ies initiatives (contemporary with Hevesi and Antal Németh) to the forefront of the academic discipline. Former members of the Szeged Youths organisation created in the orbit of Szeged University became

"the young scholars and artists who in 1934 founded *Színpad* (Stage),²⁹ the first theatrical journal with genuinely academic standards, then in 1936 the Hungarian Theatre Studies Group, and 25 years ago [in 1937,] combined with other Communist organisations, the legal theatre project of the [illegal] Communist Party, the Independent Stage."³⁰

Hont's narrative evidently legitimates his own standing, but peeling off the Soviet verbiage, it is revealed that Hont interprets theatre as a social activity and process, that he seeks to find the synthesis between daily reviews (critique de théâtre) and real analysis (critique littéraire), that his concept of ideal theatre hinges on the simultaneous shared effort of the actor and the audience. It is in this spirit that Hont publishes the volume titled *Hungarian Theatre History* in 1962, and this approach to research, disdained by Marxist academia despite its foundations in positivist methodology, proceeds to flood the reader with hundreds of volumes and publications. Some already perceive at this 1962 conference (in Margit Gáspár's remarks during the debate) that while the particularity of this academic discipline lies in the analyses provided by the directors, by the actual theatre-makers, nonetheless directors are absent, research became the purview of data collectors and aesthetes. These are the decades of quiet data collection that pave the way for the resurrection of theatre studies as a discipline once the regime change brings about a political shift, because the data collection wasn't limited to all the data, relics, photos, video and audio recordings and press reviews etc. of all Hungarian performances after 1945, no, the ministerial deci-

²⁹ LAKATOS Éva, *A magyar színházi folyóiratok bibliográfiája 1778–1948* (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2010.) 448.

³⁰ HONT Ferenc, "A Magyar színháztudomány és az élő színház", *Theatrum* 1, No. 1. (1963) 8–28. 13.

sions of the coalition period (1945–1948) also received their own reprint editions,³¹ as did reviews of older Hungarian theatrical events,³² as did bibliographies and collections, that due to the antiquarian nature of source publications could (and sometimes did) avoid taking a political stance. Hont and the Institute create theatre studies in the quantitative sense, their publications feature the writings of Western Communist authors in addition to the compulsory Soviet literature, and in a few years, they publish volumes that would have taken decades to write. Far from the scholarly structures of universities and academia, they develop their own methodology, and the most severe consequence of this is that Hungarian theatre studies don't become a part of academic research until the Changes, and this intensive, but insular research will demonstrably hinder entry into international academia.

Women play a curious role in this era of theatre studies. Female theatre historians of great renown and great legacy begin their research, Tekla Dömötör shoulders the search for traces of old Hungarian drama, Jolán Pukánszky-Kádár the search for sources on the National Theatre, their books tell the story from its beginning. Rózsa Dancs and Ilona Csillag conducted background research projects, they compiled databases, histories of dramaturgy, and they did not summarize their findings themselves, but contributed to the professionalisation of the craft.

4. Epilogue

Following Schlegel, we believe that small-language cultures are indicators, they let us know which movements, which trends reach their geographical and linguistic borders,

³¹ DANCs Rózsa, ed. *A Vallás- és közoktatási minisztérium színházi iratai* (Budapest: OSZMI, 1990).

³² BÉCSY Tamás, KERÉNYI Ferenc, SZÉKELY György, eds. *Magyar színháztörténet I–III. 1790–1949* (Budapest: OSZMI, Könyvklub, 1990–2005).

and how thoroughly they need to be altered before they can be adopted. This paper follows the rise of Hungarian theatre studies until the 1960ies, and so outlines the geopolitical field of academic currents in Europe, complete with concepts, events and trends, while struggling with the question: what are the benefits of studying the analytical scholarship of small-language cultures? We accept that both the cultural process and the scholarship interpreting it passes through a multitude of translations, both in terms of examples cited, and in terms of analytical and methodological vocabulary, and yet the researcher's motivation is affected by the necessary divergence between local and global expression. Local research projects are discouraged by the fact that global publications have a disproportionate weight in academic metrics, furthermore, local results can only be received or transmitted by a larger cultural scene if they use the dominant language of the larger community. Yet in addition to the preservation of a nuanced national identity, there is a reason to analyse and evaluate events that were seen and recounted only by few, because they point to symptomatic processes. Let us admit that it is rather difficult to find the academic vantage point where, while one is forced by the sheer size and foreignness of the international audience to rely on simplifications and generalisations, and worse, one builds on the statements of academics who are unfamiliar to the audience – one still hopes that one's insights add to the global histories. Since the theatrical culture of small-language nations³³ in some instances reveals a completely different aspect of cultural globalisation than that of major languages, the dynamics of

³³ Meike WAGNER, "Expanding the Canon, Creating Alternative Knowledge, marketing the Filed? Performance Practices in Theatre Studies." *Nordic Theatre Studies* 28, No. 1. (2016): 4–14.

their academia also differ, and that is why I made this attempt to outline the dynamic frameworks of Hungarian theatre studies, for an audience who reads in English, and possesses the theatrical culture of Europe.

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