

## Get involved! Krétakör: Crisis, Part III – The Priestess, 2011

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**Abstract:** The twelfth production of the contemporary art centre Krétakör (Chalk Circle) was part of the “Crisis Project,” presented twice in its entirety and on view at the TRAFÓ House of Contemporary Arts, and the result of a societal therapy through interdisciplinary art. The current study reconstructs, employing the Philther Method, from the perspective of community theatre and education in theatre, this societal workshop. The analyses re-contextualise, for their own sake, the concept of *participation* by straining the boundaries of public education, understood as community art.

“Interaction is the only criterion.”<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the third piece in the reformulated Chalk Circle’s international project expounded upon this thesis, which can be read in Árpád Schilling’s work *Notes of an Escape Artist*.<sup>2</sup> It also shed light on the art pedagogy aspects of the commonly known fact that the significance of Árpád Schilling’s “happenings” was no longer expressed by their association with the word *theatre* but with the expressions *contemporary art centre* and *societal workshop*. By experimenting with conventional theatre-making’s working methods and means of reception, as well as the societal

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<sup>2</sup> SCHILLING Árpád, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései* (Budapest: Krétakör, 2008), 15.

discourses and material-technical practices that delineate these forms, the work of this creative company makes the scheme of its activity apparent in a singular way.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of applied theatre’s self-determination, and cognizant of the phenomena of constructive pedagogy and *social turn*, they re-contextualise, for their own sake, the concept of *participation* by straining the boundaries of public education, understood as community art.<sup>4</sup>

### *Context of the performance in theatre culture*

The twelfth production of the new Chalk Circle, *The Priestess*, was part of the “Crisis Project” (presented twice in its entirety and on view at the TRAFÓ House of Contemporary Arts) and the result of artistic research based around a focus problem. Árpád Schilling’s legendary production of *The Seagul* (stripped of its final letter) provides the context of the work (conducted between June and October of 2011 in Prague, Munich, Budapest, and three workshops in Transylvania with the participation of adult amateurs and children

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<sup>3</sup> KRICSFALUSI Beatrix, „Apparátus/diszpozitívum”, in *Média- és kultúratudomány: Kézikönyv* [Media and Cultural Studies: Textbook], eds. KRICSFALUSI Beatrix, KULCSÁR-SZABÓ Ernő, MOLNÁR Gábor Tamás and TAMÁS Ábel, 231–237 (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2018), 236.

<sup>4</sup> Ádám CZIRÁK, „Partizipation”, in *Metzler Dictionary of Theatre Theory*, Hg. Erika FISCHER-LICHTE et al., 242–248 (Stuttgart–Weimar: Metzler, 2014); Cf. CZIBOLY Ádám, ed., *Színházi nevelési és színházpedagógiai kézikönyv*, 154–155 (Budapest: InSite Drama, 2017).

14–16 years of age) in two ways. First, it is a direct continuation of the character Treplev's "aesthetics of positivism" as he searched for new forms.<sup>5</sup> The dialogue established among an experimental film (*jp.co.de*), a contemporary opera (*Ungrateful Bastards*), and a product of drama and theatre pedagogy (*The Priestess*) proves that scenographic sequences are also produced when the creator defines the concept of theatre "not as a museum or a temple, but much rather as a laboratory."<sup>6</sup> Second, it realises the dream of Treplev as he ponders Doctor Dorn's advice.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "TREPLEV: She adores [the modern stage] and imagines that she is working for the benefit of humanity and her sacred art, but to me the theatre is merely the vehicle of convention and prejudice. When the curtain rises on that little three-walled room, when those mighty geniuses, those high-priests of art, show us people in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing their coats, and attempt to extract a moral from their insipid talk; when playwrights give us under a thousand different guises the same, same, same old stuff, then I must needs run from it, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower that was about to crush him with its vulgarity. [...] We must have [new forms]. If we can't do that, let us rather not have it at all." CHEKHOV, *The Seagull*, Act I. All translations are mine, except otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> SCHILLING, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> "TREPLEV: Life must be represented not as it is, but as it ought to be, as it appears in dreams. [...] DORN: You chose your subject in the realm of abstract thought, and you did quite right. A work of art should invariably embody some lofty idea. Only that which is serious can ever be beautiful! [...] Use your talent to express only deep and eternal truths. [...] Every work of art should have a definite object in view. You should know why you are writing, for if you follow the road of art without a goal before your eyes, you will

The message of the dream is "You are immature," and the dreamer's calling obliges him to make the viewer curious. The goal of dreaming is to raise adults who are "free," because "they take interest, pay attention, question, communicate, and bear criticism," not "becoming flustered and frustrated, loathing, and even fighting" when "there is no one to decide for them what they must do."<sup>8</sup> According to our thesis, this anti-theatre (Kotte) was made apparent and indicated during what would traditionally be the curtain call<sup>9</sup> at the conclusion of Chalk Circle Theatre's *Seagull*, performed in the Cupola Hall of Fészek Club. Árpád Shilling's 2003 direction deprived audience members of the most conventional, least interactive, and most easily manipulated means of expressing their opinion, as the members of the company were already seated outside the hall and clapped at the spectators.<sup>10</sup> Eight years later to the day, the multi-media performance shown at TRAFÓ demonstrated further exploration of this path, which employs "theatre" for the purpose and goal of pedagogy and andragogy: "using the experi-

lose yourself, and your genius will be your ruin." CHEKHOV, *The Seagull*, Act I.

<sup>8</sup> SCHILLING, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*, 9–10.

<sup>9</sup> "In terms of method, 'anti-theatre' constitutes a background, before which actors perform and engage with scenographic sequences as theatrical forms. [...] Its content is not restricted by prohibitions, because it is concerned, for example, with the suspension of these, whereby it expresses a personal or societal stance vis-à-vis the theatre." ANDREAS KOTTE, *Theaterwissenschaft: Eine Einführung* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 2013), 260.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the 'old' Chalk Circle Company's so-called "theatrical projects", see KISS Gabriella, *A kockázat esztétikája* (Veszprém: VEK, 2006), 135–143.

ence of sociological studies to bring about creative community plays.”<sup>11</sup>

The three-member Gát family’s crisis management merely serves as a pretext for the realisation of “societal therapy through interdisciplinary art.”<sup>12</sup> The lives of this trio (the psychiatrist father, compelled to face ghosts of the past; the mother, who has not found her way as either an actress or a drama teacher; and the son, who has fallen victim to his parents inability to communicate) examine what it means to be a social being in the age of “tired Prometheuses.”<sup>13</sup> The bluff of a computer game that, referencing the self-immolation of Jan Pallach, promises the divine basis of human cooperation and “dynamic harmony”; the analysis of paternal control that becomes brute force; and the arch of the drama teacher, who ultimately flees from the problems of collaborative teamwork with family members, co-workers, and students—all provide an anatomy of the dysfunction within micro- and macro-communities.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, no part of

<sup>11</sup> SCHILLING Árpád, „Tanulj! Alkoss! Gondolkozz! A Krétakör edukációs programjairól”, in *Szakpedagógiai körkép III.: Művészetpedagógiai tanulmányok*, eds. BODNÁR Gábor and SZENTGYÖRGYI Rudolf, 131–146 (Budapest: ELTE, 2015), 135.

<sup>12</sup> CSAKI Judit, „Pincétől a padlásig”, last download: 17.07.2023, *Magyar Narancs*, <http://magyarnarancs.hu/szinhaz2/apanya-gyerek-77566>.

<sup>13</sup> Byung-Chul HAN, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> “The *Crisis Trilogy* is a radical exploration of artistic expression. A photo exhibit that grows out of community theatre, which later evolves into a film, from a film into an opera, which becomes a theatre play that just as easily fits the definitions of public performance, circus, a film assembled from static pictures, and an installation. More importantly, however, *Crisis* questions the role it plays in the artistic community. Themati-

ally, it questions the position occupied by the individual in the immediate environment – in the family, the nation, society. Yet, re-considering one’s role also occurs within the creative process that brings about *Crisis*. In fact, Árpád Schilling initiates a conversation, attempting to share the artistic duty among artists and community alike.” Sodja LOKTER in KRÉTAKÖR, *Crisis: A Trilogy* (Budapest: Chalk Circle Foundation, 2011), last download: 17.07.2023, <https://archive.kretakor.eu/hu/search>.

the trilogy becomes moralistic or preachy, and the reason for this can be found in the project’s goal of theatre pedagogy. On the one hand, it believes “in the power of theatre to effect change in the span of an average person’s lifetime.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, it is aware that, in order to accomplish this, the production must become a *vita activa* (Hannah Arendt) which confronts participants—professional and amateur actors, as well as the spectators—with the processes whereby the *zoon politikon* (political animal) is degraded to *animal laborans* (beast of burden).<sup>16</sup>

This is also behind the *Invoke Me!* installation, the unjustly forgotten frame of the *Crisis Trilogy*.<sup>17</sup> Through the ‘voice’ of photography and video-making, participatory research dissects situations that limit the minors’ freedom to make decisions.<sup>18</sup> The participants, aged 14–16, could express through ‘photographs’ (tableaux or moving pictures)

<sup>15</sup> Philip TAYLOR, *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 93.

<sup>16</sup> HAN, *The Burnout Society*, 34–42.

<sup>17</sup> The pictures can be viewed in the online archive of the Chalk Circle (Krétakör): *Szólíts meg!*, last download: 17.07.2023, <https://archive.kretakor.eu/hu/search>.

<sup>18</sup> OBLATH Márton, CSOSZÓ Gabriella and VARGA Attila, „A fotóhang mint részvételi kutatási módszer”, in *A felszabadítás pedagógiája: A kritikai pedagógia elmélete és gyakorlata*, ed. UDVARHELYI Éva TESSZA, 403–436 (Budapest: Közélet Iskolája, 2022), 404.

what they thought about family aggression, not limited to physical or emotional abuse. A static photo tableau established the basis of the project, depicting “inherited experiences and life strategies often incapable of being questioned and giving rise to relationships that could not be changed,” as the children considered them “the natural concomitant of the family unit.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, they had the potential to alter this impersonal, sealed context through improvised scenes (recorded on video) based on the photographs and autobiographical performance reflecting upon it. During the one-week camp, the creators of the photographs and the young performers experimented with bringing about an alternative model of cooperation.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the focus was not necessarily the family—and not at all the photographs by Máté Tóth-Ridovics, which would reflect the artist’s preconceptions—but the personal stories of the young participants, i.e., questions concerning the relationship between individual and community that were important to their generation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> TÓTH-RIDOVICS Máté in KRÉTAKÖR, *Crisis...*

<sup>20</sup> BERNÁTH Flóra in KRÉTAKÖR, *Crisis...*

<sup>21</sup> He experimented on this with *A csillagász álma* [The Astronomer’s Dream] in 2006, *hamlet.ws* in 2007, and the so-called *Szabadulóművész project* [Escapologist-Project] between 2008 and 2011. Tamás Jászay also lists here the “multi-disciplinary performance” entitled *A szabadulóművész apológiája* [The Apology of the Escapologist], which premiered in Paris in 2008; the “adapted” Budapest version in 2009; the four-part concert series entitled *A szabadulóművész analógiája* [The Analogy of the Escapologist] in 2009 and 2010; the apartment theatre piece *Anyalógia* [Mother-Analogy] on male-female co-habitation and having a child in 2010; *Akadályverseny* [Obstacle Race], which modelled what can be learned from democratic game rules within a school or class in 2009; and *Új néző* [New Spectator], uncovering the possibilities of

Since, in the case of *The Priestess*, the art pedagogy carried out in the workshops was of vital importance, what constitutes the context of the production is *Notes of an Escape Artist*, which can be seen as the *ars poetica* of the new Chalk Circle. From our point of view, the content of this work, written in 2008, and its publication on a lesser-known forum are both important. After all, the text contains a “course description,” recounting a training session held by Schilling in the Csillag Forest of Komárom on July 9–25, 2007. The scheme of activities employed (in the service of art education and the training of students in acting and dramaturgy) made it possible for participants to create *études* (scenes) using their own lives as material. This course description is important for three reasons. First, it further developed the Chalk Circle’s experience with summer camps, thus preserving as an institution the company’s operation as a workshop. Second, it reinterpreted the world of those amateur theatre camps from the perspective of art pedagogy. In the 1980s, these camps regarded the work produced there as serious creations—innovative plays that arose not professionally but organically from nature.<sup>22</sup> Third, it makes it clear why the *Crisis Trilogy* became a model, by virtue of the fact that it ultimately was created in workshops<sup>23</sup> where

co-existence within a conflicted society in 2010. JÁSZAY Tamás, [Körülírások: Fejezetek a Krétakör Színház történetéből 1995–2011](#) (Szeged: PhD thesis, 2013), 60–62.

<sup>22</sup> DEME János and DEME László, „»Átpörgetni, felfedezni, előre menni.«: Beszélgetés Schilling Árpád rendezővel, in *Ha a néző is résztvevővé válna: Kísérletek a színház és a közönség viszonyának újragondolására*, eds. DEME János and DEME László, 81–110 (Budapest: L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2010), 82, 87.

<sup>23</sup> “Because of this, the actors are linked to numerous events in the camp vis-à-vis the potential performers. Sándor Terhes oversees morning exercises as the PE instructor. Lilla Sárosdi, as the drama teacher, leads

participants were awakened to their own experiences, so they could appear onstage as human individuals capable of formulating their right to independent decision-making through the medium of their personal stories.

This is the reason why this course description, disseminating the most important fundamental principle of contemporary student acting, should have immediately appeared in the columns of *Drámapedagógiai Magazin* (Drama Pedagogy Magazine) or in the Marczibányi Square's subsequent training programme in drama and theatre pedagogy (regardless of its author's status as artistic director and main director of the most successful repertory theatre on the Hungarian scene after the system change). It is on the latter forum that Árpád Schilling's professional work was featured three times. The first was by virtue of László Kaposi and Judit Szakall, two drama pedagogues who play significant roles in the nation's student acting.<sup>24</sup> The second was due to collaboration with Káva Kulturális Műhely (Káva Cultural Studio), which spawned from this and seeks to redefine its activity in terms of social dra-

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acting games; and Lóránd Bartha, in the role of the priest, holds religious talks. Besides them, Bálint Juhász (from the Chalk Circle) and Misi Fazakas, Oszkár Mucha, and Bernadette Daragics (from the Stealth [Osonó] Company) hold jobs at the workshop. Members of the crew also include a cinematographer, a photographer, and a sound engineer. They shoot the documentary film of the rehearsal process." ANGYALFÖLDI Ede, „Angyalosi színház-műhely”, last download: 17.07.2023,

[http://www.3szek.ro/load/cikk/43890/angyalosi\\_szinhazmuhely](http://www.3szek.ro/load/cikk/43890/angyalosi_szinhazmuhely).

<sup>24</sup> Árpád Schilling was an actor in the Round Table [Kerekasztal] Theatre Company, based in Gödöllő; and his first direction, *Vérnász* [Blood Wedding] by Garcia Lorca, took place at the Origin [Origó] Student Stage.

ma.<sup>25</sup> The third is precisely related to the *Crisis Trilogy*. Indeed, in the cases of *Ungrateful Bastards* and *The Priestess*, Schilling had a serious need for instructorial assistance from the drama pedagogues he himself had selected.<sup>26</sup> Hence, it is no surprise that, when taking part in the “Theatre – Drama – School” conference organised by the Professional Methodology Centre of ELTE BTK [Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities] in 2015, it was not he but the Chalk Circle that held the plenary lecture. One year later, this event received the Princess Margriet Award for Culture from the European Cultural Foundation; since, as a foundation, they consider it important for instructors, drama teachers, mentors, and student teachers, who do the ‘everyday’ work of public education, to ask themselves the very same question that the drama teacher in *The Priestess* could have posed to her students, the priest, to her own child, to her husband, and to herself: “In a democratic vision of school, is it allowed to jump on the teacher's desk?”<sup>27</sup>

#### *Dramatic text, dramaturgy*

Nevertheless, Lilla Gát (introduced as Lilla Sárosdi, arriving at the poverty-stricken

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of *New Spectator* [Új néző], see JÁSZAY, *Körülírások...*, 102–114.

<sup>26</sup> This assistance was provided by János Kardos and András Sereglei (in the case of *Ungrateful Bastards*), Flóra Bernáth (in the case of *Invoke Me!*), and members of the Stealth [Osonó] Theatre Workshop: Misi Fazakas, Oszkár Mucha, and Bernadette Daragics (in the case of *The Priestess*).

<sup>27</sup> The conference program was accessed 17.07.2023,

<https://www.btk.elte.hu/content/szinhasz-drama-iskola-cimu-konferencia.e.1710> Cf. SCHILLING Árpád, „Színházi nevelés, drámapedagógia a Krétakör gyakorlatában”, in *Dráma, pedagógia, színház, nevelés*, eds. Júlia ECK, József KAPOSI and László TRENCSENYI, 306–312 (Budapest: OFI, 2016).

Transylvanian village with the toil of PE classes) seeks the answer to a different problem: "I have to know what a life without applause is good for." Moreover, this question, formulated at the end of *Ungrateful Bastards*, is not resolved by the final film clip in *The Priestess*, where she is interviewed in front of the Thália Theatre. "I don't know... Well, yes... It's possible," says the actress, who escaped from Budapest to the village, then from the village to the capital. Of course, this apparent uncertainty is not necessarily a failure, at least from the fictional character's point of view. The text—made up of personal stories, interviews, and the participants' improvisation—is rather a score, an investigation into the conditions whereby those who are exploited, who are marginalised, who are deprived of agency and cultural opportunities, and upon whom violence is committed come to *know* what life is good for.<sup>28</sup> These five faces of oppression are made visible by the theatre pedagogy convention known as *forum theatre*, placing the right to decide, to guide, and to interpret, in the hands of the invisible and the exploited, signified by the word "Stop!" In the hands of the three actors and sixteen adolescents, "Stop!" is heard seven times in the course of *The Priestess*. That is, the acting and viewing participants (the latter being *spect-actors*) seek together "solutions and new means of escape in the struggle against oppression".<sup>29</sup>

Since Forum Theatre must always comprise at least a dramaturgical motif that counts as a political or societal failing, it seems self-evident that the focus of onstage events would be the villagers' nerve-racking helplessness or the decision of the drama

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Iris Marion YOUNG, "Five Faces of Oppression", in *Oppression, Privilege, and Resistance*, eds. Lisa HELDKKE and Peg O'CONNOR, 37–63 (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Augusto BOAL, "The Early Forms of Forum Theatre", in Augusto BOAL, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. Adrian JACKSON, 241–249 (London: Routledge, 2002).

teacher who escapes both to and from the setting. In this forum, two questions come under examination: (i) "How can we help someone on their path when even they are not sure where they are going?"<sup>30</sup> and (ii) "Why does convention always win out? [...]" The environment simply cannot stand upheaval, whereas Lilla, who cannot bear failure, returns to the capital.<sup>31</sup> Yet, is it only Lilla Gát who suffers this oppression? Such oppression is not necessarily the result of "a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules,"<sup>32</sup> be they psychological or sociological in nature. The fact that, out of the seven times "Stop!" is heard during the show, the first and last are voiced by Lilla Gát hints at a more complicated dramaturgical structure of oppression.

"What happened here? Don't answer. We've gone over this scene a hundred times with the children, and they immediately say this and that. This 'stop, what happened' is just a signal. In the show, we will use it to signal who has the right to direct. Now I'm directing. For the time being," says Lilla while we see a handshake. The PE teacher, who has the class of 16 students run in concentric circles and punishes them with push-ups for lack of equipment, shakes hands with the order-disturbing teacher, who stinks up the big hall of the TRAFÓ with petrol fumes and titters like a teenage girl at the man's surname (Terhes), which literally means *pregnant*. Thus, in the form of a kinetic stat-

<sup>30</sup> UGRAY István, "Egyre sokasodó kérdőjel-ek", last download: 17.07.2023, <http://7ora7.hu/programok/a-papno/nezopont>.

<sup>31</sup> CSÁKI Judit, "Apa, anya, gyerek", *Magyar Narancs*, last download: <http://magyarnarancs.hu/szinhaz2/apa-anya-gyerek-77566>.

<sup>32</sup> YOUNG, "Five Faces of Oppression", 39.

ue, we are presented with the question: with their differing concepts of order and means of establishing it, can they cooperate? With their differing attitudes towards teaching, can they understand each other? The second “Stop!” tests this. Frozen in tableau, ‘Uncle’ Sanyi slaps someone in the face in order to end the chaos, verging on a fight, which erupted when he left the class to have a cigarette. Yet, the drama class—where they seek alternative solutions, opportunities, and the causes of aggressive and non-aggressive *communication*—comes to an end with one of Forum Theatre’s boldest examples of a “Stop!”,<sup>33</sup> as it tests the viewers’ *constructivity*. Indeed, one of the child performers, Attila Komán, suddenly sits outside the circle of chairs and initiates a conversation with the TRAFÓ audience about what they have seen. His questions focus on the significance of the drama class, which disturbs the fiction (the story of the Gát family), the narrative (introduction of relationships and life in the vil-

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<sup>33</sup> “[...] for the discussion offered by Attila Komán in the production, the artists acted out possible questions and developments several times. Schilling, Fazakas, and the helpers often played difficult-to-handle viewers and extreme situations, so Komán would be prepared for the worst. However, during the rehearsal process, it became clear what questions he could ask the audience with sincere curiosity—because they were, in fact, his questions—and what he could not, often those that were supplied to him. Ultimately, they left the latter out of the production. After all, it remains a primary stance for Schilling that the only dialogue and business for children onstage should be their own, which they themselves stand for. Thus, what they go through on stage is not merely playacting, but the conveying of thoughts and questions.” NYULASSY Attila, „Próbanapló – semmi sem véletlen”, last download: 01.07.2023, <http://7ora7.hu/hirek/probanaplo-semmi-sem-veletlen>.

lage), and the education system (the “banking concept” of distributing knowledge<sup>34</sup>) alike. “What do you think is happening here onstage? What is your opinion of the young people’s role in this play? And outside, in real life?” Whatever we answer, the conversation with the audience is by all means deepened with the following game, based on personal stories, and the fourth “Stop!” The students Emese, Erzsé, Kati, and Márti tell four stories about being orphans, their relationships with their guardians or foster parents, how they ended up in the orphanage, and their life there. This time, Attila does not ask our opinion of what we have heard. Instead, he is curious about what we think. Which child lied the most *creatively*? In fact, one of them lives with her parents.

The penultimate “Stop!” is also heard from a child, and perhaps he is most at a disadvantage because he must confront his own mother. Balázs Gát disturbs the “sincerity-building” drama class, in which Lilla, by means of the unfinished sentence technique, has the children say silently to themselves (and she, of course, to herself) when they feel good or bad, what is most important to them, whom they love the most, what their greatest loss in their lives has been, and what their biggest dream is. That is when the son steps in to ask his mother to let him go back to Budapest because he cannot bear “how everyone looks at us like pitiful losers”. Lilla—who has been so careful with her words, the personification of tact and patience, ensuring the safest of spaces for her pupils—is irritated and aggressive with her son. The choreography of the children’s bodies attests to this alarming contrast. The students seated on the floor watch mutely how this adult—who, as a teacher, made known to them the hierarchies of practicing power, typical of the PE teacher and pervasive in the

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<sup>34</sup> Paulo FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra BERGMAN RAMOS (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 71–86.

practices they learned in the orphanage or the village—is incapable, as a mother, of being a partner to her child. Also, the production's penultimate film clip composes this very same fear, arising out of precisely the same contradiction, into an "organic picture." The teacher goes up into the church tower, where she argues with the priest, who is hiding there. At a certain point, the projector goes dark, and we see the two people fighting in the theatre space. Between them stand the mute and alarmed children, turning their faces to the priest, who practically rescues them from the woman who is out of control, crying and shouting.

This second "Stop!" from Balázs serves to inform us that his father *took care of* his peace of mind (such as it was), while Lilla's final "Stop!" ends the performance, making us aware that our applause has significance. After all, the actress (played by Lilla Sárosdi, taking her bow) was seeking the meaning of a life without applause, which she failed to find in the village.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the production's

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<sup>35</sup> "Although Schilling had a strong vision for how the show should end, the reaction of the first audience altered that. Originally, Komán would have brought the evening to a halt with the familiar "Stop!" but then the viewers clapped, so they themselves ended the production. Then, the director rectified this with such assurance in the framework that, if the viewers activated themselves and were so inclined, they, too, could say "Stop!" However, if they did not, the events onstage would still come to an end. After all, the show intended to somehow address civil action—that we should join in and take responsibility for our thoughts and their consequences—and the audience did this. While Schilling did not intend to end the show this way, the framework allowed for such a possibility, and he seized it. The viewers continued to conceive of this thought. Naturally, when it became part of the performance, immediately, on the second occasion, the viewers did not end the scene, although, in

dramaturgy, inspired by Forum Theatre, showed that if anything is capable of producing a mature, democratic, self-governing community, then it is the six C's: communication, cooperation, concentration, creativity, constructivity, and consideration. This is the "competency as a facilitator" that every pedagogue with a diploma in drama education possesses,<sup>36</sup> even without the status of "priestess."

### *Staging*

While theatre critics unanimously claimed that "the framework of *The Priestess* is a protracted drama pedagogy session,"<sup>37</sup> it is more productive to regard it as the product of an art pedagogy project, conducted over three workshops and divided into twenty sequences. In this case, the production documents a working process where the participants vary greatly in terms of age, social position, socialisation, and worldview: adults, children, and adolescents; religious and not affiliated to any church; those coming from families and those residing in an orphanage; Hungarians from both Transylvania and Hungary, as well as Romas. Consequently, at stake in the project is whether, in the course of the work undertaken in Sfântu Gheorghe, Angheluș, Băile Tușnad, and at TRAFÓ, the practices of self-governing (grown habitual and automatic through internalised experiences of power and having posed an obstacle to cooperation and coexistence) become out-of-the-ordinary.<sup>38</sup> This becoming extraor-

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talks held afterward, it was clearly expressed that this was in the air. Hence, the director preserved this game." NYULASSY, „Próbanapló...”.

<sup>36</sup> Monica PRENDERGAST and Juliana SAXTON, *Applied Drama: A Facilitator's Handbook for Working in Community* (Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 1–17.

<sup>37</sup> JÁSZAY, *Körülírások...*, 124.

<sup>38</sup> Michel, FOUCAULT, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II, Lec-*



dinary (or *uncanny* in the sense of Foucault) is key to the situation of theatre-making, in which everyone is certain of their personalised function, which delineates the sphere of responsibility; yet, it also authorises “everyone to act within these limits according to their best judgment.”<sup>39</sup> In this manner, the direction builds upon the alienating rhythm of *études* which reveal the so-called immutable authenticity of reality. In the process of creation, it shows the unchanging nature of reality within a community that has only experienced hierarchies.

For a significant portion of the production, viewers of *The Priestess* see film clips, yet movie-watching, in the classic sense, is only manifested twice. In total darkness, like an overture, we see a short film introducing the village. On one hand, a herd of cattle passes in front of the sunrise; there is plenty of mud, a shabby bus, etc. On the other hand, a white Opel emphatically comes into the camera’s focus, first arriving and then departing. With knowledge of the second part of the *Crisis Trilogy*, we can interpret what we see. The car belongs to the father, who is moving his wife and son out to this Transylvanian backwater. As Lila will use EU money to work as a drama teacher and Balázs will attend school, they will only be able to visit him during breaks. Yet, the car can also be seen as a motif of escape, which shapes the lives of the father and son, not just the mother’s. Both the psychiatrists of *Ungrateful Bastards* and the “Jan Pallach” of *jp.co.de* (who creates a virtual reality and de-

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*tures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, trans. Graham BURCHELL (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). Cf. Ruth SONDEREGGER, „Foucaults Zyniker\_innen: Auf dem Weg zu einer kreativen und affirmativen Kritik“, in Isabell LOREY, Gundula LUDWIG and Ruth SONDEREGGER, *Foucaults Gegenwart: Sexualität, Sorge, Revolution, Presence*, 75–92 (Wien–Linz–Berlin–London–Zürich–Málaga: transversal texts, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> JUHÁSZ Bálint in KRÉTAKÖR, *Crisis...*

stroys it along with himself) are unable to take care of themselves or others. It is under the same circumstances that we later see a documentary clip edited like a news report, in which two older men talk about one of history’s more authoritarian forms of community creation: farm collectivisation, whereas two youths discuss their own solitude: the village’s insularity, lack of prospects, boredom, and bigotry.

This technique of establishing authenticity, linked to the two distinct film genres, juxtaposes these three video clips. Moreover, each can be glimpsed in full vitality onstage, reflected upon in scenes created by professional and amateur actors. This is first seen in one of the camp’s recorded drama games. The children, standing in a straight line, each receive a role card identifying their gender, age, occupation, and social status.<sup>40</sup> Then, they take one step forward or remain in place, depending on whether Lilla Sárosdi/Gát’s statements apply to their role.<sup>41</sup> As one

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<sup>40</sup> “I am a 56-year-old unemployed woman with two children. / I am a 40-year-old, alcoholic, homeless man. / I am a 60-year-old Roma woman who cannot read or write. / I am a 15-year-old girl with six siblings, living on a farm. / I am a 9-year-old Roma child attending a special-needs school. / I am a 7-year-old orphan boy who has trouble studying. / I am a ten-year-old student in the capital, attending a famous school. / I am a 60-year-old herdsman with five children, living in a village. / I am a 19-year-old drug dealer and drug addict. / I am a 65-year-old priest in a village. / I am a 28-year-old flight attendant with no family. / I am a 50-year-old university professor in the capital. / I am a 50-year-old famous film star. / I am a 44-year-old minister with no family.”

<sup>41</sup> “I have my own room at home. / I am certain I will easily find work—if not now, then when I grow up. / I regularly spend my summers at the seaside. / I never have to use social aid. / I regularly go to the hairdresser’s. / I have only had success in school. Go ahead

would suppose, in this personified sociometry, a small group confidently pulls ahead of the others. This shows that they are not left behind in society; however, they grow immersed in the arising differences as hierarchies become stabilized. This research result makes it more personal when the teacher, who employs inclusive means in drama class, falls silent in one scene, as Janka, who is not even willing to sit beside her Roma classmates, states that her two dreams are that “there should be no Gypsies here at all” and that “they should leave this village forever.” In the second instance, a reporter asks locals, playing fictional members of the class, what they got out of the drama lessons (actually run by Lilla Sárosdi and truly experienced in the camps), as well as why Lilla Gát finally gave up and returned to the capital. Symbolically, the opinions expressed by the ‘self-portrayed’ residents draw the viewer’s attention to the man who (unlike Lilla) has been with them since the beginning and stayed with them, and whose calling is to transmit values and build a community, just like those of a (drama) teacher.

ATTILA: I’ve thought a lot and realised that it’s simply impossible for something big—for something to be bigger than a bunch of people, than a state, than a union. That is, there shouldn’t be anything bigger. It’s impossible. And then I started reading the Bible, and now I would say that, yes, I’m a Christian.

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and think it over, Attila. / Handling some official matters has never caused me trouble. / I regularly eat in restaurants. / I think life is beautiful. / I regularly go to the theatre. / I have a laptop. / I read the news every day. / My favourite TV show is *X Factor* [a talent-search program]. / I smoke cigarettes. / I regularly go to church. / I feel good about myself.”

REPORTER: So you’re saying that working with the drama teacher brought you closer to religion?

ATTILA: Yes, clearly.

LEVI: It also brought me a little closer, but rather, it’s helped me not to offend others who are more religious than me.

It was an essential directorial decision to have the role of “Father Lóránd” not played by one of the Chalk Circle’s stars at the time, but by a young creator who provided an intellectual workshop and home for theatre research and experimentation, an actor in the Stealth (Osonó) Company, and a master-class teacher on the drama faculty of the Sándor Plugor Arts Lyceum in Sfântu Gheorghe. Closest in age to the adolescents, Lóránd Bartha’s status as a mediator occupied with *positivism* indicates an opportunity for cooperation between the priest and the priestess. Indeed, the “reverend father” reacts to the needs of the youths expressed in the film, and he addresses the concept of community in his theology class. However, he does this within the very rigid, traditional framework of head-on instruction. For example, he initially makes dialogue impossible by turning his back to them. Moreover, his valid questions are neither open nor based on lived experience.<sup>42</sup> Thus, despite his good intentions, the actual content of the answers produced in this sterile pedagogical environment makes the execution problematic. Also addressing this problem (courses in methodology for those training in religion or theology) is the scene that, with the aid of a microphone, takes place at the site of confession.

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<sup>42</sup> “And what is a community? / How many people do you need to make a community? / What types of communities do you know? / What do you think makes a good member of the community? / What do you think is a bad member of the community? / Are you a good member of the community, Attila? / What community would you like to belong to?”

The barely, if at all, audible voice is amplified, thus indicating its broadcast to a supposed public. Even without the TRAFÓ's large audience, this tends to blaspheme against the confessional, indeed reflecting critically on its intimacy. Levi's admission parodies confession when, at Father Lóránd's questioning, he tells how he tried out for and reached the final of *X Factor* [a talent-search programme] by singing the folksong *Tavaszi szél vizet áraszt...* ("Spring winds raise the tide of water...") incredibly off-key. It draws attention to the impossibility of direct conversation when three young people whisper into the microphone the emotions that they could only speak aloud or think over in drama class; what is more, feelings that they must keep secret in theology class. After all, how can Ági tell the man, seen as the father of the church's order, that the drama teacher made her realise that she needs faith in her life, but she is incapable of accepting the power of forgiveness, and she does not want to seem like a fanatic, either? Or can Kiki admit to a Catholic priest that she is in love with Father Lóránd? Is Joli sinful for wishing to be rid of her brown skin because, based on her personal experiences, white people more closely resemble the representation of God? Also, the confessing priest's replies (or his silences) over the microphone are empty,<sup>43</sup> and yet the production's most natural scene hinges on the nature of his being there with them. Liberated laughter accompanies little Charlie's joke when the Roma child from Órkő unsuccessfully attempts to put the reverend father, who "always looks so sad with his bulging eyes," in a brighter mood.

### *Acting*

The actors of the new Chalk Circle are not pros at impersonating or embodying any characters. Instead, they are artists capable

<sup>43</sup> "You should love someone in all situations. / *The priest does not answer.* / Go and bring someone else joy."

of directing themselves so responsibly that Schilling refers to them as "shamans, teachers, and mediums" in his *Notes of an Escape Artist*.<sup>44</sup> In the case of *The Priestess*, Rimini Protokoll's 'message' article from *ABCD* sheds light on an especially valid dimension of these comparisons and concepts in the case of *The Priestess*. Lóránd Bartha, Lilla Sárosdi, and Sándor Terhes (playing characters that bear their own private names), as well as the minors (from the Roma settlement in Órkő, the Saint Francis of Déva Foundation's home in Băile Tuşnad, the People's Art School in Sfântu Gheorghe, the acting class of Sándor Plugor Arts Lyceum, the orphanage in Târgu Secuiesc, and middle schools in Braşov and Miercurea Ciuc) are "ambassadors" of problems and situations.<sup>45</sup> They are the 'everyday experts' in the micro-societal context that shapes their daily lives, conveying this through self-representation.

Lilla seeks a location and space for theatre and acting, which she wishes to be a place of education [*Bildung*], referred to as a moral institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, as a drama teacher, she establishes a "funhouse of democracy" in a village school<sup>46</sup> and experiences how it is when no one applauds her for "acting, performing, recounting, moving, radiating, miming, teaching, and ultimately

<sup>44</sup> SCHILLING, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Rimini PROTOKOLL, *ABCD* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), 8.

<sup>46</sup> In an editorial written in the spring of 2010, Árpád Schilling christened this complex research format – which is artistic, intellectual, and focused on the present, the "funhouse of democracy," where the theatre artists serve as animators and catalysts. SCHILLING Árpád, „Demokrácia-játszóház”, last download: 12.10.2011, <http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20100504-velemenyo-osszefugg-a-szinhaz-es-a-demokracia-valsaga.html>.

communicating".<sup>47</sup> Supporting her contract and seeking cooperation with her, Father Lóránd, who has a sense of calling, demonstrates the complex of problems that a young priest wishing to connect to his young parishioners fights in his own religious order. In the drama teacher's words that constantly offend him, "You make people ridiculous, so you can hold God over them, and that way you can use them." Meanwhile, the sixteen minors, growing up here and now, do what they have no right to do within the classroom walls. They pay attention, play, articulate, and clash opinions—acting and speaking. Thus, she has the potential to be a "cultural terrorist" or "biological bomb",<sup>48</sup> because she realises in the meantime that her present role is that of a sacrificial victim. In the meantime, she experiences that, as participants in the project and residents of the workshop camp, they are capable of changing and effecting change.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, not one of the impressively large number of reviews noticed that, in the fundamentally choral staging, the motif of making a sacrifice appears twice, only not in relation to Lilla or the minors. Both times, the crucifix is formed from the body of the supervisor, who demonstrates a dictatorial attitude at odds with both the drama teacher and the priest, who, as teachers, embody facilitating and proselytising postures, respectively. At the start of the show, Sándor Terhes raises his arms to his mid-chest, and thus he repeats the words of the resurrected

<sup>47</sup> SCHILLING, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> "The surer the hands we entrust the framework of the play to, the more secure the setting we create for self-expression becomes—and now I'm speaking about those whom society traditionally deprives of the right to self-expression. I can aid the process of democraticization [...] by creating opportunities for marginalised social groups to tell their stories." CSAKI, „Pincétől a padlásig”.

Christ addressed to Mary Magdalene, who wished to embrace his legs: "Do not touch me."<sup>50</sup> He preserves the diameter of the running circle, thereby preserving the children's physical health. He protects his own position of authority and keeps himself far from what, if said aloud, would cause his collapse. This, in fact, occurs when he makes a self-admission with his body spread out on a beam,<sup>51</sup> and he delivers the sentence that explains the superiority of Lilla, just as she feels like a sacrificial victim:

PE TEACHER: Don't get upset! Your colleagues can't help being so stupid.

DRAMA TEACHER: But why do they do this to me?

PE TEACHER: Because you can leave here anytime, and they cannot.

Then, Lilla goes up to Sándor slowly, but they do not repeat their first shared scene. There is no handshake, no laughter, and no "Stop!" For a while, they stand facing each other before both exit. Moreover, this visual dramaturgy, especially evocative in 2023, could explain why the trilogy's first working title was "Jesus Project," and the second was "Catafalque".<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Noli me tangere* ["Do not touch me" in Latin]. *The Gospel According to St John* 20:14–18.

<sup>51</sup> "I have two children, three geese, and a wife. I'm sick of it all. The trash lies in a heap next to the woods. The selective bins are completely empty. They steal. Eighteen tiles have already been lifted from the terrace. It's hopeless. I keep a spider behind the out-house. Every morning, I take it as a living fly. I know what it's like to come down here. I came down here twenty years ago. This is all that's left. I have a puli dog. I call him the Devil. He's six years old. No one has asked why I named him Devil. Not even my wife."

<sup>52</sup> SCHILLING Árpád, „Prologue”, in *Crisis...*

*Stage design and sound*

If you seriously believe that community projects working with participatory and amateur theatre forms are primarily “traces of connections among various backgrounds,”<sup>53</sup> then the task of the visual world of the production is to conjure the living spaces of the groups affected by the focus problem. That is, the “existing space” and its aural component need not illustrate what we hope will undergo change here and now, but, with the aid of singular signifying elements, they must help bring to life the imagined sights and sounds within the actual confines of the stage. (It is telling that, “For performances in the countryside, Schilling decided to place the black ballet mats on the stage white-side-up. The effect of this simple change was ‘it’s as though the viewers are witnessing an experiment carried out in a laboratory.’”<sup>54</sup>) In the case of *the Priestess*, the projection of previously recorded visual material at the start gives us the picture of a Transylvanian-Roma-Hungarian village so tucked away that it could be anywhere in Central Eastern Europe, and where, thanks to the recordings of children being creative in the Chalk Circle’s camp, a youth club, only dreamt of by the girl working in the local pub, was realised. Among the planes drawn on the TRAFÓ’s main stage, the gymnasium is conjured with the clomp of shoes running in circles, push-ups done pantingly, and sprints accompanied by a whoosh. A circle of chairs and the dragging of chairs, as well as the relaxed postures, summon up the drama class, while the microphone conveys the atmosphere of the protestors’ podium and that of the confessional, contrasted with the projected image of the church’s interior. In other words,

<sup>53</sup> SCHILLING, *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Lóránd Bartha Quoted by JÁSZAY Tamás, „Krizisben A papnő: Egy helykereső előadás emlékezte”, last download: 07.07.2023, <https://jatekter.ro/?p=31804>.

the spectacle and sound give rise to opportunities for modes of thought, speech, and behaviour, which (although one commonly encounters such productions in the TRAFÓ building) bring to the strange not what is ‘good’ or ‘best’, but what is ‘worthy of attention’. Instead of being a venue for holding competitions and giving prizes, it provides a free space for ‘encounters’ without concrete aims or stakes.

*Impact and Posterity*

Symptomatically, one of Lilla Gát’s last sentences in *Ungrateful Bastards* was misquoted by nearly every critic: “I have to know what good is *theatre* without applause,” instead of *life*. All the while, as Tamás Jászay’s doctoral dissertation first made me aware, *The Priestess*, which was performed 28 times by the spring of 2013, could have explained to the profession the implosion of the Chalk Circle Theatre, the most successful company at the turn of the millennium. The critical response to the *Crisis Trilogy* proved that they understood and accepted it and that the politics of anti-theatre could (and, what is more, did) have a place in cultural life (e.g., at the TRAFÓ).<sup>55</sup> Thus, when a “performance and media art studio” with a great past—a “structural model” and a “talent-nurturing program”—placed itself onstage, it made visible

<sup>55</sup> “In every one of the projects after 2008, the true main character is the viewer, who cannot plan or count on anything beforehand, for whom the creators often present only the building blocks of a potential theatrical production. Yet, the combination of those elements and the creation of a viable, comprehensible work of art out of them depend at least as much (if not more) on the will of the audience, just as a creative community play depends on the (theatre) experts conducting it.” JÁSZAY, *Körülírások...*, 115.

the “nameless instance of the order”,<sup>56</sup> which is capable of “determining, orienting, cross-pollinating, forming, leading, and regulating the behaviour, habits, opinions, and discourse of Mankind and living substances”—all in all, the concept of theatre.<sup>57</sup> It is an “invisible theatre” (or, as Agamben wrote elsewhere, a “zone of indistinction”) that gives rise to “New Theatre Realities”<sup>58</sup> hence “making it possible, with the aid of artistic means, to formulate more questions relevant to generations growing up.”<sup>59</sup> This was also confirmed when the majority of professional writers voting for the Theatre Critics’ Awards cast their votes for *The Priestess* (which premiered during the Wiener Festwochen in 2011) in the category of “best independent theatre production,” from among the three Chalk Circle productions that received nominations.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, recognition has only become unavoidable in 2023, in light of the “Future Prize,”<sup>61</sup> which

<sup>56</sup> André EIERMANN, *Postspektakuläres Theater: Die Alterität der Aufführung und die Entgrenzung der Künste* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Giorgio AGAMBEN, „What is a Dispositive?“, lecture delivered at the European Graduate School, Switzerland, 2005, last download: 28.06.2021,

<https://aszem.info/2017/02/giorgio-agamben-mi-diszpozitivum/>.

<sup>58</sup> In Wrocław in the spring of 2009, Schilling accepted the recognition of “New Theatre Realities”. Cf. JÁSZAY Tamás, „Semmi művészet?“, *Színház* 42, no. 6 (2009): 60–61.

<sup>59</sup> SCHILLING, „Prologue...”.

<sup>60</sup> In an open letter, the artistic director declined the critics’ nomination, stating that *independent* is not an aesthetic but a financial category, which called for the elimination of the “best independent production” category. Cf. JÁSZAY, *Körülírások...*, 125–126.

<sup>61</sup> In 2022, the 35-year-old Round Table [Kerekasztal] Theatre Company and the 25-year-old Káva Cultural Workshop jointly received The Future Prize from the Theatre

showed that a significant portion of the art theatre audience seated in the TRAFÓ and watching *The Priestess* was faced with the essence of theatre education and the tools of drama pedagogy. Moreover, the performance’s canon-establishing significance also arises from the Chalk Circle’s use of its image to draw attention to an area of expertise unjustly neglected in the common knowledge of Hungarian theatre, not to mention the consciousness of the nation, even as late as 2011.<sup>62</sup>

### *Details of the production*

*Title:* The Priestess (Crisis Trilogy, Part III). *Date of premiere:* October 23, 2011. *Veneu:* TRAFÓ House of Contemporary Arts. *Director:* Árpád Schilling. *Director’s assistant:* Bálint Juhász. *Authors:* the actors and all the participants in the Chalk Circle Company’s “Crisis Project”: Márton Gulyás (producer), Ildikó Ságodi (production leader), Lóránd Bartha, Bernadett Daragics, Mihály Fazakas and Oszkár Mucha (from the Osonó Theatre Workshop), Krisztián Pamuki (camera operator, editor), Bence Hutlassa (sound engineer), András Pires-Muhi (casting), Máté Tóth-Ridovics (photography). *Dramaturg:* Árpád Schilling. *Actors:* Lóránd Bartha (Father Lóránd), Lilla Sárosdy (Lilla Gát), Sándor Terhes (‘Uncle’ Sanyi), sixteen amateur actors (14–16-year-old students), and the spectators and participants at all the performances.<sup>63</sup>

Critics’ Guild for their introduction of TIE (Theatre in Education) to the nation.

<sup>62</sup> Tamás Jászay first alerted me to this fact in “Krisziben A papnő...”.

<sup>63</sup> The script, dated November 20, 2011, was accessed on 17 July 2023 at

<https://archive.kretakor.eu/hu/search>. The recording of the performance was accessed on 17 July 2023 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmnzNXi-cl4>.

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