

Don't shoot the spectator! Stop the shooting!

Essay

Auhor Iulia Popovici

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I have so much to say, I do not know where to start from. I am searching for the form – I do not know how to get out in writing from the vicious circle where I think I am, from the circle where so much malice, perhaps hate is pouring forth, around of what is, after all, but a *pasatiempo*, a gesture of profound futility that extracts its beauty precisely from that lack of utility.

We speak of the 'new' theatre (*whatever that means...*) burying the spectator who does not 'feel for' with it, either a professional spectator, or an innocent amateur. As if forcible love is possible or if love does not blossom, the issue is the same nevertheless. Zița face to face with the 'boor'. Since experiments have been discussed in Romania, about social theatre, about research, never has this 'new' theatre been so threatened in his own existence – precisely by his more devoted supporters. Because anything that gets to be the privilege of a chosen group of aggressive and arrogant experts is dead from the start.

And the paradox is that once hatred and contempt got town privileges they get to embrace even the territory of the niche defended with such accuracy.

So let's talk about about the documentary theatre, as 20/20 by Gianina Cărbunariu and Capete înfierbîntate (Hot heads) by Mihaela Michailov and David Schwartz are labeled. So that we know *what* we are talking about when we hit with words-bats.

The documentary theatre was born in Europe some time ago, before our era – during the wonderful antic theatre – and not in the 20th century (Frinichos, a somewhat minor tragedian, because early, who introduced the first actor besides the choir leader – thus creating a dramatic dialogue - is also the first who used a contemporary *documented* subject which later shall be called a play).

And Shakespeare followed. And so on, up to Brecht, who, for the first time, turned the documentary in a aesthetics per se, a gender different from the other forms of theatre that use facts as a source of inspiration or starting point.



The difference between contemporary documentary theatre – since Brecht – is given by a certain technological conjuncture - namely, the film and the television, for which this *documentary* (and its counterpart, feature report) is a language with a specific vocabulary (because Piscator and Brecht started to theorize their theatre in the context of the 'moved image', reproduced mechanically).

The verbatim technique (the faithful reproduction of the real language of characters-personages, nevertheless submitted to a *editing* – in theatrical terms, a playwright treatment) is nothing more than a technique in the documentary theatre. Not any show-documentary text uses the verbatim method – as not every theatrical product using a faithful quote is documentary theatre (see **Stuff Happens** by David Hare, where people like Bush and Condoleeza Rice are carefully quoted, but the *form* of the play and its language are not at all a documentary).

The documentary theatre – as an art form – does not aspire to reveal the truth (among other things, because it subsumes a society and artistic logics where meta-narrations died and the 'truth concept' once with them). And now let us introduce Moisés Kaufman in our discussion, the author (together with Tectonic Theatre Project, his company) of a 'classical' creation documentary (appealing to verbatim and Brecht heritage), **The Laramie Project** (2001; in 1998, in the small town Laramie in Wyoming an abominable crime took place, the young Matthew Shepard was murdered because he was a homosexual). 'All our projects have two objectives: 1) to directly research the topic, 2) to explore the language and the theatrical form.' The idea for **The Laramie Project** was born out of my wish to find out (more) on why Matthew Shepard was killed; on what happened that night; on the small town Laramie. (...) How is Laramie different from the rest of the country and how it resembles?'

Obviously we can call also Anna Deavere Smith to witness, when talking about her long term project, **On the Road: A Search for American Character**: 'My objective is to discover the American character in the way people speak. (...) *Who has the right to see what? Who has the right to say what? Who is entitled to speak in the name of whom?* These questions left their mark on contemporary theatre. These questions aim equally issues regarding the anti-discrimination policy and issues on *who appears on the stage*. These questions are questions destabilizing and preventing the existence of a democratic theatre in America' (from the preface of the text *Fires in the Mirror*). You see, the truth is hardly the object of these famous documentary theatre enterprises. Anna Deavere Smith did not search for the truth on who murdered the black little boy from Brooklyn and how, and Kaufman did not intend to take the place of the court judging Matthew Shepard's murderers.



Same as not even the so-called *tribunal plays* (put-up by the British from Trycicle Theatre) do not wander after sentences – I shall not go further, here is the statement of the 'witness' Nicholas Kent, the artistic director of Trycicle Theatre: 'I have never done a show where I made a statement that belonged to me. Always, others make these statements and I reproduce them faithfully and they do not remain anonymous. In **Guantánamo**, Jamal al-Harith says *We have been tortured*, and I do not question it. He says it. So you can believe him or not. It is your business as spectator to do it'.

In parallel, those engaged in all these three examples of a *documentary* are equally interested in theatre as a platform for a multiplicity of points of view (let us call them tiny truths) on a 'piece of reality' with social-political consequences, and the way the theatre reinvents itself, as language, adapting to the formulas of facts. That is the 'facts' generate their form, you work with the material of the client, what people interviewed are willing to tell you, what detective-theatral methods succeed in bringing to light.

They share the sub-versions of the documentary theatre and the fact that they deal with the 'reality' of the moment tackled – and not its effects from a distant present perspective. If are to consider it from this angle only, **20/20** by Gianina Cărbunariu *is not* a documentary theatre – its stake are the traces digged now by the events that took place 20 years ago, not the events per se and their 'truth/s'. It is not an answer to '21-22/Who shot at us?'. And this is why **Capete înfierbîntate** is an illusion of documentary theatre – because *it makes as if* it speaks about what happened 20 years ago, but has certitudes that belong to *now*, not *then*.

20/20 – if it is to be labeled (and everything has to be labelled today, otherwise, well, we do not know what to say) – it is a theatre show of reconstruction and memory. Which is, never mind its input of 'real' and 'factual', a bit different. And we can speak further...

Translated by: *Zenovia Popa*
MTTLC, Bucharest University

