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# Àlex Rigola's *The Seagull*

## Record of a Staging Process

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES: Graduate in arts with honours in theatre acting from the University of Chile and master's degree in theatre studies from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) / Institut del Teatre, he is an actor, researcher and teacher. In recent years, he has focused his research on acting methodologies and running creative theatre workshops for amateur and professional actors and actresses.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

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### Abstract

This paper describes and analyses part of the process of staging Àlex Rigola's *The Seagull* (Barcelona, 1969). Written as a record, it explores the dramaturgical adaptation, the shaping of the proposed theatrical language, the issues raised, the methods used to stage what was devised (notably those implemented in the field of acting direction through a *decàleg de joc*) and the stages into which the rehearsal period was divided. Its main objective is to consider the development stage of a theatrical experience by recording specific data and through interpretive description — exegesis — of what has been done in a month and a week of rehearsals. Moreover, the paper seeks to decipher the poetic hybridisation procedures that a creator in the current European scene develops as a strategy to forge their work. In an effort to specifically and representatively distinguish the staging observed here, this has been called narrative naturalism.

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**Keywords:** Rigola, staging, creative processes, dramaturgical adaptation, acting methods, contemporary stage, *decàleg de joc*, narrative naturalism

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#### Credits

**Director and adaptation:**

Àlex Rigola

**Assistant director:**

Alba Pujol

**Cast:**

Nao Albet

Melisa Salvatierra

Mònica López

Pau Miró

Xavi Sáez

Roser Vilajosana

**By:**

Anton Chekhov

**Stage design:**

Max Glaenzel

**Executive producer:**

Irene Vicente



Fig. 1. *Origami*. Photograph: Alba Pujol.

## Introduction

*We lack, as it were, any access to the possible  
neurochemistry of the act of imagination and its processes.  
Even the roughest draft of a poem is already a very advanced stage  
on the journey leading to the expression and the performative genre.*

George Steiner

This paper is based on observing the process of Àlex Rigola's staging of *The Seagull*. This took place at his private home and at La Villarroel theatre between 4 February and 11 March 2020 (when it was interrupted by the pandemic triggered by Covid-19, with the planned rehearsals completed but three previews plus the premiere pending).<sup>1</sup>

I was introduced to the project through the *practicum* academic module of the UAB master's degree in theatre studies. This enabled me to adopt the not very frequent, and in this case privileged, position of observer of the entire period of rehearsals. In other words, I was present during a process of an intimate, hermetic nature (a rehearsal is not only a place of attempts — trial/success/error —, but also a space where secrets emerge, agreements are established, incidents occur, and so on), without being one of its participants. I was inside and outside at the same time: in the same space of intimacy of the rehearsal, but with the levelling distance of the witness (“being neither a sculptor nor sculpture”). This is a distance analogous to that of the National Geographic cameraman tasked with filming the birth, exploits, battles and death of animals with the same promise of non-interference. With this I describe the particular, infrequent and, in my opinion, certainly convenient place of a *non-participating observer* to provide an account of part of what happens on a creative journey.

The main objective of this paper is to carry out an analytical description of the development stage of a theatrical experience by recording specific data and the interpretive description of what I observed during the rehearsals. In other words, it seeks to provide an account of the staging process of the theatrical project observed and not its reception or artistic outcome (*performance*).<sup>2</sup> The considerations about its reception or artistic outcome will be made succinctly and only to the extent that they allow the completion, by way of conclusion, of part of what was proposed in the creative process. It is logical to think that every staging process is guided by certain objectives that go beyond the limits of its time span (planning, rehearsals), taking shape at the moment of the performance (the encounter with the audience, the performances, the order of the show). However, this research has considered

1. Rehearsals from Monday to Friday 10 am to 1:30 pm approximately, for five weeks. In total there were 24 rehearsals, all of which I attended.

2. See the difference established by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her book *The Transformative Power of the Performance: A New Aesthetics* (2004) between the concepts of *staging* (*Inszenierung*) and *performance* (*Aufführung*), where *staging* refers to “a plan, a stage idea developed by an artist, or several together, and that as a general rule is constantly changed during the rehearsal process” (Fischer-Lichte, 2004: 104); while *performance* alludes to a social event in which “actors and audience have to meet for a certain period of time in a specific place and do something together” (ibid., 65).

that the task of describing and analysing in detail what happens during a rehearsal period (the most significant part of a staging process, since — in contrast to planning — it is where work is carried out on the theatrical experience itself — with and on its materialities —) is too extensive to be covered in an article. Developing an analysis of its reception or artistic outcome would be a different undertaking, bearing in mind that it would require other methodological, analytical and conceptual tools (taken from reception theory, for example).

The second objective is to bear witness to a specific theatrical project and its participants. This objective — of a patrimonial nature — is related to the words of Hans-Thies Lehmann where he points out that those who consider theatre theory a *reflection of the theatrical experience* are a minority and that “philosophers, while contemplating the ‘theatre’ as a concept and idea with conspicuous frequency and even turning ‘scene’ and ‘theatre’ into key concepts of theoretical discourse rarely write concretely *about specific theatre forms or practitioners*”<sup>3</sup> (Lehmann, 2006; 18). The aim is to produce a research paper that is also a written portrait in order to try to establish a non-hierarchical relationship between analysis and description.

The third objective is “to serve the conceptual analysis and verbalization of the experience” (Ibid, 19) of contemporary theatre by itemising the development stage (manufacturing process, assembly of the pieces) of a current stage production. What we seek is to show that one of the reasons that the contemporary theatrical framework is difficult to define is due, in part, to its eclecticism. In this way we will see how the stage production observed is developed through a hybridisation process in which elements of divergent and/or extemporaneous poetics, aesthetic currents and disciplines are combined, mainly with references to naturalism, epic theatre, and performance art.

This text includes is divided into four parts: in the first, the dramaturgical adaptation and the proposed stage language will be addressed; in the second, the issues raised; in the third, the methods used to stage what was devised; and in the fourth, the phases into which the rehearsal period was divided. Thus, a journey is established ranging from the development of ideas to their realisation.

My thanks to Àlex Rigola and the whole team for welcoming me into their fold.

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3. The latter italics are mine.

## Dramaturgical Adaptation and Stage Language

We all love each other,  
and the lie is the kiss we exchange.

Fernando Pessoa

The dramaturgical adaptation is proposed as a free version of one of the most famous plays of recent centuries: *The Seagull*, by Anton Chekhov (1896). The company Heartbreak Hotel — led by Àlex Rigola — presents a rewriting that maintains certain landmarks that he considers fundamental to the piece, but modifies all of its dialogues and a considerable portion of the cast of characters (reducing them from thirteen to six). It is a free version that aims to adjust its content to the contemporary local *ethos*, a task that is carried out by feeding on the current and colloquial use of words, and the lives of the actors and actresses. These factors enable a change in the development of the original anecdotes, since he aligns them with the experiences and world vision of the artistic team. From this it follows that one of the distinctive aspects of this adaptation has to do with the fact that here the roles work in keeping with the current ideology that determines that it is preferable to *hold back passions rather than express them* (they are human beings educated in a refined capacity for self-control); a characteristic that differs from the portrayal of the Russian aristocracy presented by the play of reference (passionate, pompous, eccentric characters). Hence, the primary document is used as a starting structure that serves to reflect on some issues that have stood the test of time — and that, therefore, are revealed as transcendental — but without subscribing to any kind of loyalty to Chekhov; or, at least, without having the feeling of having to fulfil a “patrimonial” or “archival” mission in this regard (a rewriting restricted by its desire for deference or preservation; a version that obeys the aesthetic and behavioural patterns of 19th-century Russia, for example).

The aforementioned is consistent with the fact that many of the features that make up the staging (performances, scenery, costumes and props) are based on some of the principles proposed by naturalism.<sup>4</sup> These are: 1) the set is made up mainly of *real* objects (conceived without a staging purpose) and are arranged on stage without being subjected to aesthetic treatment;<sup>5</sup> 2) the language used tries to reproduce the social layer presented without changing how it speaks; “the actor creates the impression that the words and literary structure are made of the same material as the character’s psychology and ideology. In this way, the text’s literary and poetic construction

4. The differences between naturalism and realism are subtle and are not always easy to identify on stage. In this paper we have chosen to refer to naturalism because it has a greater emphasis on its mimetic aim. Realism, on the other hand, would seem to give up part of its mimetic aim in order to gain greater poetic and aesthetic possibilities. We can say that naturalism is more photographic and realism is more pictorial (one seeks a more mechanical copy, the other, more stylised).

5. Although it should be noted that the design developed by Max Glanzel in conjunction with Rigola is through a synthesis of materials instead of an accumulation in detail (reproductive meticulousness characteristic of naturalism).

is trivialized and denied” (Pavis, 1998: 236) and 3) the acting style “aims at producing *illusion* by reinforcing the impression of a mimetic reality and by inducing the actor to identify wholly with the character” (Ibid, 236).

This last point is taken to the limit, to the border of performance art, since actors and actresses wear their own clothes and are called by their own names on stage. The aim is to eliminate any existing distance between actress/actor and character, an idea that is similar to the performative principle of presenting oneself instead of a character (sphere of the fictitious). Thus, an acting style is used that alludes to the non-fictional, to the non-artificial, to an aesthetics of the performative, although procedurally and structurally it remains in the field of theatre. That is, the prior preparation of a structure to be reproduced; the arrangement of elements on stage of already agreed actions (unlike performance, which seeks to explore the unpredictable relationship that exists between the stage event and the moment of its performance, an issue that confers a lower level of predetermination: the question about the event as an essential part of the epistemic framework that gives life to the performance). In short, what is established is a kind of structural base, foundations, which are referenced in naturalism, but that also allude to performance art. By integrating an aesthetic referenced in performance into the acting plane, this proposal seeks to overcome the degree of illusion achieved by naturalism. The idea is to elevate the illusion to the point of making it invisible. Hence the importance that this project attaches to responding on stage to the phenomenal manifestation of “life” – in its locality and contemporaneity, resembling it without any adornment in between.

But this structural base does not operate as an absolute pattern, since its development is combined with some of the principles postulated by epic theatre – an approach that Bertolt Brecht conceived as an antagonistic response to naturalistic and realistic theatre. Beyond political differences (bourgeois theatre versus critical Marxist theatre) and reconciling aesthetics (illusionist theatre and non-illusionist theatre; mimesis and diegesis), Rigola creates a dynamic of dialectical complementarity focused on enriching the movement on stage. What he does is to borrow from epic theatre some of the stage resources that it developed or redefined, but without subscribing to its marked political foundation (inspired, mainly, by historical and dialectical materialisms). In other words, he performs a heretical algebra, since he has an assemblage that operates in both a sceptical and eclectic way. This leads to a tailored hybrid that we will call narrative naturalism here, since the resource of narration is the central element (or, at least, one of the most perceptible, together with the breaking down of the fourth wall) that this approach takes from epic theatre to assemble it on a structural base with a naturalistic character.<sup>6</sup>

6. As Peter Szondi notes, “In Chekhov's plays the characters live under the sign of renunciation – renunciation of the present and of communication before all else, renunciation of the happiness arising from real interaction” (Szondi, 1987: 18). This renunciation of the present and communication is where the pertinence of the narrative resource lies, as it is in the monologue fragments where part of what is substantial is revealed. Rigola resolves them by addressing them to the audience (he narrates them, he explains them) rather than isolating his characters.



In epic theatre, the narrative resource has the working function of breaking the fourth wall; the events are narrated directly to the audience in order to break with the illusion of the performance. This rupture is what Brecht calls the “distancing effect”. Rigola takes this triad of consecutive elements — narration, breaking the fourth wall, and distancing effect — removing the ideological load with which these techniques were conceived in order to adapt it to his concept. Thus, the distancing effect will not aim to “provide the audience with an analytical and critical attitude towards performed texts” (Brecht, 2004: 131) but rather to generate a deeper illusion, duplicated, capable of producing fiction through the expounding of the fiction. The result achieved is a mimesis that does not seek to be a mimesis, which denies itself as such.<sup>7</sup> The idea is to take the expression of the stage artifice to its zero degree — to the minimum quota required by the medium — through the production of *a game of over-illusion*:<sup>8</sup> the illusion works by pointing (distancing — epic theatre —) *disinterestedly* (aesthetics of the performative) to the illusion (naturalism). In this respect, it is as if all the elements on the stage are declaring: “*Larvatus Prodeo*, I advance pointing to my mask” (Barthes, 1972: 28).

In contrast to the classic form of naturalistic theatre, which tries to emulate reality by hiding the theatrical artifice behind a fourth wall that contains it (a hermetically sealed section of reality), here the game consists of exposing the stage mechanism in order to conjure up a sense of bare reality and *hic et nunc* (a sense of *transparency*). In this way, a poetics is developed that makes explicit the nature of the show (the actors speak directly to the audience, making it clear that they are doing theatre),<sup>9</sup> the exercise of rewriting (Chekhov himself is mentioned), and the biographical materials (parts of the private lives and professional careers of the cast are mentioned on repeated occasions). They are resources that help the show to free itself from an enormous dramaturgical bastion (one of the most prestigious and staged writers in the world, but whose plays obey another temporal, cultural and linguistic reality), enabling it to be dressed with an air of renewal and lightness; as if its metatheatrical enunciation, a playful self-referencing, were a kind of lubricant capable of making the content circulate — with its frictions, conflicts and tensions — in an *apparently relaxed and slightly melancholic* climate, an aspect that paradoxically, in my opinion, is more evocative of Chekhov's presence — as they move away, they meet.

On the other hand, the narrative resource and the breaking of the fourth wall are also linked to another of the main aspects that performance art deals with: the relationship with the audience. By speaking directly to the audience, the actresses and actors set about showing the co-presential nature

7. This is also linked to the idea of *presenting* before that of *representing* popularised with the development of performance and of performance studies between 1960 and 1970.

8. In his definition of *theatre in theatre*, Patrice Pavis notes that “the use of this form may be a response to many different needs, but it always implies a reflection and manipulation of the *illusion*. By showing actors on stage who are engaged in performing a play, the playwright involves the ‘outside’ spectator as a spectator of the inner play, thus reinforcing his actual situation as someone who is in a theatre watching a fiction. Through this double theatricality the external level acquires a heightened reality — the illusion of illusion becomes reality” (Pavis, 1998: 270).

9. To illustrate this, I propose the following fragment where Nao Albet refers to Mònica López: “Let’s talk about MÒNICA, who plays ‘my mother’” (Rigola 2020: 4).

that distinguishes the performing arts and that the performance emphasises. In any case, it still remains in the traditional terrain of theatre, since what is available is a closed, determined structure, which, although it is open to the audience (they are looked at and spoken to directly, even slightly lit), their interference is not expected or possible at a structural level in the performance, but only at a sensory, atmospheric, psychic level.

### Themes

Thematically, the following issues stand out: unrequited love, personal dissatisfaction, and the passage of time (old age and nostalgia for the past). It should be noted that of the characters<sup>10</sup> that appear in the original play only the following are retained:



Fig. 2. Cast: Nina (Melisa Salvatierra), Arkadina (Mònica López), Treplev (Nao Albet), Trigorin (Pau Miró), a combination of Sorin and Medvedenko (Xavi Sáez)<sup>11</sup> and Masha (Roser Vilajosana).<sup>12</sup> Photo provided by the company.

Unrequited love is omnipresent, including the whole cast and fully respecting the emotional alliances established by Chekhov. This is the area where the game of over-illusion falters the most, since as mostly well-known actresses and actors, it is difficult to overcome the artificiality of the love affairs (theatrical convention overlaps; the implicit deal to let yourself be fooled wins out). The relationships emerge in the same order as in the original play, but they are developed more soberly, thus adjusting to the team's frame of mind. By way of illustration, see the following comparative table:

10. A concept never used in the work process.

11. He shares with Sorin the fact of being Arkadina's brother and being bored with country life and with Medvedenko the fact of being in love with Masha.

12. Named from left to right in the picture. Hereafter they will appear as they are referred to in Rigola's adaptation with their corresponding Chekhovian character. For example, Nina (Melisa Salvatierra) will appear as: Mel/Nina.



Chekhov (Act III - Scene II)	Rigola (Act III)
<p>ARKADINA. I know, dearest, what keeps you here, but you must control yourself. Be sober; your emotions have intoxicated you a little.</p> <p>TRIGORIN. You must be sober, too. Be sensible; look upon what has happened as a true friend would. [Taking her hand] You are capable of self-sacrifice. Be a friend to me and release me!</p> <p>ARKADINA. [In deep excitement] Are you so much in love?</p> <p>TRIGORIN. I am irresistibly impelled toward her. It may be that this is just what I need.</p> <p>ARKADINA. What, the love of a country girl? Oh, how little you know yourself!</p> <p>TRIGORIN. People sometimes walk in their sleep, and so I feel as if I were asleep, and dreaming of her as I stand here talking to you. My imagination is shaken by the sweetest and most glorious visions. Release me!</p> <p>ARKADINA. [Shuddering] No, no! I am only an ordinary woman; you must not say such things to me. Do not torment me, Boris; you frighten me.</p> <p>TRIGORIN. You could be an extraordinary woman if you only would. Love alone can bring happiness on earth, love the enchanting, the poetical love of youth, that sweeps away the sorrows of the world. I had no time for it when I was young and struggling with want and laying siege to the literary fortress, but now at last this love has come to me. I see it beckoning; why should I fly?</p> <p>ARKADINA. [With anger] You are mad!</p> <p>TRIGORIN. Release me.</p> <p>ARKADINA. You have all conspired together to torture me to-day. [She weeps.]</p> <p>TRIGORIN. [Clutching his head desperately] She doesn't understand me! She won't understand me!</p> <p>ARKADINA. Am I then so old and ugly already that you can talk to me like this without any shame about another woman? [She embraces and kisses him] Oh, you have lost your senses! My splendid, my glorious friend, my love for you is the last chapter of my life. [She falls on her knees] You are my pride, my joy, my light. [She embraces his knees] I could never endure it should you desert me, if only for an hour; I should go mad. Oh, my wonder, my marvel, my king!</p> <p>TRIGORIN. Someone might come in. [He helps her to rise.]</p> <p>ARKADINA. Let them come! I am not ashamed of my love. [She kisses his hands] My jewel! My despair! You want to do a foolish thing, but I don't want you to do it. I shan't let you do it! [She laughs] You are mine, you are mine! This forehead is mine, these eyes are mine, this silky hair is mine. All your being is mine. You are so clever, so wise, the first of all living writers; you are the only hope of your country. You are so fresh, so simple, so deeply humorous. You can bring out every feature of a man or of a landscape in a single line, and your characters live and breathe. Do you think that these words are but the incense of flattery? Do you think I am not speaking the truth? Come, look into my eyes; look deep; do you find lies there? No, you see that I alone know how to treasure you. I alone tell you the truth. Oh, my very dear, you will go with me? You will? You will not forsake me?</p> <p>TRIGORIN. I have no will of my own; I never had. I am too indolent, too submissive, too phlegmatic, to have any. Is it possible that women like that? Take me. Take me away with you, but do not let me stir a step from your side.</p>	<p>MÒNICA: You want to stay, don't you?</p> <p>PAU: ...</p> <p>MÒNICA: Is it that strong?</p> <p>PAU: I feel attracted...</p> <p>MÒNICA: Attracted to a girl who is not exactly Hannah Arendt. Because she's young? Young. And pretty?</p> <p>PAU: You have never felt like being in a dream.</p> <p>MÒNICA: Pau, I'm a person like any other. Don't ask that of me. Because he's not talking about sex.</p> <p>PAU: I like her...</p> <p>MÒNICA: I know. I see. (<i>Silence.</i>) Today it seems that everyone wants to hurt me. He's probably the last great love I'll ever have. He's the one who makes me happy, who makes sense of my life...</p> <p>PAU: Mònica...</p> <p>I am not ashamed of my love for you, Pau. I love you as I have never loved anyone... He, with his talent, his intelligence, his humour... who I get along with very well working... in a profession where it is not easy to get on... I believe in you, Pau... in you as a playwright... you know how to create situations and characters like I've rarely seen anyone else do... yes, I believe that, you know I'm not saying this to make you stay. And above all, I believe in you as a person. You drive me crazy. Look me in the eyes. Am I lying? Do you think there is anyone who believes in you more than I do? I... understand you like no one else can... and I love you.</p> <p>(<i>Silence.</i>)</p> <p>MÒNICA: Thanks. Thanks. I love you.</p> <p>PAU: ...let's go together. Now. (Rigola, 2020: 28-29)</p>

The comparison shows how another of the processes undertaken is summarising, something that can be seen in the length of the lines, which have been reduced to what is perceived to be the essence of the message (they directly address the “heart of the matter”, but try to avoid being explicit; the objective is to ration the information to the minimum that allows the piece

to move on), and in the global dramaturgical structure, since there is a condensation of scenes that only leaves the order of the acts.

The second theme is personal dissatisfaction, a motive presented as one of the most “dangerous” for the cast, because their intimacies are exposed here to become material for the scene. Work and financial insecurity, unachieved goals, or the feeling that one is not good enough at the job are the main considerations in this theme. We can quote, for example, the self-criticism expressed by Nao/Treplev through a series of rhetorical questions: “Who am I? What have I done? Have I done anything of substance? Has my theatre ever moved anyone any time? Has it encouraged real reflection? Or, deep down, no matter how much I work from another place, have I ever managed to move or challenge anyone and has it all been just a *diversion*?” (Ibid, 6). Or the dialogue between Mel/Nina and Pau/Trigorin:<sup>13</sup>

PAU: I DO NOTHING ELSE. NOTHING ELSE. JUST WRITE AND REHEARSE. NONSENSE. RIGHT NOW I AM HAVING A GREAT TIME TALKING TO YOU, BUT THERE'S A PART OF ME THAT IS THINKING: “YOU HAVE TO GO BACK TO WORK”. AND THE SENSATION OF CHEATING, OF MEDIOCRITY.

MEL: I'm sorry, but doesn't the process of creation itself give you pleasure? Happiness?

PAU: THERE ARE PLEASANT MOMENTS. BUT, FOR EXAMPLE, JUST AFTER THE PREMIERE OF MY PLAYS BECOMES UN-BEARABLE FOR ME.

MEL.-Really?

PAU: I DON'T HAVE MUCH TALENT

MEL: You're in a bad way.

PAU: AND WHEN I COMPARE MYSELF WITH SOME COLLEAGUES, I THINK WHAT THE AUDIENCE MUST THINK: PAU MIRÓ IS GOOD BUT SERGIO BLANCO IS MUCH BETTER. AND IT'S TRUE: SERGIO BLANCO IS BETTER THAN PAU MIRÓ.<sup>14</sup> (Ibid, 19-20)

The passages quoted show how the meta-discursive aspect of Chekhov's play is updated in the rewriting. The characters are a professional actress (Mònica/Arkadina), an established writer (Pau/Trigorin), a young playwright (Nao/Treplev) and a young aspiring actress (Mel/Nina). In this respect, Rigola's approach involves casting actors and actresses who are in a similar situation to their characters in order to use their particularities, circumstances and backgrounds to forge his adaptation.

Lastly, we have the passage of time. A recurring aspect in Chekhov's works, it is one of the elements that creates a melancholic air that counterbalances

13. Pau/Trigorin's text is quoted in capital letters, as it appears in the adaptation. The reason for this peculiarity has to do with the arrangement on stage, since these lines are projected on a screen while Pau/Trigorin writes them instead of speaking them (mythical image of the writer — his communicative nature —).

14. Note the parallelism established with Chekhov's play when Trigorin is compared with Turgenev.

the playful atmosphere caused by the direct interaction with the audience and the multiple jokes made by the cast. Phrases like “How fine were used to be. How beautiful everything was... what a life full of light, warmth, joy, innocence, purity, tenderness...” are part of a nostalgic set of resources responsible for organising the scene. A cruder way of treating the passage of time occurs around the figure of Mònica/Arkadina. Here:

One of the problems, for example, is that Mònica... is older... or she feels older... and my presence reminds her that she's fifty instead of forty. And, of course, this means she is less capable of connecting with someone in their twenties, and this unsettles her. Yes, that's it, that's it. Less connection means a smaller audience, which means less work (Ibid, 4-5).

The moment in the fourth and final act deserves a special mention (when in Chekhov's version they play the lottery and in Rigola's it is dominoes). The cast's memories of their experiences “treading the boards” are included as a closing preamble (except for Mel/Nina, since “she is not on stage”).<sup>15</sup> For example:

MÒNICA: Working with Carles Santos made an impression on me. I remember reciting one of his percussive and amusing scripts, throwing myself on the floor in a pool of water to the rhythm of the words and playing with them. He always asked me for more. He was only interested when you went beyond your possibilities. It was an immense physical effort, and I had to go so fast that I didn't have time to think. Out of pure exhaustion I forgot about myself. About my body and especially my mind, which was exploding. At the premiere I could only hear the audience laughing, and I kept going, doing things that surprised me and playing more freely than I could have imagined. Free... Total happiness (Ibid, 36).<sup>16</sup>

After having set out the main themes addressed (which are similar to those of Chekhov's play, only differently arranged — through more restraint in expressing passions, a theatrical response to a conception that perceives the contemporary being as subject of self-control; the domain of passions as a social attribute —), it is worth mentioning the ecological interest outlined. During the rehearsals, the director himself pointed out that for some time now he had seen the need to include a plant in the middle of the set (“a living organism in the middle of nowhere”). On stage, this concern is revealed in the value given to Mel/Nina's monologue in terms of its discursive content — when she performs Nao/Treplev's play (a metatheatrical moment already in Chekhov) —, since it deals with the extinction of nature, human responsibility and future developments. After the monologue is interrupted by Nao/Treplev (as in the original play, but much more subtly — he does not “burst out loud” or “walk away evasively” but simply stops the monologue

15. In fact, the actresses and actors are always on stage, but it plays with the convention that by sitting on a bench at the back of the stage they become observers rather than participants in the events.

16. The transcription of the memories in a text was a task requested before the first rehearsal.

by apologising and goes to the back of the stage —), one of the voices that emerge points out: “I was enjoying this bit. (...) This warning about the destruction of nature that Chekhov already wrote about in the 19th century”<sup>17</sup> (Ibid, 11). Another issue explored is the generational struggle in artistic creation: the search for new forms against prevailing tradition or officialdom.

### Methodologies Used

Among the methods used, those within the field of dramaturgy and acting direction stand out (which, as will be seen, absorbs and channels most of the stage direction).

The text was mainly structured individually by Rigola. The first two acts of the adaptation (15 pages, version no. 5) were presented to the cast at the first rehearsal, followed over time by the other two. This allowed the dramaturgy to constantly feed on the material created in the rehearsals, which was modified based on personal anecdotes, ways of speaking the script by each actress/actor (adjustments to facilitate their personal take), words or phrases added to the script in the course of improvisations (*ad libs*) and changes or deletions of phrases perceived as bad, unnecessary or “strange” (unusual in the everyday use of words). In other words, they worked on a base script that was edited as the rehearsals progressed (the latest version is number 12 and has a total of 39 pages). This work was carried out through a particular form of dramatised reading (delineating dramaturgy and performances in parallel), organised according to the following formula: 1) read a line, 2) look into the eyes of a fellow actor or member of the audience,<sup>18</sup> 3) feed off their gaze and 4) then say it, a structure that aims to immediately impose the logic of breaking the fourth wall (feeding off the audience's eyes), ensuring that actors and actresses *do not overlook the scripts* (that is, that they do not get carried away by a certain flow or rhythmic pattern that establishes a homogenisation of enunciation that is indifferent to its environment and content — a kind of automation of enunciation —) and brings about the link with others (it is forbidden to speak while looking at the script). The difficulty of implementing this was that, probably due to habit or occupational hazard, the actresses and actors tended to channel the reading continuously (rhythmic awareness) and it was uncomfortable for them to have to constantly break the flow to make the necessary pauses to 1) read a line from the script, 2) establish visual contact with someone, 3) feed off their gaze and then 4) say it. This is not to say that once the lines were learnt they had to look at what was written. However, given the difficulty of remembering, the director suggested always returning to the script, since this was considered preferable to getting trapped by memory or changing the line to get by (there was no problem in them rehearsing with script in hand until the final week). In fact, throughout the process, the emphasis was almost exclusively on doing a slow and calm reading, focused

17. Note the explicit reference to Chekhov (intertextuality, distancing, over-illusion).

18. In the rehearsals, the role of audience was played by Rigola, the assistant director Alba Pujol and myself.

mainly on understanding what was being said (underlying intentions) in dialogue with the environment.<sup>19</sup>

Undoubtedly, the aspect most developed throughout the process was the task of directing the actors. Those familiar with the aesthetics of Rigola's most recent stage productions will probably not be surprised by this — *Vania (escenas de la vida)* (2017) or *Aquest país no descobert que no deixa tornar de les seves fronteres cap dels seus viatgers* (2019), for example —, as they feature an austere stage, almost empty, to give more space to the acting. A field in which this creator expressed a kind of crystallisation of his experience, in working with a particular and defined method (less common than thought<sup>20</sup>). In the first rehearsal the cast was given one of the key elements in the entire creative process: *El decàleg de joc* [The ten rules of acting].

<i>DECÀLEG DE JOC HEARTBREAK HOTEL</i> <sup>21</sup>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be more interesting as a person than as a character.</li> <li>2. Do not act out feelings/emotions or seek them out.</li> <li>3. Do not force or enhance the reactions produced by actions or thoughts or add body language to seem more credible.</li> <li>4. Breaking the fourth wall. Whenever possible, look into the audience's eyes.</li> <li>5. In every line be very clear about what you want to achieve from the receiver and write it down in a word.</li> <li>6. Do not memorise the script until a week before the opening and, when you do, memorise the aims of the last point rather than the script itself.</li> <li>7. The characters are never less intelligent or more innocent than us.</li> <li>8. The audience is never less intelligent or more innocent than us.</li> <li>9. Avoid looking at the ground or the sky at all times. Do not feign thinking.</li> <li>10. Win a fictitious contest where at the end of the show the audience must choose one of the actors/characters as an ideal flatmate.</li> </ol>

It can be inferred that within the rules that make up the *decàleg del joc* there are various factors that drive them. As a first block, those that, from the perspective of this analysis, aim to modulate the actions towards a naturalistic/performative aesthetic will be analysed. Rules number 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 are, in my opinion, basically established to achieve this quality.

19. On speed, the director adds: "Running through the texts is the most simplistic version of trying to be 'natural'."

20. In my experience I have found there is still a lack of integration and/or awareness, and even a resistance, concerning the methodological in the sphere of theatre creation (experiences that, moreover, have been integrated mostly by academically trained theatre professionals). It is as if the methodological process (as a conscious act) were still considered a dispensable addition and, therefore, distanced from the creative act, when, perhaps, it is more beneficial for theatre professionals to think that every creative act, like it or not, contains a method that makes it possible (that even the proposal of a non-method embodies a method) and that, consequently, it is necessary to deepen and question the ways in which one proceeds. Moreover, I have also noticed a perspective that is linked to a conception that understands the methodological as an area that, due to its subordination to the sphere of reason (planning, structuring), makes it impossible for certain attributes considered superior to flourish for artistic creation such as inspiration or instinct, attributes that to a certain extent are linked to the sphere of passion. These are perceived as unfathomable to reason, since they emerge unexpectedly, mysteriously, in the heat of a determined, liberated, uninterrupted task. Thus, the methodological is assigned — due to its configuration outside the moment of praxis — an actancial capacity of cold provenance, limited to the contours of reasoning. This even leads to certain inhibiting, disaffecting, exorcising, harmful capacity being assigned to the methodological.

21. Transcription of the document provided by the company.

The first rule (“Be more interesting as a person than as a character”) calls for an appropriation, a sense of absolute belonging to the role in hand. This can be associated with that old aphorism that says that “theatre is not putting on a mask but taking it off” and with the influence exercised by the performance on the prevailing conception of acting; in particular, the idea that the performer “is someone who speaks in the first person rather than on behalf of a third party or another.”<sup>22</sup> In the words of the director, “on stage the doubt should be: is it Nina or so and so?” (that is why there are no costumes and each actress/actor wears their own clothes). The roles are played in the terrain of ambiguity, in order to generate a doubt that provokes an activating tension in the audience (to act fluctuating between the person and the character to enhance uncertainty – *perceptual multistability*). This work on ambiguity in the acting register is decisive if one takes into account that it is one of the few areas where the general transparency that governs the stage is counterbalanced (where the aim is for most of the elements to be shown bare, just as they are). In this way, this first rule not only concerns outlining an acting form (naturalistic/performative), but is also situated in terms of a stage device, since the implementation of *perceptive multistability* – “What is perceived as the actor’s presence in one moment is perceived as the character in the next and vice versa” (Fischer-Lichte, 2004: 182) – aims to stimulate the self-referential and autopoietic feedback loop that occurs in the relationship between actors/actresses and audience based on their physical co-presence and mutual influence that they exert on each other (chain of reactions).

Rules no. 2 (“Do not act out feelings/emotions or seek them out”) and 3 (“Do not force or enhance the reactions produced by actions or thoughts or add body language to seem more credible”) are used to lead the performances towards an aesthetic that proposes a *raw* (not stylised) proliferation, an idea that overcomes any technicality or conventionalism. Hence, a *cold* performance (devoid of a certain expressive vigour) is assumed to be preferable to one that seeks, represents or forces feelings/emotions, since these volitional manoeuvres, when detected, acquire the physiognomy of manipulation and deception (colouring the scene with a suspicion that undermines the production of a non-artificialised binding bond; a minimum trust that supports what is expected of the scene).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, these manoeuvres turn out to be a trap for the actors and actresses themselves, since by focusing on the emotional they lose sight of their intentions and objectives (this is

22. Although this conception was already found, for example, in writings from the first half of the twentieth century by Stanislavski – “Whatever character the artist plays, he must always play on behalf of himself” (Stanislavski, 1957: 308) –, it is notable how performance, through an exhaustive implementation of the premise (the performer as someone who works avoiding fiction), has made this idea its hallmark that has spread at an interdisciplinary level. In the case of Stanislavski, it is understood that his ideas – although visionary – are still submerged in a context where the prevailing paradigm of incarnation established as an ideal “the total dilution of the actor’s phenomenal body (his physical being-in-the-world) into the semiotic body to be played (the character).”

23. Because, even in Brecht, *summum* of the critical-rational in the theatrical expectation, a minimum amount of faith is required: “The illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may always be recognized as an illusion” (Brecht, 2004: 31). That *partial* – the impossibility of its total abolition – is the admission of a kind of religious ontology that founds the theatrical: the ritual is inconceivable among staunch fanatic sceptics (sweet paradox).



based on the idea that, in life, attention is never focused on trying to get excited or on “feeling things” — other than on a few occasions —, but rather on what one wants to achieve). All of this ends up being established as a technique in reverse, because by not looking for emotions, by *holding* them instead of *freeing* them, even by *resisting* them, they have the possibility of *being revealed* more vehemently (in their exceptionality and — perhaps out of sheer obstinacy — in their power). This way of proceeding is based on the fact that we are more accustomed to the exercise of avoiding becoming emotional than the opposite, since this is an essential part of the morality that governs us (the ideology of self-control). In short, actresses and actors are exempt from being emotionally accountable, and *coldness* is accepted as a peculiarity that — in part — defines the contemporary subject (“if the emotion happens, fine; if not, it doesn’t matter”).

Regarding rule no. 5 (“In every line be very clear about what you want to achieve from the receiver and write it down in a word”), it should be noted that it is linked with the only reference mentioned in terms of a system or acting proposal: Declan Donnellan and *The Actor and the Target*. We can see that this rule is very similar to Donnellan’s approach through the following quote: “You can never know what you are doing until you first know what you are doing it to. For the actor, all ‘doing’ has to be done to something. The actor can do nothing without the target.” (2005: 17). Perhaps the complement to the rule (“and write it down in a word”) has to do *simply* with giving a fixed shape separated from corporality itself to part of the material you are going to use to act (not a minor issue if you take into account the tremendous instability of this task, understanding that its medium or support, corporality, is matter subject to change and movement). Over the days, Rigola was repeatedly heard to say “go for the target, that’s what matters”. *What I want to achieve from the receiver* has the virtue of setting up a dynamic of constant active dialogue, as playing with desires in distant terrains brings about an exchange of fluctuating stimuli, reciprocal, summatory, of comings and goings. The discovery and knowledge of the intentions was sought through a maieutic induction, a task conceived as fundamental and repeatedly returned to (what do you want to achieve? What is your intention?).

The sixth rule (“Do not memorise the script until a week before the opening and, when you do, memorise the aims of the last point rather than the script itself”) is designed to avoid mechanisation of the script and its consequent sedimentation in a refractory structure that later turns out to be unalterable for the actor or actress, thus annulling their ability to interact with their environment and the present evolution (everything that happens in the moment of the rehearsal or performance, regardless of whether it was planned). In fact, the direction for working with the script was: “The script can be read at home, but not to memorise it but to understand the intentions therein.” The aim of this rule is to put the mechanisms that modulate action in a logic close to those that govern everyday behaviour, where there are no memorised scripts that must be uttered to the letter, or that have been rehearsed or established in advance; rather what mobilises us are the intentions that inhabit us in dialogue with the environment.

Rules no. 7 (“The characters are never less intelligent or more innocent than us”) and 8 (“The audience is never less intelligent or more innocent than us”) concern, on the one hand, an acting regulation tool that is again consistent with the naturalistic/performative (they invite the cast to act according to their own way of understanding the world — point of view — instead of speculating on that of a supposed character) and, on the other, they provide an ethical nuance with respect to the acting exercise, since they try to avoid the emergence of paternalistic positions (authorial *conatus*). In practice, the application of these rules has repercussions mainly on the enunciation of the script, which will have to be expressed to escape the unidirectionality caused by the illustration of the words, a situation that would reveal an infantilisation of the audience (by giving them *chewed*, *digested*, *over-explained* scripts). Consequently, one of the struggles that was waged perpetually in rehearsals was against *tones* (vocal inflections), since underlining or explaining words through vocal modulation is understood as unnecessary if you take into account that they already mean something themselves (they carry meaning) and that, at most, what the *tones* end up doing is impoverishing the audience’s experience, since a major part of their function is removed: to unravel and/or dream the scene. *Tones* involve an implicit restriction of readings that, by excluding ambiguity, mutilate the polysemy (that is, they establish an authoritarian regime, a playful but manipulative display). All this stage/acting proclamation is explained literally through the figure of Nao/Trepnev: “Basically they do a kind of children’s theatre for adults, dressed up and putting on voices to leave everything well chewed for the audience, with all those tones, so that people know where to laugh, where the character is sad... as if the audience was unable to decide whether to laugh or cry” (Rigola, 2020: 5).

The tenth rule (“Win a fictitious contest where at the end of the show the audience must choose one of the actors/characters as an ideal flatmate”) acts as a barometer of behaviour that seeks to lead the cast to work consistently with the principles of coexistence to which they are accustomed (those that are often overlooked on stage in order to achieve greater intensity or expressive capacity). The idea is to put on stage beings that respond to prevailing social agreements in an unrestricted way; in this case, cultured, politically correct, socially civilised beings who gain the audience’s empathy by interacting while respecting their socio-behavioural framework.<sup>24</sup> Rigola explains that this rule should produce a sensation similar to that of a first date, putting the actors/actresses in a game that invites them to *defend their role* by taking care over the image they draw on their figures, a question that should lead them to try to develop an energetic quality that could be called careful, receptive, attentive and affable (this in broad strokes, as, obviously, there are different ways of assimilating the direction). The interesting thing about taking on this game/rule as a starting point is that when conflicts arise in an atmosphere populated by beings who avoid them, they appear on stage in a subtle, contradictory, resisted, oblique way, and impetuous *theatrical abruptness* (acting that is wilful, obvious and plagued by unexpected

24. Note it is assumed that cast and audience belong to an analogous or very similar social class.

changes) are replaced with performances that manage tensions in a gradual, subtle and sophisticated manner (in relation to the intention of mimesis in the daily life of the proposed stage language and, also, to the bourgeois zeal for the appearance projected).

A second block consists of rules no. 4 and 9, which this analysis understands as associated with epic theatre and performance art, respectively.

Rule no. 4 (“Breaking the fourth wall. Whenever possible, look into the audience’s eyes”) refers to the technique developed by Brecht directly, although — in my opinion — with a different objective. Here the breaking of the fourth wall is not about the drama avoiding a kind of alienating hypnotic effect towards the audience (identification), but rather a means that serves to bring the actors and actresses back to *reality* to prevent them becoming encapsulated in theatrical artifice. This is because *whenever possible, look into the audience’s eyes* connects them to their condition as agents of the show, a characteristic that must not be overlooked or forgotten. The didactic object of the technique is thus inverted, as it is the actresses and actors who must learn to feed on the audience’s eyes, since they, as always different and concentrated on discovering the scene, offer the possibility of establishing a new and *living* relationship every time they interact with them. Another thing that the audience contribute to actresses and actors is reminding them — as if they were a revealing mirror — the image of a temperance that does not seek or feel the duty to *show anything* and is content with the friendly exercise of offering open and receptive attention (listening).<sup>25</sup>

Finally, we have rule no. 9 (“Avoid looking at the ground or the sky at all times. Don’t not feign thinking”), which is understood to be seeking to avoid adding a fictional layer considered counterproductive for the proposed stage language. *Avoid looking at the ground or the sky at all times* (signifier of thinking) is established in correspondence with the premise that determines that the cast assumes that they have memorised the arranged fictional framework (meta-theatricality), so it is not possible to perform the action of thought, since this would be equivalent to delving into fiction (acting reflection or ignorance) when the aim is to avoid this. Hence, this rule is linked to performance art, since the basic aim is to resemble its appearance by adopting a certain region of its operating logic; that is, avoiding fiction and exploring the event (although, as has already been said, the theatrical development here is predetermined and established to be responded to; that is, it is *acted*, the event does not *happen* like an act that cannot be predicted and predetermined).<sup>26</sup> The objective of this rule is to strengthen the game of *over-illusion*, which seeks to render its endeavour to set out the fiction credible (the adaptation of Chekhov’s play) through *a description* that wants to pass itself off as an *event* (*over-illusion: disclosing* another greater *hidden* illusion).

In short, it is evident that although the rules of the *decàleg de joc* emerge with the purpose of articulating a type of acting that adjusts to a specific

25. Beyond the fact that this does not always happen, it is reasonable to think that in general the audience goes to the theatre for this.

26. In naturalism, in contrast, which attempts a *photographic copy of reality* (mechanical copy) in a theatrical display that does not assume its fictional character, portraying the action of thought is quite plausible.

stage language, it also has attributes that concern a more generic plane of practice. In this regard, a remarkable phenomenon produced by its implementation was managing to transfer complex ideas related to other frameworks of knowledge (political, philosophical, etc.) in a dynamic that made them simple and conducive to nurturing the acting (assuming specific objectives and intentions, acting from one's own impulses and vision of the world, etc.). We can say that the *decàleg* works as a kind of filter that oils the creative process by leading the debates to a mode of specific materiality designed to respond to some of the demands understood as fundamental to the contemporary stage. This, mainly, in relation to cinema overcoming the imitation of human actions produced by living beings — *mimesis praxeos* —, an issue that has demanded from theatre, in its role as a mirror of reality, greater *trustworthiness* in the moment of its (re)presentation (the current audience, accustomed to audiovisual performance, is reluctant to accept the *exaggerated* performances in the theatre; it is difficult for them to believe, they accept them only to the extent of their sympathy, tenderness, archaic grace or their value as cultural heritage). Thus, performances in theatre have had to slightly adjust their *volume*, often making use of technological implements such as microphones and projections that allow it to correct the distance experienced by the object of mimesis with respect to its referent due to the acting expansion of the voice and the body. Moreover, the emergence of cinema has made theatre turn to the exploration of its co-presential nature (as an exclusive artistic attribute of the performing arts — *spectacles vivants* —), that is: as it signifies “the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air of that space in which the performing and the spectating take place” (Lehmann, 1999: 17). The *decàleg* assumes the issues noted through a strategic symbiosis between elements of naturalism, epic theatre and performance art, and results in a mimetic display (naturalism) that tries to go unnoticed as such (performance art), open to the audience through a narrative language and the breaking of the fourth wall (epic theatre), which tries to establish a game of *over-illusion*.

### Stages of the Process

The rehearsals took place mostly with the team sitting around a table script in hand. The first thing done was to present the *decàleg de joc*. The dramatised readings were then carried out, a task that lasted from the first rehearsal to no. 15 (of a total of 24), where work began on the spatial layout (still with the script). New guidelines appeared here: 1) maximum of three actors sitting on the bench;<sup>27</sup> 2) maximum of two sitting at the table; 3) minimum of one standing (everyone could be standing at the same time). One factor that must be kept in mind is that initially it was considered doing the show with tiered seating on both sides (characteristic layout of La Villarroel

27. During rehearsals there was always a long table, a bench of the same length and some chairs. The arrangement for the readings was as follows: four members of the cast went to one of the sides of the table (sitting on the bench), two remained on the sides (sitting on chairs) and on the other side of the table were Rigola, Pujol and myself (plus anyone else who was at the rehearsal, such as the designer, producer, or guest).

theatre), so five of the rehearsals of the final phase were done with this arrangement (from no. 16 to 20). However, in rehearsal no. 21 — the third to be held in the theatre — this idea was discarded, as it meant an extra difficulty of adaptation for actors and actresses that did not provide anything considered significant in return (the other difficulty was dealing with the difference in size between the rehearsal room and the theatre, an issue that required enhanced acting and energy without the production failing to be recognised as part of *everyday life*). Finally, it was decided to perform the show in one direction.

In terms of dramaturgy, the acts were delivered almost weekly (five weeks of rehearsal for four acts)<sup>28</sup> and were modified until the last day of rehearsal. I sense that the fact that the script was never considered definitive has to do with the fact that Rigola's experience is more consistent with directing than with dramaturgy, something that meant that the script was always at the mercy of the stage direction and not the reverse (as in certain projects that set out to *perform the script*, faithfully respecting each stage direction and line written). Moreover, since the figure of director and playwright falls to the same person, the phenomenon of “perpetual adaptation” can be done more simply given that changes do not have to be agreed with anyone.

A moment approached in a special way was the “performance”<sup>29</sup> between Nao/Treplev and Mel/Nina (a moment when Mel/Nina speaks her ecologist monologue). This fragment was developed from various performance attempts prepared by its protagonists, who were guided on how to proceed with the team's comments. In parallel, they worked with the actress on the acting performance. The relationship between content and rhythm was detailed, trying, among others things, to do it at full speed “disregarding the audience”, or to do it slowly and steadily “explaining everything”. After going through various performance attempts and illustrative forms, one of its most sober versions was chosen: Mel/Nina saying the script calmly with a microphone facing the audience, while Nao/Treplev painted her arm *in crescendo* with a crayon. Thus, the idea of the performative was staged as the antithesis of the traditional (the aforementioned generational struggle).

In the last week of rehearsals, work was done on the devices used to complete the staging, planned from the second week. Its mission was to solve two specific issues: the lake in which the dramatic action takes place and the seagull killed in the second act. The lake was solved by projecting a video of a lake at the back of the stage (a screen on which the scripts written by Pau/Trigorin in the scene with Mel/Nina — mentioned above — were also projected, and the making of the origami seagull). For the murdered seagull, a symbolic exit was proposed by means of an origami made at the beginning of the play by Mel/Nina, which Nao/Treplev would later “murder” by submerging it in a glass of water. Added to these devices is the inclusion of the song “No puedo vivir sin ti”, by Coque Malla, performed by the cast to close

28. The last part of act four (two pages) arrived on 09/03/2020; opening week was 15/03/2020.

29. In Chekhov, the scene is the monologue of the first act that takes place in the garden setting.





Fig. 3. One of the performances tested. Photograph: Alba Pujol.

the play, which projects a sense of *festive melancholy* that is established as a representative framework of what has happened.

On the final rehearsal day (no. 24), the final scene between Mel/Nina and Nau/Treplev was worked on (the third scene of act four in Chekhov's play, when Nina returns to the lake house). The scene was played facing the audience (like almost the whole show) and more work was done, fundamentally, on avoiding *tones* (vocal inflections that explain emotion) and editing the script. The biggest difference perceived between the first and last rehearsals was that, the closer the premiere, the more attention was paid to certain technical aspects such as rhythm and vocal projection; acquiring, gradually, a greater awareness of the character of the staging. On 11 March 2020, Tania Brenlle (artistic director of La Villaroel theatre) gathered together the entire team at the beginning of the rehearsal to talk about the progress of Covid-19 and its possible consequences. The next day, when there were only three performances left with the audience plus the premiere, the total lockdown of Barcelona was decreed, which meant the end of all social activity and the consequent closure of theatres.



## Conclusions

Being present during a staging process carried out by theatre professionals and most with long careers yields a range of insights difficult to verify through writing and theoretical reflection (determinations subject to command of language), but that undoubtedly contain essential keys to understand theatre as an embodied, living, *ephemeral act of transfer*; a phenomenal corpus that emerges and is consumed at the very moment of its (re)presentation. This paper has attempted to overcome this difficulty through a descriptive analysis written as a record, a kind of testimony that has sought to comment not only on the categories put forward and explored (dramaturgical adaptation and stage language, themes, methodologies used, and stages of the process), but also to rescue the presence of the people involved and mention a wide range of materials and information (dates, places, objects, etc.) used to construct an *illustrative landscape* that overcomes the plane of theoretical abstraction and universal mediation, endeavouring not to bluntly exclude issues that could be considered “minor” or “banal”, as this would imply a censorship of the singularity of the object of analysis. This means understanding that the minutiae of the task, or the *crafts of the discipline*, are an inexorable part of theatre, that is, of the practice that must be investigated; they *are* also the object of study; they are part of its epistemic framework.

In this respect, we value the artistic importance of recording a specific theatre experience and the people, groups and institutions involved. In the paper, we have mentioned Àlex Rigola, Alba Pujol, Nao Albet, Melisa Fernández, Mònica López, Pau Miró, Xavi Sáez, Roser Vilajosana, Max Glaenzel, Tania Brenlle, the company Heartbreak Hotel and La Villarroel theatre. It only remains to mention Irene Vicente, company producer, and Jaume Feixa, technical head of the theatre (among many others).

This paper has sought to share the experience of having access to a process of rehearsals, understood as one of the fundamental moments of theatre, but an access – in general – normally restricted for outsiders. A rehearsal process is a moment of group intimacy, covered – to a certain degree – by an aura of secret activity. Normally, only people who make theatre know what goes on, although this knowledge, in general, is limited to their own experiences. But it almost never falls within the specificity of the activity carried out by so many others. The critical distance granted by the analysis of a rehearsal stage in which one is not involved, in which one does not have personal interests or responsibilities, is valued when you consider the learning benefits that can be derived from an observation that draws on attributes of this distance; namely, a kind of panoramic view that, to a certain degree, becomes *detached* – not to say “objective” – (a detachment that contrasts with the affective involvement undergone by all the participants). The aim has been to emphasise the benefits of the experience as a *non-participating observer*, considering it a space little explored, but fruitful for the development of theatrical practice and research.

Moreover, we value the fact that when witnessing a moment little given to illustrative exploration (the rehearsals), not only are its contents (what

is observed) the object of a particular or unprecedented study but also the methodological structure of this paper, which has followed a path that goes from the development of ideas to their realisation, from the general to the particular. We began with the dramaturgical adaptation *and* the stage language, as a general framework of ideas for the development of the staging, to then move on to the specificity of the themes. Similarly, we explored the methodologies used to then explore the phases of the process, thereby approaching the task of staging from a plane open to a greater level of conjectures and theoretical abstraction (methodologies used), until one that appears almost like a pure description of events (phases of the process). The idea has been to establish a structure that to a certain extent seeks to be “globalising” to thereby capture the different dimensions involved in a creative process. Moreover, the delimitation of the framework of analysis has been established in line with what is developed by the process of staging observed. Hence, for example, the acting field is one of the most developed issues in the text, since it operates as the central axis of the production (an issue that Rigola himself raises).

On the other hand, although the rescue of the particularity of the staging process observed has been emphasised, the general value of this rescue is appreciated in the fact that, based on its specificity, we can refer to a broader spectrum of contemporary stage practice. In this regard, the process of poetic hybridisation observed is remarkable, since it refers to a particular, but not exclusive, type of strategy. In this case, the components that have been identified and studied go back to great references, since it is an aesthetic current (naturalism), a poetics (epic theatre) and an artistic discipline (performance art) that have generated an influence that transcends the frontiers of their times (the prevailing issues to which they responded at the time). In an exercise of dissemination or deconstruction, elements that have been linked or attributed to naturalism, epic theatre and performance art have been detected in the unique and multidimensional body that is the phenomenal set of the stage. This group has been called narrative naturalism here, in an attempt to establish a name that is easy to recognise, specific and representative.

Similarly, it has been considered that the poetic hybridisation proposal observed responds to a sceptical/eclectic spirit that to a certain extent speaks of its time: a mixture of elements unrelated or uncommitted to their sources, which operate with a personal, private purpose. In this case, the approach has been to establish a game of over-illusion, a reduplication of the fiction that seeks, by expounding one of the layers of fiction (the circumstances relating to the adaptation of Chekhov's play), to generate a fictional framework that goes unnoticed, invisible. It is a framework that appeals to an aesthetic of the bareness of artifices, an issue that is basically related to the question of representation. Hence, this free version of Chekhov's *The Seagull* distances itself from its referent, making use of its content to convey a piece that ends up talking about itself (*re-presentation*). This has been one of the points on which criticism has focused the most and has generated divided opinions about the value of the version presented.

Within these opinions, it is noted that the tautological development available does not reach a level of passionate intensity similar to that attributed to Chekhov's playwriting. Elia Tabuenca, for example, points out in her review (*espectaculosbcn.com*) that at the end the show the feeling that remains is that of having seen more of a "chat" or a "colloquium" than a theatre play,<sup>30</sup> a logical question if the narrative display used and the passionate self-control ideology portrayed are taken into account (subjects that exercise retention rather than expression of passions). However, this may also be related to a structural issue. Because, although the stage ensemble presents — under the reading proposed by this paper — a mixture of diverse and even divergent poetics and aesthetic currents, the way in which its elements have been arranged may not have generated a sufficient level of contradictions or oppositions that allow the intensity of the staging to be raised from its own structural framework (beyond the content concerned), a lack of friction that can correspond to a theatrical flow that is too flat, direct, calm, impassive. Perhaps the arranged poetic assembly has ended up being conjugated in a way that is too consistent, *un-conflicted*. Something similar can be alleged about the *decàleg de joc*, which establishes a certain redundancy in its aim to produce a performance that is not perceived as such (naturalistic/performative aesthetic), which is capable of avoiding artifice on stage, and being real. It is a staging that by referring to the idea of *the real* as the everyday can lead to a lack of power if the spirit of the actors and actresses is not right. In this respect, there is a risk of irregularity (precisely one of the problems that the methodological work tries to remedy, in this case solved mainly through the *decàleg de joc*). In the rehearsals there was a significant difference between a "good" and "bad" scene. A "bad" scene stood out for its impassiveness ("correct" performances as a portrayal of an idea of the contemporary everyday but where it seems that "nothing happens") and the "good" scene as one that can create an atmosphere of intimacy inhabited by compact passionate forces that shine in the exercise of their contraction and subtlety. In any case, it is difficult to imagine a methodological strategy that does not contain its own risks, especially if it falls within the field of art.

For the main objective of this paper, which has been to understand the staging period of a theatrical experience (and not its stage performance), the consistency of materials and methodological strategies presented in the creation process observed are highly valued, since it is considered that they have been communicated in a clear and specific way, particularly in the methodological field with the *decàleg de joc*, for example, which establishes them as a new source of materials for theatrical research and creation, available for analysis and the reference in their quality as an archive of the contemporary. Finally, it is worth highlighting once again the proposal of poetic hybridisation observed (if that is what it is), since this has allowed the renewal of the elements appearing at the crossroads of coexistence, a renewal that in its projection, in terms of achieving greater clarity, can become what may be considered one of the new forms or poetics of theatre. In other words, that

30. <<https://www.espectaculosbcn.com/critica-la-gavina-grec-2021>> [last accessed: 10/03/22].



Fig. 4. The performance. Photograph from: <[https://www.ara.cat/cultura/rigola-gavina-txekhov-villaroel\\_1\\_1015081.html](https://www.ara.cat/cultura/rigola-gavina-txekhov-villaroel_1_1015081.html)> [Last accessed: 10/3/2022].

with hybridisation an element is produced that is sufficiently emancipated from its references to be able to show new territories for stage exploration.

Undoubtedly, the challenge pending is still to create or reformulate strategies of analysis, methodological tools and concepts that allow us to more precisely distinguish the factors involved in the contemporary performing arts. Thus, although this can come to rise up as an indescribable chimera at the time of the performance — a kind of amalgamation of all the scenes that have existed and exist, for example —, it can always be examined more closely in the sphere of investigation, construction and reiteration that, in general, implies a staging process, an exceptional laboratory-type space for observation, learning and research.



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