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Moving Dialogue: PART I – Illicit Dances

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“I remember we used to steal reviews from the American Library to know about choreographers like Twyla Tharp and Lucinda Childs”. The controversial statement made by choreographer Vava Stefanescu during Moving Dialogue exchange reflects upon the awkward subversions she and her peers dealt with to have access to some information about the international dance scene during the Communist regime in Romania. Recalling a time in which many books were prohibited and the fear of asking questions prevailed in the psychology of the Romanian society, Stefanescu declares that modern and contemporary dance were clandestine and reserved for the “after hours” classrooms and improvisations given by the teachers who studied abroad. It was in that concealed setting that her teachers showed the students training techniques from Western choreographers, including

Martha Graham.

The historical restrictions imposed on Romanian dance can be illustrated, for instance, with the fact that during the regime ballet schools worked under the Soviet model and in accordance to its papers on how a ballet school should perform its activities. Given the circumstances, it is not unusual that the rupture with classical dance would emerge not only as a reaction and refusal of a dance tradition, but also as the rejection of the educational system imposed by the Communist regime established in 1947 and its operative influence in framing Romanian artistic referential scope. The regime’s fall occurred with the execution of president Nicolae Ceaucescu in 1989. In the Romanian Constitution of 1991 – which was amended in 2003 for the integration with the European Union in 2007 –, the country was proclaimed a democratic and social Republic.

The [National Dance Center Bucharest](#), in which Stefanescu currently works as artistic director was founded in 2004. The CNDB (from the original Centrul Național al Dansului) is the only institution working to promote contemporary dance in the country. Stating on their website that “the Romanian contemporary choreographers and performers were much more known abroad than in their own country”, one of the challenges faced by the institution is to form an audience for the contemporary dance works.



Photo: Courtesy of Madalina Dan, Thumbnail photo: Cosmin Manolescu

Romania to develop bigger dance productions – projects are created with budgets orbiting around US\$ 1,000 –, making it impossible for choreographers to employ a cast of dancers for long periods of rehearsal. Lastly, the political content and the subversive nature of many works are also aspects in coherence with the conceptualism in Romania.

There are no romantic abstractions in totalitarian regimes and oppressive political systems. After all, to forbid other dance aesthetics could be merely a way to avoid any foreign influences over the country. Still, in referring to dance as “clandestine”, Vava Ștefănescu activates an abstract space to reflect on the illicitness of movement, the unauthorized power of dancing and the political force intrinsic to freeing the body of accepted social patterns and obedient behaviour. Her initial statement allows us to understand the perspective Romanian choreographers and dancers are coming from and makes us imagine how their political history can be challenged in turning out to be a key for a fruitful original scene.

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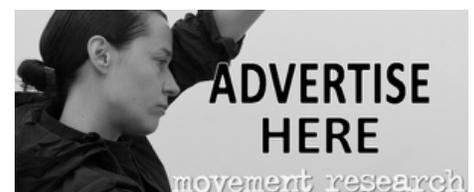
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