Bizarre Dialogues with the Director Radu Afrim and the Scenographer Irina Moscu

Interview by Ioana PETCU*

Abstract: The end of January in Iaşi is like the beginning of January. Meaning that it is also very cold. Director Radu Afrim is in rehearsals at Teatrul Naţional with Măcelăria lui Iov (Job’s Butchery) by Fausto Paravidino and he is accompanied by his scenographer, Irina Moscu. They are on the fifth collaboration after Naïve, Completely Frivolous Details in the Life and Death of the Audience (Teatrul Maghiar de Stat in Timişoara), Suntrack (Teatrul Maria Filotti in Brăila), Everything’s Alright between Us (Teatrul Naţional in Bucharest) and The Retro Bird Hits the Block and Falls on The Hot Sand (Teatrul Naţional in Târgu-Mureş).

Key words: stage directing, stage design, Romanian contemporary theatre.

It is Sunday, it is jazzy at Treaz & Nu, although I think there could be room there for some Björk, of course. The first to arrive is Irina, with a cold floating steam melting around her tea cup. Then appears Radu – undercover, wearing a cap and a foulard which leave only his eyes free and make him look like an Eskimo.

Ioana Petcu: Who speaks more in the theatre? The director or the scenographer? And when I say “theatre”, I don’t mean only the stage and rehearsals.

(And all around the table got silent)

Radu Afrim: …Logically, not the scenographer.

* Lecturer, PhD, Drama Department, George Enescu National University of Arts, Iaşi.
Irina Moscu: It depends on what language or what kind of vocabulary you report. From a visual point of view, the scenographer is the one “speaking” more in the theatre. A clever director knows this thing and he shall maximally use the visual language offered by the scenographer to deliver his directing message. If they potentiate one another, the result is an optimal one. That is happening in successful cases... with happy-end.

I.P.: There are directors, for example, that not necessarily have the gift of speaking and then the scenographers are those who “cover” them.

R.A.: The directors who do not communicate through words must have a hard life with the actors. I confess that sometimes I would like the scenographer to communicate with the people on stage instead of me. But I haven’t yet met a scenographer having enough time to stay too much on stage. When they have assistants, they stick around me taking notes – somehow hidden, discrete, obedient. The scenographer has work to do in places where the director rarely walks. And if he does it, it’s because he has got into a production crisis or something like that. Then the director comes down as an absolute leader in the workshops, to see in what phase the building yard is.

I.M.: The workshops – unseen ones – and all the technical part behind the stage are in our subordination. There happens the magic of the stage.

I.P.: Radu Afrim is an architect – shall we say undiscovered?!, because the preliminary examination at the faculty of architecture was not meant for him – and Irina Moscu is an architect tainted by theatre. She taught at Ion Mincu University, as well. Starting from your situations, I wonder, maybe a little childishly, whether art can only be made at crossroads, by contaminations between different areas, just because it can’t live in solitude?

I.M.: The art can’t live alone and the theatre can’t survive by itself, if it didn’t consider the other arts, too. My story with the theatre commences in my childhood. My father was a scenographer at the Romanian television, in the golden age of communism. He was carrying me through backdrops, through
the wardrobe storage – where, sometimes, the wardrobe keeper ladies gave me a little dress, usually the most colorful one, on my demand. Perhaps the taste for wardrobe storages has remained hidden until I rediscovered it on the movie sets, where I managed to make a few scenography assistance works, at the time when I still was a student at Architecture. But during the Master studies at UNATC, working with the people from the directing department, I fell in love with theatre. All happened naturally and immediately. But indeed, coming back at your question, my pathway has been a natural one. I finished the Plastic Arts High-School Nicolae Tonitza, the Advertising Graphics department. Then, in need for new and concrete things, I graduated the Architecture Faculty at Ion Mincu. My Master degree in Scenography came out as a crowning of my curiosity for other arts which might have a use for the vocabulary I gained in those six years of Architecture studies. And from the need for a tale…

*Job’s Butchery*, National Theater from Iași, 2017, ©Radu Afrim
I.P.: The architect’s eye is recognizable in Irina’s stage sets. There is something from the geometry, from the obsession for proportion, for the straight line, but also something masculine, something lightsome or grandiose, as the things are displayed on the architect’s work board/wide screen. Does it help, Irina, this first profession of yours? Or was it a challenge, a rule that you had to break?

I.M.: It helped me and it still does, no doubt about that. It’s easy for me to work and think with and in space, because I have had this practice for so long. But it also can turn into a barrier which I’ve felt I need to break. Maybe just because I’ve been working with Radu for the last year, it was a good opportunity to experiment organic constructions, too, less aesthetical in architectural sense, perhaps more genuine.

R.A.: That moment was named Everything’s Alright between Us – the spectacle at TNB (Teatrul Naţional in Bucharest).

I.M.: Yes, at that moment Helmut Stürmer called me to say: “Irina, I congratulate you for succeeding to dissolve that frontier between the rigid, architectural object and what is organic.”

R.A.: The next question would be if he liked the result.

I.P.: The answer seems obvious to me, because he worked with you afterwards.

R.A.: Yes, but after that, she got back to architecture, in a way. In Timişoara, in Târgu Mureş where it was quite a block, in Brăila… Irina has the unique gift of presenting her projects in an incredibly compelling manner. She has albums which she makes for each project. There are scenographers who come with a mere sketch… Well, I think that only Stürmer still makes scale models now. Irina has, instead, some albums which mesmerize you. Although this is kind of a trap for a director, as well. Many times what is in the project is not always fitted with reality. I also take in account impossibilities and
deficiencies in Romanian theatres. In Bucharest, at TNB, I had got another play started, with an impeccable stage set. It was *Patima roşie (The Red Passion)*, which from the roundtable debate, all of a sudden, I didn’t like it anymore. Then I wanted another text, by Jean-Luc Lagarce, and Irina sat again at the table with us, starting to draw sketches. And all these just to change my mind once again, to change that text with that by Dorota Masłowska (*Între noi totul e bine - Everything’s Alright between Us*) and, because it already was quite late, I made a blend of what she already had done and what I needed for the text. It was a pile of organic things there and a wall behind. I told Irina, at some point, that I was aware that it was not the stage set she had dreamt about…

**I.M.:** But I liked it! The text there required such a conception – it was about a Poland after the war, in ruins.

**R.A.:** It was functional, it was a kind of installation, including the stuff already available in the theatre, and I wouldn’t have imagined that Irina will have ever accepted such a thing. Or even I, as long as I had been in an institution with money, it wouldn’t have been a situation for me to “collect” things. I do not know if Irina was or was not appreciated for her scenographic idea by her architect colleagues.

**I.M.:** There were sundry opinions back then.

**R.A.:** You know, there is a problem: an architect coming in theatre doesn’t necessarily think about the scenic situations which need to be served. I suppose that for him or her, the aesthetics comes first, after all a stage set doesn’t have to confront an earthquake, and if it has to be a minimalistic one, then it is even better. But those architects will talk about this with Irina while at a coffee, and Irina, being a person of unique discretion – won’t let the insides reach my ears. And this is how I told something about the human being Irina, as well.

**I.P.:** And as some features have already been shaped of the relation between Irina Moscu and Radu Afrim, I come now to the question aiming at the relation
between the director and the scenographer. In the history of theatre – neatly written down, as we like to have it – there were born some important friendships: Patrice Chereau and Richard Peduzzi, Frank Castorf and Aleksandar Denić, the indigenous Silviu Purcârete and Dragoș Buhagiar, and others, as well. Some others prefer the monopoly – Bob Wilson. Is there a need for common lines, for similarities between the two team mates? Or are the disjunctions those that accomplish the relation?

I.M.: Even if we would agree until a certain point, the contradictory discussions are inevitable. There’s a need for starting conflicts for new things to appear, the unexpected, the astonishing etc. Radu has been very generous with me and has let me imagine what I considered to be good for the spectacle and from that point we chose together. I prepare several solutions for the spectacle, solutions as different as possible. I like to believe that by the multiple variants I show, I can offer the director more freedom and flexibility in speech, in his choices. I am preoccupied that the director is able to build his ideas in the space I have penciled out.

R.A.: I interfere on details and in regard to their functionality. I confess that sometimes I prefer to save some money for the budget, due to the fact that I am unpredictable and there is a possibility that, in the second phase of rehearsals, I could get some new ideas that also have their cost. I don’t always give to the scenographer a very detailed idea about space, especially when there is a house involved. Because the house itself, it’s not an idea. I give him or her some hints to start from. I do not work with Irina on metaphor-scenographies, or on symbolic-spaces. Because the texts I have worked with her have spoken about objective worlds. Well, so to speak. I won’t get into details. In Brăila I had a project started, too, but Irina has managed to already finish the stage set. It was set on the stage, too beautiful to be changed. I proposed that we change the text, but keep the stage set. And not only did the stage set remain as it was, but it also worked very well. In fact, I wrote a play for that stage set, too. I made documentary theatre. In those days I collaborated the most consistently with Irina because we did research work together. I was with her in all villages in the Tulcea area and around Brăila, searching for local
music. In abandoned villages, with three old men on the bench in front of the house. We drank wine with them; they delighted us. It was fabulous. Both of us were fascinated and heavyhearted by the same thing. A forgotten world that sounded well. With women crying at the gate because, ultimately, crying is music, too.

I.P.: Irina, it seems that you have tricked Radu.

I.M.: Yes… maybe… or maybe Radu has tricked me.

R.A.: Our video documents were projected on the upper side, but the classic screen was split by some vertical lines which got downside and passed from one side to another. These are fine details which are important for Moscu and they are appreciated by a competent eye. When it comes to minimalism on stage, you are not allowed to mistake. If you do video mapping, it could be an enormous disturbance if an edge is not covered. I wouldn’t start the rehearsal until there is adjusted the last detail of a video image that interferes on the stage set. Irina has an elegant manner to intervene when things aren’t working well, let’s say, not even on the fifth try. I react more impulsively.

I.P.: Can a scenographer save a directing? To cover it, to dissemble its weaknesses?

R.A.: Basically, it’s a bad thing, but when somebody saves someone it’s always a good thing. I had spectacles which were not exactly what I wanted when I had started working on them, but they still looked flawless. I have seen spectacles that only had scenography. The actors come aware very well about this problem, they can feel suppressed by scenography. But in few cases they will denounce this inconvenient. I’ve seen spectacles in Germany – stage settings at important theatres – having an incredible look, but yet they were null. In such cases, I think the directors even think for a moment that they were saved by scenographers. They believe they were geniuses. They would have their signature on the set stage, too, if they could.
I.P.: When I asked the question, I had in mind firstly the model of opera spectacles. In foreign countries, as well as in our country, but especially abroad where the budgets for shows are satisfying, the scenic image can be baroque, spectacular, and you may still remain with a great nonsense about the directing outlook.

R.A.: If you have a great voice on stage out there, I don’t know if the public will want more. At the Opera, the public is very conservative. The more innovative you are, the more you will derange. You have a diva on the scene, the people go to see her. The problems begin when the diva is missing, because if there is no diva, there is nothing.

I.P.: Then art becomes a mere product for sale.

R.A.: But, on the other hand, there comes to mind Romeo Castellucci who made opera spectacles and, besides the fact they looked excellent, they had
consistency, voices and emotion. And it was something organically new, not just by costumes and kitsch lasers. In Europe, when something is experimented, it is done until the end, all stereotypes are overthrown. As long as there are crazy directors… aesthetical revolution is not when at the opera (or theatre) you dress the soloists in blue denims. Unfortunately, many directors mean exactly this thing by updating. I think I have accomplished a correct update with Năpasta (The Affliction). A not quite successful play that I have rewritten without changing a single word.

I.P.: If we reached this knot, look, I cut it off: how does Romanian scenography relate to the international context? Does it exist, is it visible in Europe? Because if we consider the case of Helmut Stürmer or of Dragoș Buhagiar, we could find that they are punctual situations.

I.M.: I don’t think so, I haven’t seen a clear line of our scenography abroad. Although we aspire to an international status and we always keep an eye there, I think we are somehow isolated. But the scenographer’s art is not visible if it performs alone, the scenographer’s performances are filtered by the director’s ones, as well. There are cases of very talented scenographers, who hadn’t enjoyed fruitful directorial collaborations, remaining thus in the shadow. Then there is also a problem of communication, of inexistence of some rostrums where the scenographers and directors from various places of the world meet; a socialization network, a virtual place where, for example, a scenographer makes proposals and others see and accept them. I don’t know if the studentships and accommodations during the faculty studies help you to become known abroad. Perhaps the connections are still made directly, if you have an entrance to such things. It is a matter of luck, timing, conjuncture.

R.A.: Well, I haven’t ever brought a foreign scenographer. When I worked in Luxembourg I brought with me Mihai Păcurar, when I worked in München, I took Stürmer. Let’s not forget the Romanian scenographers are developing in quite primitive technical conditions, so far. In the West, the theatre facilities are quite different. We have few technical competitive stages. Fairly good Western scenographers have begun to come and work in our country. And they
can handle the situation, they don’t fail. It’s easier for Hungarian directors to call for collaborators from Hungary. But I don’t think that the feeling of isolation Irina is talking about is something that belongs to Romania only. A French director will work with a French scenographer, too. And I would say that in Europe the partnerships, the theatrical couples are more loyal than ours. Our system emboldens the “adultery” in director-scenographer couples. Young Romanians learned directing assistance at Bob Wilson – this may be considered a lucky chance, even if Bob Wilson won’t promote them too much. But it does matter on a Curriculum Vitae. The spectacles where young Romanian scenographers accomplish “wow” things aren’t often seen in an international context. At most, they reach FNT (Festivalul Național de Teatru – National Theatre Festival), in a few country tours… I was in France with Boala familiei M (The Illness of M Family), and the scenographer Velica Panduru, which is half Parisian anyway, was quickly noticed, she got other collaborations in France, yet she works more with our people. I don’t know precisely why the Romanian scenographer doesn’t cross the border, and when he or she does it, it’s more like a solitary and contextualized case. And with Romanian directors, as well.

I.P.: If I am to come back to the relation director-scenographer, I know that Irina works and knows from the inside the new wave of theatre directors in our country. You have collaborated with Radu Iacoban, Andrea Gavriliu, Bobi Pricop, Andrei Măjeri and others. Is it also a choice, perhaps not very aware, between generations?

I.M.: Perhaps it is a choice between generations, too, why not? I work well with them because they are more open minded, more permissive. I don’t know if this has any connection with my experience or theirs, I mean we are somehow in a phase of endeavor, yet. I am also attracted by their desire to experiment, to do something new, to try everything that seems interesting to them. For example, the collaboration with Bobi Pricop at Luceafărul Theatre in Iași, for which he was nominated for a UNITER prize, is a good example of experimental installation for which we dared to headlong without exactly knowing where it could go. But it is not a rule of mine to work with the young
generation of directors. Also in my relation with Radu I haven’t felt any constraint.

I.P.: How are these big restless kids of the stage seen from the scenographer’s point of view? I refer strictly to the new wave of Romanian directing.

I.M.: Some of them gained more and more noticeability and I’ve observed that they are more often called to stage plays in state theatres. They are not too many, but as many as they are, they’re credited… and a couple of them, very promising.

R.A.: They need a start, a support from someone. Then they need a good scenographer, a video artist if possible, a composer, a choreographer, an assistant… I am ironic now.

I.P.: It means they need everything!

R.A.: Yes, everything. Look, when I made my debut, I couldn’t afford everything. It is an advantage to make yourself noticed, to be able to ask for all you need. Some of them are talented, but they go astray somewhere, somehow. And today it is hard for some to get a contract. And if they do it, it’s on little money. But this is what they do for a living and this thing shouldn’t happen. I worked on very little money in the beginning, but it’s not fair. Some theatre managers choose to return the money to the mayor’s office at the end of the year, instead of investing that money in young people.

I.P.: Irina, what disgruntles you at a director?

R.A.: Well, I go out for a cigarette during this question, so that Irina may be objective in her answer.

I.M.: I won’t tell, because if Radu finds out what annoys me, he will intentionally do that thing.
I.P.: Alright, I will pass the ball to the other side of the net: Radu, what annoys you at a director?

R.A.: I think the list is long enough, but I would mention the relation of a director with the scenographer. For example, you try many times to keep your calm and you suddenly wake up in the middle of a storm you induced. It’s very irritating. Not during, but after the event. Annoying are the mornings without ideas – and they exist, - and you vent your fussiness on the poor actor, blaming him that he doesn’t get the things right… The routine rehearsals are annoying, because I am not a man of rehearsals. I am the man of incessant changes. I would like to erase what was yesterday and make something new. In his relation with the scenographer, the director too often risks to be annoying. But in the evening, after the rehearsal, they can go together for some wine and talk about the world outside the theatre, they can go to a street protest together and the things becalm. The relation is restarting.

I.M.: From my point of view, the relation with the director becomes annoying when the latter thinks he’s omniscient and he dictates how the stage set shall look. When he takes away your freedom to imagine an original space, sketching some very strict lines from the start. I am convinced that, aesthetically speaking, the answer of each scenographer would be different, although the theme is the same. However, I confronted a similar situation and it was difficult for me, frustrating, and the result hasn’t satisfied me. I put it in the category of exercises, of those episodes you might encounter and you must cope with… hoping to be the last of its kind. In my case assuredly it was the last!

I.P.: Radu, what scares you in your relation with a scenographer?

R.A.: It’s hard to answer… we all got along well. Once I wanted to promote a young actress that had graduated her scenography studies in Bucharest. I was persuaded by a scale model of her that I had noticed on a contest. But when we had the work started together, I saw she hadn’t recognize the materials, she lacked the basic elements of her job. I was frightened and I brought an
experienced scenographer lady, Alina Herescu. I proposed to the young scenographer to be an assistant, but she refused. Although I don’t hold too much account on recommendations, there were happy situations as well, when at Caramitru’s proposal, I have discovered a very fine scenographer – Vanda Maria Sturdza. I did with her Năpasta (The Affliction) and Când ploaia se va opri (When the Rain Stops Falling). I’m scared by the young scenographers, their diploma licenses, which look like those of the 1980s. It scares me the school they attend… For me, although I make a social theatre, the aesthetical part is very important. Other people make social theatre on a black background. Or in front of a video screen. I’m not interested in such things. I don’t see myself in position of supplying a school, a visual education, a cultural background. And thus, we are in the situation of counting the very few good scenographers that we have. Yes, this thing scares me, too: a young scenographer gets on the bourgeois side very quickly. I mean he very soon goes for the guild’s appraisal, goes for the criticism’s prizes and ceases his endeavor. The same danger is for directors and actors. But if you are a crazy artist, who aims to barefacedly speak the issues, then you should shield yourself up against the warm temptations. You give a skip to the warm and go straight to the hot.

I.P.: In Iaşi, you deal with a text of Fausto Paravidino – Măcelăria lui Iov (Job’s Butchery). So, how is the work with the text in front of you, Irina?

I.M.: Reading it with the eye of a scenographer, it has attracted me by the fact it goes on manifold levels, it requires changes of sets, some of them very quick and almost impossible to be done on the stage. Meanwhile, we had to modify all kind of things (including the spectacle itself, which moved from Sala Mare (The Big Hall) of the theatre to Sala Cub (The Cube Hall). We adjusted the stage set for another hall and the conformation has been transformed, the perspective on the space. I liked that by making the plantation on stage, we gave up many stage props. There remained an almost empty space. It’s beautiful, it’s challenging, but it’s more difficult to work. The creativity is a must. Several props left unused, we keep trying to use and to re-semanticize
Sometimes frustration appears. And after frustration, the new good ideas come… It is a natural cycle.

R.A.: The frustration appears because for an entire month, director, actor, scenographer, ultimately, nobody sees anything on the scene. There’s a work on the stage set and you, meanwhile… use a wash bowl… Such a situation inhibits you. I know from the drawings the stage set is superb, but I wouldn’t mind at all to see that a hiatus has been created between an aesthetical construction and the acting on the scene.
I.M.: Radu always finds solutions this way. In this spectacle we aimed to use also a lot of video projections, as an element coming to dress the scenography with another meaning, another goal, another cloth, potentiating it.

R.A.: I don’t even know what is the video amount we will have. I told Cozlac to experiment. I let him do this on my show. Now we work on the acting side. Two actors at a time on the empty space. As director, you must be really interested in the two actors, for sharing 4 hours a day together. I have worked in such a situation in München, where I had two men on the stage and an empty space. The situation itself gives you some thrills. In the beginning of my career, I worked having almost nothing, too, and later I came to have baroque sets, as it was in *Herr Paul* (signed by the scenographer Iuliana Vâlsan). If today I am again in front of an essentialized, clean space, I give to myself all kind of tests to demonstrate I can manage as well as at my career’s start, when I had almost nothing. I made spectacles with suffocatingly much furniture – *Tihna (The Leisure)*, for example. But here the script was requiring this. For his conception, Adrian Damian got the scenography prize in Hungary. In the spectacle in Iaşi, beside the nothingness (and nothingness is too much said) – Irina was talking about, we want to use organic matters. Meat chunks. Bloody beef. Real bones. The kind of bones that get putrescent, for the actors’ desperation.

I.P.: We will have an André Antoine with *Les Bouchers* when Théâtre d’Art has brought the un hackneyed on stage in 1888 – meat chunks…

I.M.: There will be a few organic elements, too, which will break the cleanliness of the space, but it isn’t a naturalist set stage… no way!

R.A.: With Paravidino, the characters survive by consuming animals. His approach on The Book of Job is quite vague, a reason for which I don’t insist upon cultural parallelisms in the spectacle. Iaşi is a city fairly impregnated with religion. I hope that with faith, too. This thing is not verifiable. And is not my purpose, either. The first spectacle I made here was about some angels falling from the heavens. Paravidino is a leftist author, an artist having doubts
and asking himself questions about faith, maybe he is even an atheist, I didn’t ask him. He’s got this right, doesn’t he? The play sets issues not only about faith. It is a play about treason, about fragility of relations we thought to be eternal. The social theme is the relationship of the small manufacturer with the banks, providers, pawnbrokers. It’s a lucid sight on capitalism. It’s a mildly political play, built around a love story.

I.P.: Why not a text more classical for Iași – after Shakespeare and Ibsen, haven’t you thought, at least in your most hidden dreams, about Apus de soare (Sundown), Luceafărul (The Morning Star), Letopiseț (Chronicle)? Or perhaps a Viziune luminată (Enlightened Vision)…

R.A.: It’s true that I would make a Blecher again… and in the same time I would make a spectacle about the world of today’s Iași. Not only about the effigies of its past. The people are too stuck in this. Why Paravidino? Because his time has come.

I.P.: Will you speak, Radu, on the text’s foundation about your obsessive themes? About solitudes, suffering and the fragility of man?

R.A.: All is about fragility. The obsessive image of this text is the dolphin. And the meat. And the money. The empire built by banknotes is also extremely fragile. In The Book of Job the prosperity was converted into disaster. A bizarre bet of the divine with the devil. Arguable.

I.P.: You have in the play’s cast actors who you have worked with before and some new ones. Those you already have worked with (Ada Lupu, Ionuț Cornilă), do you think they have ripen since you left them on Femeia mării (The Lady from the Sea)?

R.A.: Cornilă is an extremely necessary actor in this company which lacks youth. The crazy young people are lacking. I always do my best to take them out of their convenience zone, out of the working handiness zone. This is a constructive thing for some and inhibits the others.
I.P.: How goes the struggle with those you impel forward: Irena Boclincă, Andrei Varga, Doru Maftei?

R.A.: Irena is very sturdy, she comes from over the river Prut (Bassarabia), she knows what means the desperation of being a very good actress with nothing to work. And to strive to subsist by this job. With the two students, the things are different. They didn’t know, before the work at this spectacle, how the reality of the stage is. They had an idyllic idea of the conventional theatre. They imagined the characters are made out of little words. They didn’t hear of blood and flesh. I think the school is very soft.

I.P.: The costume conception belongs to you. What have you started from this time in making the sketches? From the text, from the actor, from the director’s requirements?

I.M.: Usually I work with all in parallel, but I don’t take account about a rule. It depends on how I am inspired. Again, Radu lets me at large and waits for me to propound something… he wants to see it on stage, not on paper. And there I also find out if what I have imagined works or not. Everything springs from “the stomach”. Nothing is that much scheduled when it comes to costumes. I can’t say the same about the stage set. There I prepare everything in good time, to the undermost detail. And for the costumes I prepare early sketches, but it happens that what I’ve imagined on paper doesn’t fit with reality. Many times I am inspired by a cloth found in the dressing storage, or the silhouette of an actor in rehearsals, the situations on the stage, a painting, a photo, a splash of color… the list is endless.

I.P.: The actor’s body can inspire or inhibit a costume designer?

I.M.: Of course! We communicate with our body… It’s a mute dialogue, but it exists and can induce very different reactions. Nevertheless, it’s still a challenge to find available solutions for each actor.
I.P.: To reveal the Afrimian dream, what ingredients will scenography combine: the bewildering, the virtual, the grotesque?

I.M.: The subtlety. If on other enactments we have worked with much stronger images, more obvious ones, or if in the past we have accomplished great constructions, this time we will go more into abstract. And emotion. We leave more room for the actor, without hiding him after stage sets and spectacle props.

R.A.: The stage set leaves room for something else. For somewhere else. It’s always this way to me. We’re still on building yard. But I can see the final image.

I.M.: We hope the stage set to be soon present, because we haven’t met it yet and we all are curious about what it could induce.

R.A.: Yes, you know, I am like a child saying “Now! I want it now! I want Santa Claus to come right now!” Any director would like to work since the first day with the stage set, but such a thing is not possible in Romania. It happened to me only once, but there’s a clear explanation. I’m talking about Fetița din bolul peștelui auriu (Girl in the Goldfish Bowl), where I worked with Dragoș Buhagiar at Teatrul German de Stat in Timișoara. I had been in München, where the project had me rasped enough, and concomitantly I had been working with Buhagiar on e-mail. He had been asking me what I want, sending me pictures. A week after my return in Timișoara, in the gymnasium on the outskirts of the city, rented by the theatre, there was the stage set… detailed to the last book laid on the bookshelf. It was something like “wow!” I had five very good actors and I had been playing endlessly in an alluring stage set. The sunshine got in through the windows of that gymnasium. In Germany they made a plywood scale set for me. Even a car made of plywood. Including functional headlights.

I.P.: The Butchery will be of Le Corbusier, Antoni Gaudi or Ieoh Ming Pei?
I.M.: None of them. It’s more minimalistic than Le Corbusier.

R.A.: Though we have a few elements that may resemble Le Corbusier.

I.M.: You think about windows of the Cathedral of Ronchamp. Yes, true…

R.A.: It’s a Corbusier mixed with Mondrian. And with Cozlaque.

I.P.: Irina, after *Pisica verde (The Green Cat)* at Luceafărul Theatre, what has the January frost brought for you in Iaşi?

I.M.: A new challenge with Radu Afrim on the helm… A new type of aesthetics in the spectacle. I am curious and also enthusiastic to see the final result. I am hopeful!

I.P.: In a somehow naïve game, let’s see how much you close in your options. So I propose you to choose your next collaborator. On the list are: Antony (and the Johnsons / Anohni), Sia, Björk and Bob Dylan.

I.M.: There’s no doubt, Björk. I have been following her for a long time and it’s good that she still tries new forms and succeeds. I like that she almost entirely departed from the commercial zone, because she self-supports, producing by herself. She seems inexhaustible.

R.A.: Antony, although I was a Björk admirer for a long time, but something weird happened to her music. I can’t listen to it any longer. The last album of Antony, which is now Anohni, it’s very tragic, intense. She has some themes I’m interested in. I do not “sniff” Sia, and Bob Dylan… the man with the guitar, it’s not my type. I prefer Joni Mitchell. And Ada Milea, which is also a friend of mine. I gave a like when I found that Dylan got a Nobel prize without knowing very well why; mostly because they have broken a tradition there.