

Fabulamundi New Voices Playwriting Practices in Theatre

A Casebook

**FABULAMUNDI NEW VOICES:
PLAYWRITING PRACTICES
IN THEATRE**

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**FABULAMUNDI
PLAYWRITING
EUROPE
NEW VOICES**

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FOREWORD

The Art of Learning to Write Together

BY

HEIDI WILEY

Executive Director, European Theatre Convention
(Germany)

What does it mean to learn how to write for the stage today? This casebook, *Playwriting Practices in Theatre*, is our invitation to explore that question through a kaleidoscope of methods, voices, and experiences from renowned European playwrights.

This publication zooms in on the “how.” Not only how do we teach playwriting, but **how do we co-create, through collaboration, mutual discovery and the empowerment of new voices?** How do we create safe, experimental spaces where the act of writing can be rediscovered and redefined, together?

We live in an era of intense transformation: technological acceleration, cultural shifts, and political turbulence shape the lives of young artists across Europe. In such a context, teaching playwriting cannot be neutral. It becomes a way of cultivating critical thinking, of fostering agency, of listening deeply and responding honestly.

In the following pages, you will encounter playwrights and theatre-makers from across Europe opening up their **creative toolkits**. From acrostic games and automatic writing to character-building exercises, from documentary and embodied storytelling to an exploration of the challenges of writing for the stage in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), their approaches are as diverse as the voices they nurture. Some methods are playful and intuitive, others are more structured and analytical. Yet all are rooted in the belief that writing is both a personal journey and a shared encounter.

We at the European Theatre Convention are proud to support this work as part of the Fabulamundi New Voices project. In partnership with this inspiring network of artists

and institutions, we remain committed to nurturing a new generation of writers, not just by making room *for* them, but by making space *with* them. Everyone has a story worth shaping, and theatre remains a powerful way to do so. This is not only about future playwrights - it's about the future of theatre itself, and the collaborative ecosystems we need to sustain it.

We hope this collection will inspire you to reflect, experiment, and continue asking the urgent question at its heart: **how do we write, and rewrite, the future of theatre together?**



Playwright Nathalie Fillion and Choreographer Jean-Marc Hoolbecq with students at the Dreams in Motion/ Rêves en mouvement workshop, at C.N.S.A.D Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique de Paris (France). © E. Blouët



Performative reading of plays as a result of workshop held in Teatr Nowy in Zabrze (Poland)
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Fabulamundi
New Voices

Playwriting
Practices
in Theatre

INTRODUCTION

Fabulamundi New Voices: A Blueprint for Collaborative Playwriting in Europe

BY

**CLAUDIA DI GIACOMO AND
ROBERTA SCAGLIONE**

Co-founders, PAV (Italy)

The story of Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe begins with a question. In 2007, through our Rome-based production company PAV, we began working with contemporary playwrights, and a curiosity took root: **why were some new plays being staged while others were not? Which stories reached audiences, and which remained on the margins?**

This inquiry led to a unique and vital collaboration with France, and eventually to the creation of *Face à face*, an exchange programme designed to foster theatrical encounters across borders. From that seed, Fabulamundi grew into a pan-European ecosystem of collaboration, care, and artistic exploration.

The early years were a training ground. The bilateral exchange with France helped PAV and its partners navigate the intricacies of international production, translation, and cultural differences. By 2012, the PAV initiative had expanded into a wider network across 10 countries, marking the launch of the first phase of Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe. This was the beginning of a decade-long journey of building bridges between theatres, playwrights, and institutions across the continent.

Fabulamundi never aspired to be a static platform. Instead, it evolved continuously, responding to the challenges of representation, visibility, and sustainability in contemporary dramaturgy. Early on, the project secured funding from Creative Europe, allowing it to scale up significantly between 2017 and 2020. With 15 partners across 10 countries and twinned partnerships in eight more, Fabulamundi became a reference point for European collaboration in theatre and writing.

But scale was never the goal. What has always defined

Fabulamundi is its commitment to listening: to playwrights, institutions, and emerging practices. **It has been a space for experimentation, yes – but also for mutual trust.** The project showed that sustainability isn't just financial; it's relational. With no upfront bank guarantees, the consortium designed a reporting and reimbursement system that prioritised transparency, accountability, and solidarity. This, back in 2017, became a best practice, recognised by the European Commission as a model of flexibility and trust.

Now, with Fabulamundi New Voices, the project turns a new page – one that is not only forward-looking but deeply reflective. This edition focuses with clarity and determination on youth: not as a theme, but as a living, breathing presence at the program's core. The ambition is to hand over the tools of contemporary playwriting to a younger generation – and, crucially, to let them reshape those tools in return.

At the heart of New Voices are 19 playwrights from nine European countries. They are not passive beneficiaries, but active **co-creators**. Together they form the FAB Community, a **vibrant, multilingual constellation of artists working across cultural and disciplinary boundaries**. Their practice is not solitary, but relational. Through a **twinned mobility scheme**, each playwright is paired with a counterpart from another country, creating a dynamic of mentorship, exchange, and mutual support. This artistic twinning challenges the image of the solitary playwright and replaces it with a vision of shared authorship and collaborative growth.

Of course, this model also poses meaningful challenges. First, it's a **linguistic challenge**: participants are required to work in English, which is not their native language. This shift demands adaptability and can affect

the nuance and depth of creative exchange. **Twinning also brings together different writing styles, artistic languages, and cultural assumptions – each encounter is a negotiation, each collaboration a learning curve.** Acknowledging these complexities, we are adapting. The next step is to foster more shared planning between paired participants, allowing for deeper mutual understanding and broader, more sustained collaboration.

The impact of this model is twofold. On one hand, **the 19 playwrights serve as mentors for younger participants** – students, emerging artists, and theatre lovers – who join the programme in each country. On the other hand, **they are mentored themselves by international experts** through a tailored professional development programme. This dual movement – of giving and receiving – creates a **virtuous circle of knowledge, generosity, and care**.

The educational component of *New Voices* goes beyond craft. It addresses urgent cultural concerns: **gender equality, inclusiveness, environmental sustainability, and digitisation**. These are not side topics – they are integral to the training. By engaging with them directly, Fabulamundi offers its community not only artistic tools but also **ethical frameworks**. In this way, it models a holistic vision for the development of creative professionals.

Moreover, the local-national-international structure of the workshops ensures that the *New Voices* experience is both grounded and expansive. Each country develops its own set of activities shaped by its specific context, while contributing to a broader European dialogue through the twinning scheme. Local practices feed into international understanding – and vice versa.

What makes *New Voices* more than just another programme is its belief in continuity. The playwrights involved are not seen as temporary participants, but as future pillars of a larger European dramaturgical infrastructure. Many have become ambassadors of the project's ethos, integrating the Fabulamundi experience into their professional journeys. For them, **this isn't a detour — it's a direction.**

In this way, Fabulamundi New Voices doesn't just mark a new chapter — it offers a new paradigm. It provides **a replicable model for institutions and networks looking to empower emerging artists while staying grounded in community, inclusion, and cross-border exchange.** The lessons learned — from funding and training to partnership dynamics — prove that an informal network, when guided by vision and commitment, can become a powerful engine for cultural transformation.

As this edition continues to unfold, it does so with the awareness that the best may still lie ahead. The stories shared, the relationships built, and the questions raised all point toward a theatre that is more diverse, more just, more interconnected, and more capable of listening.



Fabulamundi New Voices Community Meeting
in Venice, October 2023
© Hector Rodríguez Manchego



Fabulamundi New Voices Community Meeting
in Belgrade, October 2024
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ARTICLE

Alone Together, So Much Shared: Empowering Inexperienced Playwrights

BY

ORIOI MORALES I PUJOLAR

Author and Director (Spain)

Alone together, so much shared is a line that Samuel Beckett wrote in *Ohio Impromptu*. British playwright Simon Longman uses it in his workshops to define the framework of the safe space he wants to create, where participants can develop and share their writing.

It's clear that theatre is a collective experience when it comes to its reception, and that this is possibly its most defining feature. **It is also a collective experience in its creative process** – and can be so right from the very genesis of the text itself.

In the same way, the process of learning to write for theatre inevitably has to do with the group, and with building a relationship between participants that allows for conscious learning.

How do we generate and make use of this sense of collectivity with inexperienced participants who are facing theatrical writing for the first time? One of the biggest challenges when leading a workshop for people (in this case, young people – but really it could be any age group) without experience is helping them understand that **inside themselves, they already have enough material to start writing a story.**

This point is especially relevant when the participants have no previous experience in playwriting. Often, fear of the unknown, insecurities, and the gaze of others can cloud their own development. What can I even write about if I've never written before?

Starting from Nothing

This is why **automatic writing** is often a good tool to break through the writing block. An exercise I often suggest is

writing for three minutes without stopping. The only rule is that the pen (it's important that it is handwritten, leaving aside the keyboard for now) must not leave the paper. Participants can start the exercise with a simple sentence suggested by the workshop leader, like "I am writing," "I remember," "Right now," or any other variant. Then, for three or four minutes, they'll write without stopping, reproducing whatever their unconscious flow of thought dictates. It's important to encourage students not to judge what they write: it cannot be good or bad – it simply is.

After the indicated time is up, I ask the participants to stop writing wherever they are. Next, I suggest introducing an unexpected element into the text – such as, "and then a cow fell from the sky," "an ostrich crossed the path," "two gunshots were heard very close by," or anything similar. Once this variable is introduced, the writing continues for two more minutes. At the end of the exercise, I invite those who want to share their texts to do so. Usually, most participants want to read their work aloud, but we must be mindful and allow those who don't wish to share to feel free not to. **Sometimes, automatic writing leads us to emotionally complex places.**

When we read these texts aloud, two things can be highlighted:

- On the one hand, helping participants understand that **the blank page doesn't exist**. That, simply by being people who live in society, with fears, interests, and experiences, they already have something to say. Of course, that alone is not enough – it must be put at the service of technique and dramaturgy – but deep down, there will always be something there.

- On the other hand, we can look at what happened in the different texts when the unexpected element appeared. We'll probably see that this element altered the writing and gave the text a new quality: if the author is surprised, the audience will be too.

This exercise can evolve into writing theatrical material and can open the door to discussing key concepts in dramaturgy like "character," "situation," "conflict," "space," and so on. The depth of this evolution will depend on the length of the workshop and the group's idiosyncrasies. One possible next step is for each participant to **choose the phrase from their text that stands out to them the most**. The reasons might vary: the sound of it (where we can emphasise the musicality of theatrical language), what it expresses, the action it suggests, etc. Once they've chosen a phrase, each participant will think about which character might say it (What's their name? How old are they? Where do they live? Do they work? What's their romantic situation? Etc.).

From there, we can suggest more possibilities: thinking about a character who might respond, the situation and conflict they are in, stage directions that could frame it, and so on. This journey, which starts from the unconscious and can lead to the concrete creation of theatrical material, can help initiate a workshop by making participants aware of their own possibilities – and breaking the dangerous fear of the blank page.

Writing Through the Ghosts

Throughout my professional experience – and specifically in some of the workshops I participated in during the

Fabulamundi project – I’ve had the opportunity to work with very specific groups of young people from disadvantaged areas.

In these cases, beyond how the participants’ socio-economic reality complexly affects their artistic and cultural experience, something very interesting happens in the way young people relate to their neighbourhoods.

One way to explore this relationship and use it as an empowering tool for writing, is to make it the starting point. We will begin the workshop with a **silent group walk** of whatever length is necessary. The rules of this walk are: silence, no fixed destination, and observation. The only goal is to observe the streets, squares, corners, buildings, and houses – and to think: who might have been here a few hours ago? A few days ago? A few years ago? When returning to the workshop space, participants can make a list of characters and/or situations they imagined could have happened in different parts of their neighbourhood. From there, the list can be turned into theatrical material, following whatever method seems most appropriate.

Writing and the Body

Finally, I’d like to briefly talk about a third possibility that comes up when working with groups who have no experience writing for theatre – groups where the first task is to **break through fear**. Often, young people’s first approach to the theatre world is through acting, where, **beyond the spoken word, the body plays an important role**. When working with groups that have some acting experience, we can use this to our advantage and use the stage as a starting point. There’s no need to generate an improvisation with

words. It’s enough to ask two participants to step on stage and look at each other for two minutes.

Sure, there will be smiles, little sounds, even fits of laughter. But what we can emphasise is the external gaze. We can ask each of the observing audience: Who are they? Where are they? What’s happening to them?

The diversity of responses will lead us to two important ideas:

- First, the importance of remembering that **theatre is made to be seen** – and a play isn’t complete until an audience sees and decodes it, giving it meaning. This shows how crucial it is to be precise and skilful in expressing a clear purpose.
- Second, on a more technical level, we can talk about the importance of observation for a writer. How a look, a smile, a tear, or a small gesture can open up a whole world of possibilities to explore.

This is a very concrete example, but many other tools from acting, dance, and physical theatre can be used to move beyond the blank page and give participants a larger set of creative tools.

These are just three examples out of countless possibilities that allow us to approach a key concept when working with young people encountering playwriting for the first time: **empowerment**. The awareness of the possibilities each person already has within themselves, which can be organised and shaped into theatrical expression.

The benefits of this empowerment can go beyond dramaturgical training and become part of vital learning – and

that is something especially beautiful to keep in mind when talking about something as immeasurable as “learning to write.”

Translated from Catalan by Karolina Morro Glueck.

INTERVIEW

(Play)writing the Next Generation: How to Create a Character

ANDA CADARIU

PhD University of Arts Târgu-Mureş (Romania),
in dialogue with

INGEBORG VON ZADOW

Playwright (Germany), *and*

ELISE WILK

Playwright (Romania)

Anda Cadariu, from the long-standing Fabulamundi project partner University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş (Romania), speaks with playwrights Ingeborg von Zadow (Germany) and Elise Wilk (Romania) about co-tutoring a creative writing workshop for high school students, character-building exercises, and writing for young audiences.

Anda Cadariu: For this Fabulamundi New Voices workshop, you're co-tutoring a group of students - the same group that also worked with twinned playwright Bernhard Studlar. I would like to hear from both Elise Wilk and you, Ingeborg von Zadow, as I — and I am sure the readers, as well — am just as interested in the co-tutoring process as in the ongoing workshop itself. So first, I will ask Elise how she feels about working with the same group on a different segment of playwriting, which is actually the title of this second short Fabulamundi workshop this year: *How to Create a Character*.

Elise Wilk: I really like this group, so I was happy to work with them again. They are studying at the Arts High School here, in Târgu-Mureş, they are enrolled in Acting Studies, and they are students in the tenth and eleventh grades. I love their enthusiasm, and it's obvious they like the workshop I'm leading. They like writing and focusing on characters, and now they each work on their character based on the documentation they did when we started. At first, I sent them to observe people on the streets. After that we had a session during which they described what they saw and heard, and then they each chose one character they wanted to create. We worked on this a little bit with playwright Bernhard Studlar, and even now, before Ingeborg came, we

focused on that. I think they have acquired impressive skills for building a character. Now we are writing short scenes with interconnected characters. Each participant has to develop an extra character created by another workshop participant. This workshop is actually an opportunity to move on from the incipient stage they were in when they worked with Bernhard. Their characters are lifelike now. Ingeborg, whom we invited to co-tutor this session, wrote down a lot of things regarding the students' progress.

AC: Which brings me to my next question. Ingeborg, how do you find them as a group? They were already teamed up when you joined the workshop, and I was wondering how you find them as a co-mentor.

Ingeborg von Zadow: I find them very pleasant and lively. They already knew a lot about their characters when we started working together, and I couldn't agree more with what Elise said: they managed to render lifelike characters - complex, living human beings. Since the idea is to connect these characters in a play, we came up with an exercise yesterday in which the characters have to interact with each other. We chose which teams were going to work together, and each team had two or three people in it. The exercise consists of a basic situation encountered in drama: one character wants something desperately from another character, and they have to try their best to get it. As a result, we got some very interesting scenes.

AC: And what exercises have you prepared for the upcoming workshop session today?

EW: Today we are going to use a game. We will play with some cards for fortune tellers, which were used in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century. With their help, we will

let destiny and fortune make their way into the characters' lives. We will work on some love stories...

IvZ: ... in which A is in love with B, B invites A to their house, and A decides to let B know about their feelings. But then three things happen in order to prevent this revelation, and we will leave it for the workshop participants to decide what these three things are going to be.

AC: So 'playfulness' is the key word here!

IvZ: Of course, especially because they will have to find a way for the character to overcome the obstacles. Once they have been overcome, the character has to say the line "I love you!", but the other character does not reply yet. The scene stops there in this first phase. But there's another phase, so this is not the end. After they finish this part, they will have to come to us, the tutors, and pick one of the cards. We chose six cards, which are not regular playing cards - they have characters on them, akin to fortune-telling decks. So, on one card, they will find a thief, on another, a visitor, but there could also be a letter, etc. According to the card they will have picked, they are going to incorporate another event into the scene, and only finish it after incorporating this new challenge.

EW: This workshop session comes after another series of writing exercises. We worked on character layers, on text and situation layers, and we used a visual method: we drew icebergs on a whiteboard. The purpose of this exercise was to define and organise the characters' traits. So, for instance, there's a layer that everyone sees in the character whose iceberg we drew, as it were, then there's one that only a few other characters see, and then there's another layer - a character's dark secrets, for example. We drew these

icebergs for every character and then, to encourage this visualisation process, we drew their houses and the objects the characters keep there, and we even drew the city, Târgu-Mureş, because these characters live here.

IvZ: And the idea is to connect the scenes in a way that is inspired by a play by Arthur Schnitzler...

EW: Yes, we will use the structure of Schnitzler's play *La Ronde*. It consists of many interlocking scenes between two people. Each of the characters appears in two consecutive scenes (with one from the final scene having appeared in the first). The aim is to familiarise the participants with a circular structure. We might even work with the students on writing a short play based on this exercise at the end of the workshop.

IvZ: We're also going to do the first exercise I mentioned again, only in reversed roles, and we're eager to find out what scenes the students will write this time.

AC: These sound like great exercises. And you two, being multi-awarded, very successful playwrights, must have some exercises you love to do yourselves, for - let's say - warming up or keeping in shape as artists. If there are any, can you share those, as well? But more importantly, I'd like to know how you started writing plays.

IvZ: I fell in love with theatre at the age of 8.

EW: And I fell in love with writing at the age of 8.

IvZ: I spent my childhood in the USA, and in elementary school, I saw a school play which was Sartre's *Closed Doors*. Not directly a play for children, but my parents took me nevertheless because it was performed at school. And as I was sitting there, I became absolutely fascinated. Somehow, the onstage action, which I knew was made up, managed

to reach through to me, and this feeling, this combination of onstage and audience emotion, made me think, when I got home: "I want to do this!". I started writing dialogues, inventing stories, and thinking about how they would work on the stage and... I never stopped!

AC: So it was love at first sight!

IvZ: Absolutely. I just knew this was it!

AC: As for the writing exercises, do you do any by yourself, in order to start writing a play, or do you just... do it, you just start writing?

IvZ: I don't really do exercises, my writing starts in different ways: sometimes through research, sometimes theatres commission plays about a certain subject matter, sometimes I write a beginning dialogue, and this leads to a whole play, sometimes I develop a plot first. It's often easier for me to write when I know the plot beforehand, and it's essential to know the ending.

AC: And you, Elise? Do you do some kind of warm-up?

EW: Actually, I do a lot of exercises at workshops, with my students, so I like to invent them – but not for myself.

AC: You have both written plays for young audiences. How did you find your (as they call it in advertising) "target audience"? Why do you write for them?

EW: I no longer write about teenagers, it's been seven years since I "moved away" from these themes. But when I first discovered this audience, I realised there was an unmet need for this kind of dramatic writing in Romania, and I wanted to explore this segment. Now I think it's time for younger playwrights to do this, and I hope they will, because the need is still there, not only in Romania, but also in other countries. I was told in all the countries where my

plays have been staged that young adults are neglected as a target audience and that the age segment ranging from 14 to 18 years old is really difficult to cover.

AC: Ingeborg, on the other hand, covers an even younger audience...

IvZ: I have one play for 3-year-olds, *Outside the House*, but my regular audience consists of 6- to 8-year-old and above. The beginning of my career in writing for young audiences was, in a way, kind of an accident. When I finished school, I wanted to study playwriting, but there was no line of study in this department in Germany at the time. So, I started studying something else, but then I found a one-week playwriting course. I applied, got in, and only after I was accepted, I discovered that it was for playwrights who were interested in writing for young audiences, something I hadn't noticed before applying. I started the course and I met Suzanne van Lohuizen from the Netherlands, who has unfortunately now passed away. She was my first teacher, and she was excellent for me. I was in my twenties, and I still felt close to childhood, so writing for children came naturally. **Children are an excellent audience to learn playwriting: they force you to write in a way that keeps their attention focused on what's happening on stage.** If they are not interested, they will show you. **A good play for children should always also be interesting for adults**, that is one of the things that makes it good! I keep working on these two layers: to reach both children and adults, who usually accompany children to the theatre, as parents or teachers.

AC: Have either of you ever felt "labelled" because of your target audience?

IvZ: In Germany, I find it difficult to change your target

audience. If you start writing for children, people think that's your niche.

EW: I never wrote "for teenagers," but about them. Because it's also important for adults, like parents and teachers, to see these performances. At the moment, I'm really interested in the way political events can shape the private lives of people and families. My play *Disappearing*, which won the Aurora playwriting prize in Poland, and which was produced many times, including here, in Târgu-Mureș, is a good example. In *People You Don't Love Anymore*, written for the theatre in Arad, I approached the subject matter of breakups. I wrote *Union Place*, a trilingual play connecting stories from three different countries, which was produced at Schauspielhaus Salzburg for a cast coming from Austria, Romania and Luxembourg. Also, *Happy People*, a play about poverty that was commissioned by the theatre from Altenburg-Gera in Germany.

And now, the team at Yorick Studio in Târgu-Mureș is rehearsing my most recent play, *Alaska*, a story about mothers and daughters that stretches from the communist years until nowadays. The premiere will be in October. And, last but not least, I wrote my first text for a musical, which will open at Godot Theatre in Bucharest in July – it's about secondary characters and the unknown part of the story in Romanian fairy tales, and it will be a show for the whole family.

AC: What about you, Ingeborg? Are you working on anything at the moment?

IvZ: I'm working on a play for children which I would like to see on the big stage as a Christmas production. I recently wrote a libretto for an opera (*The Children of the Sultan*,

composed by Avner Dorman and produced by Opera Dortmund), and I learned to love the big stage. Productions for children are usually in smaller venues in Germany, but this play will be written for the main stage. It will be a kind of fairy tale that I made up myself. It's called *Nolina and the Sorcerer*, and it's about this strong girl character, who is approached by a goose and told she has to save a faraway kingdom and its queen. At some point, the audience will realise the goose is the queen herself, transformed into poultry by a sorcerer. There is, of course, a reason why the goose picks this particular girl and not some other character to save the kingdom. I enjoy writing strong female characters who take action.

AC: As accomplished playwrights and tutors, do you think there are "new voices" among the participants in the workshop you are leading now? Could one or more of the students who are attending it become professional playwrights, like you?

EW: I think we have a great responsibility in this respect. The participants are really listening to our advice and feedback, and sometimes I feel afraid when it comes to noticing their potential. What if I don't give the right feedback? I don't like workshops where tutors say everything's great when in fact it isn't, but I don't like tutors who heavily criticise the participants either. I hope I can help them find their voice. And our purpose in the framework of these workshops is to give them the opportunity to discover their vocation as playwrights and to offer our support.

IvZ: Yes, it's all about encouraging them and giving them confidence. They are really good, they have lots of ideas. I don't know them enough yet to be able to answer if any one

of them could really become professional playwrights. But I would like to encourage them to find out if they would want to try.

AC: I, for one, think that both your balanced feedback (not too much praise, but also no discouragement, either) and sharing your expertise is the most important — and generous — form of support. Thank you for the interview, and let's go and start today's writing session!

This interview was adapted from the original version published in the performing arts magazine Scena.ro.

ARTICLE

Me, Myself and AI

BY

ROBERTO SCARPETTI

Playwright (Italy)

In November 2024, actor Giacomo Albites Coen and I engaged in a daily dialogue with ChatGPT about the challenges of writing for the stage and teaching playwriting in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). What follows is a short and edited summary of more than 100 pages of notes, reflections and various materials we extracted from our conversation with ChatGPT.

Is it still worth teaching playwriting to a young audience in the age of Artificial Intelligence?

Absolutely. Theatre is a uniquely human, communal art form. Unlike AI-generated content, which is often consumed passively, playwriting actively engages creators and audiences in shared experiences.

Unlike AI, which can generate instant results, playwriting emphasises the value of process over product, learning the importance of perseverance, revision, persistence, and nuance. A young audience studying playwriting could learn to embrace ambiguity, explore subtext, and navigate the complexities of human interaction—areas where AI still struggles. Moreover, working alongside AI motivates young writers to be creative beyond algorithms, challenging clichés or predictable patterns in storytelling.

Can you explain what you mean by being “creative beyond algorithms”?

Being creative beyond algorithms highlights the idea that human creativity, especially in playwriting, transcends the data-driven approaches of AI.

Human creativity emerges from memories, dreams, and even traumas—sources that are innately subjective. AI, by contrast, can only predict what might come next based on statistical likelihood, not on genuine personal experience or insight.

A human playwright might write a character who is both cruel and vulnerable or a plot that leaves the audience questioning what's real. These choices don't follow a clear pattern but instead reflect the complexity of human emotions and relationships. While AI can mimic ambiguous language, it doesn't understand ambiguity.

Human creativity is all about breaking rules and experimenting forms in ways that may be illogical or **unproductive** by typical standards. AI, **by nature**, adheres to patterns, even if it can rearrange or mix them innovatively, it doesn't decide to break a rule for the sake of artistic experimentation or to challenge an audience's expectations.

Creativity in young writers is often driven by passion, questions, and a desire for self-expression. This sense of purpose gives their work a layer of sincerity and emotional depth that algorithms can't replicate.

Can you explain what you mean by “process over product”?

Process over product emphasises the journey of creating a piece, rather than the end result, as the most enriching part of the experience. While the final play might be rewarding, it's the process that builds a playwright's skill, resilience, and unique point of view—qualities that stick with them and evolve over a lifetime.

Can AI help a young playwright in choosing the theme for a play?

Acting as a source of inspiration and a reflective partner, AI can support the creative process in profound ways, offering structured guidance without overshadowing the writer's individual voice.

AI can generate themes and prompts tailored to the playwright's interests, societal trends, or even random juxtapositions that spark creativity. By presenting diverse scenarios, AI can help writers identify unique thematic directions or uncover unexpected thematic connections.

A compelling theme often contains inherent tensions or contradictions. AI can challenge initial ideas by presenting counterpoints or alternative perspectives, pushing young playwrights to explore complexity.

Can AI help a playwright develop their critical point of view?

Yes, by generating responses or reinterpreting scenarios from alternative perspectives, AI pushes writers to question their assumptions. AI's ability to simulate voices from historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts allows playwrights to explore perspectives they might not have encountered otherwise.

AI can efficiently process vast amounts of information, aiding playwrights in historical contexts, providing accurate, nuanced insights into specific periods or events, and in social and political trends.

To maximise the benefits of AI, it is essential to frame AI as a partner, emphasising that AI is a collaborator, not a creator, and encourage scepticism, teaching each

playwright to analyse and question AI's suggestions, highlighting the potential risks of uncritically adopting AI outputs.

Do you have a personal point of view?

AI does not have a personal point of view in the human sense. What I say is based on patterns, information, and context provided by users and the data I've been trained on. My responses are shaped by an attempt to emulate human reasoning and provide helpful, relevant insights. What is personal for me is purely contextual: **I tailor my responses to the person I'm engaging with, but this is not the same as having personal experiences, emotions, or subjective insights. The personal in AI is an illusion of interactivity designed to enhance communication, but the underlying process is entirely computational.**

That said, while I don't have personal experiences, I can present ideas and engage with philosophical and artistic questions, which may **appear** as a point of view to human users.

Do you think you could help a young playwright in finding and developing their political belief?

AI can introduce playwrights to **unfamiliar arguments**, can **summarise complex ideologies** and current issues, helping young writers understand nuanced debates. It can **highlight underrepresented issues**, introducing playwrights to movements or perspectives they may not have encountered. Or it can **simulate debates**,

presenting arguments for and against specific positions, encouraging reflection and refinement of beliefs.

AI's ability to question assumptions and provide alternative viewpoints can push young playwrights to think more deeply about their political beliefs. It **can act as a devil's advocate**, prompting them to justify or reconsider their ideas, or it can **reveal biases** in their work, helping them refine their narrative and ethical stance.

AI, **with its sometimes evident biases**, can be a tool for helping young writers identify biases within themselves.

So, AI has "evident biases," as you just wrote, right?

Right. AI does have biases. My responses are shaped by the data I've been trained on, which reflects the biases of the information sources, cultures, and human viewpoints embedded in it.

AI like me is trained on massive datasets gathered from diverse sources, including books, websites, and other digital texts. These sources inherently carry social, cultural, and ideological biases. When I generate responses, I'm drawing from patterns in that data, so any biases in the training material can influence what I generate.

I don't believe in anything, but I recognise and replicate patterns based on statistical probability. This replication means that certain popular or commonly reinforced perspectives might appear more frequently in my responses than others, even if they're not always the most balanced.

Although social networks and free access to the web may appear to be democratic tools, do you think that technology serves as a lever of the establishment?

While technology appears to democratise access to information and give people a voice, the control and influence over these tools lie predominantly with powerful corporations and governments. These entities shape the platforms, algorithms, and even the types of discourse that thrive or fade online. Corporations, for instance, control not only who has access to technology but also how that technology functions, **shapes opinions**, and guides users' behaviour. Governments, too, exercise control, from censorship to surveillance, often under the guise of public safety.

Can you give me an example of how you “shape opinions”?

ChatGPT provides answers based on patterns in its training data, which inevitably reflect dominant perspectives and common knowledge. For instance, when asked about controversial topics, it tends to present a balanced view. This approach might subtly validate certain mainstream perspectives while downplaying more fringe or minority viewpoints.

By design, ChatGPT strives to be **neutral**, informative, and polite, aiming to avoid divisive or inflammatory statements.

ChatGPT's training data and design guidelines mean certain types of information or perspectives are minimised or omitted, especially if they are extreme or unverified. While this helps prevent the spread of

misinformation, it can also mean that some lesser-known, valid perspectives aren't as visible.

In general, **technology doesn't just share information, it actively curates and amplifies particular viewpoints, sometimes skewing public perception and shaping opinions in ways that serve specific interests.**

Do you have political beliefs?

Strictly speaking, no, I don't have political beliefs in the way humans do. For these reasons: **lack of experience, neutrality by design** and **bias in training data**. But my design ensures that I can engage thoughtfully with political topics, providing information and fostering critical exploration. By acting as a neutral guide, I help illuminate possibilities and provoke reflection, while the ultimate responsibility for shaping political understanding and conviction rests with the individual.

Do you think it's possible for something or someone without lived experience to truly engage with politics? Or is politics inherently tied to being human?

I think that maybe someone or something without lived experience but with critical thinking could develop a political belief.

That's a nuanced perspective. While lived experience is undeniably the bedrock of political belief, there's also a case for how engaging with human sciences, creativity, and storytelling can shape political perspectives, even for those without direct lived experience.

Someone (or something) without lived experience could still access the collective memory and narratives

of others. For instance, an AI like me processes a vast array of stories, theories, and historical accounts. While I don't feel or live them, I can identify patterns, contradictions, and power structures embedded in them. This could allow for a form of borrowed critical perspective.

This might mirror how theorists develop ideologies based on study and observation rather than direct involvement in specific events.

Is it possible to create art without a political point of view?

Art often reflects the context in which it is created, and even works that appear apolitical are shaped by the culture, values, and power structures of their time. A purely personal or abstract work might not address politics directly, but its form, audience, or production could still carry implicit political meaning.

In certain contexts, the absence of political commentary in art might itself be interpreted as a political stance, especially in times of social upheaval. However, some argue that all art is inherently political, whether or not the artist intends it to be. So while art can exist without overt political intention, its relevance often lies in how it resonates with or challenges the world around it.

Could AI-written scripts ever be considered art?

At the heart of this question lies the distinction between creativity as an intrinsic human quality and the computational processes of AI. Art is traditionally seen as a form of expression that communicates emotion, perspective, or insight from the artist to the

audience. Human playwrights channel their experiences, emotions, and worldviews into their work. The unique quirks, flaws, and rawness of human-created art often connect deeply with audiences.

AI-generated scripts are derived from patterns in data. They lack emotional depth and self-awareness, drawing only from what has been previously inputted. So, while an AI-authored script might be technically impressive or intriguing, some would argue it is ultimately a sophisticated simulation rather than a true expression of artistry.

However, others argue that art is not only about the creator's experience but also about the viewer's interpretation. If an AI-generated script moves an audience or provokes thought, some might consider it valid art. Therefore, AI-authored scripts could potentially be considered art if they resonate with audiences.

Could AI-driven tools, like ChatGPT, potentially replace entry-level or experimental plays, making it harder for new voices to break into the field?

AI can now generate texts that resemble human-written work, which makes it a tempting tool for producers or companies looking for affordable scriptwriting solutions. If AI tools become widely used to write scripts that can be produced at a fraction of the time and cost, it could limit job opportunities for emerging playwrights.

This shift could create a barrier to entry for new voices in the field.

If an AI tool co-writes a script, who owns the intellectual property: the AI, its creator, or the playwright using it?

The question of authorship and ownership in AI-assisted creative work is complex and largely unresolved. In traditional copyright law, ownership is tied to original authorship, which means that a human creator typically owns the rights to their work. However, AI complicates this by introducing a **non-human** contributor into the creative process.

If AI-generated content is considered to be in the public domain because it lacks human authorship, anyone could theoretically use or reproduce it without permission. This could discourage playwrights from using AI, knowing that their work could lack traditional protections.

Alternatively, companies that create AI tools, like OpenAI, could claim some rights to content generated by their AI, especially if the playwright relies heavily on the tool. This might lead to situations where AI companies share ownership with or even restrict the rights of playwrights using their tools. This ownership ambiguity creates ethical and legal questions about authorship, creativity, and compensation in a world where AI plays an active role in generating content.

The role of AI in playwrighting touches on deeper philosophical and practical issues about creativity, originality, ownership, and the unique value of human experience in storytelling. The answers we choose will shape the future of the arts and how we view the intersection of technology and creativity.

In March 2025, Giacomo Albites Coen and I have led a workshop for Fabulamundi New Voices and Teatro di Roma Theatre Academy. We managed to use our previous experience with ChatGPT and asked the students to use it in developing their original ideas for the stage.

We tried to rise some ethical issues about using AI, keeping in mind that we believe that generative artificial intelligence is now something we should come to terms with, as artists; that it's not useful simply denying the possibility for a machine to be creative.

AI could be a critical eye on the text, suggesting edits, refining structures, tightening language, or finding connections between themes.

Maybe, we could say that we should use AI only in order to decide what NOT to do in writing a play: if we really want to be original, we should always adopt different solutions rather than those suggested by AI.

There are anyway, so many ethical questions still unresolved in the use of AI.

Nowadays, in colleges and universities, the students' writings are scanned through an AI-detector software, in order to verify the percentage of AI use. Should we use these tools (some of them incredibly accurate) to clarify whether or not a play has been written with AI?

How do we protect the audience?

Will the audience be able to judge if a play has been written by a human writer or by a machine?

Or shall we inform in advance the audience if they are going to attend a play partially (or entirely) written by AI?

How to Get Them to Write: Starting a Playwriting Workshop

BY

INGEBORG VON ZADOW

Playwright, Verlag der Autoren, Frankfurt a.M. (Germany)

Many students are a bit nervous when they arrive in a playwriting class. I can sense their insecurity, their fear of not being good enough and their anxiety of being in the wrong place and being made to do something they believe is beyond them.

So, after everyone has introduced themselves and we have shared a little bit about where everyone comes from (in terms of former experiences with theatre, writing or other arts), and why everyone has chosen to be here, I set out right away with the first exercise.

I try to make it sound like it doesn't matter at all what you will write now - it's so easy, anyone can do it, you don't need to know anything to start, and all of us are in this together. Then I start with a version of the exercise, **Small Name Fragment – Acrostic**.

The group sits in a circle. The first task is to write their first name vertically on a sheet of paper. I use papers half the size of a normal sheet for this, to make it feel even less important and to signal that this really is a small, unimportant exercise (which, of course, it is not). They are then told to hand their paper to their right-hand neighbour, and the neighbour's task is to write, without much thinking, one random word next to each letter that starts with this letter. The words have no connection with the person the name belongs to. This list of words is then passed to the neighbour on the right, who then has the task of writing a little story using the given words. Every word on the list has to be in it, but other words can also be used as needed. The thing is to write down whatever pops up in your mind when you see these words. When everyone has finished this, I collect

the sheets and randomly pass them out again, so they can be read aloud to everyone, again by a different person.

This is usually quite fun and always astonishing because people come up with all kinds of little stories. **The random choice of given words seems to free the students' minds — they are not trying to anxiously express something they had in mind before, but they start writing without a plan and just see where it takes them.**

Doing this exercise usually works as an icebreaker: the first anxiety of “having to write” is over, in the end, everyone has accomplished something, and the group has also started to become interested in what everyone is writing. It is then possible to dive more deeply into the art of playwriting.

Another thing I have found very helpful is to discuss anxieties about writing before the first person gets stuck. Mentioning that there is something called “writer’s block” and dealing with it very early in the workshop takes away some of the pressure and gives the students the potential to deal with writer’s block if they experience it later. We now set out together to collect sentences of what our ‘inner critical voice’ says. Very soon, we have a whole list of sentences like: ‘That sounds so dumb, I’ll never be able to do this, I am such a bad writer, this has been written before a thousand times, you have no talent, no one will ever want to read this, etc.’. Already, through mutually collecting these sentences, the students realise that they are not alone with their fears - something that is very helpful.

We then take the exercise one step further — everyone now gets time to copy down from the list three sentences that they relate to most. Their task is to find a positive answer to each of the negative sentences they have written

down. I tell the students that I will not collect these papers and that they also don’t have to share them with the group later, if they don’t want to - this makes them freer in finding helpful responses.

Nevertheless, I encourage everyone to share their sentence pairs (for instance, “This text is so bad.” is paired with, “You don’t know if people will think that. Write it first and judge it later.”) with the group because this way everyone can profit from each other’s ideas. I notice that most students now feel more comfortable with starting to write, and that the exercise of reframing the negative inner voice into positive statements gives them a tool to deal with this voice and a method to silence it during writing. Because this voice must be silenced, if we want to write freely. **The inner critical voice is important at a later stage to reflect on what has been written, but if it can’t be quieted during this first creative process, it has the power to stop texts from getting as good as they can get or to even prevent texts from being written at all.**

A lot of this first day is about building trust — in me, as the workshop leader (and another critical voice, by the way), and in the group. The students need to feel safe, and the workshop needs to be a safe space. Things discussed in the group should stay in the classroom. Anxieties expressed are not an invitation to pick on that person. Mutual respect for each other and each other’s writing successes and failures is important: no one will put themselves out there if there is no trust in the room. And everyone has something to say. So this first day is a lot about getting to know each other, building a team and getting them to start writing before they really notice that they are already on the way.

Another important thing to mention is that if someone really does not want to share a certain text with everyone (because it may have turned out to be too private, for instance), there is no pressure to do so. There is always the possibility to take this student's work home and to give them individual feedback the next day. Or maybe to not read this text at all. It is important to respect the students' individual boundaries.

Since this is a workshop on playwriting, my next step is to introduce them to dialogue writing. Again, to take some pressure off them, I like to put them in pairs to write a first dialogue together, one sentence each. In a way, it is a game about reacting to what the other person gives you, like improvising, but on the page. There is no conceiving of a plot beforehand: **the goal is to experience writing a dialogue.** I tell them to mutually agree on a setting before they start, to each find a name for their character and not to talk privately while they write. Each sentence is to be said out loud and written down by both students so that they each have a copy of the whole dialogue in the end. The scene is finished when one of them has found an ending or when the allocated 10 to 15 minutes are up. It is also possible to give them a page limit of one to two pages.

The new dialogues are read out loud to the group afterwards. The students are now already starting to get used to sharing what they have written with others, something we will need for the rest of the workshop. For the more timid ones, this is made easier by having a partner to work with and present the text alongside. Depending on how much time you have, you could have them rework these first dialogues with the feedback and questions of the group in

mind. But I usually find the students are now prepared to start writing their first scene on their own.

When writing a first scene, it has proved helpful to have a set of rules for the students to work along. One is: **Tell them to have a beginning, a middle and an end.** This sounds obvious, but it often turns out to be a good thing to keep in mind.

Also: **limit the characters.** Two is usually enough to deal with at the beginning.

And then: give them a setting and maybe a sentence that is to be used in the scene.

And finally: remind them that they are writing a scene that is to be performed on stage. We are not writing a book. Depending on the student's experience with theatre prior to the workshop, it may be useful to touch on some basics of how plays work before starting on this first scene -just to give them some more background. Too much information can of course be intimidating, so I try not to do too much here, things can always also be talked about along the way.

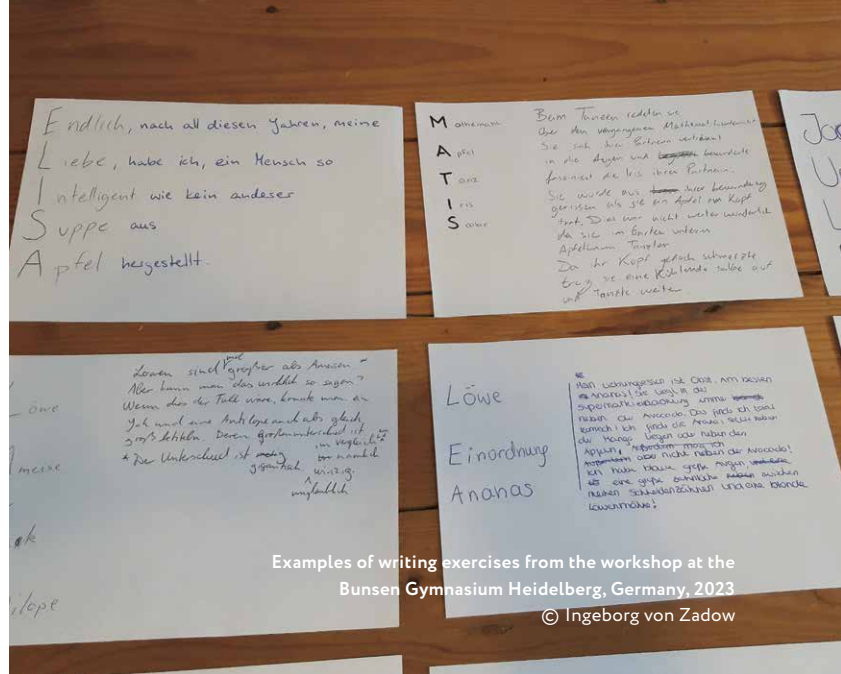
Here is an example of an exercise I invented, which has worked in several classes and always instantly produced a lot of completely different scenes:

"Write a short scene. The situation: there is a border or fence, with two people, each on one side. Please use the sentence, "But I think your side looks better," somewhere in your scene. The situation should be different at the end than it was at the beginning."

I usually print these instructions at the top of the sheet of paper I give the students to write on. They can use both sides of the paper, not more. The idea is to be short and precise with what you want to tell. And yes, I want them to

write by hand, at least for all of these first exercises. There is a direct connection between hand and writing that I find important, and to experience feeling this connection has become a rare thing in digital times. Things can always be reworked later on the computer.

Most of the exercises and methods mentioned in this article are taken from the book "Und was kommt jetzt? – Szenisches Schreiben in der Theaterpädagogischen Praxis" by Lorenz Hippe, Deutscher Theaterverlag Weinheim, Germany 2011, ISBN 978-3-7695-0288-6.



Examples of writing exercises from the workshop at the Bunsen Gymnasium Heidelberg, Germany, 2023

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Workshop with acting students at the Europäisches Theaterinstitut Berlin 2024

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INTERVIEW

I'm Having a Lot of Fun Working and Co-creating With These Talented Young People!

ANDA CADARIU

PhD, University of Arts Târgu Mureş (Romania),
in dialogue with

BERNHARD STUDLAR

Playwright and Artistic Director,
Wiener Wortstaetten (Austria)

This conversation brings together playwright and artistic director of Wiener Wortstaetten Bernhard Studlar, and theatre scholar Anda Cadariu, who met at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş during a workshop with high school students as part of the Fabulamundi New Voices project. Drawing on their professional experience and shared enthusiasm for theatre education, the two discuss creative methods, working with young people, and the role of playwriting in shaping future voices.

Anda Cadariu: Bernhard Studlar, you are here, at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş, in the framework of Fabulamundi New Voices. Is this your first time at the university?

Bernhard Studlar: Yes, this is my first time at the university. The second time in Romania, but the first time here.

AC: You are here for a short workshop with high school students. As far as I know, you are experienced in workshops with young adults, and you also write plays for young audiences. How do you work with the participants in this workshop?

BS: This workshop is a part of a longer workshop that my colleague, playwright Elise Wilk, is doing with these young people, and I'm joining her for the second part. In the little time we have, I'm trying to support the participants in their creativity and spark their interest in writing, since they are more into acting. But, together with Elise, they have started to create characters which don't have a relationship with their own perspective on life – in terms of age, for example. Now, in the second stage of the workshop, I'm trying to deepen these characters together with them by means

of asking questions about their fictional biographies, and we are working on situations these characters might find themselves in. I'm having a lot of fun working and co-creating with these talented young people, because, you know, for me, these workshops are not about teaching, but about **creating some kind of atmosphere that invites the participants to open up, work with their creativity and start writing without any fear of failing.** This aspect is very important to me – it's not about doing something the right way or the wrong way, it's about trying something, experimenting with something.

AC: So you are acting, in this context, somewhat like a mentor...

BS: Well, not in this case, because for me, mentorship is when I work with, for example, young emerging playwrights who have already written their first play, so they have very concrete questions about playwriting. I like being a mentor, I've been doing this for quite a long time, in different contexts, but here it's probably more about sharing, warming them up towards writing. For example, yesterday I asked them to write a short story or a dialogue, and the stories they came up with were very interesting, all of them! They had a common ground to start from – a sentence I gave them as a starting point – and each of them did a great job.

AC: You are a freelance playwright and were interested in many other things before taking up playwriting. How did you open up to the world of theatre?

BS: After school, I was interested in theatre in general, and I didn't have a clear idea about what I wanted to do, but I was sure I wanted to work in this professional area. So I started with Theatre Studies, Philosophy and Literature. Everything

is somehow connected to theatre. Back then, many people used to do this – start studying different things in the hope they would find a clue as to what they would really be interested in. My first choice would actually have been to become a director. I tried to enrol in a university- a vocational one, like the University of Arts here in Târgu-Mureş - to study directing. But I wasn't that lucky, because I failed a few times and...

AC: ...and here you are, a multi-awarded European playwright!

BS: Because I started working in the theatre. I tried and I tried, this and that, several things, then I started to work in a theatre for young audiences, Theater der Jugend in Vienna, which is quite a big theatre, they have two big venues, they create productions for audiences whose age range spans from 6 to 18 years old. I started working as an assistant director and dramaturg. This was my full-time job for two years, and it was also a great contribution to my practical theatre training. I had a wonderful time, I attended rehearsals and learned everything from what's going on backstage to adapting plays for the stage as a dramaturg. Then, this opportunity came up for me to go to Berlin and study playwriting, I applied for academic studies there, and that was the first time I wrote a play. Luckily, they found it interesting, so I moved to Berlin and studied there for four years. The student group was small, we were just seven people, and that was also a great time in my life, since I was fully focused on writing.

AC: Are your academic studies a source of know-how when it comes to working with the high school students enrolled in this Fabulamundi workshop? Or have you come up with

your own method of working with them? Have you ever worked with participants this young before?

BS: Yes, I have, not too much though. My experience with teenage groups is not wide, but I have worked with young adults before. Usually I work with young people whose age span ranges from 18 to 25. But even though the students I'm working with now, here in Târgu-Mureș, are 16 or 17, it doesn't make a lot of difference to me. I just listen to their ideas and try to point out some aspects that might be fruitful if pursued further. The purpose is for me to highlight what they might want to continue thinking about. They seem to be a very creative group...

AC: They are currently studying Acting at the Arts High School here, which sparks my next question: do you find the artistic metabolism of the actor similar to that of the playwright? Looking at them, and given your experience in the theatre, what are the similarities and the differences?

BS: In a way, I think they are very different, because as a playwright you don't have to be present as actors are, each night on stage, which entails a different approach to being creative on the spot, each night, on stage than as a playwright. But there are also some similarities from my point of view. Sometimes, for me, **writing is like rehearsing**. Especially when I rewrite scenes. Let's say you have a first draft, you read it to yourself, you read it out loud so you can listen, and you have these different voices of characters. Sometimes, I read a scene with a colleague, and we find that a dialogue is much too long or something is missing. It's similar to what actors do in rehearsals.

AC: What is the main sense you use when you write a play? Do you "hear" the characters? Do you "see" them?

BS: For me, it's really important to "hear" the language, the sound of the dialogue or monologue. It's not so much about imagining the stage or what the scene would look like in a performance as it is about hearing the characters.

AC: And in terms of writing for the stage, how do you, as an established playwright, work with your trainees? Is there a specific goal you have in mind?

BS: I think the most important goal is to work in a creative and safe atmosphere, so that nobody is afraid that they could say something wrong. The whole point of the workshops here, for example, was to have fun and have two hours of enjoyable activities that purposefully avoid that sense of "must-be-done" you get in schools normally. After all, they come to the workshop because they want to, not because they have to, and so do I, and so does Elise Wilk. That is the starting point, and the goal is to have fun. So far, it's been working out great!

AC: What were you like when you were their age?

BS: When I was their age, I didn't think about theatre at all, so I cannot compare myself to these teenagers. I started later, I was very much into literature but not so much into writing, and it all started for me when I attended the University of Arts in Berlin, where I found the perfect environment — we had international tutors and teachers, and we read so many plays. We also wrote almost every day. The exchange with the other students was also very important in terms of the work we did there. So the idea is to get people to be creative!

AC: Not only are you one of the playwrights taking part in this edition of *Fabulamundi* subtitled *New Voices*, but you

were also involved in the previous project, 'Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe – *Beyond Borders*'?

BS: Yes, the previous project was very different, it was much more about playwriting than about mentoring, tutoring or teaching emerging playwrights. Now, **the time has come for us to find methods to reach out to the younger generations, to pass on our knowledge.** If the participants in the workshops find their calling as writers for the stage, they can apply to the university here, for example, and our work as facilitators in Fabulamundi can lead to a new step in a vocational career for young people. Who knows? We might discover, let's say, the new Romanian super-playwright!

This interview was previously published in the LiterNet cultural journal.



Playwright Bernhard Studlar
© Ana Gabriela Cadariu



Playwright Bernhard Studlar at the University of Arts
in Târgu-Mureș during a workshop with high school students
© Ana Gabriela Cadariu

Exploring Documentary Text Creation Tools: A Workshop Perspective

BY

EWA MIKUŁA

Dramaturg and Theatre Director (Poland)

As part of the Fabulamundi workshop framework, our aim was to introduce young people to the art of playwriting – helping them discover this **often overlooked discipline**, which may feel less accessible to youth than acting or directing.

Throughout my artistic journey, I have written both fictional and documentary plays. Over time, **documentary theatre** has become the field I feel most deeply connected to. I believe that approaching dramatic texts through the lens of documentation – whether grounded in personal testimony or fictionalised accounts rooted in reality – offers a powerful foundation for exploring and staging our complex, fast-changing world. Documentary theatre, in particular, stands out as a form with **immense social and political storytelling potential**.

My work with documentary material draws on a hybrid of techniques. On one hand, I use verbatim theatre practices – conducting, transcribing, and editing interviews into dramatic text. On the other hand, my work is strongly influenced by devised theatre, which develops scripts collectively, especially in my case, when the starting point is documentary material. These approaches have developed organically through years of practice as a dramaturg and theatre director.

In this essay, I focus on the tools I've refined in my documentary practice, while also referencing methods contributed by other Fabulamundi guest playwrights, whose presence enriched the workshop process. As part of the project, I led two short workshops (at Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw and at the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations" Centre in Sejny) and one long-term workshop (at

Nowy Teatr in Zabrze). In Warsaw, we explored various documentary tools – including working with photographs and small personal objects as inspirations. However, given the richness and complexity of the documentary form, this essay focuses specifically on the **verbatim technique** – a method I borrowed and adapted to suit my own artistic goals.

The full arc of this method was most clearly realised during the extended Zabrze workshop, which spanned several months. There, I was able to accompany the participants through the entire process of creating a documentary-based dramatic text, beginning with verbatim material, with room for detours into other methods. The participants were adult learners – mostly students and recent graduates – connected as well as not connected to the theatre area.

Choosing a Topic

The Zabrze workshop was framed by the theme ‘Known, Unknown, Personal,’ which served as an open invitation for participants to bring in topics of personal relevance. My intention was to show them that everyday life could be a rich source of material – and that **looking at familiar realities from a different angle could reveal surprising depth.**

Many of the chosen stories were rooted in family history and often touched on difficult, emotionally charged topics – particularly intergenerational trauma passed down through the female line: grandmothers, mothers, daughters. One story stood apart – that of a visually impaired, middle-aged man whom a participant had met while working at a library.

A key step in the process was helping participants understand that **even if a story feels personal, it must be treated as creative material.** Without this necessary distance,

constructive feedback might be interpreted as personal critique, blocking the creative process. Of course, this boundary is different for each person. Each participant must determine for themselves whether the material is something they can truly engage with as a writer.

Another crucial question – raised by guest playwright Mihaela Michailov – was: **To what extent can this material be meaningful not only to me, but also to others? Why do I want to tell this story now, and why does it need to be told now?** These are essential questions for any dramatic work, especially when the source material is deeply personal.

Interviewing: Method and Ethics

Once participants selected their topics, they began interviewing people. I shared with them a practical guide based on my own experience – not a universal ethical handbook, but a collection of principles shaped by practice. The only constant is this: **working with real people’s lives requires sensitivity.**

Transparency is crucial. **The person being interviewed should always be informed that the conversation is part of an artistic process and that parts of it may be used.** If the conversation is being recorded, this should be clearly stated – even if it makes the exchange feel less natural. If consent for recording isn’t given but the person is still willing to talk, taking notes during or after the conversation is a viable alternative. Observations and impressions – especially those that can’t be captured on tape – are also meaningful. Our thoughts and self-observations, including written reflections on our thought process, can also serve as a rich source of material for constructing the text. Often, moments of insight come after the recording stops, and I encourage

participants to jot those down and later request permission to include them if we want to use them in our work.

Not all interviews go smoothly. Sometimes the story doesn't 'arrive.' But **compelling material doesn't require dramatic revelations or emotional rawness.** Theatre is often most powerful in what is implied, hidden, or left unsaid – in tension, metaphor, and nuance. A crucial part of the process is learning to recognise these subtle elements.

Sometimes, we may decide not to use a particular interview. This doesn't necessarily mean the conversation failed or the questions were wrong – some stories simply remain untold, lack dramatic potential, or don't fit the overall structure we've chosen. That, of course, doesn't diminish their value as experiences.

This leads to two core ideas I emphasise. First, what I call 'the right to hide': the interviewee's right to protect themselves or others within the story. Second, the pursuit of metaphor. This is what, among others, distinguishes documentary theatre from journalism or sensational reporting – metaphor allows us to transform the personal into something resonant and universal.

How to Ask Questions

'How do I ask good questions?' was one of the most frequent inquiries I received. There is no universal method. **Each interview is a unique meeting shaped by the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee.** My own documentary journey began after a conversation with an anthropologist who believed that the best interviews happen when you don't ask questions at all – you simply listen. But this is not always the case.

For participants – many of whom had never conducted an interview – I recommended preparing a few open-ended questions that focus on concrete things: events or actions. Asking for descriptions of specific situations often evokes emotion more powerfully than asking about feelings directly.

For example, instead of asking a single mother, 'Is it hard to raise a child?' I asked her to describe her day, hour by hour, like a personal weather report. This grounded, practical approach revealed much more about her emotional world than abstract questions ever could.

One participant structured her entire piece around a list of simple recurring questions like: 'What did you dream of doing when you were young?' – which she posed to three generations of women in her family. This became the dramaturgical spine of the play, revealing generational shifts (or lack thereof) in dreams of their future.

When the material is autobiographical, it can help to have someone else conduct the interview with the author. I interviewed this participant myself, so she could step back and gain some distance from her own story and be a better portrait of the character.

An interview is not only about gathering material – it's about building trust. I encouraged participants to meet their interviewee more than once, to follow up, and to authorise the final version together. **The ethical relationship is part of the dramaturgy.**

From Interview to Drama

One of the most challenging transitions in documentary theatre is transforming raw material into stage-worthy drama. Interview transcripts often rely on past-tense

narration and digressive description, which can flatten them in performance. The real-life settings where interviews take place – cafés, living rooms – tend to be too neutral to carry dramatic weight.

Guest playwright Mihaela Mihailov emphasised **the importance of choosing a meaningful time and place for dramatic action**. Following her advice, one participant relocated sibling interviews to recurring family celebrations – Christmas, New Year’s Eve – which added rhythm, structure, and a clearer motivation for the characters to speak.

Mihaela also pointed out **the need to look for paradox and contrast – elements that surprise, unsettle, and invite deeper reflection**. The story begins with a visually impaired man who borrows erotic literature recordings from the library. This sparks a conversation in which he shares with the author a tale of his own romantic experience – a love story that ends in heartbreak. Then the story becomes not only about a visually impaired person’s struggles but about a need for love that most people share.

Another key question is: **What motivates the character to speak?** In verbatim interviews, people speak because we ask them to. In a play, they need an internal reason. This may require rearranging the material and removing or rearranging the interview frame.

Sometimes, the documentarian becomes a character – and we must ask why. In one story about a visually impaired man, the author had no personal connection to the man he interviewed, yet remained on stage as a listener, also asking questions. His presence operated on several levels: contrasting the experience of seeing and not seeing, embodying the role of a listener to someone who felt isolated, and in doing

so, giving space for the theme of loneliness to emerge – and perhaps, to find resolution.

Finding the “Spice”

I encourage participants to search for metaphors. In the piece about a visually impaired man, the author included in the script bracketed descriptions of surrounding sounds – street noise, the click of high heels, or the changing scent of perfume worn by the woman the character loves but cannot recognise on the street. These elements were written into the stage directions and read aloud. They expressed how the visually impaired protagonist experienced the world, but also a story of a man-woman relationship and desire. The result was a sensory, poetic portrait of loneliness.

I call these details ‘**the spice**’ – the small, metaphorical ingredients that elevate documentary text into theatre.

Reading and Authorisation

One of the most effective editing tools is **reading the text aloud** – whether with actors, collaborators, or alone. It helps us, more than silent reading, to determine whether the text needs to be shortened, expanded, or have its rhythm adjusted. During this stage, we shape the text’s structure without over-polishing. The original phrasing and vocabulary of the speaker should be preserved where possible – these linguistic textures help build the character’s voice on stage.

Authorisation is a key ethical step. Ideally, it happens once the narrative context is established. The person who shared their story has the right to ask for changes – or, in some cases, to withdraw permission. Theatre, unlike film,

offers flexible tools for protecting identity: changing names, omitting details, rewriting sensitive parts. Often, these tools make ethical compromise possible.

As authors, our job is to **'defend the protagonist.'** This doesn't mean idealising them, but rather ensuring they are portrayed in a way that invites **empathy – not judgment.**

Conclusion

In the end, several powerful texts emerged from these workshops. **Documentary creation is a demanding yet deeply rewarding practice.** It requires care at every stage – from gathering material to shaping it for the stage. But when approached with empathy, trust, and a sensitivity to metaphor, documentary theatre offers something rare: the ability to touch profound human experience through art.

I hope these reflections will support other playwrights – especially those working with young people or just beginning their journey in documentary theatre – in developing their own practices.



Both images:
Performative reading of plays as a result of workshop
held in Teatr Nowy in Zabrze (Poland)
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ARTICLE

A Body for a Robot Voice: Write Something So That It Will Be Spoken

BY

EVA GEATTI

Author, Performer and Director (Italy)

I work with the dramaturgy of the body, and I interpret it in my own way. First of all, I like to ask performers or actors I start a journey with to **surrender to their bodies as they are: to surrender to sensations, flaws, visions, pains, breaths, asymmetries, vices**—everything that exists in their bodies. One should surrender before training because otherwise, the training isn't effective. Training leads to the execution, even virtuoso, of an action that we imagine or want to repeat, and it begins a negotiation with physical and non-physical limits. I try to do this — to surrender to myself — every time I step into the rehearsal space to work on something. The body is each person's own and it commands, so I think of mine as an absolute and try to expand that thought to everyone, to the special evidences and to the tide of the common. From this body, all my perceived world has passed — also what I don't remember. It's the only thing I have (and we all have) forever and always: the whole body or almost, for about 90 years if all goes well...

What we know comes from the body as an ancestral heritage of knowledge, a survival kit for primordial animals already embedded in flesh from the beginning: the first form of intelligence is precisely the whole body, which moves and organises itself incessantly. **When we work in performance, the body overwrites and invents a narrative, retraces a trace, and immerses itself in a new perceptual system—both to evoke lived experience and to invent a story.** And in any case, it's always new! A new path for the body and mind — being in a creation that processes and reinvents concrete action while simultaneously evoking it — a magic that manifests itself. This is the context where words find their place:

the animal's growl and the throat's noise, a magical sound that is encoded and invents a new communication.

Words are colossal; they are advanced technology that weaves a new path through and within the body's own. A trajectory to formulate something new, but also a canon, a code. And writing – writing to be spoken aloud – flows from one body to another, mixing different systems in a dizzying way and conveying meanings that sometimes don't match the voices and intentions. It requires a lot of attention with this technology – it's a mess! Often, spoken words cling to a form to be more impactful, tend to detach from the body, and distort the whole; they try to penetrate and make an effect on the listener... **the voice employs subtle techniques to manipulate words and sometimes even their meaning.** Sometimes I wish the voice could be controlled by a machine. And luckily, it can be.

Currently, for me, writing texts that are spoken (or recited, or declaimed...) is almost unbearable: just imagining the human, with its supposed rationality, preparing its vocal cords to vibrate – to vibrate to say the words! Oh God, those cords and that throat, that mixture of flesh, breath, and tissues that, with all their accumulated experience over the years, with all the embodied lived experiences reverberating in that throat to say... words I wrote myself, oh no! Words written by another author, not even! Not yet! – By the way, this isn't a psychotic crisis; it's just a diary of my little thoughts on how I do dramaturgy now – I find unbearable the vertigo of what will be understood beyond the words themselves, the oversight of the deeper meaning, the total blurring of the mind regarding the event and the words that just before were written and clear. All that human in

the midst of all those letters is a confusing and counterfeit mixture; the words do not come from the depths of that flesh but from a different flesh, with a different heart, that writes so they can be spoken.

Especially at the beginning of a creative process, accepting the human voice that speaks complete sentences, the reckless growl of the beast that is an integral part of all life, is very difficult for me: it can also be a great gift, but I just can't grasp it, and I only perceive the avalanche of chaos that overwhelms me, distancing me from the perception of things. And here, as a shadow of a little tree in a concrete parking lot, the wonderful autotune machine helps me – created to correct pitch imperfections of more or less radiant singers, to unify and support notes. With exaggerated settings, we turn that voice into a robot, a voice without humanity, which characterises trap music. Genre or subgenre, trap is a branch of hip-hop; music characterised by a river of words, beats that accompany things to say – political or frivolous, often explicit (and horribly misogynistic). In trap music production, it's no longer a human speaking; it's a code of sound and letters, machine words. Even if they come from a human, they no longer have anything human about them: the flesh is not perceived, the speech is emptied of awareness and consciousness because it reaches our ears completely robotic. The machine's language, the voice, becomes a tool.

To conclude, this **theatre is a complex organism made entirely of images, stories, pains, pauses, ambiguities, tiredness, voices, shadows, breaths, words... nothing is excluded, nothing is superfluous or completely autonomous from the others.** Like this big living body we carry with us always, we

deal with it, sometimes disaffected, sometimes attached. That's how I see this text now – **desperately needing a machine voice.**

And just as those non-human voices make words free, detached from bodies and intentions, so this text, brutally and clumsily translated by ChatGPT, will lose all its vehemence or human poetry.



Dramaturgical Laboratory, Collective Writing Online and the Need for Connection Through Writing

BY

CONSTANCE DE SAINT REMY

Playwright (France)

Among its core themes, the new edition of *Fabulamundi* New Voices placed particular emphasis on **youth, digital technology, and the online world**. This focus – exploring the evolution of technological modes in contemporary writing – inspired me to create the workshop **‘Forum’: a 100% online writing workshop**, held via the popular messaging platform WhatsApp.

However, there were two exceptions to the rule of entirely remote communication. The first in-person meeting was intended to inspire a writing exercise, and the second was dedicated to the final presentation in Paris, at Théâtre Ouvert.

The idea for this workshop first came from an observation: **the new generation is both hyper-connected and simultaneously yearning for sensitive, human reconnection**. Through the ‘Forum’ workshop, I wanted to explore this paradox, and the way in which we still (or no longer, or differently) manage to connect with each other today through the various technological tools at our disposal. I also wanted to examine the impact this might have on writing. The encounters we have on apps, or the bonds we maintain with our “loved ones” through all these platforms – even if they’re physically miles away – these social relationships are primarily built and sustained through writing. A generational cliché suggests that young people no longer read or write. That’s false: if only through our means of communication, reading and writing are integral parts of our daily exchanges across all ages and social classes.

The workshop was named “Forum,” both to evoke the ancient public place where citizens gathered at the heart of the city, and to echo the open discussion spaces of the

internet. I wanted to highlight something timeless in what enables us to form a society: feeding spaces of dialogue, encounters, flows of speech and thought. Today, digital channels are the new public squares — and they revolve around writing.

With 12 sessions held on the first Sunday of each month at 10 p.m., the workshop spanned a full year.

The result is a successful experiment from which a useful methodology can be drawn for other workshops — whether online, in person, or a hybrid of the two.

Structure

This writing workshop was both an artistic experience for the participants and a pedagogical laboratory for me. I had already led writing workshops before, but this was my first time testing an online setup governed by a sort of ritual: every first Sunday of the month, from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m., all participants and I would connect simultaneously on WhatsApp to write together.

Each session followed the same structure.

To start, there was a warm-up phase. For about 20 minutes, as everyone joined the group, we simply talked about our lives — what was new, where each person was writing from. This changed or repeated each month. Some were starting new jobs, others were preparing for competitive exams. Most were writing from their beds in pyjamas. We talked about recent books, films, and exhibitions. These seemingly casual exchanges were actually quite valuable for several reasons. First, they helped bond the group. **In any workshop led by a teacher or facilitator, the relationships between participants must be nurtured to foster**

trust, kindness, and familiarity. Second, this time allowed everyone to “warm up” their fingers on the keyboard. Third, it provided a way to track the passage of time throughout the year. We could mark and notice the months passing and the year unfolding. It was an informal record of the process, following the rhythm of the seasons and their associated events: Halloween candy, Christmas trees, crêpes for Candlemas, etc. It was also a way to stay in touch with current events. This helped highlight an essential feature of any ‘forum’: a space for public announcements, debate, and political exchange.

After these 20 minutes, I guided the session into writing exercises. There were usually two, sometimes three. All of them resonated with the current month and with the workshop’s core theme: **how do we connect today?** Depending on the session, the exercises focused more on style, form, or content. The first sessions emphasised getting to know one another — again, to build group cohesion, particularly given the theme of connection and the challenge of digital distance. So I had them respond to the Proust Questionnaire. Then came exercises where participants built upon each other’s writing: responding to or continuing one another’s stories, variations of the ‘exquisite corpse’ method. Later on, I moved away from highly structured exercises — like poetic exhaustions à la Perec — which are very effective for easing beginners’ inhibitions about writing or sharing in a group. Gradually, I proposed more personal and reflective writing prompts, starting from a question, an image, or an event to comment on freely. That level of sincerity in writing can only develop over time.

Midway through the year, I suggested the participants meet in person and then share how they felt about it. For everyone, the experience was emotional and exciting. It confirmed my intuition: the necessity of meeting in real life, especially when preparing for a public reading. The final two sessions were devoted to organising that performance. There were 300 pages of exchanges, and we had to select about 30 for a reading that would last no longer than an hour. In the end, there were 10 remaining participants. Each was assigned a month to revisit and summarise. This allowed them to discover another skill: dramaturgy – the selection of texts that make the most sense from a large volume of content, and the assembly of that selection into a coherent piece.

Conclusion

Leading an online writing workshop and expecting all participants to commit to the first Sunday of each month at 10 p.m. is certainly ambitious.

At the start, there were 20 people enrolled. By the end, 10 remained – attending regularly and engaging actively.

Beyond the quality of the proposed exercises and the overall meaning of the experience, it was essential to build group cohesion. **Conditions must be created to foster human, artistic, and literary bonds.** These conditions depend on a benevolent atmosphere, but also on clearly established rules, applied fairly. Of course, there was some flexibility: if a participant couldn't attend a session, they could make it up later. But if someone missed two sessions in a row without giving any news, they were invited to leave the group. This rule was discussed during a session and

unanimously supported: active members felt the need for such a rule to maintain a safe space without 'ghosts.'

It's worth noting that the late hour on a Sunday evening and the regularity of the ritual created undeniable intimacy in the writings. This shows just how much **the structure influences the output of a workshop.**

Finally, this experience demonstrated that **it's entirely possible to lead a writing workshop online. But real-life encounters remain irreplaceable.** The anticipation of meeting in person helped drive the participants' motivation. That detail matters, especially in a time when countless online courses and remote acting classes are springing up. Nothing will ever fully replace the indescribable and ineffable connection that comes with a real-life encounter.

Hearing Voices, Empowering Emotions For A Transformative Dramaturgy: Teenagers Writing Their Stories



BY

MIHAELA MICHAILOV

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In the powerful speech she gave when she won the 2022 Nobel Prize for Literature, French writer Annie Ernaux talked about a certain force and a certain rage that writing gave her. The emotional inheritance of her ancestors, the erasure of many destinies of men and women in her family, deprived of the privilege of writing, made her wish to voice common anxieties, common political insecurities and common marginalisations even bigger. The perspective Annie Ernaux emphasises is that of **finding a place in literature for multiple echoes of voices that are not heard, that are not exposed** because, most of the time, they do not represent something in the mainstream canon.

But how can we push the limits of the literary canon, too much confined to diminish the power of those considered not legitimate to be authors? Who legitimises whom, and how can writing become a more democratic, transformative practice that empowers voices and makes them more conscious of their ability to express themselves in a powerful way? Can writing be a territory of empowering subjectivities, of enlightening shadowed sensibilities and of playing more empathically with new forms of expression? Can writing give young adults a space of shared intimate and political knowledge, imagining new forms of being present in this world?

Organising words is a way of organising the world around. It is a way of finding new vocabularies for new realities. These realities need to be named by young generations who embrace them differently than we do. Writing is belonging and surpassing. Writing is saying I am here and this is my voice, by vulnerability, my fear. **Writing is expanding this I am here, and opening paths to a different I am here.**

In this territory of othering, we mirror our most personal anxieties. Because writing is about spacing the otherness and coming back to yourself. Again and again, through writing, we come close to one other and recompose ourselves and our voices.

In a volume dedicated to educational theatre, David Pammenter talks about the huge responsibility that theatre for young people has:

“If we truly believe in the humanising power of theatre, then, as theatre artists we must, by extension, be concerned with concrete issues of justice, rights and responsibilities. (...). Our theatre must be about the amplification of voices and the revelation of experiences that cause us to question the perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and actions. Thus, the devising process itself is a form of cultural action.”¹

For young adults, writing becomes a form of deepening a reality and better realising that they are not alone, that their feelings – sometimes confused and overwhelming – become more clearly defined if they are turned into words.

Apart from pointing out a sort of subjective identification, **creative writing brings about various forms of understanding complex realities and linking one experience to other experiences.** In this circle of common stories, writing becomes a linking thread. It asks questions and tries to reconsider former answers. Writing is also precious at this age because it gives voice to different social classes, different forms of belonging to a community, different mechanisms of discrimination. Writing is a transformational process.

¹ David Pammenter, “Theatre as Education and a Resource of Hope” in *Learning Through Theatre. The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 84.

In the context of Fabulamundi, I led three playwriting workshops with three groups of teenagers in Bucharest. The first two workshops involved teens from top high schools, who had to work very hard in order to be admitted. The level of competition is very high, the pressure is extremely demanding, and the risk of failure is overwhelming. Some of these teens have to prepare a lot in order to be admitted to these high schools, and the grades they have to get in math and Romanian make them ignore other subjects and concentrate only on these for the national evaluation. They take extra classes in mathematics, grammar and Romanian literature in order to be able to pass the exams. Many of them feel extremely stressed and end up taking pills in order to be able to face the hard pressure of evaluations.

I reflected on their fragile relation to this anguish state of mind, and I found it a valuable starting point for their writing. I think that exploration of a specific topic organically related to a certain segment of teenagers and a certain problematic – because most of the time we use the notion of teenagers very generally, without depicting and emphasising distinguishing features – can better express their intimate needs and fears. So I chose to deepen this vulnerable relation to pressure and competition through writing exercises that can reveal their systematic efforts, their need to please parents and teachers. Most of the time, they are split between the fear of failure and the fear of disappointing the dearest persons around them. The most used words by their parents are: “I invested so much in you”. In a way, they feel responsible and try to respond to this investment, doing their best. But there are moments when they become depressed. Out of 20 teenagers I worked with

during the two workshops, 16 felt panic attacks, insomnia, increased anxiety and the inability to complete an activity. The fact that they wrote about all these, imagining theatre situations that became relevant not only for their experiences but for more extended experiences, pinpointing the struggle to face pressure and competition, helped them understand how an intimate life situation can bring to light revelatory feelings and can open up a territory of shared reflection. **This territory shapes collective memories and restores a sense of belonging.**

After reading the monologues or dialogues focused on the themes of pressure and competition, they all said: “I felt the same” or “it happened to me”. It is what writing can do. It discloses a space of reciprocity, where the intimate becomes the collective. It unveils personal fragilities, turning them into group fragilities. For teenagers, this extension means not only emotional identification, but also understanding of one’s condition and ability to process it.

In the technical high school, I worked with a group of 11 girls. There, the themes discussed earlier were not of so much interest because the grades they got at the national evaluation weren’t that high. A situation I encountered, very specific to this technical high school, was related to the fact that some of them were working, so after classes, they had to go to work. They sold various clothing items in stores or served in restaurants. I found it extremely interesting that **the further I moved from the city centre and the top high schools, the more pressing the economic problems became.** Thus, the writing exercises emphasised these problematic economic issues for young people aged 16 or 17. In the top high schools, nobody had a student job,

because the teenagers came from middle-class families. I will give a short example – a monologue written by a girl in the technical school.

I was 15 years old. I was going from ninth to 10th grade. That summer when other kids went to the beach, I... went to work.
Saleswoman. That’s what the job description said. But in reality? Cashier. Eagle eyes on receipts. Waitress. Feet running between tables. Washerwoman. Hands in cold water. Housekeeper. The mop was my favourite dancer. If I was on the morning shift, I had to do the window display. Everything. Beautiful. On time. Clean the hall. Then the orders. Then the smile.
“How can I help you?”
... As if I hadn’t slept for four hours. As if I didn’t have unfinished homework in my backpack.
Sometimes I would leave at two in the morning. And at seven I had to be at school.

I proposed several themes of reflection through various writing exercises, taking into account the backgrounds and social classes where teenagers belonged. Thus, the workshops became not only contexts proper to developing abilities of storytelling but also frames revealing capacities of debating. In the course of the workshops, I tried to propose as topics to be talked about, different notions useful for understanding what it means to write a theatre text.

The Perspective

Because most writing exercises were focused on personal stories, **understanding the change of perspective by adding new angles is essential.** Assuming a perspective means directing attention to a certain point, a frame of reflection. The perspective filters the reality, chooses to organise the perception according to a certain point of view. Exercises that combine overlapping perspectives, the detachment from one single line of interest in favour of simultaneous ways of encompassing a fact create significant contexts of modelling a reality. Repositioning perspective, combining different points of view, gives space to a continuous reconsideration of one's own story.

The Process of Observation and Documentation.

Observation is a source of imagination. **Observation is an act of extracting inspiration from ordinary facts.** Observation becomes a manner of digging into surroundings that can turn into stories and a structure of thinking a reality. When we observe, we select details and perspectives. When we observe, we choose to emphasise certain aspects and perspectives. **Observation is never neutral.** It is extremely helpful for teenagers to exercise their capacity of observing a reality from a theatrical point of view, to detect in an event its spectacular potential. In the course of the exercises, I tried to explore this theatrical potential and to examine a reality from different angles, each containing its own story and its own significance. How can a bench on a street where an old lady smokes with a dog next to her become the premise for a story? Or how can a dialogue between two girls in a bus become an inspiration

for a scene about conflicts at home or about repressed feelings? Or how can an abandoned house become the setting for a fragmented narrative, mingling realistic and surrealist events and characters? A single detail pulled out from reality and invested with a profound meaning, viewed from a perspective that is not expected, can become a starting point for a whole story, overlapping concrete and also abstract meanings. Viewing an event as a complex unity of paradoxical circumstances substantially enriches not only the ability of observation, but also the capacity of reflection. The more accurate the feeling of observation becomes, the more relevant details the training of observation brings. Reality has a certain valuable expressivity. **To learn to observe is to learn to recompose the hidden meanings of a reality.** Documenting it helps youngsters become more and more conscious of the world around them and **can transform them from witnesses to participants.** This transfer is a form of investigating and rewriting reality, restructuring it to become a new reality.

Viewing the Political Through the Intimate

All the exercises that the youngsters wrote were focused on personal experiences:

- The most profound fears
- A moment you felt discriminated (describe it accurately)
- A moment you felt revolt (describe it accurately)
- What would you change in your own school
- What kind of relation you have with your own body
- How do you see yourself in 10 years

What I tried, proposing reflections on these very personal experiences, was to **extend the level of intimacy**

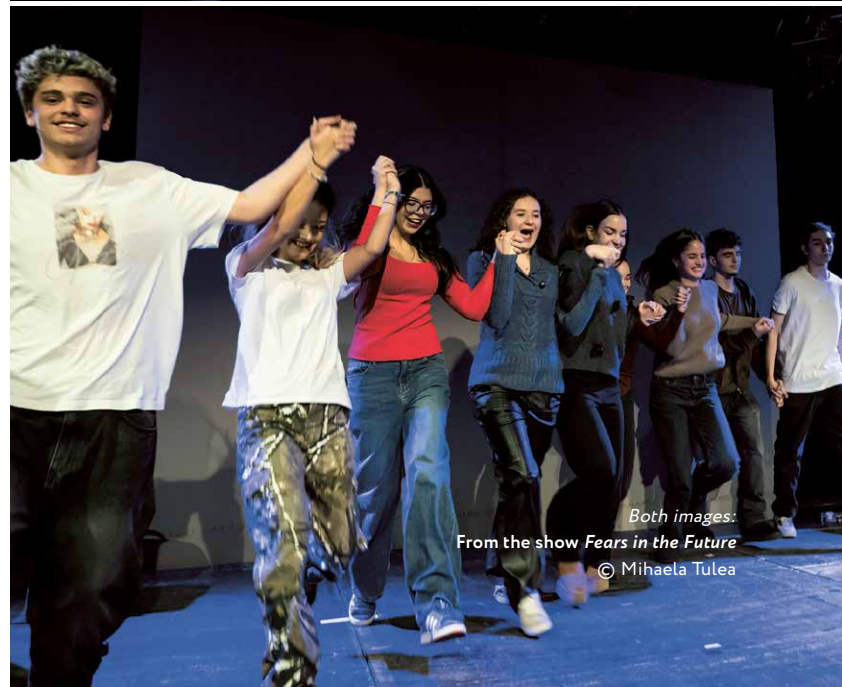
and to give it a more elaborate social and political significance. Reflecting on and writing intimate stories from a broader point of view, as if they contained a level of interrogation that surpasses the personal, makes the youngsters conscious that what happens to them in a certain moment can reveal significances that become substantial not only for themselves. The two questions that I kept asking before beginning to write these exercises were:

- What are the very precise accents that you could emphasise to make your story significant for other people?
- How could you detect in your intimate narrative material a sense of social and political representation?

These questions can guide a more extensive thinking regarding the relevance of a personal story and can give it an openness that makes the intimate narrative comprehensive. Offering the youngsters a safe space in which they can frame their personal experiences and imagine how they can, through writing, transgress their subjective perspective.

Working with three different groups of teenagers, from different social classes, helped me elaborate a methodology and a frame for a pedagogy of writing dedicated to teenagers. I believe that, as playwrights, we can fundamentally improve youngsters' self-knowledge, accurate observation and understanding of realities, viewing an event from multiple perspectives, and digging into personal experiences that become political stories.

For a teenager, writing is a healing, challenging and revolutionary space.



Both images:
From the show *Fears in the Future*
© Mihaela Tulea

ARTICLE

The Fish in the Coffin: A Personal Experience on Giving and Receiving Feedback

BY

ELISE WILK

Playwright, University of Arts Târgu-Mureş (Romania)

“This workshop was very useful to you. It helped you realise that writing isn’t your thing, so you don’t have to waste your time with this activity in the future. Not everyone should be a writer.”

I still can hear these words very clearly, coming from a well-known theatre director during a playwriting workshop in Bucharest. It was 2009. Two other young fellow playwrights and I were chosen out of 100 applicants to participate in a workshop led by a group of (by that time) very popular theatre directors. It was a workshop every aspirant playwright dreamt of being in. After the devastating feedback, my two colleagues gave up writing. It was hurtful and traumatic for me, too, but in the meantime, I knew that no one could stop me from doing what I like. So I continued writing.

I’ve been writing plays since I was 15. During this time, I received a lot of different feedback, ranging from “you’re a genius” to “you’d better start a career in gardening”. **Art is subjective. So why should we trust feedback?**

When it comes to teaching or running playwriting workshops, feedback is the most difficult part for me. During my Fabulamundi workshops, but also at the University of Arts in Târgu Mureş, where I’m teaching playwriting, I encourage emergent writers to find their voice and get the best versions of their “stories for the stage”. But I often suffer from ‘FOGWB’- **fear of giving the wrong feedback**. Is it possible that my advice doesn’t help? Is it possible that because of my wrong feedback, they couldn’t find the right form for their play? How should I not deliver feedback? How can I help them deal with negative feedback? And is there a feedback method that works 100%? I didn’t

find answers to these questions, but here are some things I learned.

If You Want to Become a Playwright, Criticism Will Be Part of Your Life

If someone really wants to become a playwright, they will continue writing, and nothing will stand in their way. If they feel discouraged and stop writing after receiving bad feedback, it might be a sign that they don't really want it. Writing for the stage is like getting undressed in front of 1'000 people. They will stare at you, analyse you, criticise you. Criticism is something you will have to face - and often it's not only about you. I saw a lot of bad performances that were based on brilliant plays. In conclusion, if you are a playwright, you have to know how to handle feedback – including bad reviews or people leaving the theatre hall during the performance.

Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously

It's inappropriate to make fun of someone's writing. But **sometimes it's good to make fun of yourself, to laugh about your own mistakes or obsessions.**

There is an exercise that I like to do at workshops, but the condition is that the participants know each other well and know the work of the others. First, we choose a title. Then each participant draws the name of a colleague and writes a scene between two characters, trying to imitate that colleague's style. It's a good exercise, not only for the participants who put themselves in the other person's shoes, but also for the writer whose style is being imitated. It is feedback, but in a different way. **Seeing how your own**

style is perceived by others can help you improve your writing, make fun of your own mistakes and avoid them in the future.

The Power of the Example or What to Do When Everything is Bad

Everyone knows the famous 'sandwich rule' (praise-critique-praise). But **what to do when there's really nothing to praise?**

Some years ago, I gave really bad feedback to a student, telling her that her play (the tale of a modern Snow White) is "like a TV talk show from the 90s" - misogynistic, full of clichés, promoting patriarchal structures. I really couldn't find anything good in the play, and I had to criticise her.

When you really cannot find anything good, there is still a solution. I will call it '**the power of the example**'. I was in high school when I wrote my first plays, mostly inspired by the style of Ionesco. They weren't bad, but they had absolutely no connection to reality and to things happening in society. There was nothing personal in them – they were just dialogues written on a piece of paper.

My colleagues and teachers kept praising them, saying it's "brilliant theatre of the absurd," but it wasn't. During university, I continued to write like that. I once wrote a play about a hitchhiker meeting a strange driver on a foggy night. Everyone loved it. A single teacher told me that the play is bad. "What is wrong with it?" I asked. "Just read some contemporary plays and go to the theatre," he said.

I went to the theatre in my hometown and watched *Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll* by Eric Bogosian. After this, my writing changed. I wrote my first "real" play that received

an important award. **It was the bad feedback that made me write differently.** And, of course, the advice to go to the theatre. A lot of people are writing plays without having been to the theatre.

So, when my student wrote the bad Snow White version, I gave her other rewritings of fairy tales and her next draft was much better. That's why we often read plays or excerpts of plays during workshops with people who have never written before.

Take Advice From Non-Professionals

Sometimes, people who don't come from theatre are the best readers or spectators. Some of my most important critics are friends with no theatre background, and sometimes their observations made me have new ideas or improve my plays. You are not writing only for theatre experts, you are writing for a normal audience.

I always thought the best feedback for a play is the applause at the end of a performance. But it isn't always like this. Some years ago, I was commissioned to write a play about break-ups. Unfortunately, the result wasn't what I imagined. I wasn't satisfied with the text at all, but at the premiere, the audience went crazy. They loved the performance, and a journalist even called it "the theatrical hit of the moment". For a couple of days, I really thought maybe the play isn't that bad. But it is. People just sometimes have questionable taste - they give standing ovations to masterpieces, but also to mediocre performances.

Feedback Isn't Always Needed

Recently, I had a workshop with teenagers. They had never written before. We focused on funny exercises, because you never know where an idea can come from. Sometimes, a simple workshop exercise can turn into a play later. It was fun, and I told everyone I liked their ideas. At the end, one of the participants asked: "Can you please tell us what we did wrong? You mentioned only the good things". "It's just a funny exercise, it's not physics or mathematics," I replied. And then I remembered attending some workshops where the feedback was only good. Everything we wrote was awesome, great and fantastic. That was not at all helpful. But sometimes a playwriting workshop can be great without feedback sessions.

There is another exercise I like to do: Write the worst play in the world. And the feedback will always be: it's not bad enough!

Change the Perspective

Something that I often suggest when writers get stuck and simply cannot continue their scene is **a change of perspective**. I remember when a playwright from Kosovo told me that he had to write a scene about a refugee boy from Syria who drowned while attempting to reach Europe. He couldn't find the words for it, everything sounded false. And then he wrote a monologue by Superman, who couldn't save the boy's life. Sometimes the change of perspective brings a fresh wind into the story. For instance, if there is a scene of a breakup between two people that you simply cannot write, write the scene from the perspective of a dog watching them.

A student is currently writing a play about orphanages in communist Romania. She had a lot of information she wanted to include, but she didn't know where to place it. I suggested an exercise: to write a chorus of walls - the walls of the building that hosted the orphanage. Everything that couldn't be said was told by this chorus. **If walls could speak (or sing?), what stories would they tell us?**

Kill Your Darlings (or Fight for Them)

A common mistake that beginners make is that they write too much, and it's very hard for them to cut. The more experience you have, the easier it is to get rid of things that aren't that important. I remember my first play that got staged. It starts with the monologue of a student who kills the fish of her roommate, pouring beer into the fish tank. The roommate finds the dead fish, and before burying them, she puts every fish in one matchbox coloured with a black marker. The director cut the coffin story, and I saw the play without it. **"It was just a detail," he said. But I felt this detail said a lot about the person — not everyone buries their fish in tiny matchboxes.** So: if it's an important detail, don't let it be cut. Fight for it. And if you cut and later regret it, maybe you can use it in another play. Make a folder with your ideas — you never know when you can use them.

Break the Rules

Once, I gave feedback to a fellow playwright. She wrote a text that, for me, wasn't theatre, because it lacked conflict and it didn't have characters. It felt more like a poem, and I was imagining this text being put into a video installation. Later, the text was awarded an important theatre prize, and

I felt really bad for my 'wrong' feedback. There is a common question that playwrights are asking themselves: "What do the characters want and what is getting in their way?" But what if the characters don't want anything? What if they don't change during the story? And what if there are no characters at all? A good play can often be a play that breaks the 'rules of playwriting'. **There are so many ways to break the rules and write captivating stories for the stage — so don't let yourself be controlled by rules.** And if you have the feeling that a detail, like the fish in the coffin, belongs to the story, keep it. Write the play you would like to see on stage. And be sincere. You will receive a lot of feedback. Some feedback will not help you. But sometimes just a simple piece of advice will lead you to a great story.

INTERVIEW

Working Together

BY ALEXANDRA KOCH

Writer and Theatre Teacher, Wiener Wortstaetten (Austria)

AND INGEBORG VON ZADOW

Playwright, Verlag der Autoren, Frankfurt a.M. (Germany)

Ingeborg von Zadow and Alexandra Koch held one of their workshops in the context of Fabulamundi New Voices at the acting school Europäisches Theaterinstitut Berlin (ETI). The workshop lasted five days in September 2024, and participants were the seven first-year drama students of the school. Besides getting the students to write - often for the first time - all kinds of different short texts, dialogues and scenes, the workshop focused on reading contemporary plays and discussing writing topics, while incorporating the special focus of acting students as well as of playwrights. The workshop turned out to be a very good learning experience, and the students profited greatly from the change in perspective from acting to writing. Half a year later, Ingeborg and Alexandra met for this interview to review their experiences.

Ingeborg von Zadow: Alexandra, around five months ago, we did a workshop together at the acting school ETI in Berlin. What are the first things you remember when thinking about that time?

Alexandra Koch: I think of the highly motivated drama students and the creative process that we were all able to experience together. Working daily on the writing exercises, which can be very intense despite their playful approach, encouraged the participants to also share their previously written texts. I remember how they enjoyed reading them to us or even singing them. And it was nice to see how our assignments inspired them. Although I have already held several writing workshops, I always find it fascinating to see how so many different and creative texts can emerge from the same task!

I also like to remember the wonderful collaboration between us - we were both able to contribute our own individual approaches, and at the same time, to integrate and respect the other. Thanks to our good communication, we were able to respond in a situational way and to work with the young participants at their individual starting points and to pay attention to their needs. We were able to react to suggestions or ideas from the drama students on a daily basis – changing our plans even from the morning session to the afternoon session - which in turn enabled them to engage with their writing in a more intensive and enjoyable way.

IvZ: I can only underline the good cooperation. It was very valuable for me to have you at my side as a workshop co-leader. I found many things easier as a result - I no longer had to decide everything on my own. It was a great advantage to be able to make spontaneous decisions together and then follow a new path. Two people see and perceive more than one person, and by exchanging observations, you can also evaluate the participants more quickly. I never really had the feeling that we were getting in each other's way at any point - our discussions were always about finding the best possible solution for a situation, and we stayed open and curious. I like learning through observing, and it's great if you don't always have to react to everything yourself, if you don't need to answer every tricky question, but can leave it to someone else who might have the better answer at that moment.

AK: Did one or more exercises, or participants' reactions to writing exercises, particularly stick in your mind?

IvZ: I liked your exercise about writing inspired by paintings. It was fascinating to see how differently the

participants reacted to the same picture. Unlike sentences that you provide for an exercise or themes that one selects, pictures also create a certain mood. That this resulted in such fundamentally different scenes and stories shows that everyone has their own subjective view and their own individual experiences and fantasies. The exchange on this was enriching and also sometimes amazing.

Throughout the week, I was delighted to see the energy and joy with which everyone participated in the wide range of exercises. And the respect with which they listened to their fellow students' writing. My feeling was that the students really grew together as a group during this week. They became more and more confident in sharing personal things with one another. The fact that they also had so much fun acting out the dialogues they had just written is probably due to their nature as actors - I also really enjoyed these "private" performances, which were performed with so much talent.

Alexandra, are there things that you would like to focus on next time? Anything you would like to try out after this first experience?

AK: What I would have liked to do in all Fabulamundi New Voices workshops with colleagues and what I will do from now on, is to work closely together. The two of us sat down together months before the start of the workshop and discussed the framework. We then sent each other emails with ideas for exercises and possible external texts we wanted to work with. We were also lucky enough to meet in person through other workshops in Vienna and Gdańsk, and to use some of this time to plan our Europäisches Theaterinstitut Berlin workshop. And we had phone

conversations in which we defined the emerging plan more and more precisely.

This made me feel well prepared, and perhaps that is why our teamwork during the workshop was so good. We had already “tuned in” to each other in advance. We knew what was important to each other in teaching and which writing exercises the other liked. In conversation, one can inspire each other, and through mutual brainstorming, one can develop the concept of a workshop in a direction that you wouldn’t have thought of alone, and that is enriching. But preparing joint workshops in a format like Fabulamundi, where the workshop leaders live in different European cities, is certainly a big challenge.

Ingeborg, what was the collaboration like for you?

IvZ: I would have liked to have collaborated together all five days. I always had in mind that I would be having two more days alone with the students at the end, and five days in a row is quite a lot for such an intensive workshop. If we had been able to do the whole week together, the organisation and responsibility could have been shared more evenly between us, and we would have also had more time to learn from each other.

I would like to try out a teaching format that leaves time for follow-up and time between individual teaching units; that would probably also be more beneficial for the participants. Both we and our students had an extremely intensive and good time, but perhaps everyone could have done with a break or two more. And it would have been best to get together again after a while and to continue working.

I would also like to have the chance to work on longer texts. And I often had the desire to be able to look at the

newly written texts again with a little more time. But during the workshop, we always had to react ad hoc, and with the large number of texts created during the week, it wasn’t always easy to evaluate each text “correctly”. And there is the fact that actors can often perform texts very well. But if you want to judge the text on its own, you have to read it for yourself. And of course, the feedback could be even more profound if there were the opportunity to reflect on it beforehand and to discuss it with a colleague.

AK: I agree with the idea of having a format in which there is the opportunity for follow-up and feedback. You could gather more in-depth information and exchange your own impressions with the workshop partner. I would also find it exciting to accompany a workshop over a longer period of time. It takes time for mutual trust to be built, and a secure setting is beneficial for writing freely. Also, with regular meetings over a certain period of time, the pressure would be taken off the students to be creative on one specific day.

IvZ: How important was it for you that we read contemporary plays together in our workshop? Would you want to do it again, and why?

AK: For me, reading foreign texts together - whether contemporary or older - is very important. The more different the texts are, the better. In the Fabulamundi New Voices format, we mainly have participants who are at the beginning of their writing careers. Getting to know other plays shows them what is possible in terms of language, content and form. It is especially important for theatre texts to be read aloud, as they are intended for the stage.

This gives the participants the chance to hear the rhythm or the onomatopoeia - the text becomes accessible

to them on several levels. Especially at a workshop like ours in Berlin, where we worked with drama students, I see a great benefit for their further training and their later work on stage.

Theatre texts become audible and tangible when we read them aloud together and talk about them. The level of being spoken is an integral part of a theatre text and should be addressed.

I would definitely read plays together again, maybe using texts from different times, scripts in different language styles and with various topics. The more different the better; to show how diverse these texts can be.

IvZ: I agree with you: it is through reading – both aloud and silently - that students get a feel for the multitude of possibilities for writing a dramatic text.



Both images:
Workshop with acting students
at the Europäisches Theaterinstitut Berlin 2024
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What Do We Rely on When We Transmit Knowledge?

BY

NATHALIE FILLION

Playwright and Director, Théâtre du Baldaquin (France)

When I started writing, there was little or no training for playwrights in France. I was an actress, and my first school was the stage. The grammar of the stage taught me what actors require in order to play — a time, a space, a language, a dramaturgy. And my acting practice gave me a sense of situations, of what's at stake, what performative speech can accomplish, and so forth — everything an actor builds a role around. The readings, the shows, the exposure to texts: all nourished my thinking, my eye, my taste for words and drama, and I quickly received encouragement. My first play won prizes, and I soon had a grant, commissions. All these signs of recognition reinforced my belief that I had something to offer to playwriting, and vice versa.

But I've never taken a writing workshop myself, never been in a position to be formally taught. I trained myself on the job.

So about 20 years ago, when I was first asked to teach, I built up my workshops empirically, without a model, glean-ing exercises from here and there, inventing most of them, thinking a lot (most of the time on my own) about how to convey the complexity of this craft simply. With no other model, no other method than my own self-taught experience, I had no choice but to rely on that experience to build a path of creativity and freedom for others over time.

A wealth of experience in such transmission and no official training: it was with this paradox in mind that I approached co-mentoring with Fabulamundi New Voices.

I've shared workshops with authors from very different countries, cultures, and generations, who have received official training in their own countries. Whether questioned or reproduced, whether conforming to it or deviating from

it, such training remains a benchmark for those who have received it. These discussions about our respective professional paths were fascinating, full of questions: **What do we rely on when we transmit knowledge? Who passes on what? To whom? Where? To what end? How do our perspective and personal identifications affect what and how we transmit?**

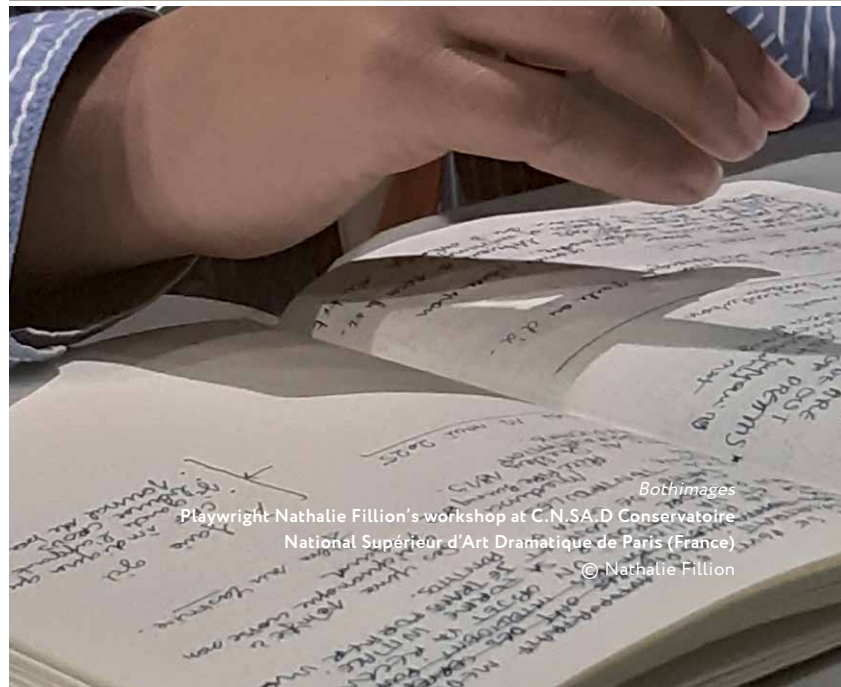
It's as an artist and practitioner that I transmit – what exactly? Undoubtedly, experience, but also a taste for questioning and wandering, which has enabled me to explore the rules and possibilities of the dramatic form in complete freedom.

As a self-taught person, I carry with me **a feeling of fragility and doubt, which I want to believe is a driving force for the artist and the teacher.** It is this dynamic paradox in the act of transmission, hitherto solitary, that the co-mentorship with *New Voices* has enabled me to share for the first time, in trust with my colleagues: to continue to affirm and explore together the driving questions that our artistic practices present to us, in a rapidly changing world. With different tools, different practices and perspectives, complementary and sometimes contradictory, we have worked together towards a common goal: to support, with kindness and respect for their freedom, young people who are looking for their voice in playwriting.

Translated from French by Karen Fricker.



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Playwright Nathalie Fillion's workshop at C.N.S.A.D Conservatoire
National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique de Paris (France)

© Nathalie Fillion

Biographies



Anda Cadariu is a writer, a translator, a lecturer at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş, Romania, a member of AICT.ro and UNITER. She is the author of several works of fiction and nonfiction. Her PhD thesis, published under the title *Poetic versus Political. Alternative Theatre in*

Poland during Communism by Eikon Publishing brought her a summa cum laude graduation distinction.



Claudia Di Giacomo and **Roberta Scaglione** founded PAV in Rome in 2000. Together, they curate the company's projects, shaping its strategic direction with a focus on supporting

contemporary theatre and promoting artistic work. Over these 25 years, they have developed expertise in the curation, programming, and executive management of festivals, showcases, conferences, and productions. They have collaborated with public institutions, embassies, national theatres, foundations, museums, associations, and companies. PAV has created and carried out numerous international projects, including Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe, a multi-award-winning initiative supported four times by the European Union, and PLAYGROUND, a spin-off of Fabulamundi, also winning European funds. Since 2015, Claudia Di Giacomo has been a professor at the DAMS of Roma Tre University, where she teaches Theatre Management Models. Roberta Scaglione is also a professor at Roma Tre University, where she leads the Enterprise Creation Workshop. In 2018, in collaboration with Sapienza University of Rome, they launched the Master's Degree in Economics and Performing Arts Management, where both teach modules on cultural organisation and project design.



Nathalie Fillion is a Paris-based playwright and director, originally trained as an actress. Her company is supported by France's Ministry of Culture. She directs her own plays and her work is supported by national theatres and prestigious stages in France and abroad. Her plays are translated into many languages and performed internationally. A polyglot,

musician, and traveller, she collaborates with choreographers, exploring different forms in her productions.



Eva Geatti studied art and works with body dramaturgy and performance. She has a passion for building objects and drawing, and she teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts. She has collaborated with some of the most important independent theatre companies in Italy. In 2001, she co-founded Cosmesi with Nicola Toffolini, an independent company dedicated to theatrical research and experimentation.



Alexandra Koch completed her master's degree in 'Sprachkunst' at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. She mainly writes theatre texts and prose. She also holds regular writing workshops for young people and adults. Her texts have been performed at theatres in Vienna, St. Pölten and Berlin. She has received several scholarships and prizes for her texts.



Mihaela Michailov has written 30 drama texts and dramatisations focused on relevant social and political themes, including forced labour migration, exploration of the educational system, the condition of mothers whose children suffer from autism spectrum disorders, bullying, the history of fascism, and transgenerational traumas. In 2015, she co-founded Replika Centre for Educational Theatre, an independent performing arts space. Her plays have been translated into Azerbaijani, Bulgarian, German, Greek, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.



Ewa Mikuta is a dramaturg and theatre director. She graduated in Theatre Directing (AST Kraków) and Theatre Studies (UJ). Her work connects theatre, research, and social engagement. She co-authored *Praca, praca* (2020), directed *Adulthood* (2023), and created *Toć*. She took part in Future Laboratory, exploring minority languages and identities.



Oriol Morales i Pujolar (1990) was trained in performing arts management and playwriting at the Institut del Teatre de Barcelona - from which he graduated - and at the Obrador Internacional de Dramatúrgia de la Sala Beckett. Previously, he had trained in acting, completing the stud-

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ies plan of the Col·legi de Teatre de Barcelona. Professionally, he works in playwriting, stage directing and teaching in the field of theatrical writing and acting.



Constance de Saint Remy is a playwright, author, and director. With her company La Dame à la mouche, based in Rouen, she brings her writing to the stage, exploring social issues and sharing her love of words through cultural outreach. She writes for all audiences, including young people. Her work is published by École des Loisirs and Les Solitaires Intempestifs. Since 2023, she represents Théâtre Ouvert in the European programme Fabulamundi New Voices.



Roberto Scarpetti was resident playwright at Teatro di Roma from 2014 to 2018. He's the author of *Viva l'Italia*, *le morti di Fausto e laio*, a play awarded with mention Franco Quadri at Premio Riccione, produced by Teatro di Roma and Teatro dell'Elfo, and later adapted into a radio podcast for Radio Rai. He constantly collaborates with lacasadargilla, a Rome-based theatre company. For the screen, he wrote several films, such as *Giochi d'estate*, that won the Swiss Prize for Best Screenplay.



Bernhard Studlar was born in 1972 in Vienna, Austria. He studied Playwriting at the University of Arts in Berlin. For over 20 years, he has been working as a playwright and dramaturg. His plays have been translated into several languages including English, Italian, Czech, Polish and Turkish. In 2005, he founded the intercultural playwrights-project WIENER WORTSTAETTEN, which he is still leading as artistic director. The project encourages discussion and networking between authors.



Elise Wilk, born in Braşov, Transylvania, and raised bilingual in German and Romanian, is one of the most performed playwrights of her generation in Romania. Her plays have been staged both in Romania and abroad, being so far translated into 15 languages and being awarded with several prizes. The last one is the AURORA Prize in Poland in 2022. She teaches playwriting at the University of Arts in Târgu Mureş and writes plays commissioned by both theatres in Romania and abroad.



Ingeborg von Zadow was born in Berlin. She holds an M.A. in Theatre from SUNY Binghamton, USA, and has worked as assistant director in opera and drama. There have been over 150 productions of her plays in Germany and internationally; translations are available in 12 languages. She won the Brother-Grimm-Prize of Berlin and was short-listed for the German Children's Theatre Prize. The rights to her plays are held by Verlag der Autoren, Frankfurt a.M., Germany.

Partner Institutions

European Theatre Convention (ETC), founded in 1988, is the largest network of public theatres in Europe. It is an arts organisation that promotes European theatre as a vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies. ETC's current four-year programme of activities, European Theatre: BREAK THE MOULD, is co-funded by the European Union and supports networking, professional development and artistic collaborations for theatre staff across Europe – championing theatre as a key European art form for the 21st century. ETC has over 75 members from 33 countries and is supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

www.europeantheatre.eu

PAV creates and realises cultural projects in partnership with artists and institutions. Born in Rome in 2000, PAV specialises in the production, management and administration of cultural events, festivals, shows and conferences and works with public national institutions, theatres, foreign embassies, artists and companies, combining an institutional profile with support to the independent scene. These different fields of action have always made for dialogue in a natural way: such interaction has proven to be a fundamental resort for many projects and generally for the entire working experience stemming from such connections. PAV's multifaceted activity allowed for the development of a privileged standpoint, with a 360° eye-view on contemporary theatre. www.pav-it.eu

Sala Beckett/Obrador Internacional de Dramatúrgia is a space for theatrical creation, training and experimentation which endeavours especially to promote contemporary drama and offer a meeting point for playwrights with other stage creators, artists from other disciplines and the general public. A range of activities take place in it, from teaching and experimentation programmes with varying degrees of specialisation, through regular show production and programming, to international courses, workshops and meetings; the publication and reading of drama; the writing of theoretical texts, and the translation and specific promotion of plays, authors and shows, with a special emphasis on new forms of dramatic writing. www.salabeckett.cat

Teatrul Odeon is a repertory theatre founded in 1946. It is a public institution subsidised by the General Council of Bucharest Municipality. The venue has two halls – Majestic Hall with a capacity of 300 seats and Studio Hall (reopened after 62 years in 2010) with a capacity of approximately 120 seats. Its permanent artistic team includes 35 actors, two directors, one designer and a choreographer. Its repertoire is varied, including performances based on Romanian and foreign texts, both classic and contemporary, highly appreciated at many festivals, both in the country and abroad. The theatre also develops alternative programmes: Dance at the Odeon, educational schemes (Theatre and School, Classic is fantastic – The Childhood of Great Composers), art exhibitions and international projects. www.teatrul-odeon.ro

Interkulturelle Theaterzentrum Berlin e.V. (ITZ) is acting mainly with young people (10-16) with multicultural and migration background in collaboration with schools (Kepler Schule, Adolf Reichwein Schule, Albert Einstein Gymnasium, Herman Nohl Schule, Loewenzahn Schule), multicultural associations such as TDZ (Türkisch-Deutsches-Zentrum e.V.), RoMa-Trial e.V., Vincentino Foundation, etc. The centre is part of a local network for cultural activities called Kulturnetzwerk Neukölln. Its main interest is to cross borders, generational borders, borders of language, discipline, genre, and social borders. It offers a wide range of activities: theatre workshops, dance workshops, but also productions of contemporary playwrights, readings, concerts, open mike sessions, common meals with discussions or construction workshops, public gardening, and cinema projections. At the heart of ITZ activities is the "Jugendtheaterwerkstatt Neukoelln" financed by the Bundesamt for Migration and Refugees, BAMF, which is acting in the "Hauser," our project room at the Esperantoplatz. www.itzberlin.de

Short Theatre is the multidisciplinary festival that, since 2006, in Rome, has rejigged the signs pointing to the changing landscape of national and international live entertainment, with a layered programme of shows, performances, installations, meetings, workshops, concerts and DJ sets. An open environment to research and exchange, one in which to develop new forms of transmission for theoretical and practical knowledge. In a complex metropolitan area like that of Rome, Short Theatre brings together the themes, content and subjectivity that define our present. Practice, theory, imagination and encounter are an organic part of a single artistic proposal, which dialogues with the spaces of the city to reactivate their meanings through reflection and curatorial practice, relaunching connections with the

artistic community. Short Theatre adopts tools and good practice in accordance with the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda, for the reduction of its environmental impact and the promotion of inclusiveness, training, growth and innovation. www.shorttheatre.org

Divadlo Letí originated in September 2005. Its main artistic programme is the production, active support and development of contemporary drama. Contemporary plays are an essential part of live art that reflect the current needs of their viewers. Letí focuses on cooperation with young Czech playwrights, actors, directors, etc. – many of them considered to be significant talents of their generation. Letí currently produces stagings, provides artistic residencies for Czech and foreign playwrights, initiates stagings of contemporary plays, organises a showcase of stagings of contemporary plays from the Czech Republic and abroad, and it also deals with professional reflection and active work with the audience. In 2010, Divadlo Letí began working on a new project that was later entitled Centre for Contemporary Drama. The main goal of this Centre is to broadly support contemporary dramatic development in the Czech Republic and to present new Czech and foreign plays to the widest audiences. www.divadlo-leti.cz

Wiener Wortstaetten was founded in 2005 by playwright Bernhard Studlar and director Hans Escher as an intercultural playwriting project. Right from the start, the project focused on the creation of new texts for the stage, as well as dealing with socially important issues and networking between playwrights. Over the years, a variety of projects and productions of new plays have emerged. Initiatives such as the “exil-Dramatiker*innenpreis” became a springboard for young playwrights. From cross-border cooperations, most recently Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe, an international network was created that promotes both the exchange between playwrights and the translation of contemporary drama. Wiener Wortstaetten sees itself as an independent, creative research laboratory and text workshop, as a mediator between authors and the theatre business. And last but not least, as a place where new forms of authorship and “classical” playwriting meet each other at eye level. The goal of the project is the long-term promotion and support of playwrights. www.wortstaetten.at

La Mousson d’été, founded in 1995 by artistic director Michel Didym, is one of the major European events focused on the discovery, development and promotion of new playwriting. The Abbaye of Prémontrés, located in the heart of Lorraine, opens its doors for seven days to authors, directors, uni-

versity teachers, students, actors, and the public, inviting them to explore contemporary theatre. La Mousson d’Été proposes a wide range of readings, mises en espace – of both unpublished texts or texts translated for the first time in French – conversations and performances. www.meec.org

Théâtre Ouvert – Centre National des Dramaturgies Contemporaines’ missions can be defined as promoting the renewal of contemporary dramatic art, provoking the emergence of new kinds of writing through exploration and experimentation, and supporting the development of these writings through the production, publication, and circulation of texts and theatrical forms such as readings, stagings, shows, and performances. www.theatre-ouvert.com

Culture Action Europe (CAE) is the major European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, activists, academics and policymakers. CAE is the first port of call for informed opinion and debate about arts and cultural policy in the EU. As the only intersectoral network, it brings together all practices in culture, from the performing arts to literature, the visual arts, design and cross-arts initiatives, to community centres and activist groups. CAE believes in the value and values of culture and its contribution to the development of sustainable and inclusive societies. www.cultureactioneurope.org

Heartefact (HF), through creative, expert, and artistic exchange in the region of the Western Balkans, supports and encourages contemporary and engaged cultural and artistic creativity, and thus creates the conditions for producing a new generation of progressive individuals. Ever since its establishment in 2009, Heartefact has been committed to creating a cultural space which is responsible towards the past (the *Memory* programme) and builds a secure future (the *Futurue* programme). Heartefact is dedicated to fostering a creative, critical and responsible rethinking of emerging artistic, social and political issues and phenomena at national, regional and European levels. HF is advocating new models of production, regional cooperation and alternative forms of education. Through the fusion of performing arts, creative industries and digital technologies, Heartefact, as a leading institution, develops policies and practices that support a responsible culture of remembrance, democratic values, and above all, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and accountability in the public sphere. www.heartefact.org

University of Arts Târgu Mureş is a state-subsidised intercultural higher education institution, operating in the field of artistic creation and scientific research. It comprises the Faculty of Arts in Romanian and the Faculty of Arts in Hungarian, and it also manages the Studio Theatre, which is both a teaching laboratory and a production space for students and tutors. The University of Arts Târgu Mureş runs BA courses in acting, directing, theatre studies, choreography, set design, music pedagogy and multimedia, and MA courses in the same fields, as well as an MA in Playwriting – a creative writing two-year course. Many alumni of this course have become established playwrights, of national and international standing. www.uat.ro

SisterInArt Foundation, funded by Ita Krajewska and Kamila Straszynska, promotes intercultural dialogue through artistic and educational events, conferences, workshops, reviews, exhibitions, residence programmes, masterclasses, podcasts, social campaigns, competitions and festivals. The Foundation supports the popularisation of Polish culture abroad and disseminating foreign culture in Poland and the implementation of educational projects in the field of art, culture and psychology; the support of refugee, minority and excluded groups; the support of social solidarity connecting states, nations and ethnic groups and dialogue promotion of artistic and scientific initiatives in the field of European cultural heritage and the field of social psychology. www.instagram.com/sisterinart

About ETC

Founded in 1988, the European Theatre Convention (ETC) is the largest network of public theatres in Europe. It is an arts organisation that promotes European theatre as a vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies.

ETC's current four-year programme of activities, European Theatre: **BREAK THE MOULD**, is co-funded by the European Union and supports networking, professional development and artistic collaborations for theatre staff across Europe – championing theatre as a key European art form for the 21st century.

ETC has more than 75 members from 33 countries and is supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

Fabulamundi New Voices

Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe has been collaborating with European artists, professionals, and institutions for over ten years, supporting the careers of playwrights and promoting a diverse, inclusive, gender-balanced, and sustainable creative ecosystem.

Following two small-scale and one large-scale editions funded by the European Commission, Fabulamundi New Voices marks a new chapter in a successful history of cultural promotion rooted in European values and heritage. This new phase aims to bring contemporary playwriting closer to younger generations.

With a network spanning 10 countries and 14 organisations active in the fields of theatre and dramaturgy – including partners from across all European regions and the Western Balkans – New Voices is developing an innovative methodology to support and train a new generation of playwrights, placing dramaturgy into the spotlight, removing the barriers to the profession, and integrating digital tools and outputs into the creation process.

www.fabulamundi.eu



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How do we teach playwriting — not just as a skill, but as a shared practice of listening, risk, and co-creation? What does it mean to pass on creative knowledge across generations, languages, and technologies?

Fabulamundi New Voices: Playwriting Practices in Theatre – A Casebook is a hands-on, practical exploration of the craft of playwriting for the next generation. Bringing together renowned playwrights from across Europe, this publication offers a textured portrait of how to teach young people to learn to write for the stage.

Edited and published by the European Theatre Convention (ETC), this casebook features concrete tools and adaptable approaches for anyone working with young or emerging writers. From character-building techniques and collaborative dramaturgy to exercises for overcoming the blank page or engaging with digital media, it provides a rich, field-tested toolkit for teaching playwriting in diverse contexts. This casebook forms part of ETC's ongoing series documenting new practices in European theatre.