

Acting Presence as an Avant-Garde Experiment in Selected Performances of the Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop

ROZÁLIA SZÉKELY

Abstract: The article examines selected performances of the Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop through the concepts of acting presence and stage present time. The analysis focuses on performances built from real family relationships, personal biographical material, and shared presence, involving professional actors, amateurs, civilians, children, and animals. The intertwining of theatrical and performative elements, together with fragmented dramaturgy and indeterminacy, creates a mode of spectatorship in which presence functions as the primary medium of transmission. Drawing on John Keats's concept of "negative capability," as well as theories of autobiography and autofiction, the study interprets these performances as open, non-linear structures that foreground lived presence over narrative coherence.

In the performances of the Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop, acting presence and stage present time became perceptible within a liminal space that emerged through the symbiosis of autobiography, theatre, and performance, including the presence of the spectator. The Workshop was founded by Lili Monori and Miklós Székely B. The permanent creators of the performances were members of a single family: in addition to Monori and Székely B., their son, Sándor Farkas Horváth, and their daughter, Rozália Székely, the author of the

present study, also participated. Civil performers (Ernő Tihanyi, Lajos Greff, Béla Újlaki) and the family's domestic animals played an important role in the creative process, and on several occasions, friends also joined the work (Gyula Francia, Natasa Stork, and András Antal). Between 1990 and 2004, the creators presented their performances in a basement system on Szentkirályi Street; between 2004 and 2014, the performances took place at the Kultiplex, the MU Theatre, in private apartments, and in classrooms of the DOVER Language School.

Contexts of Presence

The theatrical avant-garde can be approached from multiple perspectives: spirit and ethos, historical context, stylistic features, methodologies of experimentation, the role of the spectator, mechanisms of impact, and the often restrained receptivity of both audiences and the professional field. The Dadaist formal experiments of the Zöld Szamár (Green Donkey) Theatre in 1925 resulted in only two performances.¹ In the same year, Géza Blattner left the country and later founded a successful experimental puppet theatre in Paris.² Under the Soviet system, neo-avant-garde art found its space primarily underground, organising itself as a counterculture.³ Following Grotowski, the

¹ JÁKFALVI Magdolna, *Avantgárd – színház – politika* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2006), 49.

² N.N., "Blattner Géza", *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, accessed September 29, 2025, [https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-](https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/b-74700/blattner-geza-74C41/)

[kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/b-74700/blattner-geza-74C41/](https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/b-74700/blattner-geza-74C41/).

³ SCHULLER Gabriella, "MŰ/EMLÉK/MŰ. Halász Péter: *Mű emlék* (Hatalom Pénz Hírnév Szépség Szeretet), Kamra, 1994", *Theatron* 13, No. 1. (2014): 33–36.

Universitas Ensemble pursued experiments in physical theatre; however, two members who later separated from the group, Péter Halász and Tamás Fodor, came to represent markedly different directions⁴: Fodor developed a politically engaged partisan theatre through the method of *création collective*, which gradually became integrated into Hungarian theatrical culture, while Halász's company, which pushed the boundaries of intimacy, was forced into emigration due to its mode of existence.

The happenings of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the events of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, operated at the boundary between visual art and theatre.⁵ These are most often classified as part of neo-avant-garde visual art, in contrast to Halász's company, which articulated its radicalism within theatrical frameworks.

In examining the avant-garde character of the Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop, I do not approach the question primarily from the perspective of formal language or historical classification, but rather through personal involvement, acting presence, and stage present time. Within avant-garde theatrical experimentation, particularly in the neo-avant-garde context of the 1960s and 1970s, performance emerged as a distinct genre, with antecedents already present in early avant-garde actions.⁶ Alongside formal experimentation, emphasis increasingly shifted away from text and narrativity toward presence, the human body appearing on stage, and the

subject. The experience of the human being present on stage—or, at times, an animal—became the medium of transmission itself. This experiential quality of performance did not disappear over time.

In 2019, during the theatrical roundtable discussion *Halász Péter: hol vagy?* (*Peter Halász: where are you?*), participants reflected on Halász's legacy by considering the possibilities of personal involvement and intimacy, identifying these categories as central elements of the avant-garde inheritance. According to Veronika Szabó, what matters is that “performers do not play roles, or only partially play roles, but also undertake themselves on stage,” while Zsuzsa Berecz emphasises that “intimacy is something that must always be created, because it can very easily turn into spectacle... Personal involvement has become a dominant tool today; we build from personal involvement and produce value through it. What is it that connects us beyond personal involvement?”⁷ This question can also be posed in relation to the Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop. A family performs genre-indeterminate productions for a narrow audience, drawing heavily on personal stories and on the real relational network among the performers. But what does the spectator perceive? What is the present time in Szentkirályi performances?

In these productions, performative and theatrical elements intertwine. Theatrical elements include, for example, the extended rehearsal process, the elaborated quality of

⁴ “But they set off in a different direction, and they kept fucking with my life, asking why we were dealing with politics when we should be speaking much more harshly, and not on a political basis.” *Szabadságzigetek. Fodor Tamás és a Stúdió K Színház*, ed. by SÁNDOR L. István (Budapest: Selinunte, 2007), 225.

⁵ Artpool Art Research Centre, “Kápolnatárlatok 1973 – Chronology,” accessed September 28, 2025, <https://artpool.hu/boglar/1973/kronologia73.html>.

⁶ JÁKFALVI, *Avantgárd...*, 9–10.

⁷ In the discussion moderated by Gabriella SCHULLER, the participants were Ádám FEKETE, Ármin SZABÓ-SZÉKELY, Klára CSERNE, Veronika SZABÓ, Zsuzsa BERE CZ, Martin BOROSS, Kristóf KELEMEN, and Vilmos VAJDAI. *Halász Péter: hol vagy?*, *Színház.net*, July 28, 2019, accessed September 28, 2025, <https://szinhaz.net/2019/07/28/halasz-peter-hol-vagy/>.

acting presence, and the maintenance of a repertoire. Performative elements, by contrast, include personal involvement, the quality of presence, non-linear dramaturgy, improvisational components, and singularity. When seeking to distinguish between performance and theatre, in the case of Szentkirályi, I draw on the observation of Magdolna Jákfalvi, according to whom theatre produces a form of virtual doubling: two bodies are present—the performer and the spectator—while a virtual mode of existence is imposed upon the performer's body.⁸ When this virtual doubling does not occur, we speak of performance. In Szentkirályi productions, virtual doubling was only partially realised, in the form of role fragments. The personal self became intertwined with these fragments.

The Scope of Personal Space

At the centre of the work stood Lili Monori's artistic personality and the stories of her life, around which the family also organised itself—simultaneously as lived reality and as the group of individuals appearing in the theatrical performances. Autobiographical elements permeated the structure of the productions, yet they generally did not appear in an explicit form. They were inter-woven with literary elements and with thematic materials that differed from lived personal experience. Political and social reflections—also important layers of the performances—were present, but only secondarily. At times, real documents were incorporated as well. For example, in the 1996 performance *Matiné*,

⁸ JÁKFALVI Magdolna, „A nézés öröme”, in *Átvilágítás. A magyar színház európai kontextusban*, ed. by IMRE Zoltán (Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 2005), 99.

⁹ Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *Matiné (Matinee)*, directed by Lili MONORI and Miklós SZÉKELY B., Budapest: Szentkirályi utca 4, basement, 1996.

¹⁰ Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *A levél (The Letter)*, directed by Lili MONORI and Miklós

a letter written by Lídia Szujó, Monori's mother, was read aloud.⁹ In 2001, in the performance *A levél (The Letter)*, which thematised a screenplay, an aborted film production, and the memory of a former husband, excerpts from the screenplay were used—not for the purpose of adaptation, but as acts of recollection.¹⁰

In the first performance, *Műtét (Surgery)*, premiered in 1990, scenes built on strongly symbolic gestures thematised phases of human–animal transformation and transformations of human relationships through images of courtship, wedding, and consummation.¹¹ In later productions, the use of dramatic texts became intertwined with performative elements and with multimedia: sound effects, visual components, projections, and even solutions in which one performer (Lili Monori) participated in the performance via Skype.¹² Certain decisive life events in Monori's life played a role both in the emergence of Szentkirályi and in the themes of the performances, scenes, and motifs. The fatal train accident of Lídia Szujó in 1974 was recalled in *Matiné (Matinee)*. A one-day shoot of Dezső Magyar's unrealised film *A levél* became a source of inspiration for three performances. The figure of Albert Monori, Monori's father, served as a source for many of the male characters represented or evoked across the performances. Her relationship with Gábor Bódy, their joint work, the performance *Cselédek (The Maids)* by Jean Genet, and her experiences at the Academy of Theatre and Film Arts—especially when contrasted with the period focused on poetry recitation—were

SZÉKELY B., Budapest: Szentkirályi utca 4, basement, 2001.

¹¹ Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *Műtét (Surgery)*, directed by Lili MONORI and Miklós SZÉKELY B., Budapest: Szentkirályi utca 4, basement, 1990.

¹² Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *Egy szívvel két hazában (In Two Homelands with One Heart)*, directed by Monori Lili. 1122 Budapest, Maros utca 11, private flat, 2010.

all decisive factors in shaping Szentkirályi's mode of operation and working methodology.

Alongside these foundational narratives, lived reality was also palpable in the shared presence of the family within the performances, as a layer that was at once conscious and unconscious in the staging. Although the existence of Szentkirályi and its performances was grounded in autobiographical events and in real relational experiences among the creators, these materials were transformed into a play of identity through postdramatic dramaturgy, non-causal sequences of events, and role fragments.¹³ This play affected the spectator's perception more strongly than it guided the audience toward any predetermined interpretive framework. Personal experiences and stories constituted important elements of the performances, yet text, linearity, and causality were no more central organising principles than the existence or coherence of a stable stage role.

In the 1990 performance *Műtét (Surgery)* and the 1992 *Orlandó*, the male figure appeared simultaneously as actor, as Miklós Székely B., as father, as partner, as the owner of a dog, and as a bird-headed creature. In a similar manner, every performer who ever appeared in Szentkirályi—women, children, civilians, amateurs, professionals, dogs, cats, ducks, sheep, hens, and roosters—was at once themselves, then a role, then themselves again, becoming identical with all living and non-living entities present within the space of play. The family spoke partly about Monori's life and partly lived their own lives on stage, yet the scenes fractured the act of writing life onto the stage: they did not close into an interpretive framework, but

¹³ "We stumble in the half-light, our shadow sways together with the shadows of the performers on the cave-like wall of the basement; it is impossible to know exactly who they are, just as it is no longer clear who we ourselves are." HORVÁTH, Péter, "Érintő", *Színházi Élet* 1, No. 7, (1990): 11.

evoked fragments of past or present lived realities.

The unpremeditated nature of the working method, the use of one's own life material, the fragmented dramaturgy of the performances, and the consistent rejection of linearity can be related to John Keats's concept of "negative capability". This capability compels both spectator and performer to coexist with uncertainty and indeterminacy. As Keats formulates it: "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."¹⁴ Both the scenes and the stage meanings of the human and animal performers remain continuously ambiguous: motifs can be identified, yet it is palpable that the emphasis does not lie on symbolic meanings. As soon as the spectator might begin to articulate what they see or perceive, the narrative shifts.

Although the rehearsal processes were preceded by research, the formulation of a specific artistic concept, and at times even the drafting of a plot outline, the meaning and structure of the performances were not precomposed forms, but open frameworks—at times modifiable in the course of play itself. The creators made use of presence and the immediacy of the situation. Lived reality unfolding in the present time of the performance was perceptible and constituted a distinct layer, yet it was minimally contextualised; directorial gestures typically did not emphasise it.

Despite the mixture of theatrical and performative elements, the Szentkirályi performances cannot be considered happenings. Nevertheless, it is worth introducing into the

¹⁴ JOHN KEATS, *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*, ed. by Sidney COLVIN (London: Macmillan, 1925), quoted passage on "negative capability," accessed via Project Gutenberg, <https://mason.gmu.edu/~rnanian/Keats-NegativeCapability.html>.

discussion the Kirby–Cage debate surrounding the happening, as it sheds light on a quality that also defined the Szentkirályi working method and can be connected to Keats’s notion of negative capability. Marvin Carlson juxtaposes the opposing positions of Kirby and Cage: Kirby argues that the happening is organised by the creator’s individual conception and that “traditional theatre provides the spectator with a comprehensible ‘information system,’” whereas Cage warned that regardless of individual intention, any form of intentionality ultimately leads back to conventional message transmission. “According to Cage, the only certain way to avoid this problem is to replace intention (even individual intention) with improvisation and chance”.¹⁵ In Szentkirályi, artistic intention manifested precisely in the avoidance of intentionality, though not exclusively in the form of improvisation and randomness articulated by Cage. The performances, created over rehearsal processes lasting several months—sometimes several years—did not target the spectator’s inclination toward interpretation; indeterminacy governed not only the performances, but also the presence of the performers themselves.

The first two productions, *Műtét* (*Surgery*) and *Műtét/Analízis/Orlandó* (*Surgery, Analysis, Orlando*), used little or no text; explicit autobiographical references appeared only sporadically and were not clearly identifiable.¹⁶ Contemporary reviews expressed interest and acceptance alongside incompre-

hension. “Our categories are insufficient for it.” wrote Péter Horváth after *Műtét* (*Surgery*) in 1990,¹⁷ while Péter Esterházy formulated after seeing *Orlandó* in 1992: “There is no answer, because we cannot ask a question”.¹⁸ In his writings following the first premiere in 1990, Péter Molnár Gál emphasised the relationship between the performers as a defining aspect of the acting: “Two people stand barely twenty centimetres apart. Yet the abyss between them is unbridgeable. They are close to one another, but separated by an insurmountable distance.”¹⁹ Molnár Gál’s texts repeatedly reveal that, in the present time of the performance, the personal relationship between the performers exerted a stronger effect than autobiographical reference alone—this relationship being not merely professional in nature, but a product of their lived lives.

In the performance *A levél* (*The Letter*), it is stated with regard to Székely B.’s stage identity that he “plays” Dr. Dezső Magyar. This name refers to a real person: Monori’s former husband and the author of the screenplay *A levél*. Based on audience responses, it can be assumed that spectators were able to follow—if not from other sources, then certainly from the programme booklet—that Dezső Magyar was a film director and the screenwriter of *A levél*, and that the performance involved an act of remembrance. However, not all spectators could have been familiar with the biographical aspects of the life story involved.²⁰ Until that

¹⁵ Marvin CARLSON, “A szemiotikai értelmezhetőség és hiánya az előadásban,” trans. by NYISZTOR Miklós, in *A színpadtól a színpadig. Válogatás Marvin Carlson színházi írásaiból*, ed. by KURDI Mária and CSIKAI Zsuzsa (Szeged: AMERICANA eBooks, 2014).

¹⁶ Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *Műtét/Analízis/Orlandó* (*Surgery, Analysis, Orlando*), directed by Miklós SZÉKELY B. and Lili MONORI. Budapest, Szentkirályi Street 4, basement, 1992.

¹⁷ HORVÁTH, “Érintő”, 11.

¹⁸ ESTERHÁZY Péter, “Egy kékharisnya följegyzéseiből – Monori, Székely B.,” *Élet és Irodalom*, July 3, 1992, 3.

¹⁹ MOLNÁR GÁL Péter, „Szentkirályi utca 4”, *Népszabadság*, March 10, 1990, 9.

²⁰ “On the 2nd, *A levél* (*The Letter*), the premiere of the theatre operating in the basement at 4 Szentkirályi Street, District VIII, was created in memory of Dezső Magyar’s screenplay *A levél*. A remembrance of an old scene from an unmade film, of a single day of shooting from 1972. The basic idea was the short

point, the lives of the performers had primarily been known to spectators as the biographies of creative artists, given that both had already achieved considerable professional success. In this context, one may think, among other things, of Székely B.'s performance in the title role of the Stúdió K production of *Woyzeck*,²¹ and of Monori's film *Kilenc hónap (Nine Months)*²², in which she gave birth on camera to her son, Sándor Farkas Horváth.

In analysing the spectator–creator relationship, it is worth turning to the concepts of autobiography and autofiction derived from literary theory. Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiographical pact as a dual contract based on the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist, a pact that either exists or does not exist.²³ Presenting Manuel Alberca's theory of autofiction, Dóra Faix introduces the concept of the "ambivalent pact," which, according to Alberca, occupies a position between the autobiographical and the novelistic pact, "on no one's land," and is based on the constant, undecidable co-movement of autobiographical and fictional readings.²⁴

In Szentkirályi, real life history, reality, and fiction are interwoven, and the real male–female relationship between the Monori–Székely B. pair became perceptible in the performances, a fact also registered by contemporary criticism. Spectators—generally acquaintances—knew whom they were watch-

story *A levél* from the Soviet short story collection *Kemény szerelem (Hard Love)*, which had been published shortly before and then suddenly placed on the index. The director of the unrealised film was Dezső Magyar, the cinematographer Elemér Ragályi, the writers Péter Dobai and Dezső Magyar, and the leading actors Lili Monori, Gábor Bódy, and György Cserhalmi. The creators and performers of the production were: Lili Monori, Miklós Székely B., Sándor Farkas Horváth, Gina — now a dog, Totyi the duck." *Pesti Műsor*, May 10, 2001, 42.

ing: the family members living together wrote and staged the performances, drawing on their own life material and stories, appearing together with their own children and domestic animals. At the same time, the arc of the performances did not follow classical dramaturgy; they did not narrate a life story or an event through linear narration. In his writings, Péter Molnár Gál repeatedly emphasised the present-time quality of the relationship between the two founding members on stage, recording primarily its atmosphere and tonal register. In one of his characteristic descriptions, Molnár Gál writes:

"In their work, dramatic action does not consist of attractive confrontations: they present the routine of coexistence, the bored familiarity with one another's deeply guarded secrets. They do not expend energy even on indignation, let alone on outbursts. They love one another to the point of boredom. They understand one another's virtues with hatred. 'I'm going to the post office' or 'I'm going to buy milk!'—these everyday routine actions are of the same value as scenes in which a husband gives birth to a horse or a letter recounting a life filled with tragic turns is read aloud. Nothing happens to them. Everything happens with them."²⁵

²¹ Stúdió K Theatre: *Woyzeck*, directed by Tamás FODOR and the ensemble, 1977.

²² *Nine Months*, directed by Márta MÉSZÁROS, 1975.

²³ Philippe LEJEUNE, "Az önéletírói paktum", trans. by VARGA Róbert, in *Önéletírás, élettörténet, napló*, ed. by Z. VARGA Zoltán (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2003), 17–76.

²⁴ FAIX Dóra, "Az autofikció Spanyolországban", *Filológiai Közöny* 66, No. 2 (2020): 26–44.

²⁵ Péter Molnár Gál on the performance of *A levél*, premiered in 2001. Péter MOLNÁR GÁL

With regard to the 2007 performance *Argosz földje, én hazám* (*Land of Argos, My Homeland*), Molnár Gál once again confirms the reality-based quality of acting presence:

“Now the texts of Aeschylus and the material of the Pasolini murder form the subject of the performance. On the literary plane, the inner sediment moves. A private mythology. A murky preliminary confession of suffocating memories. At the lowest level, like lava, personal passion. A psycho-play analysis of hatred accumulated within a lasting, exemplary marriage.”²⁶

In the Lejeunean sense, the autobiographical space—that is, the authorial–receptive horizon in which the stage figures and real life history are projected onto one another—opens up most distinctly after the 1996 performance *Matiné* (*Matinee*).²⁷ From that point on, an increasing number of long interviews were conducted with the creators, in which they recounted in detail the personal references of the performances, including autobiographical events and the fact that they appeared on stage as a family, together with their own children. As Tibor Legát wrote in 1997: “A few minutes after seven o’clock, the rusty cellar door of the building at 4 Szentkirályi Street opened, and to the sound of the DIVSZ march, the forty or fifty curious spectators who had come to see *Matiné* could march down the steep staircase. Five years later, Lili Monori and Miklós Székely B. are presenting a premiere again. In pioneer uniforms, with their daughter and a legless duck, Totyi, they

Péter, “A levél”, *Népszabadság*, June 5, 2001, 9.

²⁶ Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Monori meg a telefonkönyv”, *Mozgó Világ* 33, No. 7. (2007): 103–106.

²⁷ LEJEUNE, *Önéletírás...*, 17–76.

²⁸ LEGÁT Tibor, “Egyszerűen ez lett a sorsunk”, *Magyar Narancs*, February 13, 1997, accessed September 28, 2025,

evoke the 1960s.”²⁸ In the same interview, Monori states: “But here everything is about personal matters; *Matiné*, for example, was created in memory of my mother.”²⁹

From this point onward, based on the published reviews and interviews, spectators could know that this was a theatre inspired by the creators’ own lives, and that, as a family theatre, the living representatives of these sources of inspiration were present on stage. It can therefore be assumed that, for the small stable audience as well as for occasional spectators, the autobiographical potential of the performances constituted shared knowledge even when explicit, identifiable autobiographical references did not appear clearly within the textual or motivic structures.

In the 2011 performance *Rókatánc* (*Fox Dance*)³⁰, multiple narratives of personal involvement were interwoven in a manner characteristic of Szentkirályi; however, the decades-long creative constellation was disrupted, and the personal relationships among the performers shifted to a different level. The premiere of *Rókatánc* took place in a classroom of a language school, as the Workshop had not performed in the Szentkirályi Street basement for seven years by that time. The performers were Natasa Stork, a professional actress and family friend; Béla Újlaki, a resident of Kisoroszi and a civilian performer; Lili Monori; and Rozália Székely, Monori’s daughter, who had been involved in Szentkirályi productions since childhood.

The video recording of the performance was made by Miklós Székely B., who positioned himself on the threshold of the classroom, at

https://magyarnarancs.hu/film2/egyszeruen_ez lett_a_sorsunk_monori_lili_es_szekely_b_miklos_szinmuveszek-56482.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Szentkirályi Theatre Workshop: *Rókatánc* (*Fox Dance*), directed by Lili MONORI, Budapest: Dover Language Centre, Király Street 9, 2011.

the edge of the playing area, yet in front of the audience and within their field of vision. By that time, he was no longer collaborating with Monori, and they had separated in their private lives as well. Although he did not participate in the rehearsal process, and there was no prior agreement among the creators regarding how he, as the camera operator—beyond this task—would take part in the event, his presence contributed to the performance's mechanism of effect. The production was created in memory of Totyi the duck, an important animal performer of the Szentkirályi basement period; this theme appeared openly, and the performance was autobiographical in the sense that it addressed significant elements of the shared real-life history of the three people on stage—Lili Monori, Miklós Székely B., and Rozália Székely.

Within the performance, Monori articulates remembrance in the first person singular. She delivers the following monologue facing the audience in a room of approximately fifteen square meters:

"I thought that about this—about this building and Szentkirályi—I would somehow say something. Something would come to mind, somehow, and I submitted a grant application to the National Cultural Fund. In the meantime, every three or four months I am in an operating room, so not... afterwards it takes two months for my brain to recover. And the other thing is that I cannot remember. That is, memory is as if it were a copy. Some kind of copy. And I think that we are what we have lost. So it will be about Totyi. The memoirs of a little duck. A legless duckling. It had legs at first, it even ran, then while running it lost its leg."³¹

³¹ Text spoken in the performance *Rókatánc*. Transcribed from the performance recording.

Monori delivered this monologue turned toward the audience, while the other performers participated in the outer circle of the first-person narrative. As far as I recall, such utterances were hardly rehearsed collectively. Monori knew that this monologue would be part of the performance and prepared for it alone.³² In the video recording, one can observe that at various dramaturgical points Monori looks into the camera for extended moments, her gaze marked by sadness. On the other side of the lens stood Székely B. Given the small size of the room and Monori's central position within the playing area, neither the direction nor the depth of her gaze could escape the spectators' attention. These human gestures directed toward Székely B. were improvised, born of the moment; they were not tested in multiple variations during rehearsals. The staging therefore did not make a prior decision regarding their use, but allowed them to occur.

Monori situates Székely B. within the performance with a single sentence: "And that is why I asked my colleague, Miklós Székely B., to record this—what I cannot, what I cannot." She then looks into the camera again, quietly and sorrowfully. Székely B.'s presence—half outside, half inside—hovers in the uncertainty and randomness characteristic of "negative capability." The staging does not emphasise this plane; the focus remains on Monori's solitary act of remembrance.

The spectators of the performance—Erzsi Sándor, Eszter Novák, Péter Kárpáti, Júlia Ungár, Orsolya Kóvári, and Lajos Verasztó—were long-time acquaintances of the family and of Szentkirályi. The interpretability of personal involvement was therefore tied, in part, to specific persons. In the video recording, one can see and hear how, at the beginning of the event, an image of the iron cellar door of the Szentkirályi basement was passed around on the screen of a prop laptop.

³² The framing of my use of personal memories is still in progress.

Someone from the audience identifies it aloud: "Szentkirályi." The person had been there; they recognised the entrance from a small image, and the emotional involvement was audible in their voice. Another layer of personal involvement was generated by a network of motifs rehearsed during the process. The creators incorporated the thesis of Sándor Farkas Horváth both verbally and as an object. In Újlaki's scene, he refers to it as his own writing, holding the document in his hands, its white cover bearing the name "Sándor Farkas Horváth" in large black letters. Natasa Stork laughs and says: "That's not your thesis, it's Sanyika's." Through the diminutive and the naming of ownership, Stork defines herself as personally involved in the act of remembrance and in her relationship with the family.

At the same time, the mode of communal identification or desire for community that appeared in the performances of Újlaki and Stork was almost entirely absent from the arranged or unarranged presence of Miklós Székely B. and Rozália Székely. They did not reflect on their own involvement or on one another within the shared history. On one occasion, Rozália Székely named Székely B. when a fragment of an earlier performance, *Matiné (Matinee)*, was projected: "Miklós Székely B. is my father; he played the bird-headed creature in *Orlandó*." The direction of *Rókatánc (Fox Dance)* placed Monori's past and present relational networks at its centre. While the inclusion of family members constituted a crucial source of inspiration, they did not enact their own lives on stage. In her study published in *Theatron*, Dorka Porogi describes the Szentkirályi performances as follows:

"This play is diary-like and confessional: the performers present their own lives, their real bodily and emotional relation-

ships, and their connections to the spectators, using them within the framework, world, and language of literary material, placing them in the space of the basement for a form of social thinking together and for acting associations. The bodies existing on stage do not start the play from zero; they know one another".³³

At the same time, Porogi points to a double absence. On the one hand, from the creators' side, there is a lack of a key to interpretability; on the other hand, contemporary critical writing does not sufficiently reveal the associative structures and conceptual foundations of the performances. As she notes: "Almost every spectator perceives the effect of strong acting presence, yet the relationships among the elements of the performances, the associative structures, and the theoretical and conceptual bases are not uncovered by reviews and analyses".³⁴

In the case of a dramatic theatre production, where actors perform roles written by a playwright and identified by character names, it is easier to unravel the internal relational system of the work. In the case of Szentkirályi, however, the difficulty of interpretation may have been caused precisely by the complexity of genre classification—by the unique mixture of theatrical and performative elements, autobiography, and autofiction. The question then arises of how one can speak about the personal register of an artistic work when it unfolds live before the spectator's eyes: not as quotation, not in objectified form, not symbolically, but as bare reality. Stage life reality was not contextualised by direction; *it simply occurred*. This experience thus became a significant register of the performances' mechanism of effect, yet for the spectator it remained only partially verbalisable.

³³ Dorka POROGI, "Színészet, mint önálló formanyelvű művészet. A Monori–Székely B.-játékról és a Szentkirályi Műhely három elő-

adásáról," *Theatron* 15, No. 2 (2021): 21–41., 37.

³⁴ Ibid.

Bibliography

- Artpool Art Research Centre. "Kápolnatárlatok 1973 – Kronológia". Accessed September 28, 2025, <https://artpool.hu/boglar/1973/kronologia73.html>.
- CARLSON, Marvin. *From Stage to Stage. Selected Writings on Theatre by Marvin Carlson*. Translated by NYISZTOR Miklós. Edited by KURDI Mária and CSIKAI Zsuzsa. Szeged: AMERICANA eBooks, 2014.
- ESTERHÁZY Péter. "Egy kékharisnya följegyzéseiből – Monori, Székely B.". *Élet és Irodalom*, July 3, 1992.
- FAIX Dóra. "Az autofikció Spanyolországban". *Filológiai Közlöny* 66, No. 2 (2020): 26–44.
- Halász Péter: *hol vagy?*. *Színház.net*, July 28, 2019. Accessed September 28, 2025, <https://szinhaz.net/2019/07/28/halasz-peter-hol-vagy/>.
- HORVÁTH Péter. "Érintő". *Színházi Élet* 1, No. 7 (1990): 11.
- JÁKFALVI Magdolna. *Avantgárd – színház – politika*. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2006.
- JÁKFALVI Magdolna. „A nézés öröme”. In *Átvilágítás. A magyar színház európai kontextusban*. Edited by IMRE Zoltán, 99–112. Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 2005.
- KEATS, John. *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*. Edited by Sidney COLVIN. London: Macmillan, 1925. Online edition: Project Gutenberg. <https://mason.gmu.edu/~rnanian/Keats-NegativeCapability.html>.
- LEGÁT Tibor. "Egyszerűen ez lett a sorsunk". *Magyar Narancs*, February 13, 1997. Accessed September 28, 2025, <https://magyarnarancs.hu/film2/egyszeruen-ez-lett-a-sorsunk-monori-lili-es-szekely-b-miklos-szinmuveszek-56482>.
- LEJEUNE, Philippe. *Önéletírás, élettörténet, napló*, translated by VARGA Róbert. Edited by Z. VARGA Zoltán, 17–76. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2003.
- MOLNÁR GÁL Péter. "Szentkirályi utca 4.". *Népszabadság*, March 10, 1990. 9.
- MOLNÁR GÁL Péter. "A levél". *Népszabadság*, June 5, 2001. 9.
- MOLNÁR GÁL Péter. "Monori és a telefonkönyv". *Mozgó Világ* 33, No. 7. (2007): 103–106.
- N.N. "Blattner Géza". *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*. Accessed September 29, 2025, <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/b-74700/blattner-geza-74C41/>.
- POROGI Dorka. "Színészet, mint önálló formanyelvű művészet. A Monori–Székely B.-játékról és a Szentkirályi Műhely három előadásáról". *Theatron* 15, No. 2 (2021): 21–41.
- SÁNDOR L. István, ed. *Szabadságzigetek. Fodor Tamás és a Stúdió K Színház*. Budapest: Selinunte, 2007.
- SCHULLER Gabriella. "MŰ/EMLÉK/MŰ. Halász Péter: *Mű emlék (Hatalom Pénz Hírnév Szépség Szeretet)*, Kamra, 1994.". *Theatron* 13, No. 1 (2014): 33–36.