



ULBS

Universitatea "Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu



Interdisciplinary doctoral school

Field of doctoral studies: THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS

DOCTORAL THESIS

**FROM CINEMA TO THEATRE AND FROM
THEATRE TO CINEMA ON THE ROMANIAN
STAGE AFTER 1989**

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Keywords: theatrical adaptation, book-to-film adaptations, film-to-stage theatrical adaptation, multiple adaptations, theatrical public space, "The Forest of the Hanged", "Hamlet"; "Scenes from a Marriage", "Breaking the Waves", "Cries and Whispers", "Confession at Tanacu"; "Over the Hills", hybridity of theatre, dramatic multimodal analysis



SUMMARY

In the thesis *From Cinema to Theatre and from Theatre to Cinema on the Romanian Stage after 1989*, we set out to research the trends in the Romanian theatre and cinema over the last 30 years, in the light of the new social and political realities. After 1989, beside the economic and social turmoil, inherent in a post-totalitarian society, the rift between generations grew deeper and extended up to theatre auditoriums and cinema halls. From allusive theatre to post-industrial drama, the post-December Romanian theatre and cinema have assumed the need for change.

The research is divided into three distinct directions: **adaptations from epic to dramatic**, **adaptations from cinema to theatre** and **multiple adaptations**. In the theoretical section, where the fundamental concepts are presented, we also provided a description of the socio-political context, which has influenced the dramaturgy of the last two decades. The approach considered not only the sequence of historical events, but also the trends and their effects on receptors.

We continued the research with a presentation of the different adaptation mechanisms and motivations, also seeking to find answers to questions on whether a valuable literary work automatically provides the same value to the performance or to the film. Given that, before 1989, playwrights would take refuge in classical drama or adaptations of literary texts it becomes particularly insightful to understand the trends in this regard after 1989.

The commercialization of public sphere is a recurring theme in many fields, including arts. Originally addressed by Jurgen Habermas in his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, commercialization made reference to the substitution of a sphere of individuals

who „gather together as a public” to „a semi-private world of consumer culture”¹ following the evolution of the mass media. Although the concept of the public sphere initially implied a sphere of rational-critical problematization of citizens, often associated with the televisual space and with political journalism, along with the types of involvement that it may elicit or not, the notion was quickly translated into the theatrical field as well, where the ludic force gives substance and specificity to the theatrical public space².

The initial Habermasian perspective on public sphere becomes somehow obsolete if we consider that, rather than being necessarily an area of civic discourse, the stage of theatre and adaptations is, implicitly, a cultural space and, more precisely, a public cultural space - a concept developed by Jim McGuigan³- whose outlines are no longer normative, but simply reflect the everyday interests of individuals, whether it is sexuality, concerns for a healthy life, or any position on certain events, political or non-political.

We have learned from these theories that the definition of commercialization in contemporaneity tends to be dominated by the idea of hybridity, either among elements from different cultures or from different registers, but indicated as being mostly Western elements - despite the fact that there is no pinpointing regarding the Western culture whose influence would be in question. Depending on the social context and the various patronages, this hybridity can acquire political contours, aestheticizing anyway. The stake was not only to capture the audiences, but also was the expression of a deconstructivist, avant-garde project.

At the same time, if we consider the emergence of online communication, the growing intertextuality of genres and the influences they can have on plays, we have come closer to a more precise definition of commercialization in the theatrical space. Discussing about the various commercial trends in televisual communication - also relevant for the theatre play screenings - Raimund Schieß pointed out that the insertion of visual as well as auditory elements from the area of online communication, tributary to the interference of televisual genres, such as cartoons / *voice-over*-type comments in different formats; the mix of elements specific to news broadcasts, such as

¹Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* . Trans. by T. Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 160, 1962/1989.

²Christopher B. Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere* , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014.

³ Jim McGuigan, The Cultural Public Sphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8, pp. 427-443, 2005.

breaking news, and the insertion of culturally resonant symbols, all these are forms of *multimodal entertainment*⁴ which has gained momentum in the last 20 years.

Thus, the mobilization of elements specific to the online and televisual communication, along with various cultural markers in theatrical communication, can be indicators of commercial trends, perceived as hybrids, which give an innovative meaning to the basic elements.

Starting from the above-mentioned theories, this paper aims to analyze the extent to which we can discuss about a theatrical public space with commercial trends, hybridized in contemporaneity, centred around adaptations from epic to dramatic and from theatre to cinema in the Romanian performing arts. Naturally, in order to understand the evolution towards such a trend, it was necessary to bring into discussion theatre's fundamental notions and some major landmarks of its historical and conceptual route.

The first chapter brings together a large theoretical corpus and contextual data about the theatrical public space. We begin by problematizing the theory of public sphere in Habermasian terms and its connections with the theatrical area, a perspective highlighted especially by Cristopher Balme⁵. Subsequently, we analyzed the perspectives on the role of theatre, as highlighted by Wagner, Brecht, Lehmann and Artaud; as well as the contemporary theories on the trends of hybridization, politicization and aestheticization in theatre from the perspective of Delimata⁶, Lin⁷ and Markin⁸. The purpose of this entire analytical approach was to extract the elements that can provide an operational definition of an analysis grid for the empirical framework of this paper. Since we could not approach the specifics of the Romanian public theatrical space without delimiting the political and European context that shaped it up, in the second part of this chapter, we emphasized the characteristics of theatre during the communist period in Central and South-Eastern Europe, on one hand, and of the Romanian post-December theatre, on the other

⁴ Raimund Schieß, Information meets entertainment. A visual analysis of election night TV programs across cultures. In Anita Fetzer, Gerda E. Lauerbach & Johann Wolfgang (eds.) *Political Discourse in the Media. Cross-cultural perspectives*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2007, pp. 275-313.

⁵ Christopher B. Balme, *op. cit.*

⁶ Maria Delimata, Authenticity and commercialization. Cambodian theatre in a postcolonial perspective, *Transgressions*, 15, pp. 15-25, 2010.

⁷ Shen Lin, Aestheticization and Politicization of Shakespeare in a Globalized China, *Critical Stages*, nr. 13, criticalstages.org/13/aestheticization-and-politicization-of-shakespeare-in-a-globalized-china/, 2016.

⁸ Pablo B. Markin, The Growing Aestheticization of Society, Culture, and Everyday Life, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296637920_The_Growing_Aestheticization_of_Society_Culture_and_Everyday_Life, pp. 81-115, 2016.

hand. At the end of this chapter, we made a summary of the theories in theatrical communication, trends in modern theatre and prolegomena to theatrical adaptations.

As a side note to our analytical approach, we noticed that few researchers explicitly mentioned the concept of public sphere in relation to the evolutions of the theatrical scene in the sphere of adaptations, although the reference to the values of ethics space and collective action is obvious⁹.

Our approach assumed the risk that “neither the subjects nor the storytelling set the theatre apart today from other languages. The drama of a great theater performance can equal the one of a successful film, and the sequencing of the episodes, their concatenation and the typology of the scenes are not necessarily different either [...]”¹⁰. The increased intertextuality in many fields and especially between cinema and theatre as a result of the development of online instruments, as well as the interpenetration of genres in order to attract new types of audiences, have somehow hindered the efforts to obtain a distinct critical perspective on the new trends in theatre staging. However, at the same time, we considered that „the live presence of the narrator and of the spectator who is watching nearby from the auditorium are not necessarily the distinctive elements of theatre”¹¹, but the presence or simulacrum of the stage itself, through the authenticity it claims and certain types of interactions that are consecrated as metatext in some contexts, remain the basic fabric of theatrical art and allow the understanding of the various changes that have occurred over time.

We noted that „the theatrical space remains a variable [...] that incorporates primarily three elements: the architecture of a stage, the place from which a spectator watches, and the route of a performance. Anything else can be integrated into this triad of spatiality [...]. There is, of course, a fourth one: the space of the dramatic text, with its own architecture [...] with an imaginary self-sufficient projection of the literary matter [...]. Relationships are defined in a variety of possibilities: from continuity to discontinuity, from harmony to brutal antagonism”¹².

At the same time, we have taken into account the fact that a director's option is quite flexible in terms of compliance with the literary text, despite the various normative requirements that may be in this regard. As a communication vector in the world of show business, a director offers the spectator a comparative perspective between play and theater performance, and guides towards

⁹ De pildă, în Jonas Tinius, Art as ethical practice: anthropological observations on and beyond theatre, *World Art*, pp. 1-25, 2017.

¹⁰ Octavian Saiu, *Teatrul la persoana I*, Nemira, București, 2016, p. 54.

¹¹ Idem

¹² Ibidem

reflection - unlike the reality of the cinematic audio-visual, which invites to escaping into other worlds¹³.

The Romanian theatre was a form of resistance, not only against communism, but also against the „greedy, indifferent and destructive" capitalism¹⁴ or against various forms of consumerism, through its playful and agonistic dimension¹⁵.

In the methodological section of this paper, we discussed about the well-established tools used in theatre studies to analyze plays and, then, we proceeded to the analysis of adaptation compositions from epic to dramatic and from theatre to cinema. Thus, we performed analysis of adaptations' content, along with a multimodal analysis of theatrical performances and films after the year of 2000, as Schieß had done in the field of televisual productions, which we discussed in detail in subchapter "Commercialization of theatrical space: analytical operationalizations"¹⁶.

To meet the research objectives, we used an analysis of adaptations' content, doubled by a multimodal analysis¹⁷, exploring the following elements in the corpus under analysis:

- visual elements in the area of online communication
- auditory elements, tributary to the interference of televisual genres, such as, for example, cartoons / voice-over-type comments in various formats;
- the mix of elements specific to other genres, including screening-specific themes in theater performances, visualization techniques;
- insertion of symbols with local cultural resonance

In the empirical section, we set out to analyze the extent to which we can discuss about a theatrical public space with hybrid tendencies in contemporaneity, focusing on adaptations from epic to dramatic and from theatre to cinema in the Romanian performing arts after 1989. This option is justified by the hypothesis that, after 2000, there was a tendency to dramatize film scripts, i.e. works written for the big screen, a form of art with a different language and with different structuring and narration rules than those of the theatre.

¹³Marian Popescu, *Theater and Communication*, Unitext Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011.

¹⁴Ovidiu Mihăiță, The Tragic & Troubled History of the Romanian Independent Theater, *Theater as Resistance*, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1-20.

¹⁵The two attributes in association have been indicated as features of the theatrical public sphere, in general, by Janelle Reinelt, Rethinking the Public Sphere for a Global Age, *Performance Research*, 16 (2), pp. 16-27, 2011.

¹⁶Raimund Schieß, Information meets entertainment. A visual analysis of election night TV programs across cultures. In Anita Fetzer, Gerda Eva (eds.) *Political Discourse in the Media. Cross-cultural perspectives*, pp. 275-313, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 2007.

¹⁷ Raimund Schieß, *op. cit.*

Thus, we made an analysis of a series of theatrical performances based on dramatic texts, then, theater performances based on film scripts and a series of multiple adaptations. Using these criteria, together with the archive accessibility and the popularity enjoyed by the theater performances and films in question, for the purposes of this research, we selected the following corpus:

- "The Bed of Procrustes" (directed by Cătălina Buzoianu)
- "Lolita" (directed by Cătălina Buzoianu)
- "Oblomov" (directed by Alexandru Tocilescu and dramatized by Mihaela Tonitza Iordache)
- "The Forest of the Hanged" (directed by Radu Afrim)
- "Faust" (directed by Silviu Purcărete)
- "The Danaids" (directed by Silviu Purcărete)
- "Oidip" (directed by Silviu Purcărete)
- "Hamlet" (directed by Vlad Mugur)
- "The Seagull" (directed by Andrei Șerban)
- "The Meeting" (directed by Simon McBurney)
- "Cries and Whispers" (directed by Andrei Serban)
- "Scenes from a Marriage" (directed by Radu Jude)
- "Persona" (directed by Radu-Alexandru Nica)
- "Breaking the Waves" (directed by Radu-Alexandru Nica)
- "The Bane" (directed by Radu Afrim)
- "Hamlet" (directed by Thomas Ostermeier)
- "The Tanacu Case" (directed by Andrei Șerban)
- "Beyond the Hills" (directed by Cristian Mungiu)
- "The Cherry Orchard" (directed by Alexandru Lustig)
- "Maria de Buenos Aires" (directed by Răzvan Mazilu).

In addition, due to the full or partial accessibility of the archives, we approached the performances based on the works written by Marin Preda, Caragiale, Shakespeare and Aglaja Veteranyi, as well as on the adaptations of the text "Fires" by Wajdi Mouawad, in the context of

general problematizations. We considered the approach of these shows to be relevant for capturing the trends in the contemporary theatre staging.

We researched the international trends, first of all at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS), which brought to Romania, in the editions organized since 1991, some of the greatest actors, theatre and film directors, theorists from all over the world.

Based on the model of Cătălina Buzoianu, a master of adapting literary works in dramatic scripts, we followed certain theoretical and historical directions, starting with the shows staged based on same-name literary works: "Lolita", "Oblomov", "The Forest of the Hanged", "The Alchemist", "Why the Child is Cooking in Polenta". The empirical section of this study also includes a discussion about adaptations made by Yuri Kordonsky, Dragoş Galgoşiu and Chris Simion.

Therefore, we started from the premise that this is a new tendency of the contemporary theatre director who seeks new ways of expression in these new, cinematographic tools. The director no longer finds himself in the existent tools in the contemporary context.

Later on, we noticed the directors' preference for dramatization of film scripts, i.e. of some works, not necessarily literary works, but scripts written for the big screen, a form of art with a different language and with different rules of structuring and narration than in theatre. We wondered how this hybrid structure came about, this symbiosis of multiple adaptations that we can see today. What made the directors seek inspiration in screenplays and give up on the dramatization of literary texts?

In the chapter from theatre to cinema, in the research section, we attempted to find the answers through case studies dedicated to major directors such as Silviu Purcărete, Andrei Şerban, Radu Jude and Radu-Alexandru Nica, who put on great shows inspired by screenplays. We made reference to their canonical performances about Ingmar Bergman's universe, "Cries and Whisper", "Scenes from a Marriage", "Persona". Radu-Alexandru Nica was the promoter of screenplay adaptations, "Breaking the Waves", inspired by the screenplay of Lars von Trier's film and staged at the "Radu Stanca" Theatre in Sibiu, this being a reference show in our analysis.

In the third section of the research, we had a comparative overview on the convergence of theatrical poetics in several theatrical and cinematographic models, inspired by classics such as Shakespeare, Chekhov and Caragiale, but also by texts written by contemporary playwrights. We

made reference to "Angels in America" and the avatars of director Theodor Cristian Popescu, "Fires", from Wajdi Mouawad's text to Denis Villeneuve's film and Alexandra Banea's theater performance, to the "Tanacu" Case, from the actual events to the non-fiction literature, from literature to theatre and cinema. We also analyzed the trends in musical shows with reference to directors Răzvan Mazilu and Răzvan Ioan Dincă, who have staged musical shows in Romania in the last two decades.

Two dominant tendencies can be observed at corpus level: regardless of the nature of adaptations, until the year of 2000, theater performances would not include multimedia elements non-specific to the theatrical genre, instead they operated with a certain symbolism through sets, props and different visual juxtapositions; and, after the year of 2000, not only is multimodality increasingly observed, but it is calibrated so as to obtain specific spectator experiences, becoming a new theatre dimension. Andrei Șerban intentionally makes an exception to this rule in both stagings of the play "The Seagull/Pescărușul", seeking to guide the audience towards verbal interactions, not to other potential stimuli.

Most of the adaptations of the last ten years have tended to mobilize excessive theatricality and use a multimodal discourse - through the mixture of arts, levels of staging - and this is the vehicle of distinct messages, which add to or replace the basic script. Some of the adaptations have kept a static structure, using few or no multimedia elements - for example, in "Oblomov", "The Bed of Procastes/Patul lui Procast", "Lolita", "Scenes from a Marriage/Scene dintr-o căsnicie" and in "The Danaids/Danaidele" - and they opted to emphasize the dramatic dimensions of the script.

The multimodal elements used have the role of creating a new dimension of interactivity with the spectators and favour distinct experiences according to their selection.

If in "The Forest of the Hanged", Afrim generates synesthesia through the multitude of inserted elements and their depth - from chromatics to symbols and their overlapping - Purcărete distills whole pages of reading, involving the audience to saturation during performances. In "Faust", the alert dynamics, horror music and interaction with horror characters create the feel of a real-time thriller. In "Oidip", the viewing experience is less amplified, tending to reach a cinematic view: a high-contrast dark chromatic, video projections with various collapsing buildings and soundtracks with '60s music, many points of view and elements borrowed from the film genre: framing the props through an overall plan-type perspective from the very beginning of the show, respectively the *point-of-view* in the scene dedicated to the banquet. These forms of

visualization have the role of inducing in spectator the feeling that he is watching a real-life event "through the keyhole", thus, assigning the role of witness. In "The Danaids", we notice that the show did not use multimedia elements from other genres, and the mobilized visual and auditory register is typical for the theatrical space. A possible explanation for this fact could be the moment when the show took place, namely prior to the year of 2000, when this type of staging was not appreciated as having a certain aesthetic value.

The multimodality that Vlad Mugur mobilizes in "Hamlet", although less prominent than in many other post-2000 performances, goes beyond the level of multimedia elements used (smoke, music, construction of a horror film-typical character) and features the unique mark of the spatio-temporal dissolution, presenting parallel and yet congruent worlds, from the perspective of an omniscient narrator.

In "Cries and Whispers", Andrei Șerban directs the straightforward, tactile contact between actors and audience and fragments the flow of events through the speech delivered by Bergman. The theatrical performance is centred around the screenplay, which turns out to be a hybrid reality of staging. The fragmentation itself is a contemporary theatre trend and has visible discursive effects, especially by superseding the initial themes.

McBurney uses the binaural sound to guide the audience towards different messages and modes of perception, giving the show a distinct level of reception depth.

In the case of screenplay-based theater performances, the references to them (explicitly or not) seem to be a common denominator. Afrim's "The Bane" and Nica's "Persona" for example, make such references.

"Scenes from a Marriage", directed by Radu Jude, opts for a linear logic, devoid of multimedia elements and of elements with local cultural resonance, most likely to emphasize the burden of inter-human relations, but this option deprives the performance of a certain dynamism that could help the reception.

In "Persona", the multimedia elements of the show reinforce the doubling of the characters and highlight the dimension of the human subconsciousness: the pre-filmed insertion with the incursion of one of the protagonists in a warehouse has the role of creating the effect of visualizing an emotion (fear), while the pre-filmed insertion with both characters on stage generates a déjà-vu illusion effect.

In "Breaking the Waves", video projections are used to illustrate Bess's inner life throughout the performance. In the moments of great emotional tension of the female character, the projections illustrate images with numerous hostile male figures, as well as an intermittent caricature of Bess. The inserted musical elements have the same value: bird sounds in the lull moments, rock music in those of frustration.

Ostermeier's show, "Hamlet," is a unique example of filmed theatre, in which live film inserts are augmented and run in real-time in the background. The effect on viewers is surprising as he also uses pre-filmed inserts, making it intentionally difficult to understand the types of content used. In this way, he renders the multimodal construction of Hamlet's madness, in which the planes of consciousness are diffused, interspersed with trivially-created *reality-show* images of the other characters.

In "The Tanacu Case", the use of video projections with excerpts from actual interviews given by real people after the death of Irina Cornici not only adds authenticity to the show, but amplifies its dramatization. The use of elements with local cultural resonance (church music, amplified bell sounds, the song "Mona is getting married", the strong smell of grilled minced meat rolls) conveys the vulgarizing facets of the Romanian environment, transferable to each public life area.

Paradoxically, although it is a hybrid theatrical product par excellence, the filmed performance "The Cherry Orchard" (directed by Alexandru Lustig) uses very few multimedia elements (music, sounds, very discreetly positioned light projections). The performance creates a diffuse time, concurrently conveying through the adaptation construction a message about the centrality of theatre as an art, still closer to reality. The televisual elements ("bird's eye" frames, chromatics, lights) have the role of re-enacting the dramatic text as an ethereal *soap opera*-looking space from the perspective of a mute omniscient narrator.

The "Maria de Buenos Aires" musical performance does not contain elements that are not specific to the genre, but, by comparison, other shows directed by Răzvan Mazilu, such as "Mon Cabaret Noir", do include circus and pastiche elements, yet no elements from television or online communication.

Another trend observed in adaptations with prevalent multimodality is the existence of a meta-discourse about theatre. Given that the theatre itself is searching for an identity, and hybridization makes the identification between film and theatre exponentially more difficult for

the viewer, the concern for its mission remains present. Paradoxically, the "theatre-to-theatre"-type constructions precede the film-to-theatre adaptations. In the process of conveying ideas, as McLuhan stated, the channels on which "words or images are fixed are more important for the quality of communication than the actual words or images. Or, to put it briefly, there is a famous formula that says: *the media is the message*".¹⁸

In an adaptation - either cinematic (screening) or staging (dramatization) - the "story" is the least important. The story of King Lear can be found in the Romanian space in "Salt in dishes", found and written by Petre Ispirescu or, even though it may seem vulgarization, quite frequently in radio and TV news journal reports. Therefore, the literary source (prose, epic or lyrical poem, dramaturgy), an artwork per se, functions according to its own literature-specific rules. When transposed into film, the same literary text becomes, in turn, both an artwork in itself and, with each film director who screens it, a completely different cinematic work. Laurence Olivier 's Hamlet tells the same story, but the film is totally different from Smoktunovsky's Hamlet. The same happens with the staging versions.

Each director reads a literary text in his own historical, social, cultural, axiological paradigm, defined at a certain moment of his artistic existence. Any adaptation is a betrayal of the original.

Thus, any artwork adapted to several media of expression can be, therefore, understood only when it is discovered in each and in all, alike. In conclusion, at the end of this research journey, we can say that the adaptation **from epic to dramatic** is the opposite of the adaptation **from theatrical to cinematic**: it reduces, essentializes and concentrates. At the same time, it takes us to a new world of images and meanings, with a multiple decipher code, from all the artistic levels and registers, which passes through new communication channels. On other hand, the tendency towards multimodality allows for several messages to be conveyed simultaneously and enables a very dynamic reception experience.

A side note to this research is that adaptation has become the supreme principle of these times: people and reality adapt and so does the theatre, in a continuous fluidization, in which messages intertwine in a hybridization specific to each directorial style. Adaptation has become a sort of *modus vivendi* of an eclectic and fragmented contemporaneity whose mirrors send the

¹⁸Mihai Coman, *Introduction to the media system* , Iași, Polirom, p. 184, 1999 .

original meanings into metamorphosis by short messages, flashes, strobe lights and customizable staging.

Adaptation has become a norm of the historical context we live in, which lacks certainties and centrality, where everything is filtered through cameras and the audience returns to auditoriums for unique artistic experiences. We live an adapted reality, focused through the angle of subjective approach of the artistic act creator, both in its theatrical and cinematic form.

The thesis makes an original contribution to the specialized literature primarily by the fact that it focuses on plays and screenings alike, the content of which is used to test the hypothesis of hybridity; and secondly, by mobilizing multimodal analysis, a less-known method, but with a distinct potential for highlighting a director's meta-text.

Regardless of the register, there is still the tendency that the adaptations be "pretexts" in theatrical communication: irrespective of the script, the performance starts from such symbolic landmarks to define a universe with own meanings, with specific resonances to the stage of our times.