

***THE POETICS OF THE DIDASCALIA DISCOURSE  
IN THE MODERN THEATRE***

***– A reading of the drama text's backstage –***

**DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY**

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### *DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY*

The work proposes an analytic, theoretical and detailed exam upon the semiotic status of the didascalía/stage direction in theatre and particularly in its relations with the drama text's poetics as a model of instrumentalization *sui generis* and also as generic transgression (inter-genre). The approached perspectives consider both the work methods of analyzing the text and the discourse (pragmatics, textual linguistics, image rhetoric problems, aspects which concern the poetic of the genres which are integrated in the framework of the stylistic, poetic and hermeneutic research) and the procedures which focus on the research of the theatre and the stage phenomenon (theatrical semiotics, the heteroclite composition of the spectacular representation followed in the paradigmatic data of the implicit stage languages).

#### **I. The text of the didascalía: conceptual delimitations, functional repertoire, taxonomic framework**

The starting point of a such demarche is the interval text-stage from which the theatrical genre is claimed. From this point of view, the analysis of the didascalía knows a double interpretation: that of a functional, auxiliary text which sustains the directing project at a minimal level, the level of a texture which, in terms of format and diction, acquires aesthetic autonomy. The first approach is addressed by the theatrical semioticians (Jiri Veltrusky, Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavice, Tadeusz Kowzan) which see the didascalía as secondary texts in relation to the study of the stage procedures, while the text-centered perspective is approached both through linguistic perspective (John Searle, Austin, Sanda Golopenția, Thierry Gallèpe, Jeannette Laillou-Savona, André Petitjean) as well as from the perspective of literary theory (Jean-Marie Thomasseau, Michael Issacharoff, Milagros Ezquerro, Witold Woloski) or hermeneutic interpretation (Florence Fix, Monique Martinez Thomas, Véronique Lochert, Claudine Elnécavé, etc.). The issue of the text-centered and stage-centered cleavage proves to be inoperable and not justifiable from a theoretical point of view: both the text and the spectacular component represent two generic particularities of the theatre; nevertheless, they imply two different semiotic regimes and this is why any type of hierarchization is proven to be unjustifiable. The eluding of this fact and

the base of the insurgent tendencies of the two interpretative directions gave birth to some tendentious interpretations, narrow-minded in relation to what the methodological premises of an analysis represent no matter its nature. The textual regime of didascalia takes into account the linguistic component in relation to the actual play: a protéiforme component linked to the stage representation text and to the semiotic permutability of the scene languages written by the stage directions. Depending on these two constants, I have proposed the taxonomic grid of didascalia: on one hand the didascalia which follow a sustainable nature of the scenic representation (the actual stage and scenographic directions as well as the escort notations ensemble which have the *mise-en-scène* as a reference point), on the other hand the textual didascalia which counter the scenic regime in favor of a narrative and poetic development of the drama text and, therefore, a more visible augmentation upon meanings. From this perspective it can be observed a symptomatic evolution of the concept proposed by this paper: the didascalia in the modern drama text migrates from its initial functionality - *mise-en-scène* – to one which targets the reading and, therefore, condensing several texts with a substantial semantic and aesthetic content. The short diachronic excursion which proposes an evolutional halo of the textual and discursive shapes, is quite significant in this respect: establishing some metamorphosis phases scrutinized in terms of shape and content which created the work premises – detaching those paradigms that evolve the potential existence of a didascalie genre ascribed to the generalized hybridization and the permutable possibilities of discursive-aesthetic classes and registers.

Thus it is created a panorama of the drama text grid found at the meeting point of two discursive levels which are structurally divergent and yet inseparable (Anne Uberfeld): the dialogue (the defining shape of structuring and expressing the intrigue) and the didascalia (the sum of stage directions, explicative notes etc. which precede or accompany the characters lines). Restraining the conceptual frame will target the terminological option for “didascalia” as a term under which can be integrated any (pro)stage, directing and scenographic indication and also the assembly of “explanatory additions” (Sanda Golopenția) which structures itself under an exponent discourse of a controlled reading of the *mise-en-scène*. The reference of the terminological questions is a predilect phrase in the analysis of the drama text proposed by Roman Ingarden „Nebentext”/„the secondary text” – which imposed itself in the drama text analysis terminology. We consider the fact that accepting such a hierarchy proves itself to be irrelevant in an active, tabular reading, which is the reason why we can enframe the Polish phenomenon perspective in the “obtuse”

dissociation series that succeeded at the theatre's theory level and which have as a starting point the background of the stage- and text-centrism insurgence. The short discourse in the history of "forms" creates a panoramic perspective upon the evolution of the didascalical text: from the simple, insular, austere and segmented forms, to those plays in which the didascalia handles a well determined place in the economy of the drama text and which is suitable to more detailed analysis starting from stylistic and poetic dominants, thematic universe, ways of updating the aesthetic imaginary, dialogue connection etc. The option for the "form" concept frequently adopted in this work, overlaps the textual paradigm image which is observable in a natural development of forms and content. Following the steps of Vincent Jouve or Umberto Eco which brought into discussion the semiology repertoire of the reading, we find that the forms represent textual unities with formal consistency and variable content that, when detached from the actual text, can undergo a semiotic process in relation to several significance indices in order to determine the general direction. We will observe the fact that this is a type of reading which is based on a series of hypothesis and diagnosis applied on these textual paradigms and that can be confirmed or not by the practice of the text. The purpose of a such interpretation practice doesn't pursue the simple cutting of the textual fragments and analyzing them on different levels of content and meaning; then observations upon these analyses start from a hypothesis which envisages the trans-generic poetics of the didascalia in modern theatre and the adjacency of the didascalia upon the inter-genres class (the reading in the generic framework).

## **II. The didascalia and the textual registers**

Another pivot aspect of the theoretic exam present here targets a didascalia analysis from the textuality point of view. The starting point is the dilemmatic nature of the theatrical text which, on one hand, refers to a concrete linguistic assembly which is easily noticed in a scriptural area (the drama text) while on the other hand refers to a linguistic reality expressed at the "texturized" representation level which involves a scenic languages rivalry. While the first phrase considers the actual textual object, the trans-linguistic nature of the theatrical text assumes heterogeneous structure and forms which can be easily analyzed using theatrical semiotic tools. A reference point regarding the dominants and textual phrases is the approaching of didascalia in relation to the presented aspects. The fact that these ones follow the architecture of the drama text while

forming a single unit along with the lines assembly, is a defining compositional constant which doesn't need any other proof. The relation between the didascalical text and the lines' text proves a high level of mobility which is the result of the stage conceptions' evolution along with the directing vision and experiments which influenced the theatrical modernity. From this perspective I took into consideration a number of relations established between these two compartments of the drama text: generally, these seem to define the contextual support in relation to the lines' chain from textual and scenic perspective, starting from the way in which the general propagated information is perceived. This is how I could delimitate a series of relations which outline the contextual fluency of a stage direction: the first relationship, materialized in an equilibrium between the two compartments of the drama text, reiterates the informational contribution of the didascalia in order to sustain the lines. This type of relationship represents the classic link by means of which both the reader and the spectator have access to the same type of information. The second type of relationship counts on the richness of the information brought by the stage directions to which the spectator doesn't have access, not even through the mediation of the play. This is the case of those plays in which the gamble is a literary one and the scrutinizing of the textual referent is made to the detriment of the scenic one. The theatrical indices are suspended and the exposure has a profound poetic character. The last type of relationship envisages the tension between the line and the stage direction which doesn't sustain the dialogue anymore. The strongest example in this respect is the aperture didascalia from "The bald soprano" in which the scenic notation is disseminated in such a way that it constitutes a wordy framework for conducting the dialogue.

By reference to the actual textual dimension, the didascalia analysis can be made both through paratextual perspective, as well as through a metatextual point of view. The paratextuality has become a defining attribute of the approached concept here: when in the dialogue proximity taking the shape of interstitial spaces, the indications present a mutual formal feature with the paratextual one, reaching situations in which these two intervals overlap. This is the reason for which I have chosen the paratextual didascalia phrase in order to conceptually mark the debut functional lists (the characters' list, the scenery and the costumes' list) and those sequences which target the arhitextuality and the fragmentary frame of the drama units (arhitextual didascalia, rematic didascalia).

In the relations of transcendence established on the textual architecture level, the metatextuality represents the point through which its “mechanics”, its way of functioning and relating with its own language or exterior reference, provides the text an alternative functional register. In the equation of passing from the semantic universe of the text to the theatrical representation act, the didascalía assumes this metatextual particularity which has the role of prospectively offering a functional and miniature image of the play. Hence, the emergence of standard structures that organize the content in theatrical patterns: the graphical nature of the stage indication represents a first metatextual element, a signal *per se*, using a lexical-semantic field of a related area, which may arise in formalized structures, respectively the existence of those specular suites which gives the drama text a thematic and also plays the role of some metatextual indicators (references, critical notes, polemics, several explicative additions etc.).

We are especially interested in the way which the didascalíic text may establish a communicative link through postulating the image of an ideal spectator which approximately meets the narrator. This way it is terminologically justified the theatrical narrator that overlaps the director’s authorial figure.

### **III. The stage directions. The mise-en-scène and the poetics of the stage representation**

In order to observe the role of the didascalía in the mise-en-scène we should consider the theatrical languages targeted by each (pro)scenic indication. The term which previously taken from Oswald Ducrot and Jean-Marie Schaeffer is the essence of the way in which the author’s notations manage to liminary configure the status of the ideal stage, the image of the characters, the technical or atmosphere details. In this respects there is a first issue which targets the actual being of the character and its scenical availability regarding the prosopopeya indications. As a fictional entity this is, generally, a typological synthesis metamorphosed as the professional theatrical action. The character’s didascalía has as reference point the way of creating scenic transfiguration (stature, posture, outfit, grime) and its scenic expressivity (gesture, mimic, intonation, movement etc.); these are the theatrical clues which follow the scenic reification. Therefore, there are two categories of stage indications which are interesting in what concerns the mise-en-scène: on one hand the non and para-verbal didascalie which sustain the lines and augment the dramatic character of the play and on the other hand the didascalía which refer to

the expressivity of the costume (the theatrical indument), of the mask, makeup, personal accessories which sustain the corporal aesthetics. Last, but not least, we are interested in the elements of portrait topic and also in those authorial indications which are impossible to practice on stage. Another kind of pro-scenic indications are those of scenographic nature, strictly linked by the stage space and functionality. The notion of space in theatre represents a plurivalent concept, describing both the fictional scene on page made of iconic representation at a mental level, and also the theatrical scene materialized at a tridimensional level. Much more than the actual time which has a cardinal role, the stage topos is the pivot-element to which the representation rises. In this respect, the perspective is realized using topic didascalism which brings a quite rich information addition regarding the dynamics of forms and volumes in the representation, the ergonomics and scenic display, the functional and symbolic value of the props and the relationship between the characters and the space (the moving). The elements of decorative props, the objects and their space display are concurred by the light and shadow effects of which drama completes the scenic syntax. Finally, the sonorous texture of the play is concurred by scenic acoustic languages which are traceable at text level by using the sintonic didascalism. The sound and light drama complete the scenographic conception and their symbolic ornamental role is concurred by a special functionality which creates the atmosphere detail of the representation. This is why, the stage directions regarding the atmosphere become a particular mark of the text's theatricality by the extension of the spectacle.

#### **IV. The poetics of the didascalism: the reading of the didascalistic genre**

The final chapter creates an overview of the stage directions' poetics, while trying to approximate them in space of didascalism – a category which is at the intersection of the inter-genres classes. The history of literature knows a period of time during which the borders and the general frameworks have been disseminated, while the writing took the mixed aspect of several generic consonants by combining and orchestrating their discursive particularities such as the artistic prose or the narrative poetics as an aesthetic frame of the narrative lyricism. As an analogue, the analysis made in the same register of the modern theatre reveals a predisposition towards the discourse hybridization expressed by the formal autonomy besides the lines' assembly and also by the autonomy of the content overlapped on a hermeneutic reading. Just as the excursion in the history of didascalistic "shapes" classifies the aesthetic mutations, it can be

detected some specific didascalical features: on one hand the predominance of the narration of which distinctive attributes (the temporality of the event, the stylistic register of the narrator and the narration, the narration procedures etc.) gives the dramatic text epic notes which are close to the novel poetics; on the other hand it can be observed the usage of a connotative language, such as the timbre of a “didascalical voice” which brings the didascalical writing close to the procedural code of the poetics and of the subjective exposure. Even at this level it can be observed the scindation towards the *mise-en-scène*, while the text is redirected to the hermeneutical reading. From this perspective we can detach the two referential levels: the drama text and the notes of the scenic referent. The reading model of the didascalical (of this textual backstage) marked by the intensive presence of a hidden director, of a “voice off” which gets into unmediated contact with the reader, is applied at the drama text creation level by four authors with different didascalical poetical styles. At Blaga we pursue the “textual action” of the stage directions which constitutes, in a strong majority, the rematic of the pantomime play “The Resurrection”: a wide directing text with poetic inflexions which relies both on the aesthetic virtues of silence and drama gesture. Concerning Petrescu, the “theatrical novel”, a phrase which describes the narativity of the didascalical from his own dramatic creations, represents the point through which many questions are being raised towards the status of his drama creations: theatre or a failed drama writing lost in the great sea of epicity? The contemporary writing of Sorescu interests us from a subversive stage indication perspective which, before enunciating the data of the scenic topos, subdues the characters towards a hidden directing: the space of Sorescu is a poliphonic one with a rich poetic content. In the theatre of Vişniec, the poetics of the didascalical proposes a series of challenges both for the reader and the director and, thus, being a “total” conscious writing sprung from a high awareness of the theatre and the drama phenomenon in general; therefore, this is an attempt of multiple analysis which represents the ambition of an applied hermeneutics starting from shapes and structure towards thematic and content issues.

The importance of such a plural approach demonstrates that, eventually, even in the marginal areas of a such research domain it can be materialized a cohesive, poetic vision from which it can emerge the analysis and interpretation perspectives that elude the mediocre things of the genre hermeneutics. Such a project doesn't reject an additional vision in the lecturing of the theatre and the key-concepts that a didascalical text poetics brings to surface are with no doubt linked to the issue of significance at the organization overall texture. The necessity of a poetics doesn't

necessarily result from the compositional literary construction patterns determined by a general framework while the aesthetic justification of a such demarche and, before having a pure expository role, it proposes solutions of an inter-genre hypothesis and the aesthetic of the hetero-morph classes that constitutes the coalescence shape of the didascalical genre and ant the point from which a possible poetic line could be claimed.

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