

Theatre and radio – ethical dilemmas in the doctoral research of common history

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Abstract: Theatre and the radio have systematically intersected since the beginning of the existence of this means of mass communication. It is known that the radio included in its modes of expression those of the theatre. Entertainment shows, radio theatre, children's stories, poetry recitals are just a few examples of elements that have become inseparable in radio programmes. Moreover, the role of the theatre professional on the radio has also evolved over time, and the main influences relate to the historical, political and cultural changes in Romania. The study anticipates a number of ethical dilemmas, such as copyright issues, the potential for misinterpretation of cultural nuances, and the fine line between academic research and personal privacy. From this point of view, the rules imposed by deontology in journalism guarantee the equidistance and impartiality of the research. On the other hand, the stylistics of writing such a doctorate, placed between the rigours of an academic research and the criteria of a journalistic investigation, represents a challenge. Another ethical problem concerns the use of radio theatre as a tool to propagate a political or social attitude through the messages conveyed by playwrights and directors who work on the radio “stage”.

Keywords: radio, theatre, ethical, dilemmas.

1. Introduction

The theatre and the radio have systematically crossed paths since the beginning of existence of this means of mass communication. It is known that the radio has included among its modes of expression those specific to theatre. Entertainment shows, radio theatre, including that for children, children's stories, poetry recitals are just a few examples of elements that have become essential in radio programs.

In fact, the role of theatre people in radio has evolved over time, and the main influences are related to the historical, political and cultural changes in Romania. Understanding these metamorphoses requires both a deep knowledge of various contexts and an expanded ability to interpret how these changes influenced the development of radio theatre.

In this research, I chose to study the valuable relationship between theatre and radio, especially in terms of theatre and radio in Iasi, in order to structure a serious argument regarding the cultural potential of the city.

Using an interdisciplinary outlook, the doctoral research plan is based on specialized literature in both art and media communication, in order to establish the optimal methodology for analyzing the phonotheque of Romanian radio theatre. The study circumscribes the fundamental role of sound as a landmark in the construction of narrative and characters, as well as the challenges associated with the scientific endeavor when integrating research into sound archives. The richness of radio experience and socio-cultural contexts can only be captured by a constant appeal to mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative.

2. Ethical dilemmas

The study anticipates a range of ethical dilemmas, such as copyright issues, the potential for misinterpretation of cultural nuances, and the fine line between academic research and respecting personal boundaries. From this point of view, the rules imposed by deontology in journalism guarantee the non-bias and impartiality of research. On the other hand, the stylistics of writing such a scientific endeavor, placed between the rigors of academic research and the criteria of a journalistic investigation, represent a challenge.

Another ethical issue concerns the use of radio theatre as a tool to propagate a political or social attitude through the messages conveyed by playwrights and directors working on the radio “stage”.

Right from the beginning, I pointed out that theatre and radio have had many points of intersection ever since the advent of this media. Theatre people, actors, screenwriters and directors have always been part of the production teams of radio plays, cultural and entertainment shows. As far as Iasi is concerned, the situation involves certain peculiarities and is especially related to the need to communicate with the population across the Prut River. More precisely, on October 8th, 1939, Radio Bessarabia was inaugurated, established as a necessity to combat Russian propaganda and the anti-Romanian campaign carried out by the Soviets through the Tiraspol radio station. In 1940, the Soviets took over Bessarabia and, of course, the radio station. The building was destroyed, equipment confiscated or destroyed, and personnel found in the institution executed. The same fate befell Radio Odessa. As a consequence, on November 2nd, 1941, Radio Moldova is inaugurated in Iasi, the station being established from the same reasons as radio Bessarabia. Its main role was to convey information and programs in the Romanian language beyond the Prut River. Radio

Moldova's activity was interrupted in 1944 with the entry of Soviet troops into Iasi.¹ It was opened again on May 1st, 1956, under the name of Radio Iasi, as a local station of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company². Another interruption in the activity of the current Radio Romania Iasi took place between 1985 and 1989. Those were the years when the straps of the communist dictatorship strangled any manifestation of freedom, especially the freedom of expression³. The moment of the 1989 Revolution is an important chapter. The former employees returned immediately, in the very days of the Revolution, to the headquarters in Lascar Catargi 44 street. Actors from the National Theatre of Iasi joined them. They were part of the radio's team and experienced together with the employees the emotion of reopening Radio Iasi.

Conveying information to Romanians living across the Prut River was not the only objective of setting up a public radio station in Iasi, but also the preservation of the Romanian language, literature and values in general. Therefore, cultural broadcasts, radio plays, either from Romanian literature, but not only (interpreted in Romanian language) have served this purpose for many years. At the same time, other Romanians, far away from the country, listened to the voices of famous actors on Radio Iasi, interpreting well-known texts from literature, childhood stories and thus felt closer to their loved ones, to their native places. This was possible due to the high transmission power of the transmitter from Uricani. Therefore, Radio Iasi has been was and still is, thanks to its cultural programs, a space for Romanians to meet, wherever they are, with everything that is familiar to them.

And since I mentioned Romanian language as a valuable tool in triggering this sense of belonging, it is important to emphasize that the actors of the National Theatre in Iași, who became anchors/presenters of Radio Iasi - with an impeccable, elegant speech, with the right phrasing - were the ones who used this instrument with great art. Moreover, when the roles in different plays required the Moldovan accent, the actors interpreted

¹ Vali Brad, *DOCUMENTARY: Radio Bessarabia – broadcasting station intended to combat Soviet propaganda, Radio Chisinau – bridge of Romanianism across the Prut*, RADOR Agency, 8 October 2018, retrieved from <https://www.rador.ro/2018/10/08/documentar-radio-basarabia-postul-radiodifuziunii-menit-sa-combata-propaganda-sovietica-radio-chisinau-punte-a-romanismului-peste-prut-2/> [viewed on 30th September 2023]

² Cătălin Belu, *DOCUMENTARY: Radio Iași, mirror of the deeper life of Moldova, celebrates 80 years of existence*, RADOR Agency, 2 November 2021, retrieved from <https://www.rador.ro/2019/05/24/de-astazi-nu-mai-emiteti-radio-iasi-in-zilele-revolutiei-din-decembrie-1989/> [viewed on 30th September 2023]

³ Călin Ciobotari (2014), *Emil Coșeru, actorul nostru* [Emil Coșeru, our actor], Editura Opera Magna, Iași.

with great charm and authenticity. This is another aspect that brought those far away closer to home.

Critics, placed between stage and audience, have always had their significant “role” in radio programs. Some of them turned into screenwriters; those who did not, have set interpretation landmarks for several plays presented, either on the radio or on the classical theatre stage. Such shows mold the audience for theatre.

This old and deep connection must be brought to light and highlighted because it is part of the cultural heritage of the city, and this is an ethical duty (not a dilemma) for theatre and radio people. Important actors, screenwriters, directors and theoreticians created a generous common space between theatre and radio, which they used to promote Romanian language and literature or, before 1989, convey subversive messages. Such messages were masterfully hidden in the humorous sketches of Saturday and Sunday broadcasts or in the texts of radio plays. In the notes sent to the *Securitate* by informants from institutions, these were identified as “provocative ideas”⁴ or “distortions of the messages of the play”⁵.

On the other hand, a question emerges about the justness of using radio, especially public radio, for the purpose of transmitting messages, political or social opinions, by playwrights and directors. In my opinion, freedom can have no limits other than the risk of violating the freedom of others. Freedom of expression is also a sacred right if it does not incite to hatred or murder. It is precisely undemocratic regimes that violate this right, instead overusing the media and any other communication vehicle to convey their own principles. That is why I believe that the introduction of political or social points of view in radio texts is allowed and justified, just as it is allowed and entitled on the stage of any national theatre (also a public institution) to which the public has access. Such texts are, at the same time, perspectives of sociological research, and later will become documentary material for historians.

In conclusion, if theatre and radio have a role in educating and training the public, then refining ways of thinking and elaborating reasoning can also be achieved by exposure to various political or social attitudes.

Another aspect I want to bring into discussion, related to research ethics, is the attachment to the topic (“the research fuel”, as professor Octavian Jighirgiu, PhD calls it). It is positive, because it keeps a maximum

⁴ Cristina Modreanu (2022), *Teatrul ca rezistență. Oameni de teatru în arhivele securității* [Theater as resistance. Theater people in the archives of the Securitate], Editura Polirom, București, chapter 2 The confrontation “*I want to be the director of my own life!*” the Emil Reus case, p. 75.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

interest during the four years, especially in conditions of sustained effort, as is the case of a doctoral thesis. On the other hand, one can fall into the trap of subjectivism, the research being thus altered, as pointed out by the director of the Doctoral School of Theatre, assoc. prof. Călin Ciobotari, PhD.

Going through part of the bibliography, I received confirmation that the topic has a deeply personal connotation for me. Authors of books, interviewees (theatre and radio people) are all part of an intimate universe, they had a special role in my development as a human being and as a professional, and reading is accompanied by a lot of emotion. Theatre and radio have been part of my life since childhood. The memories of the plays I watched, with lots of admiration for the actors of Iasi National Theatre, alternating with my fascination for listening to the radio, trying to imagine the universe hiding in the magic box, were quite overwhelming. It is precisely this emotional connection that guarantees responsibility for the academic endeavor and the desire for the initial goals to be achieved. I am talking about exploiting this cultural potential, this precious relationship between theatre and radio.

I also identified solutions that remove the danger of a subjective approach: establishing the historical and current context around the theme very clearly, becoming aware of its importance, determining research objectives. At the same time, the journalist is always subject to the temptation to personally treat some topics, influenced by his experiences or feelings. Professional experience has taught me that respecting deontology, measuring the quantity and quality of arguments and drawing an imaginary red thread throughout the story, report, interview or debate are rules that protect the journalist from the sin of being biased.

But in my journalistic experience originates, however, another caveat, namely the stylistics of writing do not fully comply with academic rigors. Radio speech allows for some freedoms that does not fit into the rules of expression of a doctoral thesis. Journalistic communication requires expressiveness, a personal touch, a language accessible to a heterogeneous audience in terms of education. The distance between the orality of radio speech and academic discourse is significant. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the stylistics of writing to academic requirements.

A final aspect identified as ethical that I want to develop has its origin in the area of legality. Reporting to the law, although an unattractive approach, is necessary because this way we can know the limits within which the activity in radio and theatre can operate, and in which the present research can be probed. And the boundaries imposed by law also delimit some of the principles of ethics. More specifically, those that relate to property right.

Both theatre and radio are under the influence of Law 8/1996, revised in 2023, on copyright. The normative act stipulates that “the use of a work gives rise to patrimonial rights, distinct and exclusive, of the author to authorize or prohibit”,⁶ including the reproduction, broadcasting or realization of derivative works.

The law protects the author, but also the heirs, so as not to be deprived of their rights over an asset with artistic and intellectual value.

The patrimonial rights provided for in Articles 13 and 24 shall last throughout the life of the author, and after their death shall be transmitted by inheritance, according to civil law, for a period of 70 years, irrespective of the date on which the work was lawfully made known to the public. If there are no heirs, the exercise of these rights shall lie with the collective management organisation mandated during the lifetime of the author or, in the absence of a mandate, with the collective management organisation with the largest number of members in the respective creative field.⁷

This is, in my view, the ethical dilemma. High-value recordings, literary texts, extraordinary performances are kept away from the public due to lack of agreement among the heirs. This is precisely contrary to the original interest of those who recorded the production. Certainly, the goal was for the radio play, the poetry recital or the show to reach a large audience. We cannot imagine that the participants set out to carry out a secret radio act, with an internal circuit. In other words, this intervention of the law makes the original goal unattainable.

Two companies hold the copyright for the productions that are in the Radio Romania sound archive: Copyro and Opera Scrisă. Since 2019, the two companies have been closely monitoring what is being broadcast, whether radio plays or shows (“The Merry Hour”, that later became “The Merry Wave”). More specifically, in order for such a production to be broadcast, its author, translator and adapter must be listed in the database of those companies. Without this criterion, the production cannot be transmitted in radio programs. This is another obstacle placed by the law between radio cultural production and the public.

The copyright issue is not new, before 1989 it was invoked by the *Securitate* or censorship commissions in order to ban plays that were considered defamatory for the regime at the time. This happened at the National Theatre in Timisoara, for example, with a play by Brecht, staged by Emil Reus. “Despite a very good critical acclaim, the show was played

⁶ Law no. 69/2022 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 8/1996 regarding copyright and related rights; Chapter IV, Article 13, *Content of copyright*.

⁷ *Idem*, Chap. V, Article 28, *Duration of copyright protection*.

only 18 times. As the reaction of the audience showed it immediately recognized the beloved leader, it was impossible for the production to stay in the repertoire, so a reason often used in similar cases of unwanted performances was invoked, namely the issue of copyright.”⁸.

3. Conclusion

These are just some of the anticipated ethical dilemmas related to doctoral research into the common past of theatre and radio. Some answers are found in the law, others come from deontology, from the experience of those to be interviewed, from the interpretation of the readings in the bibliography and from academic guidance.

It is precisely the complex history that makes this relationship even more enthralling. In Iasi, the close connection to the sensitive political situation in this geographical space, an eternal border between East and West, gives even greater importance to the relationship between theatre and radio. Theatre people, along with media people, theatre people becoming themselves media people, creators and bearers of messages adapted to social needs. Losing this huge cultural heritage by ignoring it, amputates a part of the cultural history, including that of the city.

The answers to the ethical dilemmas raised will certainly be used further in addressing and capitalizing on this theatre-radio relationship.

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⁸ Cristina Modreanu, *op. cit.*, chap. 1983. *Ascensiunea lui Arturo Ui sau demontarea mecanismelor terorii* [The rise of Arturo Ui or dismantling the mechanisms of terror], p. 71.

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