MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI ȘI CERCETĂRII
UNIVERSITATEA DE ARTE DIN TÂRGU MUREŞ
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ TEATRU ȘI ARTELE SPECTACOLULUI

SUMMARY

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BRECHT IN THE HUNGARIAN THEATRE OF TRANSYLVANIA
BRECHT AZ ERDÉLYI MAGYAR SZÍNHÁZBAN

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2025

Introduction

My research was initially motivated by an interest in Far Eastern theatrical forms, particularly the Japanese Nō theatre. Nō is not merely an aesthetic or stylistic form, but a culturally embedded spiritual and philosophical system, which can be understood, beyond the theatrical form itself, as an instrument for shaping and exploring the consciousness of both performer and spectator. From this perspective, the function of theatre is not confined to entertainment, but rather constitutes an experiment: an attempt to shape the states of consciousness of audiences and creators alike.

Throughout the twentieth century, numerous European theatre-makers turned toward Far Eastern traditions, but only a few elaborated a coherent theoretical framework and exerted a significant influence on Transylvanian theatrical thought and practice. Among these exceptions stands Bertolt Brecht, who not only systematized the theory of epic theatre but also formulated a theatrical ideal closely related to Eastern traditions. In this sense, the impact of Brecht's work on Hungarian theatre in Transylvania is outstanding: beginning with the first Transylvanian Brecht production in 1960, numerous representations emerged in which the conscious application of the epic theatre ideal can be discerned.

Accordingly, my dissertation focuses on the extent to which Brechtian models of epic theatre have been realized in the practice of Hungarian theatre in Transylvania. I seek to answer to what degree the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical representations, from 1960 to the present, have managed to convey the idea of generating spectator consciousness—and indirectly, the possibility of political and social change—how successfully they implemented this idea in practice, and what value they represent within the discursive field of Transylvanian Hungarian theatre history.

By the 1960s, when Brecht's influence reached Transylvania, the canonization of Brechtian theatre had already taken place in Western European theatrical discourse. Brecht himself was an active agent in this process, especially through the famous *Modellbücher*, which served as pedagogical and aesthetic documentation of his productions. In parallel, the rise of cinema and the consolidation of mass communication media fundamentally transformed the forms of perception and representation. To borrow Hans-Thies Lehmann's words: "the linear-successive mode of perception is replaced by simultaneous and multiperspectival perception."[1] In this new,

[1] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Posztdramatikus színház*, fordította Kricsfalusi Beatrix et al., Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2009, 9.

technologically mediated cultural environment, theatre had to reposition itself. It appears to have found its specific locus through direct presence and performative immediacy. Lehmann formulates it as follows: "both the aesthetic act (playing) and the act of reception (attending the theatre) emerge as real actions taking place 'here and now'."[2]

Theatrical responses to these medial and perceptual transformations led to the emergence of new uses of the theatrical sign, shifting the focus from the centrality of the dramatic text to performative, visual, and conceptual forms of theatre. Lehmann terms this trajectory postdramatic theatre, which does not repudiate Brecht's legacy, but clearly surpasses it—particularly in the radical rethinking of theatrical form and audience participation. The postdramatic tendencies that unfolded from the 1970s onwards also necessitated a reinterpretation of Brechtian alienation within a new context. In Chapter 6—dedicated to the theoretical examination of epic theatre—this becomes an analytical guideline above all from the perspective of the aesthetic and perceptual effects of alienation, as well as the qualitative transformations of spectator presence.

Structure and Content of the Dissertation

Over the past century, Bertolt Brecht's work has been the subject of countless studies, interpretations, and monographs. Therefore, the aim of my research is not to reformulate or systematize Brecht's well-known theories, but to focus on their practical realization – specifically, the reception of Brecht in Hungarian theatres in Transylvania. My analysis focuses on the twenty-seven productions staged in Hungarian theatres of Transylvania between 1956 and the present, complemented by the investigation of the first German performance in Sibiu and the presentation of the first Romanian Transylvanian staging of *The Good Person of Szechwan.*

In the course of the research, early productions were primarily reconstructed based on contemporary press sources and reviews, while for post-2000 performances – where available – video recordings were also consulted. To interpret the productions, I employ the Philther-analysis methodology, applying its criteria not in a formal, but in a content-driven manner.

At the beginning of the dissertation, I found it important to outline the historical context of Brechtian theatre: first addressing the precedents in European and German theatre history, then discussing the specific theatrical traditions of Hungarian theatre in Transylvania. This helps

[2] Lehmann, 10.

illustrate the kind of receptive environment into which Brechtian theatre representations emerged, and how the socio-political context shaped their interpretation and impact.

Given that Hungarian theatrical culture in Transylvania is closely interwoven with Romanian and German theatrical traditions – through shared infrastructure, technical resources, and professional mobility among directors and actors – I found it necessary to briefly review the contemporary Romanian theatre's relationship to Brecht.

In Transylvanian Hungarian theatres, three temporally distinct "Brecht waves" can be identified. These periods are clearly separated by extended intervals during which Brecht was absent from the stage. However, within the third and most recent wave, further sub-periods can be distinguished, as new phenomena have emerged – such as shifts in audience perception influenced by digital media, or the re-staging of certain plays in relatively short succession. For example, *The Good Person of Szechwan* was staged in two different conceptions within a year of each other, *Mother Courage and Her Children* saw three different productions within a few years, and *The Threepenny Opera* was also staged three times in the same period.

The First Brechtian Period in Transylvanian Hungarian Theatre began in 1960 at the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj with József Szabó's staging of *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*, and lasted until 1965. During this period, a total of six productions were presented, directed by three individuals – József Szabó, Magda Borbáth, and János Taub. (It is worth noting that Szabó also staged *Puntila* in Sfântu Gheorghe in 1964, while János Taub directed *The Threepenny Opera* in two different theatres – Cluj and Satu Mare – in the same year.)

After this period, following an eight-year hiatus, the second Brechtian period began with the 1973 production of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, directed by Tamás Major in Cluj, and lasted until 1980. This period saw seven Brecht productions and is notable for producing the highest number of Transylvanian Brecht premieres. Furthermore, between 1976 and 1980, Brechtian methods – especially through the direction of Levente Kovács – became gradually integrated into actor training at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Târgu Mureș. In 1981, a major international Brecht seminar was held in Bucharest, co-organized by the Brecht Center of East Berlin (GDR) and the national actors' union.

The third Brechtian period, which began in 1996, is separated from the previous one not only by time but also by the 1989 regime change, which fundamentally redefined the possibilities of

theatrical expression – both formally and thematically. This period is strongly shaped by the radically transformed performative practices influenced by digitalization, and by the contemporary position and perceptual-attitudinal shifts of the receiving subject (the audience).

In light of these changes brought by the digital age, I felt it necessary to include a separate analysis focusing on intermediality, multimediality, and hypermediality. In 21st-century theatre, the phenomenon of increasingly fragmented and multi-channeled audience attention presents new challenges for creators. The expansion of digital culture has also redefined the notions of theatrical presence and immediacy.

In analyzing the productions of this period, I give special attention to two distinct representations of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, staged only a year apart. These two productions form the foundation of a separate study in which I explore the relationship between Brechtian theory and Far Eastern theatre and philosophy. In the first part of that study, I offer a historical overview of the challenges faced by artistic and philosophical movements – starting in the late 19th century – that aimed to deepen understanding of Eastern cultures, and examine how these efforts paralleled Brecht's work, in which the turn toward Eastern traditions was not merely formal inspiration, but also a carrier of philosophical depth and ideological substance.

Additionally, following the chronological structure of this chapter, I include three production analyses that not only illustrate transitional stages, but also reflect the gradual transformation of contemporary directorial vision and its relationship to epic theatre, both thematically and formally. At the end of this period, I explore a particularly noteworthy phenomenon: within a short time span, three different Transylvanian theatres staged *Mother Courage and Her Children*. These events can be interpreted as a nodal point within the reception network of Transylvanian theatre history.

Presence – as one of theatre's most distinctive qualities, rooted in the simultaneous physical presence of creator and spectator – constitutes one of the central themes of the dissertation. The conscious experience of presence and the self-reflection of consciousness, as essential components of art, are explored in a dedicated chapter. Here, I analyze the various artistic components of theatre (literature, visual arts, music), also discussing the concepts of the sign, the sublime, and catharsis. Despite the extensive body of theoretical writing on Brecht, in the following chapter I attempt a synthesis of these existing theories, with particular focus on the problem of presence.

The dissertation concludes with a final chapter, in which I attempt to summarize the findings related to the theatrical representation of consciousness, presence, and freedom as reflected in Transylvanian Brecht productions.

Hungarian and Transylvanian Theatre Historical Background

One of the main objectives of Hungarian professional theatre, which emerged at the end of the 18th century, was the preservation of national language and identity. This tradition was carried forward by the National Theatre, founded in 1837, through the staging of glorious historical events and the embodiment of moral ideals. The declamatory, rhetorical acting style that was considered suitable for conveying these ideals remained dominant for a long time – even after the turn of the 20th century – while, in parallel, the style of the Vígszínház (Comedy Theatre) began to develop, emphasizing naturalistic acting and psychological realism. However, these two dominant trends left little room for the kind of radical avant-garde efforts that laid the foundations of modern theatrical revolutions in Western Europe.

After World War II, particularly following the nationalization of theatres in 1949, theatres came entirely under state ideological control. The aesthetic doctrine of socialist realism favored normative, positive heroes and easily relatable stories, making it difficult for Brechtian theatre – with its alienation effect and critical-reflective epic style – to be embraced.

In Transylvania, the theatrical environment was shaped not only by political and linguistic constraints but also by deeply rooted theatrical and stylistic traditions, which posed further challenges to the reception of innovative forms.

The 1956 production of ***Mother Courage and Her Children*** at the Radu Stanca Theatre in Sibiu, directed by Hanns Schuschnig, was the first Brecht performance in Romania. Since then, the Romanian theatrical scene has seen one hundred Brecht productions staged across forty-seven theatrical institutions officially registered by the National Institute of Heritage (*Institutul Național*

al Patrimoniului).[3] Of these, forty-eight were staged in Transylvania: twenty-five in Hungarian, thirteen in German, and ten in Romanian.

Schuschnig's production also held historical significance from another perspective. The German theatre tradition in Sibiu, which had existed for over two centuries, ceased institutional operations after the outbreak of World War I. Thanks to the prolonged and persistent efforts of German intellectuals, the previously amateur troupe was once again granted official status, and *Mother Courage and Her Children* became their opening production. The premiere took place outdoors in mid-August, in the courtyard of a former Ursuline monastery. During the performance, a summer downpour began, but the company carried on regardless, completing the play in its entirety. This earned tremendous admiration from the audience. As of November 1st, the troupe officially became a division of the Sibiu State Theatre, thereby gaining access to the theatre's stage as well. According to contemporary reports, the "Brechtian message" was conveyed clearly and intelligibly by the actors. The ensemble's performance did not distort the meaning of the play, but rather transmitted it precisely and effectively to the audience. This new and unfamiliar theatrical form seemed to win over its viewers. In contrast to traditional productions – often conveying their messages subtly or ambiguously and allowing the audience freedom of interpretation – this production delivered its message in a direct and unequivocal manner. The characters spoke directly to the audience, emphasizing the message, which suggests that formal elements of epic theatre were effectively employed.

The Romanian theatrical environment also initially faced serious challenges in this regard. According to film and theatre critic Mircea Alexandrescu, Brecht's "aesthetic formula" – that is, the formal and scenic system he developed as the most effective way to stage his own texts – faced an uncertain future on Romanian stages in the 1960s.[4] Alexandrescu noted that the general problem of the era stemmed from the fact that although most Romanian Brecht productions took the Berliner Ensemble as their model, directors sought to avoid epigonism, i.e., superficial imitation of form. It was precisely this caution that led to Brecht's fundamental theoretical guidelines being frequently ignored. Alexandrescu explains this contradiction by pointing out that although the

[3] For comparison, it is worth noting that during the same period, Shakespeare was performed 395 times, Schiller 52 times, Goethe 24 times, Molière 192 times, Ibsen 91 times, Sophocles 43 times, Caragiale 389 times, and V. Alecsandri 140 times. Source: https://patrimoniu.ro/, accessed at: 05.02.2022.

[4] Mircea Alexandrescu, „Pe marginea unui spectacol Brecht", *Teatrul*. April, 1961. 70-75.

directors were aware of Brecht's significance, they lacked a deeper, systematic understanding of his theatre theory.

For the Transylvanian Hungarian audience, Brecht's theatre was at first a new and unfamiliar experience. However, contemporary critics already approached these performances with well-grounded theoretical insight. They not only reflected on the aesthetic features of the productions but also sought to uncover the deeper meanings behind them, placing them within a theoretical framework.

For instance, György Jánosházy wrote a comprehensive, ten-page critical study on the first Hungarian-language production of *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti* in Transylvania. Of these ten pages, only the final three were dedicated to analyzing the actual performance, the first seven focused primarily on uncovering the theoretical foundations of Brecht's epic theatre. The critic saw his task as providing a "key" not only to the current production but also to future Brecht interpretations.

Regarding the 1964 Cluj production of *The Threepenny Opera*, K. Jakab Antal wrote a review that also included theoretical observations. Among other things, he compared Stanislavski and Brecht, emphasizing that while the former's approach relies on intuition and empathy, Brecht's method requires the actor to "alienate" themselves from the role. He further noted that the purpose of alienation is nothing less than "to expose radically dishonest art."

At the same time, Brecht's theoretical works also began to appear in Hungarian translation. The volume *On Theatre* was published in 1960, followed by *Epic Drama – Epic Theatre* in 1962, both released by the Institute of Theatre Studies, thus laying the foundation for a more informed critical discourse.

The First Transylvanian Hungarian Brecht Period: 1960–1964

The first Brecht production in Hungarian in Transylvania was ***Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti***, staged in 1960 at the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj by József Szabó. "Before the premiere, there was considerable debate both within and outside the theatre as to whether *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti* was suitable for introducing and legitimizing Brecht to an audience that, for the most

part, knew little more than his name."[5] Despite these concerns, the production was widely successful: "Brecht instantly conquered the Cluj audience." According to Levente Kovács, it was one of the pivotal productions that drew his attention to Brecht and later led him to direct *Drums in the Night* in 1980. Both the creators and critics had a clear vision of Brechtian theatre, and the Cluj audience welcomed the novelty of the performance.

The second Hungarian-language Brecht production in Transylvania took place on March 4, 1961, at the State Theatre of Oradea. The production was directed by Magda Borbáth, who undertook the staging of ***Mother Courage and Her Children*** with the theatre's ensemble of the time. György Jánosházy described the production as a "bold undertaking," given that the company was still entirely inexperienced with Brechtian theatrical form. Stylistically, the stage language featured mixed solutions. According to critics, it combined an attempt to incorporate Brecht's "alienation effect" with conventional tools of psychological realism. The production did not aim for the direct, thesis-driven immediacy typical of Brecht but sought a compromise between epic and classical dramatic language.

The third Hungarian Brecht production in Transylvania occurred in 1964 at the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj. Directed by János Taub, ***The Threepenny Opera*** marked a milestone – not only because it was the first Hungarian-language staging of the play in Romania, but also because Taub was both theoretically and practically well-prepared for the production. Shortly before rehearsals began, he had taken part in a study trip to the German Democratic Republic alongside Liviu Ciulei, who also directed *The Threepenny Opera* in Bucharest, at the Lucia Sturdza Bulandra Theatre in November 1964. During his stay, Taub attended performances by the Berliner Ensemble, including their production of *The Threepenny Opera*, and witnessed rehearsals for other Brecht productions, such as *Schweik in the Second World War*. He also held professional discussions with Helene Weigel, Brecht's widow and the Ensemble's director, and Werner Hecht, a renowned Brechtian dramaturge and director. Taub returned with a large amount of professional documentation and visual materials that formed the basis for his directorial concept.

The Cluj production formally went beyond a simple adaptation of Brecht's text. Taub did not merely illustrate the dramatic material but embedded his own directorial intentions into the

[5] Jánosházy György, „Puntila úr… és a többiek", *Igaz Szó*, 06. 01. 1960., 920 – 930.

performance. This was emphasized through interludes and short inserted scenes that served not only stylistic but also dramaturgical purposes. Based on the mixed critical reception, it can be concluded that while Brecht's theatrical aesthetics were partly adapted through Taub's analytical structure and satirical devices, the production as a whole did not fully achieve a Brechtian form. The consistency of alienation effects and the sharpness of socio-political theses were at times diminished. In the same year, Taub also directed *The Threepenny Opera* in Satu Mare, and according to critics, the two productions shared many similarities.

The representation of Brecht in Hungarian-language theatre in Transylvania began relatively late and did not immediately become a cultural-political priority – neither in the careers of directors nor within institutional practice. Based on the performances examined from this period, it can be said that Brecht's alienation techniques – such as songs, direct address to the audience, distinct scene segmentation, and actors' distanced relationships to their roles – functioned more as stylistic novelties than as integrated dramaturgical tools. Their impact derived more from the element of surprise than from conceptual depth. The relationships between stage and audience, director and actor, text and performance – relationships Brecht sought to radically rethink – were only partially altered in these productions.

Efforts of national cultural preservation and the political frameworks of institutions often steered theatres toward compromise. The functional operation of theatre companies – focused on fulfilling audience expectations – did not favor experimental forms. The "redefinition" of theatre, or *re-theatricalization*, unfolded more visibly and forcefully within Romanian-language theatres.

The Second Transylvanian Hungarian Brecht Period: 1973–1980

In the early 1970s, a new phase began in the history of Brecht productions in Transylvania. After nearly a decade-long hiatus, a new series was launched in 1973 with Tamás Major's production of *The Good Person of Szechwan* in Cluj. Over the next eight years, this period surpassed the previous one both in the number of productions and in its theatrical significance. A distinctive feature of this era was that Brecht not only gained a more prominent place in the repertoires of state theatres but also became actively integrated into actor training and student theatre, playing a key role in the formal and pedagogical reinterpretation of epic theatre. The staging of Brecht texts was no

longer merely a literary curiosity or ideological statement – it became a testing ground for the reinvention of theatrical language, the evolution of acting methods, and new directions in directorial thinking.

The performances of this period clearly show how the tensions between Brechtian aesthetics and local theatrical traditions gave rise to fruitful debates and divergent interpretive strategies. On one hand, some productions applied the alienation techniques with exemplary precision, provoking reflection from the audience. On the other hand, classical modes of acting – based on emotional identification – persisted, leading to stylistic compromises in the representation of Brecht's content.

Although this research focuses on Hungarian-language Brecht productions in Transylvania, it is important to mention, as a precursor, the **first Romanian-language staging** of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, which premiered on December 9, 1965, at the Mihai Eminescu Theatre in Timișoara, directed by Iannis Veakis. According to critic George Banu, the production lacked what he called the "director's contribution" – that is, interpretation, which is especially crucial in Brecht's work.[6] The alienation techniques – so essential to Brecht's theatre – were not perceptibly present in the staging. Banu noted that although the director mentioned "alienation" in the program notes, its interpretation remained vague, and the theoretical knowledge had no real consequence on the stage.

There were also positive reviews that saw the merit of the production in preserving the spirit of the play. In Doina Artimon's interpretation, the direction successfully respected the classical formal structure while also reflecting on contemporary relevance in its conceptual approach.[7]

The 1973 Cluj production of ***The Good Person of Szechwan*** was directed by Tamás Major, one of the most influential figures in Hungarian theatre, who was regarded as a professional authority both as an actor and director. As such, the production holds exceptional significance in the history of theatre. Major did not interpret Brecht's theatre as a rigid dogma but as a dynamically evolving, applicable mode of thinking. In his view, Brecht did not create a "final, carved-in-stone theatrical aesthetic," but rather developed a system of tools that must always emerge from the specific,

[6] George Banu, „Profilul unei generații de actori", *Scînteia Tineretului*, 04. 02. 1966., 2.
[7] Artimon Doina, „Timișoara: întîlnire cu Brecht", *Ramuri*, 02. 15. 1966., 23.

current relationship with the audience: "...Brecht is not a fashion. His method, which he refined throughout his life, evolves and can be further developed."[8]

Zoltán Krizsán, one of the leading critics of the era, emphasized that the encounter with Brecht was something "all of us – audiences, critics, and theatre professionals alike – approached with hesitation."[9] Nevertheless, he unequivocally categorized the production as one of the high-prestige performances of the Cluj theatre and argued that the unity of form and content it demonstrated made it suitable to establish a modern domestic Brechtian tradition. Reviews consistently noted that the Cluj ensemble – despite having no prior entrenched experience with Brechtian performance techniques – applied the alienation tools of epic theatre with artistic credibility and technical discipline.

Even the critic István Szőcs, who admitted to having a personal bias against Brecht and generally expressed a dismissive opinion, acknowledged that the performance was worth seeing even for those who were not fans of Brecht, "because of the many good acting."[10] However, the prevailing view in the reviews suggests that the production's greatest achievement was its ability to familiarize the audience with the formal and thematic practices of epic theatre, while ensuring that the play's fundamental concerns – human goodness, social context, and moral decision-making – were not lost but, on the contrary, brought strongly to the forefront.

At the Szigligeti Theatre in Oradea, ***The Threepenny Opera*** was staged in 1975 by István Farkas. For the Hungarian audience in Oradea, the stylistic world of epic theatre was essentially unfamiliar, and it is likely that, in order to align the production with local theatrical tastes, the performance was presented in a "localized Oradea-style" adaptation. The production mostly bore traditional, operetta-like stylistic features and did not strictly apply Brechtian elements. Instead, it attempted to strike a balance between entertainment and social critique. Thus, Brechtian characteristics were represented mainly by on-stage posters, captions, and the actors' solo performances.

Based on reports, it can be inferred that István Farkas's direction softened the Brechtian elements expected by critics, adapting them to audience preferences. As a result, the intellectual engagement

[8] Major Tamás, "Bertolt Brecht és hatása a magyar színházi életre", in *Bertolt Brecht – Színházi Tanulmányok,* szerk. Major Tamás. Budapest, Magvető, 1969. 11 – 38, 30.
[9] Krizsán Zoltán, "A szecsuáni jólélek, bemutató az Állami Magyar Színházban", *Igazság,* 12. 13. 1973., 5.
[10] Szőcs István, „A szecsuáni jólélek, A kolozsvári Állami Magyar Színház bemutatója", *Előre,* 12. 20. 1973., 2.

and consciousness-raising of the viewer were overshadowed by the focus on entertainment. A short, unsigned note in *Előre* newspaper a month after the premiere stated that the performance was played to audience acclaim.

The exam production ***A Man's a Man***, performed in 1976 by acting students of the Institute of Dramatic Arts in Târgu Mureș, was the first Brecht production in the city. It was directed by Levente Kovács, with Lóránd Lohinszky as the head instructor of the class. The production drew significant attention – no fewer than four critics wrote about it: Győző Hajdu (writer, editor), Mária Kacsír, György Jánosházy, and Tibor Oláh (critic, literary historian, translator). According to some critics, the direction trivialized Brecht's serious message, failing to bring out the deeper truths of the drama, and instead reduced them to light entertainment, thus stripping the performance of its social-critical edge. Others, however, argued the opposite: that the direction succeeded in encouraging the audience not only to enjoy the performance but also to reflect on its social message. These performances, presented on the academy's practice stage, were perceived by the local public as full-fledged theatre productions rather than student exams. As such, they played a vital role not only in actor training but also in shaping the city's theatrical culture.

Elemér Kincses's 1976 production of ***The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*** in Târgu Mureș was the first staging of this play in Hungarian in Transylvania. According to critics, Kincses's directorial language demonstrated clarity and consistency in bringing this "two-voiced Brecht fugue" to life with stylistic unity and appropriate use of epic theatre elements.[11] He remained grounded in realism, favored Brechtian performance styles, and accounted for actors' training, temperament, and the audience's taste and comprehension. He achieved a balance that ensured the viewer's awareness was never lost. The production was seen as both original and innovative in Târgu Mureș – not because it questioned the principles of the *Short Organon*, but because it avoided dogmatic intellectualism and didactic tones, striving instead for a productive synthesis "between valuable tradition and lasting innovation."[12] As a result, the performance became a memorable landmark in the history of theatre in Târgu Mureș as well as in Kincses's career, and it continues to be referenced decades later.

[11] Metz Katalin, „Állítsátok meg Arturo Uit!", *Vörös Zászló*, 11. 27. 1976., 3-4, 3.
[12] Oláh Tibor, „Brecht a változó időkben", *A Hét*, 12. 12. 1976., 13

In 1977, József Szabó was the first to stage ***Schweik in the Second World War*** in Hungarian in Transylvania. In previous years, Brecht productions at the Oradea theatre had largely been adapted to traditional theatrical conventions – either by omitting epic elements entirely or applying them in a diluted, non-functional, and sometimes operetta-like form. Available reviews suggest that this production brought no fundamental shift either, and it received only a lukewarm reception from the "conservative" Oradea audience.

The 1977 production of ***Mother Courage and Her Children,*** staged by Levente Kovács at the practice stage of the Szentgyörgyi István Academy of Dramatic Arts in Târgu Mureș, was the second Brecht production at the institution and the third Brecht performance in the city within a single year. Besides the entire graduating class (fourth-year students), students from the first three years also participated in the performance. The direction was described as being characterized by "a linearity bordering on monotony," meaning that the strong dramatic situations embedded in the play, which could have been more fully explored through acting, remained underdeveloped. In this case, epic theatre meant narrating, through stage language, the dehumanizing journey of Mother Courage.

The 1978 production of ***The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*** was the 25th performance of a student theatre group founded in 1963, whose members included medical students, acting students, pharmacy and teacher trainees, and even economics students. The group was led by Levente Kovács, who, during the 1970s and 1980s, elevated the amateur troupe operating within the Student Cultural House to such a level that, alongside great public success and large audiences, they also received serious critical acclaim: in the six years preceding the Brecht production, they had won seven professional awards. The show was a major success because the director crafted the impact elements and used counterpoint techniques in such a way that it "stimulated the active involvement of consciousness both on stage and in the audience" – provoking the audience's intellectual engagement without sacrificing entertainment.[13] This student theatre production achieved a genuinely Brechtian quality – something that could not be said of most professional Brecht performances over the years. In its staging, acting, the relationship between actors and

[13] Hevesi József, „Brecht ürügyén – a műkedvelő színjátszásról", *Ifjúmunkás*, 7. 9. 1978., 5.

audience, and directorial vision, it rejected "the rigid concepts, risk-free programming, and star cult of professional theatre."[14]

Drums in the Night, staged in 1980 within the walls of the Academy in Târgu Mureș, was the third Brecht production presented at the institution. What attracted Levente Kovács to Brecht's work were the possibilities for sharp formal shifts: he sought a dynamic structure that could jolt the audience out of passive empathy through sudden emotional transitions. In this production, the dramaturgy of unpredictability played a key role: just when a scene reached emotional saturation, the performance would suddenly shift into another register – for example, a tragic moment might abruptly turn grotesque. The production can be regarded as one of the most distinctive milestones of Brecht reception in Romania before 1989. Its unique features were primarily formal – an expressionist vision, grotesque elements, and consistent use of alienation techniques. These aspects were significant not only aesthetically, but also because they contributed to expanding the interpretation of Brechtian theatre in a cultural environment where political and pedagogical considerations were deeply intertwined with artistic realization.

The second Brechtian period in Transylvania can thus be described as a phase of deeper understanding and diverse application of Brechtian theatrical aesthetics – a period defined not only by the number of productions, but by their formal, ideological, and methodological richness.

The Third Transylvanian Hungarian Brecht Period: 1996 – Present

The third Brecht period began in the second half of the 1990s and extends to the time of this dissertation's completion. Unlike previous periods, this stage is no longer defined by a single dominant director or institution, but rather by a diversity of directorial approaches and institutional settings. The structural changes in theatre following the political transition, the decentralization of institutions, increased company mobility, and the broadening of cross-border cultural and professional relations created new opportunities for reinterpreting the Brechtian theatrical language.

[14] Szász László, „A tagadás és tisztelettudás színháza", *Igaz Szó*, 6. 1. 1978., 44-46, 44.

A defining characteristic of this third period is that the Brechtian form appears not merely as a stylistic inspiration but becomes the object of varying degrees of reflective theatrical thought. Formal devices – narration, direct address to the audience, placards, songs, stylized sets – are used in different combinations, and in some cases they may seem superficial, while in others they are organically integrated into the structural and meaning-generating logic of the production.

A key shift in this period is the dominance of the director's theatre, meaning that the structure and interpretation of performances are increasingly shaped by the director's concept. The productions emerge from varied aesthetic positions: from performances built on stylistic quotations and strong visual effects, to interpretations that aim to rearticulate Brecht's philosophical and social-critical layers in new theatrical languages.

Another notable feature of this period is aesthetic diversity – not only in directorial styles, but also in the use of stage devices, the dramaturgical function of music, visual design, and the relationship with the audience. Often, behind these formal innovations lies a clear intent to reflect on contemporary social realities and to present Brecht's parables not merely as historical documents but as timely social mirrors. In this sense, the productions of the third wave approximate the aims of Brecht's epic theatre not only formally but intellectually as well.

To analyze these tendencies in greater depth, two additional studies were included in the dissertation. The first explores the increasingly prominent phenomena of multimediality, intermediality, and hypermediality in contemporary theatre, with particular focus on how digitalization has transformed audience perception. Projections, sound design, live musical and visual montages are not merely technical additions on stage, but also enable a reinterpretation of Brecht's principle of alienation, opening new horizons for activating audience awareness.

The second study examines the influence of Far Eastern philosophies – especially Chinese worldviews and moral philosophy – on Brecht's body of work, using *The Good Person of Szechwan* as a case study. The analysis does not stop at the surface-level motifs of "Chineseness" or aesthetic allusions, but investigates the deeper intellectual parallels between Chinese thought and Brecht's portrayal of conscious presence, reflective spectatorship, and ethical complexity.

The aim of these two studies is to demonstrate how the productions of the third period reinterpret Brecht's legacy in novel ways, responding to the aesthetic, technological, and philosophical transformations of 21st-century theatre.

The 1996 production of ***The Threepenny Opera*** was staged during a period of both economic and artistic crisis for the theatre of Târgu Mureș. Elemér Kincses primarily aimed to articulate the ideas, human relationships, and conclusions with clarity. Through this approach, Brecht's depiction of contemporary society was sharply outlined – presented as a summary of the relationship between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the oppressed. This image, in turn, reflected the social reality of 1996: corruption, injustice, and moral decay.

According to the reviews, the production relied on a traditional theatrical language, in which Brechtian elements were substituted by directorial creativity, without disrupting the familiar conventions of theatrical form.

In the early 2000s, a paradigm shift brought about by widespread internet use and digitalization led to the construction of a new creative and receptive attitude, which evolved in parallel with the development of internet usage possibilities. The everyday use of networked communication began in the early 1990s, and until the 2000s, mass-communication-based websites and emails dominated. These formats offered limited opportunities for feedback and interactivity. In contrast, the defining feature of the social media platforms that emerged around 2004 (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) was the ability to easily create and instantly share multimedia content – a shift made possible by digitalization.

In the 20th century, the alienation effect reflected a world dominated by mass media: it aimed to address a spectator who came to the theatre from a relatively homogeneous cultural background and a closed information space. By contrast, the 21st-century spectator is embedded in a much more complex, digitally saturated environment. Projected images, live camera feeds, and digital manipulations are no longer just technical tools – they are integral to the construction of meaning. Today's viewers, having been socialized in a digital environment, are accustomed to multi-layered reception and simultaneous media handling – that is, they not only understand but also expect media transitions on stage.

According to Henry Jenkins, this form of convergence is not only technological but also cultural: the flow of content across multiple media platforms relies heavily on consumers' active participation.[15] From this perspective, Brechtian alienation also gains a new context, as

[15] cf. Henry Jenkins , *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006. 3.

contemporary audiences are no longer single-channel recipients – they interpret, react, and comment in parallel, often in real time, even outside the theatre space. Information consumption has become fragmented, and the cultural frame of reference has splintered. Consequently, the alienation effect can no longer be achieved merely through formal devices – attention must be paid to the audience's context as well.

Theatre has always employed the most advanced technologies of its time to enhance the spectacle of performances. In postdramatic theatre, the visibility of the technological apparatus plays an especially important role.[16] Lighting does more than illuminate, and cameras do more than record – these media often draw attention to themselves. The open use of tools, their deliberate exposure, and the intentional incorporation of technical malfunctions into the space of performance can all be seen as contemporary equivalents of Brechtian alienation.

The tendency of theatre to incorporate various media has existed since the 19th century. This practice became even more pronounced later and is now considered almost self-evident. In Irina Rajewsky's interpretation, the concept of **intermediality** refers not simply to the simultaneous presence of multiple media, but to their interaction, intersection, and transformation of meaning: "Hence, the media product (and its overall signification) constitutes itself in relation to the media product or system to which it refers."[17] This is an especially important distinction from multimedia composition, where media coexist without reflecting on one another. In an intermedial structure, media do not merely coexist – they collide, come into tension, and thereby generate new spectatorial experiences.

In contemporary theatre, there are many examples of this: in Ivo van Hove's productions, events unfolding on stage are often broadcast live via video and projected back – so the spectator experiences both presence and its mediated image simultaneously. For instance, in the 2022 production of *Mahagonny*, a boxing match takes place in front of a green screen, filmed and digitally composited in real time, and projected onto a large screen beside the action.[18]

[16] Cf. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Posztdramatikus színház*. Ed. Balassi, Budapest, 2009. 85.
[17] Irina O. Rajewsky, Intermediality, „Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality", *Intermédialités*, no. 6, 2005, 43–64. 59.
[18] Director Ivo van Hove about Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Dutch National Opera, URL address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLwhyqqMeqE, at: 25.01.2025.

A distinctive feature of digital media culture is that its reflexivity is often not critical but cynical: the content "knows" in advance that the viewer is aware of the rules of the game, and as such, it no longer strives for genuine commitment. Irony functions as a form of self-defense: the more we problematize, the less seriously we have to take things. In this context, Brecht's alienation effect loses its power, as it no longer stands out as an exception – it has become part of the logic of media itself.

In Brecht's theatre, the goal of alienation was not merely to disrupt but to encourage active interpretation and critical engagement. In contrast, within the digital sphere, the alienating effect often becomes ineffective due to excessive media consciousness and the inflation of irony. The viewer sees the structure behind the stage – but is no longer surprised by it. In fact, they are often bored by it.

One of the challenges for contemporary theatre, then, is how to reinterpret Brechtian devices for an audience that neither "believes" nor "asks questions." Perhaps the answer lies not in disruption, but in new forms of engagement. One such form is post-ironic theatre, which not only reflects but re-frames – and demands a kind of ethical involvement from the viewer. The Brechtian tradition does not become obsolete through this process, rather, it faces new challenges: how can theatre today not only raise awareness but also create genuine emotional impact?

The impact of technological media on human perception – and the ways in which it shapes cognitive structures – has long been a central concern in cultural and media theory. One of its most important insights is that digital platforms do not simply transmit images; they generate new modes of attention and time perception.

According to Friedrich Kittler's famous thesis, media do not communicate – machines communicate. This highlights the material and autonomous operation of media technologies: "Inside the computers themselves everything becomes a number: quantity without image, sound, or voice. And once optical fiber networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other".[19] Media are not merely intermediaries in human communication – they are autonomous technological systems that function according to their own logic, and within which human content becomes subordinated to the technical conditions of machine processing.

[19] Kittler, Friedrich A., *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford University Press, 1999. I.

In his book *Suspensions of Perception*, Jonathan Crary points out that the 19th-century optical media (such as the stereoscope or the zoetrope) did not merely transmit images but created new modes of attention and time perception: "Since Kant, part of the epistemological dilemma of modernity has been defining a human capacity for synthesis within the fragmentation and atomization of a cognitive field. That dilemma becomes especially acute in the second half of the nineteenth century alongside the development of various techniques for imposing specific kinds of perceptual synthesis, from the mass diffusion of the stereoscope in the 1850s to early forms of cinema in the 1890s"[20]

This is equally valid for today's digital platforms. The algorithmic structure of TikTok or YouTube Shorts, for instance, does not merely deliver content – it constructs units of attention time, which the user physically follows with their gaze, rhythmic interaction, and synchronized reactions. Thus, the medium does not simply "project," but restructures – this process is one of the fundamental characteristics of hypermediality.

One significant trend in contemporary theatre is the redefinition of the body as a medium. The body is not merely a tool for movement or acting, but an interface itself – a medium among other media. According to Amelia Jones's performance theory, the body does not simply carry meaning but is the very site where meaning is generated: "The body, then, is not simply a signifier or a representation of identity; rather, it is the site through which subjectivity – and thus meaning – is negotiated and constructed."[21] The body can respond to projected images, become distorted by sound, and react to light – thereby becoming part of a multisensory network of meaning.

These layers also redefine the perceptual competence of the viewer. The viewer is not a passive recipient but an active interpreter, whose perception continuously shifts among sensory focal points. One moment may be dominated by visual stimuli, the next by acoustic ones – thus, meaning does not arise from fixed references but emerges from a dynamic network of simultaneous sensory relationships. In this way, theatre does not merely transmit – it teaches perception.

The concept of **hypermediality** has become a key term in digital culture. Hypermediality refers to modes of text and meaning organization that are based on the simultaneous presence of multiple media and their interrelations. Unlike intermedial structures, however, hypermedial formations (at

[20] Crary, Jonathan, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture,* MIT Press, 1999. 14.
[21] Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1998., 22.

least apparently) place the control of attention in the hands of the viewer, and the connections among meanings mediated or generated by different media often extend beyond the boundaries of a single artwork (such as a performance). Internet-based platforms, social media environments, and various forms of visual culture all function as hypermedial spaces where information is organized not linearly, but in parallel, fragmentarily, and often with visual dominance.

Hypermediality is not merely a technical condition – it produces a new dramaturgy of attention, interpretation, and presence. N. Katherine Hayles, in her distinction between "deep reading" and "hyper reading," emphasizes that reception structured by digital media often does not rely on the linear processing of texts, but on fragmented, jump-filled, visually motivated reading habits: „With the advent of digital media, other modes of reading are claiming an increasing share of what counts as 'literacy', including hyper reading and analysis through machine algorithms ("machine reading"). Hyper reading, often associated with reading on the web, has also been shown to bring about cognitive and morphological changes in the brain."[22] Thus, the hypermedial space is not merely the presence of multiple media – it is a regime of perception that requires constant shifts, choices, and selective awareness from the viewer. In turn, this reshapes not only viewing habits but even cognitive capacities.

In theatre, the mechanisms of intermediality transform not only the structure of visuals and sound, but also the dynamics of audience attention. As Philip Auslander pointed out in the early 2000s, the media that appear in live performances (such as cameras, projections, music, etc.) are not merely technical tools, but discursive positions that reconfigure the relationship between spectator and performance.[23] Thus, attention is no longer directed solely at the stage – it is "distributed," and this gives rise to new spectatorial roles, favoring the dominant media of the era over the live body. However, in the 2023 edition of his book, Auslander suggests a shift in perspective: "It may be more productive, however, to see such interactions of live and mediatized elements as mutually defining, as stagings of the historical process by means of which the live and the mediatized acquire their respective identities through the discursive distinctions constructed around them."[24]

In contemporary digital culture, distributed attention is no longer considered a flaw, but rather a foundational cultural formation. In *Spreadable Media*, Henry Jenkins interprets this kind of

[22] Hayles, N. Katherine, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, University of Chicago Press, 2012. 11.
[23] Auslander Philip, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Routledge, Oxfordshire, 2023. 29.
[24] Ibid.

fragmented yet networked attention as a new participatory logic – where the viewer is not just a recipient, but actively republishes, remixes, memes, and interprets: „As material spreads, it gets remade: either literally, through various forms of sampling and remixing, or figuratively, via its insertion into ongoing conversations and across various platforms. This continuous process of repurposing and recirculating is eroding the perceived divides between production and consumption."[25] Theatre responds to this by dramatizing the structure of audience attention itself in some performances: spectators may use QR codes to unlock different content layers, choose between simultaneous viewpoints, or connect to individual camera channels. In productions like *Situation Rooms* by Rimini Protokoll, spectators become participants who follow personalized narrative paths determined by the cameras they use.[26]

Reception loses its linearity and becomes interactive and multi-threaded, where meaning emerges not solely from direction but from the medium-crossing shifts initiated by the viewer. In this context, Brecht's concept of alienation can take on new meaning: alienation may arise through the friction between different media. The fact that the viewer operates on multiple levels of perception and interpretation simultaneously does not interrupt reception – it makes it more complex.

Today, when digital devices deliver a blended reality–fiction experience in which boundaries are no longer clear, "theatre may be one of the few remaining places where reality can be both revealed and deconstructed."[27] One of the most distinctive and still unmatched qualities of contemporary theatre is its ability to awaken the viewer's conscious presence. While digital media – particularly mobile technologies and algorithm-driven content consumption – often obscure perception, fragment attention, and delay reflection, the theatre's physical simultaneity and shared present-tense experience can pull the viewer out of this scattered state. The actor's presence, the voice of the body, and the dramaturgy of space do not merely stimulate the senses but sharpen a sense of being. This is where theatre's unique power lies – even in the face of intermedial complexity: it teaches presence as an ethical and political condition. While digital mediality can distort the "here and now," theatre – despite all technical mediation – can return the viewer to themselves.

[25] Henry Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, NYU Press, New York, 2013. 27.
[26] URL address: Situation Rooms - Rimini Protokoll at: 07.03.2025.
[27] Deres Kornélia, "A médiatechnológia színrevitele", 2010. URL address: https://polc.ttk.pte.hu/tamop-4.1.2.b.2-13/1-2013-0014/96/deres_kornlia_a_mdiatechnolgia_sznrevitele.html#auto_top at: 18.08.2024.

Miklós Parászka's 2003 production staged a reinterpreted, tightly edited, and significantly shortened version of ***Mother Courage and Her Children*** in Oradea. The performance combined elements of Brechtian alienation with theatrical effects based on emotional identification. The most striking alienation technique was embedded in the intermedial framing structure of the direction: the entire performance unfolded as if it were a film shoot, set during the Second World War, filming the story of Mother Courage – that is, the Brecht play was presented as a film, but mediated through the theatrical form. The audience became part of a fictional filming process, proceeding scene by scene, turning the narrative into a theatrical experience via the imitation of an unrealized medium (film). The spectator thus found themselves in a pseudo-intermedial situation, functioning not as an actual media transition, but as a theatrical representation that signals one. In many respects, the production successfully employed the tools of epic theatre, and the pseudo-intermedial structure generated by the cinematic frame contributed to the conscious guidance of audience attention. Through this, the director encouraged reflection and questioning, opening new perspectives on the contemporary relevance of Brechtian theatrical form.

Although the motivation behind the filmic frame was not clear to every viewer, the inventive directorial concept and the layered intermediality undoubtedly offered a new type of spectator position.

In the second half of the 19th century, European art and thought, in search of new directions, increasingly turned toward **Eastern cultures**. However, in the beginning, Western creators primarily borrowed formal elements from Far Eastern traditions – often without their underlying worldviews and contextual foundations. In his essay *The Influence of Japanese Theatrical Style on Western Theatre,* Earle Ernst highlights that in the process of intercultural adaptation, it is often precisely those elements that are transferred into another culture which did not hold exceptional value in their original context but become striking and aesthetically emphasized in the receiving culture.

He gives the example of the art of Hokusai and Hiroshige: both were among the first to exert significant influence on Western visual arts. Their works were celebrated as masterpieces by Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Whistler, while the contemporary upper-class Japanese audience often judged those same works as vulgar, overly simplistic, or lacking in intellectual depth. In the same essay, Ernst cites another important source: Takahashi Sei-ichirō's 1955 English-language book, a key

reference in Japan that explores the artistic, economic, and social significance of Japanese woodblock prints. Ernst uses this reference to support the claim that even by the mid-20th century, the Japanese assessment of Hokusai had not significantly changed: "Adopting some Western techniques and tainted with the conventionalized weakness of Chinese painting, (Hokusai) certainly did much toward degrading woodblock art… into something Westernized or Chinese-fashioned. This very rustic ponderousness, without a touch of smartness or refinement seems to appeal to Western people. The popularity enjoyed by Hokusai among Westerners is really surprising."[28]

In contrast, Brecht's interest in China and the Far East is not only evidenced by the Noh masks and Chinese scrolls decorating his study walls or the recurring motifs in his plays – used as tools of alienation – but also by the adaptation of ideological and philosophical essences. For instance, the idea that the world is built on oppositions, a principle found across all schools of classical Chinese philosophy, is conveyed in *The Good Person of Szechwan* through the opposing traits of characters and situations as a recurring motif. The basic principle of yin and yang – that there is no absolute good or absolute evil, only perspectives – appears in Wang's very first lines and is reflected throughout every major and minor role in the play.

At the Sepsiszentgyörgy Theatre, the 2003 production of ***The Good Person of Szechwan*,** directed by László Bocsárdi, was the first Brecht performance in forty years after József Szabó's *Mr. Puntila and his Man Matti*. This staging created a formal theatrical world through acting and stage tools – lighting, use of space, music, loudspeakers, stylized objects – that never let the viewer forget they were part of a performance rather than a theatrical illusion. Every element on stage was embedded in a broader conceptual framework. The Sepsiszentgyörgy production aimed not only to stage a classical Brechtian work but to contemporize the parable form itself. Bocsárdi's approach did not merely illustrate Brechtian principles but re-contextualized them.

Alienation – both in Brecht's and Bocsárdi's sense – was not achieved by simply breaking the illusion, but by displacing and diffusing meaning. The scenes did not build linearly, but repeatedly circled around a central question: what does it mean to be good in a world where goodness

[28] Takahashi Sei-ichirō, *The Evolution of Ukiyoe: The Artistic, Economic and Social Significance of Japanese Wood-block Prints*, Yokohama, 1955, cited by Earle Ernst, "The Influence of Japanese Theatrical Style on Western Theatre", *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, May 1969, 127–138. 129.

demands self-destruction? The production thus served not just as a modern take on Brecht's theatrical ideal but as a moral and aesthetic inquiry.

The 2005 production ***Somewhere in Szechwan***, directed by Olga Barabás, was the second performance of the Academic Workshop, which continues to offer space for experimentation by artists and lecturers from the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș. In Barabás's interpretation, the alienation effects broadened the horizon of meaning. By not separating the songs from the rest of the play, and by allowing role changes and stylistic transitions to occur fluidly, the audience was never locked into a single mode of reception.
The structure of the performance, poetic form, stylized body language, and visual metaphors created a theatrical language that constantly reinterpreted itself. The audience became intellectual co-creators in the unfolding of the stage world – answers did not emerge from the stage but rather the questions continued to resonate in the viewer's inner space.

Anca Bradu's 2006 Cluj-Napoca production of ***A Respectable Wedding*** was visually powerful and conceptually layered, offering an additional interpretive layer through symbolic gestures and alienating effects, in the spirit of Brecht. Even though it did not employ Brecht's later techniques such as songs or direct address to the audience, it achieved its goal through visual stylization and grotesque acting: it activated the viewer's intellectual engagement.

In the history of the Tamási Áron Theatre in Sepsiszentgyörgy, the 2017 production of ***In the Jungle of Cities*** marked the third Brecht staging. One of the most striking and timely features of Dorka Porogi's direction was the way it treated media technologies not just as illustrative tools but as theoretical and theatrical content. Cameras, dual screens, and the coexistence of live and projected images served not only to expand the visual scope but became alienating gestures themselves. This intermediality blurred the boundaries between theater, film, and visual art, with the stage and screen images often running in opposing rhythms as if representing distinct realities. Moreover, the media were not only used but also rendered visible – the cameras appeared on stage, becoming characters, disorienting the viewer. Actors saw themselves during the performance, engaging in self-examination, and the resulting self-reflection led to a kind of deconstruction of mediality: the medium was no longer a transparent window but a raw presence revealing new

layers of meaning. By consciously incorporating media, the production alienated perception and elevated theatrical presence to a theoretical dimension – no longer presenting reality but the struggle with it, turning the viewer's presence into conscious presence.

The 2017 Oradea production of ***The Caucasian Chalk Circle***, directed by Anca Bradu, was based entirely on Brechtian alienation devices in all aspects – stage design, music, and acting. The direction did not attempt to create an illusion; instead, it exposed the mechanisms of stylized set elements and multiplied the "theatre within the theatre" effect. "Brechtian-ness" was present in the rhythm of the performance as well – it did not allow emotional identification, avoided linearity, undulated, paused, shifted, fell silent – thus constantly pulling the viewer back into their role as a spectator.

The mediality of the performance – although not through technological means – was still radically present. Framing the story within the debate of a kolkhoz assembly functioned as a kind of meta-narrative in itself: not only the question of *what* is being told arose, but also *how* and *why* we tell stories. The audience instantly understood that what they were about to witness was not reality, but a parable, a didactic tale – but one with serious stakes. The framing device functioned as a kind of live broadcast, but what was being transmitted was not the illusion of reality.

The Threepenny Operas – Three Productions

Brecht claimed that the 1928 premiere of ***The Threepenny Opera*** was one of the most successful examples of epic theatre.[29] In this production, stage music was used for the first time according to new aesthetic and dramaturgical principles. The most striking innovation lay in the deliberate detachment of musical segments from the events occurring onstage. This was also perceptible to the audience: the orchestra was visibly placed on stage. During the songs, changes in lighting were used to separately illuminate the orchestra, while the title of each musical number was projected in the background – for example, "Ballad of the Futility of Human Ambition." Another example: Polly informs her parents through a short song that she has married Macheath, the bandit.[30]

[29] Cf. Brecht, 1969, 224.
[30] Cf. Ibid.

The musical segments took on multiple forms: solos, duets, trios, and choral finales were all featured. The music's dominant balladic character gave the play a moralizing and reflective tone. One of the key takeaways of the play was the striking similarity between the emotional structures of bourgeois life and criminal lifestyles. In the music, highwaymen often expressed the same feelings and prejudices familiar to members of the audience from their own lives. One song, for instance, pointed out that life's pleasures are only available to those living in material wealth – even if this comes at the cost of higher ideals.[31]

Music thus became a tool for exposing bourgeois ideology, precisely because it exerted strong emotional power while retaining the sensual appeal typical of operettas. In doing so, it confused, provoked, and unmasked.[32] This concept redefined the role of music: *gestic music* – particularly the cheap musical forms familiar from cabaret and operetta – allowed the actor to actively interpret human situations. This type of music was closely connected to dramatic gestures, in contrast to the lyrical and individualized expressions of classical music.[33]

The 2015 ***Threepenny Opera*** in Timișoara, directed by Kokan Mladenović, was based on John Gay's original play *The Beggar's Opera*, not Brecht's canonical adaptation. However, it is still worth mentioning because it strongly relied on Brechtian theatrical techniques. Mladenović deliberately employed Brecht's tools: direct address to the audience, the blending of reality and fiction, and a self-reflective, ironic acting style – all serving the same distancing purpose. The most striking Brechtian feature was the production's meta-theatrical gestures: the characters repeatedly broke the fourth wall, directly engaging the spectators and reflecting on the social realities in which the performance took place. Thus, although the play itself was not Brecht's version, it successfully applied Brecht's theatrical principles.

The 2019 ***Threepenny Opera*** was a co-production of the Szeged Open-Air Festival and the Tamási Áron Theatre of Sfântu Gheorghe, directed by László Bocsárdi. Bocsárdi's characteristic "cold metallic atmosphere," supported by József Bartha's minimalistic, functional set and Zsuzsanna Cs. Kiss's stylized, alien costumes, evoked the permeability of social roles – for example, prostitutes

[31] Cf. Ibid.
[32] Cf. Ibid.
[33] Cf. Brecht, im., 226.

swiftly changed into police officers – thus emphasizing the constructed nature of social positions in true Brechtian spirit. The acting was notably stylized, aiming not for nuanced characterization but for highlighting essential traits. In mass scenes, where masks and sunglasses homogenized the performers, this approach sometimes became monotonous. Critics noted that the production as a whole lacked the personal and inventive form that characterizes Bocsárdi's most memorable works.

In 2024, Artur Szőcs directed a new ***Threepenny Opera*** at the Csíki Játékszín, blending Brecht's classic text with contemporary socio-political reality – much like Mladenović's approach in Timișoara with Gay's play. In both cases, the goal was not merely to retell the story but to reinterpret it through sharp societal critique. The key difference lies in their geographical framing: while the Timișoara performance extended to Eastern Europe – particularly Serbia and Romania – the Csíkszereda staging was deeply local. The most prominent feature of the 2024 production was the consistent and creative application of Brechtian alienation techniques, reminiscent of the Timișoara performance. The production continuously dismantled the fourth wall: actors ironized their own roles, engaged the audience directly – "In the first minute, the actors held a mirror to the viewers' fears and told them they were about to see a three-and-a-half-hour play with no intermission."[34] The Csíkszereda-based version effectively and consistently applied the principles of epic theatre.

Brecht's Mother Courage – Three Productions

Brecht discusses two different modes of representing *Mother Courage and Her Children* in the section *Dialectics in the Theatre* of his theatre writings. In this part, he presents examples from various productions, illustrating how obstacles encountered during rehearsals were overcome by discovering, exposing, and expressing the contradictions inherent in a character's behavior. The dialectical method is generally the more difficult path, requiring greater preparation and perseverance from the actor to challenge the "self-evident" solution that seems obvious at every

[34] Szilágyi Katalin, "Pénz beszél", *Játéktér*, 2024/1., URL address: https://jatekter.ro/szilagyi-katalin-penz-beszel/ , at: 26.03.2025.

turn: "»It's interesting,« – said B. (Brecht – ed. K.I.) when our assumption was confirmed during the rehearsal, – »that it always takes effort to take the laws of dialectics into account.«"[35]

The 2018 production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the Csíki Játékszín was the company's first Brecht staging, directed by Sorin Militaru. The production formally adhered to Brechtian prescriptions: alienation techniques, narration, direct address, live music, dance, and stylized group scenes were all employed. However, these elements functioned more as a stylistic framework, lacking substantive depth. The alienation effects failed to provoke analytical engagement from the audience, functioning more as entertaining devices, at times completely neutralizing any interpretive impulse. Acting was predominantly based on traditional identification; Enikő Szabó constructed the character of Mother Courage with sensitivity, consistency, and great expertise, but precisely for that reason did not step outside the framework of identification. The kind of critical distance Brecht intended was not achieved. Thus, the production remained a theatrical spectacle rather than an event that provoked Brechtian reflection.

In 2019, the joint production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* by the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj and the Staatsschauspiel Dresden opened the 18th festival of the Union of European Theatres. The production was directed by German director Armin Petras in a completely novel approach. One of its key features was that it was built upon the shared performance of two companies – German and Hungarian-speaking actors – with rehearsals split between Dresden and Cluj, and the premiere held by the German troupe on September 27. According to Petras, the entire direction was fundamentally shaped by the dual cast: the clash of "German precision" and "emotion-filled Eastern European soulfulness" generated a new theatrical language.[36] The dual casting was not simply a formal novelty but an anthropological and performative reflection on the representation of cultural differences on stage. The stage structure and acting style generated a mode of meaning-making in which every theatrical component prompted reflection. The movement of bodies, group scenes, and the relationships between song lyrics and their delivery collectively created a Brechtian theatrical language. Petras' production, in its complexity, stood as

[35] Brecht, im., 563.
[36] Zsizsmann Erika, „Az egyedülálló anyák háborúja: Kurázsi mama nyitotta az UTE-festen", *maszol.ro*, 20.11.2019. URL address: https://www.maszol.ro/index.php/kultura/119080-az-egyedulallo-anyak-haboruja-kurazsi-mama-nyitotta-az-ute-festet, at: 08.04.2025.

a contemporary example of epic theatre, where the imperative to interpret fostered conscious presence.

The Tamási Áron Theatre in Sfântu Gheorghe presented ***Mother Courage and Her Children*** for the first time as the final premiere of the **2023–24 season**. Thanks to Máté Hegymegi's direction and the exceptionally talented cast, the result was a performance that fully embodied the spirit of Brecht, naturally applying the demands of epic theatre – serving as live evidence of its continuing relevance. As Beatrix Kricsfalusi wrote: "Hegymegi's fourth production in Sfântu Gheorghe is a classic example of director's theatre – tight, refined craftsmanship. A thoroughly worked text (...), excellent casting, tasteful visual concept, versatile actors, nuanced portrayals, and outstanding ensemble work."[37]

In conclusion, it can be stated that among the three productions examined, those directed by Armin Petras and Hegymegi Máté most closely adapt the criteria of Brechtian epic theatre, both formally and ideologically. In contrast, Sorin Militaru's production is only seemingly Brechtian; the genuine dialectical theatrical effect is not achieved. While Petras' direction implies thought, understanding, and reflection, Hegymegi's production offers a sensitive, contemporary reinterpretation of Brechtian theatre through actor direction, relational dynamics, and theatrical space.

Art – Conscious Presence

In this chapter, I focus on exploring how art – especially the art of theatre – can activate a quality in human consciousness that is rarely brought into the spotlight: the state of pure, conscious, receptive presence. This state is not simply the focusing of attention but rather the experience of consciousness turning inward and becoming the direct witness of its own functioning. I will enumerate the artistic domains that constitute theatre – literature, music, visual arts, and acting as a performative act – and examine how they can, either collectively or independently, evoke

[37] Kricsfalusi Beatrix, „A békeharc vámszedői", *revizor, a kritikai portál*, 01.04.2025. URL address: https://revizoronline.com/bertolt-brecht-paul-dessau-kurazsi-es-gyerekei-tamasi-aron-szinhaz-sepsiszentgyorgy/, at: 02.04.2025.

experiences that transcend ordinary levels of perception and interpretation. The goal is to demonstrate how art – whether in a spontaneous or consciously structured form – can open dimensions of consciousness in which the recipient is not merely an interpreter but an active co-creator of the experience: sensitive, focused, and self-reflective.

Furthermore, I discuss different aspects of presence: according to the categories described by Cormac Power, in parallel with Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* ("being-there"), and by examining different forms of performative presence. Following this, I reflect on awareness and presence through the lens of Brecht's theatrical aesthetics, based on three contemporary interpretations: those of L. Hawley, A. Squiers, and C. Power – each offering a different approach to how Brecht constructs consciousness and presence in theatre. These interpretations draw from distinct theoretical traditions: Hawley approaches from critical theory and political aesthetics, Squiers applies cognitive theatre studies and narrative theory, while Power links contemporary theoretical discourse on theatrical presence to Brechtian thought. Together, the three perspectives offer a complementary illumination of the theoretical foundations by which Brechtian theatre can mobilize conscious spectator presence.

Lauren Hawley's study interprets Brecht's notion of consciousness not as an isolated aesthetic experience but as an extendable mode of political and perceptual awareness.[38] Hawley sees Brecht's theatre as an epistemological experiment: through structuring the spectator's cognitive process, it attempts to create a new worldview, a theatrical language that, by means of alienation, disrupts narcotic mass experience and pulls the spectator out of habitual mental patterns.

A. Squiers' study enriches the reception-theoretical reading of Brechtian theatre by approaching the concept of "awareness" from the perspective of cognitive psychology and the structural theories of social time.[39] He starts from the Brechtian view that, if theatre properly structures the conditions of reception, the spectator is not simply aesthetically engaged but is forced to reevaluate their worldview. In Squiers' view, awareness is not an individual inner awakening but the result of collective and artificial cognitive reorganization. This approach allows him to reject critiques of epic theatre as being "overly rational" or "lacking in emotion": "the epic principles guarantee a

[38] Lauren Hawley, *Fringes Blown by the Wind: High Hopes for Expanded Consciousness in Benjamin and Brecht*. nanocrit, Issue 9, April 2016. URL address: https://nanocrit.com/index.php/issues/issue9/fringes-blown-wind-high-hopes-expanded-consciousness-benjamin-and-brecht, at: 05.03.2025.

[39] Anthony Squiers, „Narrative, Consciousness and Cognition in the Works of Bertolt Brecht". *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2013. URL address: http://www.dmd27.org/squiers2013.html https://www.dmd27.org/squiers2013.html, at: 05.03.2025.

critical attitude on the part of the audience, but that attitude is highly emotional."[40] Distorted time on stage, the suspension of causality, and narrative jumps all serve to enable the viewer to "recognize the ideological origin of structures they had assumed to be real."[41]

Cormac Power in his work argues that in Brecht, presence is not a metaphysical state but a constructed dramaturgical position.[42] He highlights that Derrida also questioned the assumption that human nature could ever fully enter the Now, to be entirely present to itself.[43] Power's perspective sharply contrasts with traditions in performance theory that define presence as self-identity or spiritual wholeness. In Power's Brechtian reading, presence is never an isolated entity: it is always defined in relation to something else – a social role, a historical context. This constructed presence carries a higher intellectual stake because it never closes into certainty but remains in the form of a question: What am I seeing? Why do I see it this way? How could it be different?[44] In this approach, presence becomes the practice of questioning, through which the spectator is compelled to redefine their own moral and social horizon.

Brecht's Theatre – The Epic Theatre

Although this research does not aim to provide a comprehensive inventory of Brecht's oeuvre – especially considering that dozens of critical analyses have been published since the author's death – it nonetheless draws selectively on existing literature. These references function as responses to questions raised during the analysis of specific productions. In order to reach an adequate conclusion about how the Transylvanian Hungarian theatre interpreted and staged Brecht's legacy, it is necessary – even if only in passing – to outline the key parameters that define Brechtian epic theatre.

This chapter therefore briefly recalls the main characteristics of Brecht's concept of epic theatre, supplemented by insights derived from performance analyses. Based on these insights, I attempt to expand the analysis towards the field of presence studies, thus shaping a more personal approach to the presence-articulating mechanisms of epic theatre. From the perspective of the literature

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Cormac Power, *Presence in play: a critique of theories of presence in the theatre*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. 2006. URL address: 2006PowerPhD.pdf, at: 06.03.2025.
[43] Power, im., 134.
[44] Cf. Power, im., 141.

employed in the analysis, the views of Brecht and his contemporaries are indispensable. Following that, I also touch upon Brecht-analyses from the 1970s and 1980s, due to their relevance in the context of Hungarian cultural conditions in Transylvania, and integrate them with both contemporary and local interpretive frameworks.

General Summary

In his notebook *The Master at the Director's Desk*, Brecht clearly states that the conventional plays of his time had become hollow in meaning for modern audiences because they failed to reflect a transformed worldview. New modes of thinking and new forms of world-perception require new artistic qualities. Therefore, "directors must raise the theater to the level of science," which means not only creating new content but also developing a new language – a theatrical language capable of addressing contemporary spectators in an adequate way.[45]It is not simply a matter of deploying new technical tools; it is a matter of acknowledging that our perception of the world has changed, and with it, theater must adopt a radically different mode of operation. The technical development of theater is not a value in itself – it only constitutes true progress if it serves the "use of the plot".[46] This service must not be limited to instrumental applications but should combine formal innovation with the transformation of conceptual and perceptual structures.

In this expanding cultural and media space, however, it becomes necessary to recognize that preserving the Brechtian legacy cannot be reduced to a purely aesthetic or historical issue. Updating the critical attitude—particularly at the intersections of 21st-century theatrical practices and digital culture—carries new challenges and opportunities. In this context, Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre does not merely signify the overcoming of epic theatre, but also its transposition: instead of narratives that convey meaning, the focus shifts to the bodily, auditory, and perceptual dimensions of reception.

One of the strongest pressures on contemporary theatre stems from the oversaturation of digital visual culture. Lehmann warns that the radical informatization of social communication fields transforms the very logic of perception: what cannot be directly translated into information loses its right of representation in the public sphere. Theatre, however—at least in its classical form—

[45] Brecht, im., 64.
[46] Brecht, im., 77.

operates precisely on this border, on the threshold between comprehensibility and sensorial experience. Theatrical experiences of presence, absence, fragmentation, and ambiguity offer an alternative to the world of univocal, closed digital narratives.

The structural demands of the digital world—fragmented attention, impulse-driven interactions, the need for immediate comprehensibility—shape modes of reception that stand in contrast to Brecht's conception of the spectator. Brecht sought an active, reflective, and acting spectator—one who steps out of the story and views it from the outside. By contrast, the logic of digital media is built precisely upon immersion and the total appropriation of attention. Postdramatic theatre—in Lehmann's interpretation—enters into dialogue with this media environment: it does not reproduce it, but responds aesthetically to it—not by providing information, but by creating experiential spaces.

For the future of Transylvanian theatre, the example of Romanian post-socialist theatre may also be instructive. According to Cristina Modreanu's theatre-historical analysis, in the three decades following the fall of the communist dictatorship, Romania underwent a gradual but decisive shift: the classical model of drama based on dialogue and character was increasingly replaced by postdramatic forms rooted in collective creation, documentary elements, and performativity.[47] This transformation is not only aesthetic but also political and social: theatre redefines its relationship with reality, and along with it, its linguistic, sensorial, and receptive structures.

Modreanu particularly highlights the role of female creators—such as Alexandra Badea, Elena Vlădăreanu, and Alexandra Pâzgu—in this transformation. These authors and directors have not only introduced new thematic horizons—such as motherhood, migration, or transcultural identity—into theatre, but have also abandoned classical narrative structures, giving space to fragmented, poetic, or interactive performance forms. It is a transformative process through which theatre reconfigures its relationship with reality, foregrounding its documentary and performative dimensions, which, with each production, regenerate the very nature of the act of representation.[48] The postdramatic form, in this case, does not signify a rejection of the Brechtian legacy, but rather a reinterpretation of it, embedded within a new network of sensorial and social relations.

[47] Cristina Modreanu, *A History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism - Children of a Restless Time*, New York, Routledge, 2020. 144.
[48] Cf. Ibid.

In this sense, the future of Brechtian theatre lies not in the conservation of historical heritage, but in sensitive responses to new social and perceptual challenges. In an information world dominated by digital culture, theatre—in the sense described by Lehmann—can remain relevant as a medium that does not inform, but allows for direct experience of the present.

Based on the mapping of Brechtian periods spanning nearly seventy years, we may state that the analysis and comparison of the thirteen productions created during the third Brecht period outline the network of the Transylvanian Hungarian Brecht-theatre discourse. In this context, the productions staged during this period—particularly those directed by Barabás Olga, Bocsárdi László, Porogi Dorka, Armin Petras, Szőcs Artur, and Hegymegi Máté—constitute essential nodes through which the canonical outline of Brecht's theatrical aesthetics can be discerned. The question is how Transylvanian Hungarian theatre can both preserve Brecht's socially critical attitude and respond to the structural transformations imposed by digitality, globalization, and mediatized publicity. The answer likely lies in shaping a flexible, reflective, and sensitive theatrical language—capable of integrating not only new media, but also new forms of audience presence.

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