

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ
COLLEGE OF THEATER AND FILM
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEATER AND FILM

HABILITATION THESIS SUMMARY

”Methodological perspectives in theory and practice of image and documentary film”

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This habilitation thesis named "Methodological perspectives in theory and practice of image and documentary film" wishes to summarize and convert into doctoral habilitation expertise the result of both my practical activities in the last 30 years on the Romanian audio-video scene (as journalist, image, television program and documentary film creator) and of my didactic activity that I perform in UBB Cluj's College of Theater and Film. In this double quality of mine I have tried, during my activity as a professor and researcher so far, to reason the creative processes of image and film expression and transpose them into a personal vision, in didactic methods and strategies, furthermore amplified by conceiving a theoretical reliance that materialized in articles and books published and previously described. It is my intention to develop and research on part of the subjects described in these titles in the perspective of a further professional development.

Ultimately, this paper aims to express my personal observations as a Human Being and an individual who lives in connection to a reality that is more and more dynamic, a reality under the fantastic pressure of technology's explosive evolution that makes us all witnesses to the history of communication.

This work is structured in three different chapters that present my professional becoming in the first place, the representative documentary film projects and my activity in this field. A more consistent is dedicated to the work I do for Romanian Public Television, where I have been working since the year of 1994.

The second chapter describes my activity as a professor and researcher in detail, along with the fields and classes that I had been teaching on the question of image (definitions, forms, perspectives, practice), documentary film and the practice of non-fiction filming, profoundly argued in the PhD thesis named "Text and image in mass-media".

The final chapter describes the intents to develop, the artistic creation and scientific research. In my audio-video, teaching practice and research activity so far, I have identified certain issues that are particular to the image that (in the contemporary communication context) stand as an entity that shapes and intermediates the individual versus precise space relationship, audio-video language particularities and those of non-fiction film.

Thus, my intentions to develop and research are headed towards the following directions of study:

- *Audio-video image/language/Non-verbal communication and film*

The image is no longer a simple copy of reality that is being captured on a certain type of support, but it becomes an active element that mediates how the individual interferes with space, favored by developing of techniques and of the new media. Starting from this new image identity that produces mutations in meaning, my interest is to extend research on fields that refer to:

- perceptive framing
- associated cultural and social references
- existential functions in the new climate that is dominated by image
- image and film role in this communicational context.

Starting from these general issues, I intend an applied development in the next directions of study:

- new identity (personality) of the camera, that is not just an artificial and mechanical duplicate of the head/eye, having the same structural elements and fulfilling the same functions, but also a "stock/warehouse" of representations that illustrate life experience. (Structure and functionality of machinery that captures images)
- research on the way in which, in the context of the new media, image becomes a *mediator* between the individual and the world, and the cinema, television, and on-line media become the meeting and connection point of multiple ontological aspects.
- identification and particularization of the way in which new audio-video expressions generate specific expressive forms, presenting effects in reshaping the perceptive framework and changing referential systems (VR, AR, 360 videos).
- the way in which communicational society reshapes the existential universe. Real natural space is replaced by the one that is filmic and virtual, created by moving images. This re-positioning and shift of roles between the signifier and representation brings into attention the concept suggested by A. Bazin in which „Model's image was metamorphosing into the Model”.
- identification of mutations in meaning that are produced by proliferation of image in a society already known as belonging to information, image or communication, spherical screen - global screen (G. Lipovetsky).

- *Documentary film*

Research in the field of science, creations in art, educational models, researches in the spectrum of knowledge and culture, they come out through documentary film and consecrated patterns in mass-media and are discharged into the common space of expression. Through its social functions, the documentary film manifests as a public common space that is global for the Humankind in its complexity, thus developing a new perspective, adapted to the informational society and humankind exploring. Through documentaries, the new media of audio-video communication constitutes as a global slope of declaring human values, an universal support and a main pole for reconsidering (rewriting) human studies. Therefore, documentary film wins a special place in the humanities expression vein, through the privileged role Man has in its structure and through the unique way of revealing human virtues. Focusing on man in every aspects of their existence, documentary distils the human essence out of the mass of the dehumanized extreme, revalues human virtues and proposes a new vision on understanding humanity. Being focused on man by structure and on positivity, documentary film opens a new territory of thinking vanguard and humanity oriented attitude, thus affirming itself as a new and elaborate form of Humanism.

- *Virtual Reality (VR)*

Even though the first attempts to create replicas of tri-dimensional images (that re-make the perceptive spatial model of human sight) were made in the 19th century, technique does not succeed to impose a serial model with a tri-dimensional image until the XXIst century. The current technological context lets us see the interest equipment producers have, and also the one of creators to optimize technical performances of tri-dimensional component that is associated with attempts to introduce other sensorial dimensions into the audio-video message (tactile, olfactory). For new representations such as 7D cinema - 5D show, there are created special spaces where the individual gets his information from (and which is similar to the real experience) via multiple sensorial means. Information is virtually projected or generated, thus making a new perceptual framework, known as Virtual Reality (VR). With this, helped by tri-dimensional eyewear, moving seats, vibrations, water and wind gushes, scented fresheners and stereo sounds, one can experience perceiving the copy of a reality in all of its dimensions involving perception.

On the same basis, another development direction is that of interactivity, where the individual stands in a space like a sensorial multidimensional cinema (a space where there is a technical

possibility to produce message from the entire spectrum of senses), but where the individual can interact, through the means of special devices, to the perception challenges. The innovative concept (that can already be found in a certain form in gaming or in amusement parks) is to be found under titles such as 7d, interactive 7D and 7D game.

Therefore, I identify a series of general characteristics of the genre through the different ways in which the viewer is positioned versus the projection screen, the specific characteristics of screens, projections and messages that come through sense (visual, audible, tactile, olfactory), perceiving the story in itself (that makes use of mixt communication elements, film/photo/animation/graphics, sounds, tri-dimensional perception, 360 perspective) and a non-linear architecture and structure.

This new reality and communication and audio-video expression paradigm sketches some directions for research that, from my point of view, need to find an answer to the following questions:

- what are the advantages and disadvantages in expression, esthetics and technique when considering 360 representation?
- how does VR change the way in which non-fiction content is seen and produced?
- in which manner does the cinematographic language work and how does it need to get updated to this new paradigm? Is there a need for a completely new approach?
- how does esthetics modify grammar and punctuation in cinematography, considering that this medium makes big distance objectives and concrete juxtaposed plans disappear?
- will VR, 3D or 360 perspective replace the standard video content?
- in the case of documentary, what are the limitations and the snares?
- how will VR video production look like in the future?

As a summary of my biography, I must say that I am a member of artistic and editorial team for the regional studio of Cluj-Napoca, working for the Public Television since 1994, where I dealt with all structures involved in the audio-video production processes as Director of Photography, achiever and producer, senior TV journalist - the latter being my current occupation. My activity materialized into television productions that were well-known and received multiple prizes, entertaining and cultural shows (Natură și aventură, Garantat 100%, Știrile de sâmbăta asta etc.), public campaigns and documentary films. I am part of the crew that founded the Media and Cinematographic Department in 2005. Withal, I have performed

my activity as a professional at TVR Cluj, and also as a professor at Theater and Film College. This double experience materialized into a PhD thesis coordinated by PhD Professor Aurel Codoban, named "Text and image in mass-media". This paper was then published by Eikon Publishing House, in their Cinemedia collection, with a slightly different name: Text și imagine în mass-media - contribuții la o semiotică a discursului filmic.

I got specialized in producing documentary films, helped by several international workshops and being selected for some of the most important training programs in documentaries in the entire world, Discovery Masterschool in 2008 and Aristoteles Workshop in 2006. These experiences then turned into many documentaries productions that were broadcasted by famous television channels in the world, nominated and awarded in national and international film festivals (ShanghaiTV IFF, Eidf Seoul, EFF Washington, Astra Film Sibiu, APTR etc.)

My filmography includes, from my positions as screenwriter, director of photography, editor and director, creations of non-fiction that cover a large spectrum, from anthropological film and ethnographic to those having environmental subjects, social ones and even films of art. They were broadcasted by prestigious international television channels (Arte France, TV5, ARD Germany, EBS Korea, CCTV 10 China, HBO, TVR) and were awarded, receiving prizes, being nominated, selected and participating in renowned festivals on multiple continents. In this field I have worked with important documentary film directors from Europe, with famous television channels and Romanian and foreign producing companies or with world-wide famous institutions (Amnesty International, FIBA).

My teaching and research activity so far have become class materials for students at Theater and Film College, all on topics dealing with image, audio-video communication in media, methodology of audio-video and documentary production, along with a series of specialty articles covering a thematics that is derived from the practice of audio-video production. In 2019 I have published the handbook work called *Bazele imaginii de film și televiziune* at Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, in their Cinemedia collection.

Since it was initiated, I supervise the MA in Documentary Film, where I teach classes on Documentary Filmmaking, Docu-drama/Docutainment and Documentary production management. For the future, I plan for this program - as a general objective - to create a headquarters of documentaries production in Cluj, developing from this program by creating a group of young artists to join the consecrated ones and to work together as mentors and tutors in the framework of this academic program. I aim to extend this core and make it into a web or

community of professionals that shall come from national and international industry (producers, distributors/broadcasters/commissioning editors) and with people of culture from the media, from the academic environment, critics and influencers who share an interest in creating and promoting non-fiction films.

Regarding research, my intention is to develop and extend research themes by coordinating PhD theses that cover non-fiction film related thematics.