

Intermediality and Spectatorship in the Theatre Work of Robert Lepage

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The Solo Shows

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of illustrations.....	vii
Foreword	viii
Introduction	1
o Short Outline of International Research.....	3
o The Concept of Distance in Theatre	18
o The Remediation of Theatre	25
o Hypothesis and Integration of Research	32
Chapter One.....	37
Subchapter 1: Robert Lepage and the Québécois Context	38
1.1.1. The Québécois Theatrical Context and its Development	39
1.1.2. Robert Lepage's Formation	46
1.1.3. The Emancipation of Québécois Theatre	49
1.1.4. Théâtre Repère and the Repère/RSVP Cycles.....	52
1.1.5. Ex Machina and its Relationship with the Québécois Identity	58
Subchapter 1.2: Robert Lepage's Method of Creation.....	63
Chapter Two.....	72
Intermediality and Theatre	
2.1. The Concept of Intermediality	73
2.2. Intermediality and Theatre as a Medium	82
2.3. Intermediality and Spectatorship in Contemporary Performance .	84
2.4. The Intermediality of Robert Lepage's Original Theatre Work....	88
Chapter Three	90
Contemporary Spectatorship	
3.1. Audience and Spectatorship in Theatre Studies.....	94
3.2. Spectatorship in Media Studies: The Problem of Contemporary Perception	105
3.3. Spectatorship in Robert Lepage's Original Theatre Work	121

Chapter Four	131
The Solo Shows	
o Vinci (1986)	135
o Needles and Opium (1991)	156
o Elsinore (1995)	177
o The Far Side of the Moon (2000).....	205
o The Andersen Project (2005)	231
o Comparative conclusion regarding intermedial practice.....	271
Conclusion.....	274
Annex A: Chronology of Directorial Work.....	283
Annex B: Awards and Honours.....	310
Bibliography	320

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Front Cover: *Robert Lepage* by Claudel Huot

Chapter Four:

Figure 1: <i>Vinci, untitled, 1986</i> by Robert Laliberté.....	154
Figure 2: <i>Les Aiguilles CH13</i> [1990] by Claudel Huot.....	171
Figure 3: <i>Robert Lepage Rehearsing Elsenaur, 1995</i> by Richard-Max Tremblay.....	192
Figure 4: <i>Lune _1</i> [2000] by Sophie Grenier.....	219
Figure 5: <i>The Andersen Project</i> [2005] by Erick Labbé.....	242

FOREWORD

In times of war, or political uncertainty, when thousands of innocent people are killed and other hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, across the globe worry about or fear the future, it is worth reminding ourselves, based on evidence, that theatre is a powerful tool for change. Societal, formal/ medial, in terms of values and mentality... Many phrases can be used here, none enough to define completely the potential of theatre as a medium. The emancipatory role of theatre, ostensible since its beginnings, applies in the case of Robert Lepage's practice, too, on combined cognitive, sensorial and emotional levels, even if this influence can be observed rather obliquely.

This study addresses the work of one of the most prominent theatre-makers, who developed his practice starting with the mid 1980s, in direct relation to the notion of theatrical communication. A director who strived towards a meaningful relationship between auditorium and stage in relation to contemporary realities, with an aesthetic discourse that combines novel ways of theatrical communication meant to address current sensibilities and literacies.

This book is a re-visitation of doctoral research undergone as a member of the International PhD Programme in Performance and Media Studies at the University of Mainz, Germany (between 2002-2006) and of the PhD thesis defended at the University of Munich (2008). I would like to thank first and foremost Prof. Dr. Christopher Balme, my PhD adviser, for his highly competent, gracious and always supportive advice throughout this process. I would, also, like to thank all members of the International PhD Programme in Mainz, whether staff or students. The environment created there, the feedback received and the stimulating ideas shared have been inspiring throughout the entire research process. I am, also, immensely grateful to the Ex Machina Company staff for providing support and access to material highly relevant to this research. Also, my gratitude extends to those who helped illustrate this publication. Their names are credited in the illustration section. And lastly, but equally important, I would like to thank my friends and family who have provided emotional support throughout this period of reconsideration and rewriting.

INTRODUCTION

The Québec based director-actor-playwright-set-designer-filmmaker Robert Lepage has imposed himself in the past more than three decades, as one of the Wunderkinds of contemporary theatre, a magician of theatre alternative, an international star whose theatre, opera and film productions are widely acclaimed at the most prestigious festivals around the world, a “cultural commodity”¹ and with *Ka* (2005) – the mega-show premiered at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas and developed in collaboration with Cirque du Soleil² – as the best paid theatre director in the history of

¹ At a meeting with students at Université Laval in Québec-City on 9 March 2005, Robert Lepage described himself as a “cultural commodity” within the international circuit of theatre production and further commented, on the one hand, upon the freedom to dispose of impressive amounts of money, time and artistic control, essential to the development of his original productions, and, on the other hand, on the limitations that the status of “cultural commodity” and the public image implicitly engendered brought to himself as an artist.

² According to Stéphane Baillargeon’s account in *Le Devoir* (2005), *Ka* required 265 million \$ for production and another 1.5 million \$ per week for the running of performances, a sum that Las Vegas as the US capital of entertainment could afford, yet at the same time a sum that represented the budget for four years of the Council of Arts and Letters of Québec, the main funding body for contemporary/experimental theatrical productions in Québec. The journalist rightfully observes that even Hollywood film productions rarely have such a budget and notes that the show was conceived as a sort of stage 3D “derivation” of the special effects typical of Hollywood blockbusters like *The Matrix* (1999) and *The Hero* (1993). As the most ambitious project of Cirque du Soleil to that point *Ka*, employed 158 technicians and 75 acrobats, and the seating was designed to accommodate 11.000 spectators. The set designer appointed to work with Robert Lepage and Cirque du Soleil was Mark Fisher, a British architect famous for creating unique set-designs for rock and/or pop mega-star concerts, for artists such as: Pink Floyd, Rolling Stones, U2, and Elton John. According to Baillargeon, one of the main ideas behind *Ka*’s design was to conceive a space that would provide audiences with a new and uncanny perspective upon viewing. A unique mechanical stage world was created, buried in a deep pit (of tens of meters), designed to multiply the apparition of floating platforms and other dramatic accessories and to maximize the impact in terms of spectatorial experience. Lepage’s fee was 2 million \$. This puts the Québécois director in the position of the best-paid theatre

Western stage production. The accolades for Lepage, however, do not stop here.³

Part of the reason the director has acquired the status of a unique theatre-maker on a par with Robert Wilson or Peter Brook is that, after his international breakthrough with *The Trilogy of Dragons* (1984), the Québec based director has quickly become a *favorite* of theatre critics and scholars over the world. His theatre and/or film productions made and still make, to this day, the subject of intense and inspiring cultural critique and debate.

Whilst cultural journalists from different parts of the world hailed or dismissed with passion each and every new production by Lepage, responding to their formal novelty, scholarly studies strived to find a conceptual framework able to define the complexity and novelty of Lepage's artistic undertaking. Thus, one can safely assert that the director's international profile as a "theatre maverick" and "Renaissance artist,"⁴ has been construed both through his own practice and the wide range of critical responses. However, irrespective of the aspect of the director's practice that made the object of academic scrutiny, a recurrent fascination with the formal novelty of his approach imbued most, if not *all* critical considerations devoted to his work.⁵

A persistent appreciation of Lepage's ability to tackle one of the most controversial and sensitive issues within contemporary culture – that is *visuality* – filters through throughout the existing body of scholarship. Challenging cultural assumptions and conventions regarding the construction of the theatrical image, building, in each of his performances, self-reflexive meta-narratives related to the medium of theatre and consistently attempting to break previously established aesthetic and medial boundaries of theatrical representation, in the attempt to widen its

director in the history of theatre, according to publicly accessible accounts so far (Baillargeon 2005).

³ For more details see Appendix B.

⁴ Several critics and scholars attempting to portray Lepage as a complex artist, interested in arts and sciences and their possible combination on stage, have recurrently used the term "Renaissance artist." The director himself seems to favor such a label/definition, as he declared numerous times throughout his career. The diversity of his artistic and intellectual preoccupations and the multiplicity of stimuli used in his theatre-practice, including non-dramatic and non-fictional, or literary, speak of this tendency.

⁵ For a list of the main studies and articles that cover Lepage's theatrical work, see Bibliography.

horizons, were and (still) are acknowledged as quintessential for the director's particular approach and signature.

As implied above, complexity and hybridity lie at all levels in Lepage's process, starting with the very moment of inception until its end several years later. Consequently and in direct relation to the hybrid medial, narrative, and/or cultural complexity of his work, critical frameworks within the existing body of research vary in focus from interculturality, to intermediality, to the development of meta-narrative strategies or strategies of "writing directly-on-stage" (*écriture scénique*), etc. One could assert that, since Lepage's international breakthrough (in 1984), academic studies strive to discuss the work from a conceptual perspective that (implicitly) acknowledged the impact on audiences, whether specialized – i.e. cultural journalists, scholars, practitioners –, or non-specialized spectators from various parts of the world. Moreover, it is generally agreed – albeit in most cases obliquely rather than explicitly – that what is defined in this study as Lepage's intermedial directorial approach *is* one of the main, if not *the* main reason for the significant impact of his theatre in diverse cultural contexts in recent decades.

Short Outline of International Research

As suggested above, the existing body of research on Lepage's theatre is extensive and diverse in terms of frameworks. The intention here is to outline the main directions of study undertaken in the past three decades, in order to identify a range of recurrent themes in academic analysis and to link them to the scope of the present research. For this purpose, studies by: Chantal Hébert and Irène Perelli-Contos, Ludovic Fouquet, Aleksandar Dundjerovic, Natalie Rewa, Marta Dvorak, James Bunzli, and Christopher Balme, will be drawn upon.

Chantal Hébert and Irène Perelli-Contos performed probably the most extensive and thorough investigation of Robert Lepage's theatre, highlighting its critical impact upon the development of contemporary theatrical culture in Québec and its further recognition abroad. Their studies⁶ monitored throughout the years the main developments in Lepage's artistic process, discussing many of the theatre-maker's original creations, at different stages of their development, as works-in-progress. Based on direct access to the various stages of several of the director's creative processes, as well as on the possibility to observe closely the local

⁶ A detailed account of each study exceeds the purposes of the present outline. For a list of Hébert and Perelli-Contos' main work on Lepage see Bibliography.

audience response, their research is of inestimable value for Lepagean studies. The authors define the director as a “unique faiseur d’images”⁷ and as the most successful representative of “théâtre de recherché” in Québec – a new theatre strand pertaining to the local scene and arising in mid 1980s.⁸ According to the scholars, Lepage’s theatre was a major instrument in redefining theatricality “par la création d’un langage théâtral différent, imagé et polysémique” (Hébert and Perelli-Contos 2000-01, 65)⁹. Furthermore, through his substantial contribution to the development of what scholars termed as “écriture scénique,” the “théâtre de recherché” in Québec can now be described as one of the revolutionary moments in Western theatre practice in the past decades. According to the authors, the term “écriture scénique” indicates that:

L]e travail de composition s’effectue d’abord et avant tout dans l’espace scénique. [...] Cette écriture scénique consiste en un assemblage, un brassage ou un bricolage d’objets, de paroles, de musiques, de sons, d’éclairages, de textes, de gestes, de mouvements, d’appareils technologiques, d’écrans, etc., bref, d’éléments disparates et hétérogènes qui s’offrent comme des ressources sensibles potentiellement exploitables tout au long de la création théâtrale. La combinaison, recombinaison, le déplacement, le jeu de ces éléments permet la constitution de la matière ou texte spectaculaire, laquelle tient précisément dans le rapport intime que ces matériaux ou *éléments scéniques* établissent entre eux et avec l’espace théâtral. Le syntagme *écriture scénique* rappelle d’une autre part, le caractère inévitablement éphémère du théâtre comme art vivant, précisément en ce qu’il est dynamique et non pas statique, processus et non pas aboutissement. Ainsi, c’est en tant que système vivant que nous

⁷ In English: “unique image-creator” (author’s translation).

⁸ In English: “theatre of research” (author’s trans.). The new strand is interpreted as the specifically Québécois version of a wider trend in contemporary practice: the theatre of image. Authors cited consider that the Québec version distinguishes itself as a practice with intensive focus on the hybridization between theoretical enquiry and practical experimentation. The notion of experimentation translates here into an engagement with *all* the elements that could potentially enter a stage configuration, and is geared towards the systematic innovation of the theatrical language, based on subverting the established aesthetic conventions and artistic practices of the time (Hébert and Perelli-Contos 2001, 10). One could assert that this particular approach towards theatre making has methodological similarities with practice-as-research/artistic research practices increasingly widespread in the UK and Western Europe in the past decade.

⁹In English: “through the creation of a theatrical language that is different, image based and polysemic” (author’s trans.).

proposons d'examiner cette écriture scénique (Hébert and Perelli-Contos 2001, 9, emphasis in original).¹⁰

In their book-length study *La Face cachée du théâtre de l'image* (2001), scholars aim to discuss the novel and “revolutionary” nature of the above mentioned Québec based phenomenon by defining it as a theatre of complexity. In doing so, they propose as an exemplary model of “théâtre de recherché” and use, as a detailed case study, *Vinci* (1986) – the performance generally acknowledged by scholars and by Lepage himself, at the time, as the director’s artistic credo. According to Hébert and Perelli-Contos, Lepage’s *mise-en-scène* strategies challenged the mainstream local theatre practice, predominantly naturalistic, both in terms of production and representation. By integrating the spectator in the creative process, Lepage’s theatre succeeded in altering quasi-traditional habitudes of spectatorship relying on passivity and potentially un-critical reception of the stage discourse. Moreover, scholars postulate that the most significant change that occurred in terms of spectatorship, at an individual level, took place mainly through a dynamic transformation of vision.

Hébert and Perelli-Contos proposed as analytical tools for *Vinci*: (a) the dialogic principle, in terms of content, defined as the paradoxical interrelation of autonomy and interdependence in theatre between reality (“la logique rationnelle¹¹”) and fictionality (“la logique imaginative¹²”); (b) the hologramatic principle, in terms of structure and the organizational complexity of the work, where almost any element or scene of the performance contained in itself the whole performance and could either reproduce or be used as a source for reproducing/recreating the whole; and (c) the recursive principle, in terms of impact and reception, based on a

¹⁰ In English: “The ‘composition’ work is done first and foremost on stage. [...] This scenic writing consists of an assembly, a patchwork, a ‘montage’ of objects, words, music, sound, lighting, text, gestures, movements, technological devices, screens, etc. In sum, short, disparate and heterogeneous elements that exist as potentially exploitable throughout the theatrical creation, and are sensitive resources. The combination, recombination, moving around and playing with these elements allow the formation of performance material/performance text constituted precisely through the intimate relationship that the materials or scenic elements establish between themselves and with the theatrical space. The term *scenic writing* reminds us of the inevitably ephemeral nature of theatre as art, precisely because it is dynamic and not static, process and not outcome. Thus it is as a living system that we propose to examine this type of scenic writing” (author’s trans.).

¹¹ In English: “the rational logic” (author’s trans.).

¹² In English: “the imaginative logic” (author’s trans.).

loop circuit of quasi-continuous interaction between the different elements of the performance, including the audience as feedback providers.

In relation to the focus of the present study, one important aspect of Hébert and Perelli-Contos' findings is the acknowledgement of a dynamic involvement of the spectator in the creative process, both at the level of production and reception. According to the authors, the agency of the spectator was significantly enhanced by the unexpected strategies of vision proposed by the *mise-en-scène*. The cognitive aspects pertaining to the "théâtre de recherché" – whose aim was, amongst others, to extend its explorative nature at the spectators' level and stimulate their intellectual and creative involvement – were accomplished mainly through the transformative aspect of vision (Hébert and Perelli-Contos 2001, 11). A further parallel drawn to Augusto Boal's theorization of agency in spectatorship lead Hébert and Perelli-Contos to go as far as to (over-)enthusiastically propose the replacement of the term spectator, in the case of Robert Lepage's theatre work, with the Boalian term "specta(c)tor," to highlight the seminal importance of the changes that occurred in terms of spectatorial involvement. However, even though a substantial change in spectatorship is indubitable and, actually, constitutes one of the key foci of the present research, the term borrowed from Boal is, I suggest, misleading in this context.¹³

Hébert and Perelli-Contos' approach towards discussing Lepage's theatre, albeit interdisciplinary in nature and acknowledging the occurrence of specific, key moments of multi-sensoriality in spectatorial experience, devotes little space to an in-depth discussion of the formal aspects of the media used by Lepage in such varied and complex ways within in each performance, or to the perceptual consequences of such uses in terms of spectatorship. Consequently, the approach proposed by the scholars provides a limiting account of what exactly constitutes the novelty and the uniqueness of the theatre that is observed on stage, in terms of spectatorship. Hybridization taking place between different "elements of the performance"¹⁴ is noted several times as a recurrent and important strategy in Lepagean practice, but the combination of semiotic and cognitive, positivistic assertions regarding the changes in perception that the authors propose proves, in this particular instance, a limiting

¹³ For a clarification of reasons and an in-depth discussion of the matter see Conclusion, pp 294-96.

¹⁴ Throughout their entire body of research on Lepage, the various media discussed are interpreted only as "ingredients" of performance (i.e. transparent transmitters of content). Consequently, formal medial differences are not called into question in terms of their impact on perception.

framework for understanding the particularities of spectatorial experience. Moreover, although multi-sensoriality is considered the dominant attribute of the experience – “ce théâtre, créateur d’images multidimensionnelles, est en train de bouleverser le régime de vision du spectateur” (Hébert and Perelli-Contos 2000-01, 66)¹⁵ – the analytical focus remains on the alteration of the regime of vision, overlooking the other senses involved in perception within the situation of live performance. The authors conclude that the novelty of this type of theatre originated in Québec, that has Lepage as a “flagship” director, is mainly established by its ability to determine a new hegemony of vision, thus definitively displacing the long lasting/imperialistic logo-centrism, key to naturalistic drama.

Ludovic Fouquet¹⁶ dedicates an extensive doctoral dissertation to Lepage’s theatre practice: *De la boîte à l’écran, le langage scénique de Robert Lepage* (2004), in which he offers a thoroughly documented and minutely detailed account of the Lepagean scenic apparatus, with its developments from the early beginnings, in 1979, until 2001. The “deployment of new technologies” in the process of theatrical production and representation and the enquiry of the ways in which the “new technologies” influence the director’s practice in matters of representation and symbolic meaning are Fouquet’s main foci. The scholar defines Lepage’s theatre as a work situated under the sign of perpetual innovation and transformation and, therefore, significantly contributing to an enlargement of the “territory of theatre,” and to the development of “new forms of artistic expression”¹⁷ via an innovative integration of various media (i.e. photography, cinema, video, music, etc.) within live performance. Fouquet considers that, born through the free-play of improvisation, collective creation and the recurrent, internalized use of the notion of “marionette” regarding the condition of the actor within a multi-medial stage environment seen as an actualization of the Platonic cave,

¹⁵ In English: “this theatre, creating multi-dimensional images, is about to shake the spectator’s established system of vision” (author’s trans.).

¹⁶ Fouquet published, in book format, the key findings of his doctoral research, alongside substantial visual documentation (pictures taken while observing Lepage’s creative process, and in the situation of live performance, for several performances) in *Robert Lepage: Horizon en images* (2005) (see further details in Bibliography). For the purposes of this study, however, Fouquet’s doctoral thesis offers more useful insight.

¹⁷ The phrases “forms of artistic expression” and “new technologies” tend to bear similar meanings in Fouquet’s thesis, and they are used accordingly, in discussing his findings. I interpret them both as standing for the term “media.” However, since there is no particular media theory framework proposed by the dissertation, or any explicit media definition, I chose to use the author’s terms, for accuracy.

Lepage's theatre becomes – as with Hébert and Perelli-Contos – a new and significant development in the contemporary strand of the theatre of image. In Fouquet's opinion, Lepage's theatre blends tradition and modernity into a new type of theatrical narrativity, which makes use of stunning theatrical imagery as a stimulating interface between performance and the spectator. An extensive (and quite useful) account of the technical details of the scenic apparatus in relation to the *mise-en-scène* is provided. The description of the ways in which “new technologies” are ostensibly integrated within the performance framework, a thorough look “behind the scenes,” at the scenic apparatus – including a detailed account of the screen set-up and its functions (pragmatic and symbolic) within the economy of various performances –, and a perceptive account of the process of collective creation, described as favoring chaos and crossovers of all kinds in order to generate striking theatrical imagery and construct unexpected meanings that intentionally challenge spectators both in terms of cognitive and aesthetic involvement,¹⁸ add significant value to Fouquet's research. However, a mainly historiographical and rather general discussion of media theory and the lack of in-depth analysis¹⁹ of the formal differences between different medial elements integrated in performance, or of the consequences engendered in terms of spectatorship, tends to limit the scope of Fouquet's highly valuable study, at least in relation to the topic of the present book.

Nevertheless, several notable and highly perceptive observations pertaining to effects of shock, displacement and the alternation of distance in terms of spectatorial experience are made throughout the study, such as the following:

Malgré l'utilisation du gros-plan, malgré le recours à des images jouant de la caméra objective- plongée dans une conscience-, ou à du matériel d'amplification sonore permettant la proximité (le HF), le public

¹⁸ Fouquet describes and, then, discusses the collective creation of *The Geometry of Miracles* (1998), in its second stage of development from the start of the creative process to the moment of official public representation in Québec-City.

¹⁹ General statements such as: the Lepagean practice is most of all a “practice of exploration based on the developments of the ‘videosphere’” (Fouquet 2002, 15) (author's trans.) are frequently offered by the dissertation, but no conceptual framework related to the use of media within the creative practice, or an in-depth discussion of the medial terms used within the context of analysis are provided. Instead, a succinct historical outline of the development of visual technologies of reproduction that influenced the development of theatre, throughout the twentieth century, hints at the (potentially) pervasive impact upon Lepage's creative approach, with no further sustained references to any media or visuality theory.

expérimente aussi une distance obligée avec le plateau, puisqu'il est invité à suivre diverses informations simultanément mais de natures (matérielles, temporelles) et de registres différents. L'évolution de l'image scénique au XXe siècle témoigne de l'importance accrue du regard du public, convoqué afin de réunir les informations diverses, littéralement les déchiffrer, puis les analyser avant de les interpréter, en relation avec l'ensemble de la proposition scénique. Bien souvent, la référence se fait sous le signe de la métaphore, de la suggestion plastique, sensorielle plus que précisément anecdotique, car c'est aussi l'imaginaire du public qui est convoqué. [...] Le public est ébloui de la disproportion entre les éléments convoqués sur scène et l'impact poétique final de l'image scénique composée, une image qui suppose observation et interprétation dans un même élan. Le public voit et il se 'voit voir', ou plutôt il a la conscience de sa vision. Le public n'est pas hypnotisé, mais capté à force d'implication et de révélations (Fouquet 2002, 9-10).²⁰

Such valuable assertions remain, alas, not further integrated within the overall findings. As with Hébert and Perelli-Contos research, a similar accent is put on the acknowledgement of enhanced spectatorial involvement – through the upsetting/challenging of the regime of vision – and provides a similarly implied conclusion: in the case of Robert Lepage's theatre, there is a definite primacy of the visual which, consequently, brings significant changes in spectatorship and provides an adequate explanation for the stunning novelty of the performances.

²⁰ In English: "Despite of the use of close-up and of images from the camera, playing the objective plunge into consciousness, or of the Hi-Fi sound amplification system stimulating the sensation of proximity, the public experiences a distance necessary in relation to the stage, as they are invited to follow simultaneously different types of information, of material and temporal nature, and on different registers. The evolution of the scenic image in the twentieth century reflects the increased importance of the eye of the audience, called in to put together diverse information, to decipher, then analyse and interpret them in relation to the ensemble of the proposal on stage. Often references are under the sign of metaphor, they are visual suggestions, sensory more than anecdotal, because it is the imagination of the public that is invited. [...] The public is dazzled by the disproportion between the elements called on stage and the final, poetic impact of the scenic image composed on stage, an image that requires observation and interpretation to the same degree. The audience see and they see themselves seeing, or rather become conscious of their own act of seeing. The audience are not hypnotized, but captivated by their own involvement and revelations" (author's trans.).

Aleksandar Dundjerovic's *The Cinema of Robert Lepage: the Poetics of Memory* (2003)²¹ is the first study to examine, in interrelation, Lepage's creative methods in film and theatre, and connect them to an analysis of the socio-cultural context in Québec. The scholar defines Lepage as a multi-disciplinary "Renaissance artist" and pleads for the necessity of an interdisciplinary reading, based on what he observes to be an organic interconnection between film and theatre practice:

Lepage thinks about theatre in a cinematic way: based on a Québécois tradition of collectively creating 'text' for theatre and dance performance, his theatre practice is thus fundamental to his creation of film narratives. Thematically and stylistically, his films [and theatre productions] reflect the concerns and preoccupations that permeated much of the 1990s: shifts in social, individual and political boundaries and borders; conflicts between the personal and the collective, and the national and the global; the phenomenon of creative expression through a hybrid of arts, culture and new technology (particularly the use of internet and digital systems (Dundjerovic 2003, 1).

According to the scholar, the Québécois theatre director's main interest is in telling stories, to an international audience, "about the relationships between personal and collective identity, the social centre and its periphery, past and present, reality, memory, truth and myth" (2003, 2). Underlining the research/explorative aspect of Lepage's film process, an aspect acknowledged as functioning to an even greater extent in his theatre practice, Dundjerovic observes that:

Lepage is an important auteur not only because of the quality of his films, but also because of the manner in which he works. [...] He works as a renaissance artist, freely engaging with other art forms essential to his self-expression and unafraid to enter into group collaboration where art is produced in the workshop (2003, 5).

²¹ Dundjerovic's study engages with notions of interculturality and "new auteurism" operating in Lepage's films. Prior to the book's publication, Dundjerovic had undergone doctoral research on Robert Lepage's theatre, at Royal Holloway University (UK). Expanding on that particular research, the scholar published further: *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage* (2007) and *Robert Lepage – Routledge Performance Practitioners* (2009) (see Bibliography for further details). The key arguments of the scholarly analysis, however, most useful in relation to the foci of the present study are already presented in the study outlined by the present survey.

Beside the focus on the cinematic aspects of the creative process, Dundjerovic's findings remain important as they highlight Lepage's creative processes in film and theatre, based as they are on an adaptation of the Repère/RSVP Cycles²² and considered within the context of the contemporary culture in Québec. Dundjerovic draws a perceptive outline of the historical and cultural background of the Québécois theatre in the 1970s and 1980s,²³ the period of artistic formation for Lepage, which, in interconnection with the director's bi-cultural upbringing, are offered as explanation for Lepage's consistent engagement with the affirmation/discussion of the Québécois identity, both in national and international contexts. The study also provides a detailed account of the Repère/RSVP process,²⁴ with special focus on the ways in which the methodology contributed to the development of Lepage's own creative approach. The research/explorative aspects of the director's medial work and the focus on hybridization strategies, using film or theatre as framing media, are considered both as informed by multicultural formation and the ongoing search for an adequate response to the perceived needs and expectations of Western audience. According to the scholar, Lepage uses fundamentally Québécois stories, yet he develops an original, artistic language able to communicate such narratives to an international audience "through influences taken from popular references: cinema, rock concerts, television, visual and physical imagery, intercultural and interdisciplinary arts, and multi-lingualism" (2003, 16).

Research upon issues of multiculturalism in Lepage's theatre has been developed in numerous studies out of which Natalie Rewa's "Clichés of ethnicity subverted: Robert Lepage's *La Trilogie de Dragons*" (1990) and Marta Dvorak's "Représentations récentes des *Sept branches de la rivière Ota* et d'*Elseneur* de Robert Lepage" (1997) stand out for the purpose of the present survey. Although the issue might appear secondary or even far-fetched in relation to the present foci, its importance for the scholarly body

²² The RSVP Cycles, developed by the San Francisco based choreographer Ann Halprin and architect Lawrence Halprin in the late 1960s, were "imported" to Québec by Jacques Lessard (artistic director of Théâtre Repère) who further adapted them into the Repère Cycles. The Repère Cycles, in their turn, influenced substantially Lepage's own creative approach, particularly at the beginnings of his national and international career. For a detailed account and discussion of both methods see Chapter 1 section 1.1.4 of the present study.

²³ The study also contains a valuable description of the social and political development of the Québécois society after World War Two, which informs Chapter 1, sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 of in the present study.

²⁴ The scholar provides a detailed discussion of the method in the first chapter: "Film Narrative as Myth and Memory" (pp. 9-30).

of research on Robert Lepage's theatre is not to be overlooked as it brings to the forefront a "cultural studies" dimension that reflects upon questions of language and ethnic affiliation, a dimension considered central to the development of the contemporary Québécois theatrical culture and of the artist himself. Thus, it becomes apparent that the strategies employed by Robert Lepage in relation to the issue of multiculturalism constituted a radical departure from the recently established (at the time), yet highly influential local theatrical tradition, and aimed to look beyond the restricting local framework.²⁵ Natalie Rewa sustains that the *Trilogy of Dragons* is "a performance of cultures in the theatre" (1990, 159) that "enacts confrontation between ethnicities in fundamentally non-linguistic ways" (149) and maintains that the significance of Lepage's mise-en-scène "lies in the way in which he employs cultural stereotypes both as a method of characterization and a way of subverting the audience's expectations of ethnicity" (1990, 149). Multiculturalism is, therefore, staged through a very specific attitude towards theatre-making, using everyday objects as resources and capitalizing on theatre's possibilities of provoking imaginative associations for spectators (1990, 152). According to Rewa, Lepage's work constitutes a radical departure from traditional explorations of cultural communities and an appropriation of cultural stereotypes into a new Québécois context (1990, 149). Marta Dvorak, on the other hand, maintains that, since the beginnings of his (widely acclaimed) international career, Lepage made, through the intercultural nature of his theatre, both a political declaration and an affirmation of artistic principles:

Lepage a toujours choisi de mettre en avant l'interaction des cultures en créant des productions multilingues. Vu la susceptibilité Québec en ce qui concerne l'infiltration de l'anglais dans sa langue, le 'patriotisme de Robert Lepage a souvent été mis en doute. [...] Son recours à un texte multilingue qui reste ouvert, qui garde tous les signes d'interaction linguistique et culturelle, est en effet une déclaration politique aussi bien qu'une déclaration des principes artistiques (1997, 139-40).²⁶

²⁵ It is generally agreed by scholars that Michel Tremblay's masterpiece play *Les belles soeurs* (1968), in which the local idiom was used for the first time, constitutes a milestone in the history of Québec theatre. At the time of its initial production, the play was declared a manifesto for national emancipation and the affirmation of a specific Québécois identity.

In English: "Lepage has always chosen to highlight the interaction of cultures by creating multi-lingual productions. Given the susceptibility of the Québécois culture regarding the infiltration of English in its own language, Robert Lepage's 'patriotism' has often been called into question. [...] His use of multi-lingual texts that remain open and maintain all the signs of linguistic and cultural interaction is,

According to Dvorak, Lepage's work never ceases to question the traditional opposition between the Anglophone and the Francophone cultures inside Québec as well as to provocatively account for linguistic and cultural differences in relation to other cultures outside the province. It does so through: (1) the constant usage of subtitles²⁷ – developed as a medium integrated in the always multi-lingual productions, (2) the staging, with extra-linguistic means, predominantly visual, of stories based on widely spread cultural conventions and clichés, and (3) the omnipresence of multi-cultural themes throughout the entire theatrical creation. To a multiplicity of languages and cultures a multiplicity of forms of artistic expression is attached and, very often, the choice of a multinational cast. Dvorak also usefully acknowledges that the different layers present within the construction of meaning discussed above require and stimulate the spectator's active rational and imaginative participation.

James Bunzli's study "The Geography of Creation: Décalage as Impulse, Process, and Outcome in the Theatre of Robert Lepage" (1999) proposes the notion of *décalage*²⁸ as a key concept for the development of an interdisciplinary framework for Lepage's theatre. The scholar considers that:

At the heart of Lepage's *modus operandi* is a concept that combines autobiography, coincidence and paradox, and the performance moment. It is a way of working, thinking, living, which gives Lepage's work a relentless indeterminacy and a dynamic, unique, imagistic inner life-even

in fact, a political statement as well as a declaration of artistic principle" (author's trans.).

²⁷ According to Dvorak, Lepage is more than aware of the inherent translation problems related to the use of subtitles, yet he compensates the unavoidable slippages and inaccuracies by attempting to transgress the limits imposed by such translations through a reliance on enhanced visuality, as part of the *mise-en-scène* strategy, whereby well-known cultural clichés are inserted within the spoken passages of the performance.

²⁸ The term "*décalage*" brings in several perceptual connotations out of which I would like to underline the temporal, as well as the spatial. Both connect to a certain gap in perception developed as a result of a significant change of parameters in spectatorship. The impression of "*décalage*" in perception tends to occur frequently in the act of spectatorship, especially starting with modernity, and it is present to an even greater extent in contemporaneity, in relation to technologies of reproduction and their employment in artistic contexts. The overall aim of such effects is that they offer the impression to bring closer (spatially and temporally) objects or sensations considered as situated at distance. The notion of "*décalage*" relates also to the concept of remediation discussed further in this chapter (pp. 25-32).

in (because of) the work's chronic 'unfinished' state. That concept, *décalage*, first surfaced in *Vinci*: '*Leonardo da Vinci wrote from ze right to ze left, like in a mirror. Zis leaves the reader with a strange feeling of décalagen. [...] Leonardo da Vinci could not bear ze human suffering, and yet he invented war machines. Zis leaves the reader reeling with a strange feeling of décalage, a feeling of décalage*' (Lepage: 1986) (Bunzli 1999, 84, original emphasis).²⁹

In Bunzli's opinion, each Lepagean performance "responds to a different professional and personal, often practical impulse on the part of the creator" (1999, 81). Therefore, productions range widely in style and subject matter and, by giving preference to the process rather than outcome, the *mise-en-scène* allows the creative process to become an end in itself (1999, 82). The framing term of *décalage* is borrowed from the artist himself and it means, in this instance, displacement. Whether this is linguistic, through the use of several languages within the same performance, and/or extra-linguistic – i.e. cultural, visual, medial or behavioral –, it always has a particular impact in terms of sensorial perception. Lepage's blind narrator in *Vinci* talks about "a feeling of *décalage*" that occurs as an effect in perception, irrespective of the nature of the source that provides the effect. The discourse, in itself, engenders ambiguity and indeterminacy. Therefore, a certain unsettling of perceptual habitudes is brought to the forefront of spectatorial experience and highlighted for the spectator's consideration throughout the experience. Bunzli states that:

For Robert Lepage, *décalage* is the main impulse, the principle mode of working, and a major of his production, both onstage and in the audience. It is an acknowledgement of gaps, indeterminacies; it is the way of working that trades on impulse, intuition, and broad creative freedom; it results in a theatre of simultaneity and juxtaposition in which actor, image, 'text,' and audience are brought into a dialogue, a questioning, and an active co-constitutive role. [...] The process, with its focus on improvisation and indeterminacy, combines the narrative and the theatrical act, and thrives on manipulations of time/space, images and actors, icons and metaphors, peppered with disarming technological intrusions, and laced with the danger and possibility of questions without answers. Finally (and throughout) the role offered to the audience permits the performance to reinvent itself – and the very medium it occupies – on an ongoing basis (1999, 89-90).

²⁹ The italicized quote used by Bunzli belongs to the unpublished manuscript of *Vinci*.

The “feeling of décalage” does not alienate audiences, observes Bunzli. It rather unsettles spectatorial habitudes and stimulates an enhanced participation to the creation of meaning (1999, 95). Furthermore, the scholar acknowledges that to offer the audience a co-constitutive role in the performance is not a new strategy in theatre. However, the creation of “a bath of sensations, ideas and emotions” through a set of “décalages” tends to stimulate spectatorship “on an intuitive and emotional level, rather than an intellectual one” (1999, 97) and this, in particular, constitutes a novel aspect proposed by Lepage’s practice, as the scholar pertinently observes and the theatre director, indirectly yet provocatively, suggests through the voice of the blind Narrator in *Vinci*. The director himself devotes little space in performance to develop further this interdisciplinary argument, in spite of its relevance for his own creative process overall, thus maintaining an open space for suggestion and multiple interpretations. Bunzli, also, devotes limited space to the further discussion of the differences in perception engendered by the use of various media in *Vinci*. Nevertheless, the notion of décalage as a key tool in the performance making process, relates to concepts considered central to this study. Thus, the “feeling of décalage,” in fact stimulated by what will be discussed throughout this book as a set of intermedial strategies of mise-en-scène proposed by Lepage, translates, in terms of perception, into an alteration of distance in spectatorship.

The last stop of this survey, but by far not the least important, is constituted by the research undergone by Christopher Balme. In “Robert Lepage un die Zukunft des Theaters in Medienzeitalter” (1999) the scholar introduces for the first time the concept of intermediality in relation to Robert Lepage’s theatre. The study uses Lepage’s original performance *Seven Streams of River Ota* (1995) as a key example to discuss the use of intermedial strategies in Western contemporary theatre. Balme positions Lepage in a Brechtian tradition, of transferring various aesthetic media conventions into the framing medium of theatre,³⁰ and underlines that Lepage’s intermedial approach relates openly to the multiple medial competencies of contemporary audiences. The scholar maintains that the director develops clear intermedial strategies in all his theatre productions

³⁰ According to Balme, Brecht uses in his plays aesthetic conventions belonging to literature, as well as other medial elements, but in his theoretical writings he pleads for a “filmishes Schreiben” (“filmic writing” – author’s trans.), a writing that should integrate conventions pertaining to the medium of film into the dramatic text. Lepage most frequently integrates filmic conventions in his theatrical narratives, but also resorts to other media such as photography, television and video, which play a major role in *Seven Streams of River Ota*.

“mal ohne, mal mit dem Einsatz technischer Medien” (Balme 1999, 136)³¹. In discussing some of the key scenes of the performance, where intermedial strategies of *mise-en-scène* are innovatively deployed, Balme proposes the following frame for interpretation:

Drei mediale Ebenen lassen sich in diesen Szenen identifizieren, die ich als *Rahmen-, Binnen- und thematisches* Medium bezeichnen möchte. Das Rahmenmedium ist Theater das im Laufe der Inszenierung nie ernsthaft in Frage gestellt wird. Lebende Schauspieler interagieren mit anderen Medien: mit Film- und Videoprojektionen, mit Fotografien. Das Binnenmedium in der ersten und dritten Szene ist Film bzw. Video. In der siebten Szene ist es Video, das sich am Ende in eine Repräsentation des Mediums Fotografie verwandelt. Das thematische Medium wiederum ist Fotografie, signalisiert bereits durch die Präsenz des Fotoapparats in der erste Szene. Fotografie ist überdies das thematische Medium des gesamten Inszenierung, weil sie zu einem zentralen Motiv im Verlauf der Handlung wird. Fotografie stellt eine motivische Verknüpfung der Komplexen, über fünfzig Jahre Weltgeschichte unter drei Kontinente sich erstreckenden Handlungstrage dar: Fotografie als das Medium der Erinnerung im 20 Jahrhundert (1999:137;emphasis in original).³²

Balme’s considerations refer further to the elements of the above mentioned frame of analysis, to the replacement of a pre-existing dramatic text with an intermedial “text,” based on collective creation and developed on stage,³³ in rehearsals, and to the particular role ascribed for the

³¹ In English: “sometimes without, sometimes with the use of technology” (author’s trans.).

³² In English: “Three levels of media usage can be identified in these scenes: framing, integrated and thematic. The framing medium is theatre, yet it is never openly under scrutiny in the course of the representation. Live actors interact with other media via film and video projections or photographs. The integrated media used in the first and third scene are film and/or video. In the seventh scene, the integrated medium is video, which turns into a representation of the photographic medium at the end of the scene. Then, in turn, photography becomes the thematic medium, after being already signaled by the presence of the photographic apparatus in the first scene. Moreover, photography becomes also the thematic medium of the entire *mise-en-scène*, and a central subject in the course of the action. Photography stands as a central theme and a link for carrying the action across fifty years of world history and three continents, thus becoming the representative medium for memory in the twentieth century” (author’s trans.).

³³ The term “écriture scénique” proposed by Hébert and Perelli-Contos (2001) finds a linguistic equivalent in Balme’s term “Szenisches Schreiben” (1999, 142). Although the meanings slightly differ, due to specific linguistic and cultural

performer(s) within the economy of performance. The scholar maintains that the live interaction that takes place on stage between performer(s), the video material (whether this is pre-recorded or produced live) and/or other medial elements constitute an important postulate in the development of contemporary performance. The context thus created provides the framing medium of theatre with a self-reflective function (1999, 140). According to Balme, a satisfying evaluation of Lepage's concept of theatre cannot be formulated without an appropriate discussion of the director's interest in different media. Moreover, although Lepage maintains that form is always located in the centre of his work, this is never limited to purely formal explorations (Balme 1999, 144). Consequently, the scholar postulates:

Lepage's Theater eröffnet eine neue Perspektive für das Verhältnis des Theaters gegenüber den technisch gestützten Medien. Will das Theater Anschluß an eine neue Zuschauergeneration finden, was zu wünschen wäre, dann müßte dieses Verhältnis ein produktives, auf intermediale Wechselbeziehungen ausgerichtetes sein (Balme 1999, 144).³⁴

To conclude the present survey, according to academic findings so far, Robert Lepage's theatre practice can be defined as a significant step forward in the development of contemporary Western theatre. Through the practice developed in the past three decades, Lepage: (a) demonstrated a significant potential in transforming contemporary Canadian theatre (especially Québécois)³⁵ both at the level of production and reception (Hébert and Perelli Contos 2001); (b) promoted locally and internationally³⁶ a concept of identity as a hybrid of local and global tendencies in continuous transformation (Dundjerovic 2003); (c) portrayed – through the narratives developed in performance, containing a hybridity of themes and aesthetic conventions from different media – Québec and,

connotations, pertaining to French and German languages, and the particular definitions the scholars propose, the equivalence nevertheless still stands.

³⁴ In English: "Lepage's theater opens a new perspective for a new segment of audience, inclined towards technology. Should theatre wish to follow and find a connection with this new generation of spectators, this would become then a productive relationship, oriented towards intermedial interaction" (author's trans.).

³⁵ As numerous critics acknowledged, Lepage's work is more influential outside Canada than inside, with the exception of Toronto and, of course, his home province of Québec.

³⁶ Lepage creates theatre works that address an international audience rather than a local one. His narratives always contain Quebecers and issues related to the Québécois identity, seen in relation and interaction with other cultures. For more details see Chapter 1, section 1.1.

by extension, Western contemporary society as a cultural “melting pot” (Rewa 1990 and Dvorak 1997); (d) pushed the formal boundaries of theatre performance through the integration of new media/technologies into the scenic apparatus and the development of theatre as process with highly transformative capacities (Fouquet 2002); (e) developed a theatre based on “*décalage*” that favors process over product, related to the sensorial and offering the audience a co-constitutive role (Bunzli 1999); and (f) used intermedial strategies of *mise-en-scène* relating directly to the complex medial competences of contemporary spectators (Balme 1999). Overall, as stated at the beginning of this outline, the preoccupation to find an adequate, interdisciplinary framework to discuss both formal and content related aspects pertaining to Lepagean practice constitutes a common feature of the entire body of scholarship surveyed.

The main argument of the present study is that an observation of Lepage’s theatre inevitably leads to the acknowledgement of significant changes in spectatorship occurring *throughout the experience* of live performance. The intermedial strategies of *mise-en-scène* proposed by the director engender changes of distance in perception, in a cumulative manner, ultimately altering spectatorship in a significant way. However, before the further elaboration on the proposed hypothesis, I suggest a preliminary theoretical detour: (1) to discuss the notion of *distance in theatre* (Ben Chaim 1984) as instrumental in accounting for the changes that occur at the level of perception, in terms of spectatorial experience in the situation of live performance, and (2) to outline the notion of *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and attempt its application to the medium of theatre, in order to account for the radical formal changes in contemporary Western theatrical practice, of which Lepage’s work has proved to be one of the key representatives.

The Concept of Distance in Theatre

Although distance has been a critical factor in the development of modernist and contemporary theatre – as the ongoing preoccupation of numerous seminal practitioners implicitly or explicitly attests, especially in relation to notions of fictionality, *mise-en-scène* and the impact on spectatorship – the concept of distance remains rather under-theorized in theatre studies. Daphna Ben Chaim, however, provides an extensive discussion of the development of the notion in her book-length study *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of an Audience’s Response* (1984). Since the research constitutes an attempt to discuss the concept both across and within the fields of theatre, film and philosophy and situate them in

inter-relation, an outline of Ben Chaim's argument is necessary. Right from the outset the scholar identifies a diversity of approaches towards the notion with one common denominator:

Dramatic theorists and theatre practitioners characterize distance in the theatre in a variety of ways, though nearly all assume that it concerns the spectator's psychological relation to the theatrical event. Concern with the state of mind or mode of perception, of the spectator is perhaps the single unvarying feature in the entire history of the idea (Ben Chaim 1984,1).

According to Ben Chaim, distance³⁷ evolved as a theoretical concept from the idea of "aesthetic disinterestedness," presented by Aristotle and further articulated by several eighteenth century British thinkers.³⁸ The idea received its most influential treatment by Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where the philosopher explained how aesthetic judgment was possible. According to Ben Chaim, Kant maintained that all aesthetic judgments were particular, subjective judgments yet devoid of any personal stake, and distinguished the experience of the "beautiful" from that of the "pleasant" and of the "good" on this basis. Ben Chaim, however, finds Kant's formulation reductive. She maintains that "there are surely some senses in which art is both a personal matter and a matter of self interest" (1984, 3) and proposes, instead, Edward Bullough theory, presented in "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle" (1912), as an attempt to overcome the Kantian restrictions and to initiate a new line of thought. According to Bullough:

Distance does not imply an impersonal, purely intellectually interested relation... On the contrary, it describes a *personal* relation, often highly emotionally colored, but *of a peculiar character*. Its peculiarity lies in that the personal character of the relation has been, so to speak, filtered. It has been cleared of the practical, concrete nature of its appeal, without, however, thereby losing its original constitution (Bullough in Ben Chaim 1984, 3, emphasis in original).

Thus, Bullough – as outlined by Ben Chaim – considers distance an independent mental force that operates bifoldedly: (1) in a negative, inhibitory way, by inserting itself between the practical self (with needs

³⁷ The word "distance" in English is used to suggest emotional withdrawal or non-involvement. This metaphorical use, according to Ben Chaim, is well established since Shakespeare (1984, 1).

³⁸ Ben Chaim mentions as representatives of British thought: Lord Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson, Alison and Edmund Burke.

and desires) and the experience of the work; and (2) in a positive way, by permitting an elaboration of experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action. Distance, therefore, is seen as an essential characteristic of the perception of art, though its effects are variable (1984, 3-4). Ben Chaim underlines that, “[i]n choosing the phrase ‘psychical distance,’ Bullough moves the discussion further towards the perceptual and psychological and away from the absolute attributes of the work of art itself, a shift congenial to contemporary philosophy and aesthetics”(1984, 4). Further on, in her account of Bullough’s essay,³⁹ Ben Chaim observes that: (1) the British author rejects “fictionality” – the awareness of the artificiality of the art work – as the cause of distance, instead making it a product of psychical distance; (2) his argument does not explain what exactly triggers the mental attitude when confronted with art works, that is what signals distance to insert itself when the aesthetic attitude occurs; and (3) his account does not explain how distance actually affects/determines the viewers’ involvement with the artwork. Thus, Bullough’s implied contention on the matter of distance – according to Ben Chaim – is that there is a lack of emotional involvement, without the complete loss of a personal relationship. A paradoxically involved-yet-removed relationship with the work of art takes place, but how this occurs it is not altogether clear. In other words, the paradox is perceived, but it is yet to be resolved by means of psychology (1984, 6). Finally, Bullough postulates that: “the ideal experience of the work of art takes place when the viewer has the least amount of distance without losing it, the most intense personal experience without too much subjectivity” (Bullough in Ben Chaim 1984, 6). Ben Chaim considers this to be “a basic principle which Bullough refers to as the ‘antinomy of Distance’– the ‘utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance”” (1984, 6). A final point of relevance in this theorization – as highlighted by Ben Chaim – is that distance is seen as a central element in the perception of art. Bullough’s concept of distance is then further applied to the experience of theatre:

Bullough [...] considers the ‘bodily vehicle’ of drama to be a considerable risk to distance: its use of real objects and real people within actual space could blur the perceiver’s awareness of the art-character [fictionality] of the event, its artificiality. ‘To counterbalance a confusion with nature,’ Bullough explains that other features of the theatrical presentation increase our awareness of theatre as art – the stage, costumes, artificial light, make-up, etc. Bullough’s emphasis on the artificiality of the theatrical

³⁹ For a more detailed account of Bullough’s essay is to be found in Ben Chaim’s study, pp. 5-8.

conventions and their importance in relation to distance foreshadows the views of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht, who both shared this crucial principle in their otherwise apparently opposed theories (Ben Chaim 1984, 9).

Further on, incorporating arguments from other thinkers as well as theatre and film theorists of the twentieth century, Ben Chaim looks at the findings by Jean Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Antonin Artaud, Christian Metz and André Bazin⁴⁰ in an attempt to develop a comprehensive framework that facilitates a more precise and nuanced understanding of the notion of distance in theatre. In *Psychology of Imagination* (1948) Sartre characterizes theatre as manifesting “absolute distance,” with the physical distance that separates the audience from performance working as a metaphor towards the psychological/emotional protection of the spectator. According to Ben Chaim, the French philosopher distinguishes between perceiving and imagining,⁴¹ where imagining is considered an involvement with the unreal, with fictionality. Consequently, the hybrid condition of theatre becomes a tension between what is seen and what is imagined and this tension – a voluntary act of consciousness – is the source of the most pleasant aspect of theatre experience (Ben Chaim 1984, 20). Elaborating further on Sartre’s theory, the scholar suggests that:

Distance is not an involuntary seizure of the mind, nor an automatic (even though it may become conditioned) response to objects of a certain kind; it is an act of will. In this case, then, distancing techniques are not merely intensification of our awareness of artistic conventions, or of the fictionality of the object, but reminders of our original contract with the object: that its existence as an aesthetic object rests on our complicity (Ben Chaim 1984, 23-24).

In relation to Brecht’s conceptualization of the notion, Ben Chaim observes that the spectator’s distance is not simply “a protection from the characters’ ‘white of eyes,’ but particularly a frame of mind”⁴² (1984, 25).

⁴⁰ Both Christian Metz and André Bazin, as film theorists, developed their arguments on filmic spectatorship by drawing comparisons with theatre spectatorship, which makes their contribution valuable and significant to Ben Chaim’s own argument and relevant in the context of the present study.

⁴¹ In the chapter dedicated to Sartre’s theory, Ben Chaim underlines that, for the French philosopher, the image is not a “picture,” but merely a relationship between object and consciousness, and ultimately an act of consciousness (1984, 86).

⁴² Ben Chaim draws on Brecht’s “Schriften zum Theater” (1964 [1922]) (see Bibliography for further details).

Instead of trying to eliminate the emotional involvement, Brecht advocates the use of emotions in a controlled, specific way. The awareness of theatre, as a medium, puts the spectator in a more active mental state, resulting in an enhanced intellectual participation, as part of the spectatorial act (Ben Chaim 1984, 28). In looking for strategies that would increase spectatorial distance, through an emphasis on the fictionality of the theatrical event, Brecht – according to Ben Chaim – suggests that: (1) the stage environment itself can distance the dramatic events; (2) emphasis on the narrative rather than on characters creates a more distanced perspective upon the theatrical event; and (3) by treating each scene like a play-within-a-play, intensive and/or ongoing emotional participation is prevented and, consequently, a critical frame of reference is maintained (1984, 29). Ben Chaim concludes:

It is Brecht's assumption that without his strenuous efforts the spectator would be mesmerized in the theatre, totally deluded into a transference dream-state. What Brecht wants instead is a critical perspective on the part of the spectator; one he thinks can be achieved by creating 'partial illusions.' By 'partial illusion', Brecht seems to refer to a need for the image to be at once recognizable and distanced, which seems essentially identical to Coleridge's definition of illusion as 'poetic faith.' Brecht seems to be maintaining that the 'reality, however complete,' becomes art when it is perceived as fiction (that is when it is 'recognized as an illusion'). He apparently means two things by this word 'illusion': fiction and delusion. Therefore, what he means by 'partial illusion' is the awareness of fiction (that is, the delusion removed) (1984, 32).

Christian Metz and André Bazin's theorizations of film spectatorship constitute further stepping stones in Ben Chaim's development of a theory of distance in theatre, relying on the differences between the theatrical and cinematic experiences. For both theorists "the relation of the unreal to the real is of prime importance for understanding the qualitative difference" (Ben Chaim 1984, 51) between the two media in terms of spectatorship. The distinctions proposed "hinge on notions of distance" (51). In Metz's view, film, as a medium, creates the conditions for the spectator to imaginatively engage with the unreal aesthetic object and to acquire minimal distance. The unreality of filmic images does not intrude upon the fictional world, thereby compelling the viewer into engagement. Theatre, on the other hand, creates too much distance, making it difficult for the viewer to imagine the nonexistent fictional object. The materiality of the theatrical means of representation – actors, props, scenery, and the actual space, in sum: the perception of the reality of the stage – often overpower the imagination (Ben Chaim 1984, 52). Metz maintains that fictional film