

Text in Contemporary Theatre

Text in Contemporary Theatre:
The Baltics within the World Experience

Edited by

Guna Zeltiņa with Sanita Reinsone

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Text in Contemporary Theatre: The Baltics within the World Experience,
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PREFACE

Perhaps this will sound naive, because I, being a young playwright, have not got my fingers burnt yet. However, I would like to assert my belief that everything is going to be all right with the play and the theatre text as such in contemporary theatre. During the past few years, the playwright has turned from a lone, mysterious, mythic person into a social being, a conversation partner for not only the director, but also the spectator, reader, costume designer, lighting technician, actor, and other companions in the creation of a production.

I became more convinced of this by participating in the masterclasses of the 2012 *Interplay Europe*, held in Spain. Representatives of 11 countries were among the participants, providing a more extensive insight into the development of European drama. We tried to find answers to a question which is relevant and urgent for us: if the text of the play is created during the staging of the performance, can it even be considered as a play? The drama material of the Latvian National Theatre production *The End* was submitted for the masterclasses. It is the outcome of a joint work, involving two playwrights, a director and actors, and there it was read by 20 participants and 10 masterclass instructors. The work is seemingly saturated with local problems, adapted as much as possible for the stage, not for reading. Hard to believe, but this international audience understood everything. They accepted the text as a play, a proof that this dramatic material was created by professionals. Even the teachers from German classic drama schools, while reading the play, did not ask what came first, the performance or the text, because—does it make a difference?

The most important thing that Baltic playwrights should learn from their foreign brothers in craft is an awareness that different paths can lead to the creation of a play. The new Dutch drama, for example, shows that they know how to put together a play from a fairy tale, using the playwright's professional skills so that nobody even thinks of asking whether it is a play. If you are a professional playwright, you must be able to construct a play from a fairy tale, a story, an expressive event observed on the street, and more. The same applies where the director has the basic idea for the play, if the text of the play is created during the process of staging, if you see in the actors' improvisation a certain theme, if you see

and perceive something that can be used in the play. The ability to create a play under any conditions and terms is, to my mind, the main thing to aspire for. Perhaps then we'll be able to take a slightly sarcastic view of everything, like young playwrights from Spain or Poland, or a self-ironic one, like Estonian young playwrights, because writing and creating is so much more valuable than grumbling.

There are still playwrights who write at home, distant from the process of theatre, in the best case attending the first night of the performance. However, if the creative team of the production can constantly discuss and analyse even the classics, introducing amendments to them, then, if I am a playwright, practising in real time and space, why should I keep an offended silence as regards my own work? I assume that many playwrights do not wish to experience this process of joint creation because then one must be ready to hear harsh views about what has been written. However, if you feel convinced about what you have written, you must be able to defend your work and your opinion, to avoid verbosity; to understand more concretely which drama skills should be used to make the written text *work* on the stage.

And with this we arrive at an equally painful topic, whether drama is text only intended for the stage. It is a controversial issue, resting upon which is considered to be of greater importance—the staging or the printing of the text. Lately the boom in the accessibility of social portals and media has allowed all enthusiasts to publish their writings. Very few get their plays printed, because publishers consider it to be unprofitable. However, the possibilities offered by the Internet have their advantages: the playwright can send his or her work to anyone they wish. And playwrights gradually adjust to these changing times and specificities, using also the possibility to participate in international drama contests and masterclasses.

That is why I feel so satisfied that this collection of articles has been created, urging us to consider the diversity and difference of drama, which at the same time can be so unifying and relevant, if founded upon professional knowledge and understanding of the problems that contemporary people face.

Even though many playwrights still feel unappreciated and unaccepted—and not only in Latvia—there is no one to blame for this. The situation will change only when all those involved in the process are able to justify and defend their work, accept constructive criticism and find in themselves the conviction that amendments to the text are the path to a better total outcome: an outcome creating both the text and the context.

Rasa Bugavičute
Latvian Playwrights' Guild

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This collection of articles represents outcome of the two-day international conference organised by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, and held at the European Union House in Riga on November, 2011. Some authorities of the field, who had no opportunity to attend the conference, such as Russian expert in Shakespeare, Prof. Alexey Bartoshevich and Hungarian researcher Adrienne Gyopar Nagy, and some Latvian researchers were invited to join to this book in addition.

The conference with the same title *Text in the Contemporary Theatre: The Baltics within the World Experience* was organised in the cooperation with the Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture and the National section of the International Association for theatre critics. It was sponsored in the framework of the project *Latvian Theatre and Theatre Science in Europe* realised by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, and supported by the European Fund for Regional Development, as well as by the Latvian Academy of Culture and its Rector, Prof. Jānis Siliņš. The conference was planned and realised in accordance with the Baltic Drama Festival in Riga and the showcase of the best Latvian performances of the year with the aim to give an opportunity for conference participants and guests to get acquainted with the newest trends and tendencies in the Baltic theatre. It was possible due to the help of Latvian Theatre Union and its Head, Daiga Gaismaņa, the actress of the Latvian National Theatre, and her team, Māra Dzene and Undīne Preisa. My special thanks to the staff of the New Riga Theatre who found the possibility for more than 50 participants, experts and guests of the conference to see the performances of this theatre, among them—the work of Alvis Hermanis, internationally acclaimed Latvian director.

Prof. Bendikts Kalnačs and Ieva Struka from Latvia, Prof. Jurgita Staniškytė from Lithuania, Prof. Anneli Saro from Finland and Estonia, and Prof. Stephen E Wilmer from Ireland, who were active panel chairs and discussants, contributed in creating a stimulating and free atmosphere in the conference pulling together the actual and inspiring ideas of the papers presented. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the participants of the conference who prepared their papers for this volume and to all other authors who shared their research in its articles.

I am very grateful to Carol Koulikourdi and her colleagues of the Cambridge Scholars Publishing for cooperation, as well as for providing professional advice and assistance throughout the editing process of the book. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues Eva Eglāja-Kristsons, who was the greatest help during this project, Sanita Reinsone, who has worked on practical realisation of the concept of the book, and Dita Jonīte, who joined us on the last stage. I would like to express my gratitude to the translators of the texts, Ingūna Beķere and Ģirts Mergins among them. My special thanks to Ian Herbert for his assistance in the language editing work. I should extend my thanks to all theatre staff members and archivists from the Baltics and Northern countries for sending photos and granting us permission to reproduce those pictures. Finally, I am also very grateful to Dr. Dace Bula, the Director of the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, for her support.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE: THE BALTICS WITHIN THE WORLD EXPERIENCE

GUNA ZELTIŅA

This book is dedicated to the complex relationship between text and performance in the contemporary theatre. The term *contemporary theatre* refers to the stage art of the 21st century. At the same time, the possibility of tackling vivid examples and essential trends from other periods that have had direct or indirect impact on contemporary processes is not excluded. The idea of this volume is to research the current process of creating and using the text and to highlight innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to theatre and performance. Since the end of the 20th century, the notion of theatre has been broadened to include other forms of structured behaviour—festivities, public ceremonials, political events, news broadcasts—any kind of reality which has been *staged* by means of theatre techniques. We are interested in the functionality of the text, not only in the dramatic and postdramatic theatre, but also in performative practice over the broadest spectrum.

We believe that the chosen theme offers at least three main directions of research. First of all is the question of the role of the text in contemporary theatre compared to other structural elements. The second issue refers to the sources of the texts used in contemporary theatre: (a) a play written by a playwright, (b) a script created by a playwright/director on the basis of other literary works or documents, (c) the text created by the creative team (actors-director), (d) other sources. Why is the play no longer the principal source of the text in many theatres? What now determines the theatrical potential of the text or its adaptability for the theatre? Third, what are the kinds of functionality of the text? How is the text transformed from the system of linguistic signs to the system of visual signs? How does the text function if it is recorded only in the corporeal

memory of the actors? What processes do terminological shifts point to—such as the use of the term “theatrical text” instead of “dramatic text”? Where and how does the contemporary theatre change the role of the actor and the audience during the performance by means of the text? How is the text perceived in the play, production and performance? How has the emancipation of theatre research from literary research affected attitudes to the theatrical text?

In this volume, theatre researchers from the Baltic countries, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Hungary, Russia and China were invited to deal with the results of their research on the theme.

The 1st Part of the book, *Traditional Texts in Contemporary Theatre*, is devoted to an interpretation of traditional texts or plays in contemporary theatre. The noted Russian Shakespeare researcher, Prof. Alexey Bartoshevich, and Hungarian researcher Adrienne Gyopar Nagy, an author of several books on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, deal with analysis of the performing praxis of such a classical, *eternal* text as *Hamlet*. Bartoshevich points out that changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers and theatre artists mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture as a whole. For two centuries the Russian intelligentsia have regarded *Hamlet* as a reflection of their own essence and historical destiny. The author demonstrates how greatly *Hamlet* influenced and filled the lives of Russia's greatest theatre personalities, both those who actually produced the play and those who were only meditating on it. The theme of Hamlet, “the Christ-like figure”, was interwoven with Konstantin Stanislavsky's life in art up until his last years, when he worked on the play with his Studio's young actors. Vsevolod Meyerhold was preparing to direct *Hamlet* all his life but his idea of doing this with stage design by Pablo Picasso and music by Dmitry Shostakovich was never realised. A recent production of *Hamlet*, interpreted by the director Valery Fokin at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg (2010) and performed as a bitter, absurd grotesque and postmodern tragicomedy on the moral degradation of the national elite, reviving the traditions of active political theatre in Russia, is a proof of the never ending actuality of this text.

In her study of the 7th International Shakespeare Festival of Craiova in Romania, Adrienne Gyopar Nagy stresses that paradoxically, this international *Ham-let Feast*, structured by and upon the greatest Shakespearean text, used and interpreted by several different theatres from different cultures, East and West, in very different conceptions, styles and genres, could actually hold “a mirror up to nature” in its diversity alone, rendering even *the postmodern man of today* as unique in every respect.

Hamlet was also considered as the greatest basic text in world drama and theatre by the Latvian theatre director Oļģerts Kroders (1921–2012), who used to stress both in his everyday praxis and in interviews that all dramatic texts created after *Hamlet* are just variations on Shakespeare's themes, conflicts and motifs. He made four productions of *Hamlet* in his life, and these performances are no less important for their reflection of essential problems in the social, political and spiritual life of Latvian society, just as elsewhere in the studies of Alexey Bartoshevich and Adrienne Gyopar Nagy. And the first of his Hamlets, embodied by the actor Rihards Rudaks at the Valmiera Theatre (1972), was no less artistically strong and influential than the Hamlet of his famous contemporary, Vladimir Vysotsky, in the outstanding production at the Taganka theatre in 1971. The last of Kroders's Hamlets, Ivo Martinsons, in the production of 2008 at the Valmiera Theatre, could be placed together with Dmitry Lysenkov's hero in the production of Valery Fokin in St Petersburg (2010). The main difference is that *Hamlet* as interpreted by Oļģerts Kroders was created in a *small* theatre culture, *Hamlet* by Russian directors in a large and well known theatre culture. Due to this fact, the *big* theatre world will never get to know the accomplishments of Latvian theatre's senior director.

Two exceptional directors in Baltic theatre are the Lithuanians Eimuntas Nekrošius and Oskaras Koršunovas, whose productions of Shakespeare and other classics travel regularly to international festivals worldwide. But there is a local problem, which has been pointed out by Lithuanian critics for years: almost all their *established* directors turned their back on young playwrights and chose instead to stage Shakespeare or Chekhov for the third or fifth time per season (Jauniskis 2005).

One of the aims of this collection of articles is to provide a wider insight into the *small* theatre cultures of the Baltic States, their processes and the personalities leading them. In his 2007 book, *The New Theatre of the Baltics*, the American researcher Jeff Johnson begins with the presumption that the Lithuanian theatre is directors' theatre, the Estonian theatre writers' theatre, and the Latvian theatre actors' theatre (Johnson 2007). I could agree with such a characterisation five years ago but during recent years the situation has changed both in the Baltic drama and theatre. The artistic leader of the New Riga Theatre, Alvis Hermanis, has changed the balance of power in Baltic theatre and has moved into the limelight, along with the directors of Lithuanian metaphorical theatre and the Estonian director Tiit Ojasoo with his theatre NO99. Estonians have traditionally produced strong new drama during recent decades but, as was stressed in a preface by the young Latvian playwright Rasa Bugavičute,

positive changes can also be seen in the relationship between Latvian drama authors and theatres. When Elena Kovalskaya, a Russian expert of the new Russian drama, writes that the representatives of this new drama have brought a new energy and a new generation of directors and spectators into the Russian theatre, I can agree with her. But the situation in the Baltics is different: in all but a few cases, it is the young theatre directors and actors who have brought and created new drama and texts in the theatre, new relationships with spectators, and so on. Studies by Baltic researchers prove this fact, especially in the 2nd and 3rd Part of the book.

Following the 1st Part, Līga Ulberte in her article provides an overview of the most characteristic ways in which the relationship between texts of Latvian and world classics and stage productions has evolved. She concludes that the main method used in this process is theatre semiotics, which differentiates between the theatre text, the text of staging and the text of performance. Examples of Latvian productions in her study have been selected and examined in the discourse of *mise-en-scène*, using the six possibilities for contemporary adaptation of classical texts offered by French theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis: archaeological reconstruction; “flat reading” of the text; historicizing; treating the text as a raw material; reading the text in pictures or understanding the text through *mise-en-scène*; dismantling the text into separate elements. Three basic types of staging of traditional texts and their manifestations in Latvian theatre are outlined by the author, depending upon the treatment of the text: autotextual, ideotextual and intertextual.

Silvija Radzobe's article is devoted to an analysis of a production by the Latvian director Alvis Hermanis, who frequently works in the German-speaking countries of Europe and has received awards at prestigious international festivals. The author shows in her article that it is possible to analyse Hermanis's production of Ivan Goncharov's novel *Oblomov*, staged at the New Riga Theatre, as belonging to the postdramatic theatre, within the axes of modernist aesthetics and philosophy. Silvija Radzobe stresses that this production is characterised by surrealist playing with time, and other principles typical of symbolism: the method of *theatre within theatre*, performance as a subjective message, the principle of deliberate uncertainty, psychological masks, the method of grotesque acting, essential for expressionism. Thus, she concludes that the postdramatic theatre has a greater genetic link with modernism than we assume in everyday practice, even though Hans-Thies Lehmann has pointed it out in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*.

In her study of interpretations of one of the most popular texts by Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Edīte Tišheizere points

out that it was one of the few modern Western plays allowed to be staged in the Soviet theatre. She notes that the extraordinarily successful production of it at the Latvian National Theatre in 1969 was, in fact, breaking the rules of social realism, and the play has since become deeply rooted in the national consciousness. Society's historical memory and several other circumstances created the context, which made the text of the play sound quite differently. She concludes that productions of the same text in the 21st century, in their turn, have acquired new artistic and theoretical principles, which existed in the European cultural space—contexts of history, culture and theatre theory.

Ilze Šarkovska-Liepiņa in her article analyses productions of works by a younger generation of Latvian composers—not a frequent occurrence at the Latvian National Opera, although the last five years have seen marked changes in this respect. The season of 2012/2013 was launched with Andris Dzenītis's opera *Dauka* (based upon a classic work of Latvian literature, the story *Crazy Dauka* by Sudrabu Edžus). *Dauka*'s theme clearly resonates with the range of narratives typical of many Western 20th century operas, centring on compassion towards the weak (often—an artist's fate in a society where material values dominate). Dzenītis's opera to a large extent continues the trend that allocates a rather significant place to the text, or narrative, revelation of the idea. *Dauka* reflects the main tendency in European opera houses, in which music is only one element among many, where the directing is based upon the interpretation of the idea and plot collisions, so that Latvian opera theatre is turning into a *theatre of directing*, rather typical of the 20th and 21st century, in which the dramatic theatre becomes enshrined in the *pure opera*.

Professor Peng Tao in his article emphasises links between speech and mind in classical Chinese aesthetics, where text and theme are unified, and both are manifestations of the artist's heart and soul. This study analyzes two cases: the first, *Peony Pavilion* (2004, produced by the well known Chinese writer, Pai Hsien-yung), is from a leading contemporary traditional theatre in China. In this production, as the author concludes, the original classical script is completely unaltered: performance and text are integrated seamlessly. It demonstrates the pursuit of *harmony*, the highest aesthetic value in the traditional Chinese theatre. The second example is *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot* (1998, directed by the leading Chinese director Lin Zhaohua). In this drama production, the director has interwoven Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* into one play. Peng Tao notes that the performance gained artistic success even though it was a box office failure. He concludes that this experimental montage of texts characterised the director's own inner conflict and

division of loyalties, which is essentially the same inner conflict and anguish as that of other contemporary Chinese intellectuals of the 1990s.

The essay by the theatre researcher Pirkko Koski examines Paul Auster's *Mr Vertigo* at the Finnish National Theatre as an example of how the postdramatic discourse contributes to the understanding of a "dramatic" performance with "postdramatic" stylistic features. It first focuses on the space of the performance, then explores the story itself and the manner in which it unfolds through individual theatrical images, finally analyzing the performance through the concept of "stage presence". In *Mr Vertigo*, adapted and directed by Kristian Smets, as the author points out, the audience is initiated into the process of artistic creation: the physical struggle, the overcoming of self, and the burden of stardom. The line between reality and fiction is revealed, blurred and erased, and, as she concludes, Auster's classically American story is reset in the context of Finland's national stage, overlapping layers of both history and show-business.

In the 2nd Part, *New Plays and Playwrights: Director and Actor as a Text-Writer*, researchers from different countries deal with the recent praxis of creating texts for the theatre, both by young authors/playwrights and theatres themselves. In her study, the Swedish researcher Charlotte Neuhauser gives an insight into the situation in Swedish theatre. She points out that the situation for Swedish playwrights is benefiting from the Playwrights' Grant, established by the Swedish government in 1999, emphasizing that the new grant has had an effect on the way the theatre looks upon both playwriting and playwrights, as well as on the actual work processes involved in writing new plays. In an attempt to demonstrate how a new classification or genre is being established in Sweden, the author has chosen to describe New Swedish Playwriting as a Bourdieuan sub-field of the larger field of Swedish drama and theatre, showing how the construction of the grant encourages a certain kind of playwriting.

The article by Ieva Struka, theatre researcher and literary advisor of the Latvian National Theatre, examines the situation in playwriting in Latvia through the results of a recent competition for playwrights organised by the Latvian National Theatre. The author informs us that the competition produced more than sixty new plays from established professional writers, young professionals and non-professional authors. She emphasises that the variety of texts reflects one common tendency: the need to turn and face the reality of life in today's Latvia. This is the main difference between the situation today and that which existed ten years ago, when a large number of Latvian plays reminded her of "a bunch of hen's eggs that had been matured in an incubator". The author concludes that the most recent

Latvian plays reflect true-to-life aspects involving Latvia and Latvians: perhaps they are not exportable, but in turn they offer an opportunity to feel what exactly the Latvia of the 21st century is, and how its citizens feel about living there.

The study by Latvian researcher Benedikts Kalnačs looks at how, during the latter part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between the dramatic text and its actual staging has undergone changes, as evidenced by practices in Baltic theatre. Special emphasis in this article has been placed on social content, which, following the restoration of independence in Latvia in 1991, has determined the development of its theatre and literary prose. The author observes how the local artistic process has been influenced by a new relationship with the global community and the wider theatre world. As an example, the approach of the stage director Alvis Hermanis and the New Riga Theatre (Jaunais Rīgas teātris or JRT) is examined. The author follows the process of structuring the performance, in which the sense of reality has been transformed, examining what rules have defined the theatre's artistic approaches and in what ways JRT's work has altered the audience's understanding of the significance of content in today's theatre.

Lithuanian researcher Jurgita Staniškyte in her article analyses the ways of staging personal memories in post-Soviet Baltic theatre. She points out that during the first years of Independence the Baltic theatre stage has served as a place to restore previously erased memories of the nations' past and to give voice to life narratives which had been banned from the stage for the last fifty years. With the arrival of a new generation of theatre creators, a shift has occurred on Baltic stages, from abstract and symbolic representations of collective memory to the more direct portrayal of subjective and personal experiences of the past. She provides an overview of strategies of staging personal memories in contemporary Baltic theatre, focusing on the most visible and innovative approaches to the communication of an individual's experience on stage.

Researcher Nomeda Šatkauskienė's study provides an overview of the text usage strategies employed in Lithuanian theatre over the past five years (2006–2011). The premise of the article is Hans-Thies Lehmann's proposition that there could be different degrees of radicalism in postdramatic theatre. The play *The Phonebook* (directed by Vidas Bareikis), performed by the Theatrical Movement No Theatre, is cited as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in theatre, while the drama *Expulsion*, by a famous Lithuanian playwright, Marius Ivaškevičius, is presented as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in drama. In terms of self-reflection, *The Phonebook* addresses the problem

inherent in all postmodern art—the identity of the theatre and its ability to express human needs. It is the first play featuring an entirely new format in Lithuania, an example where postdramatic concepts are discussed comprehensively.

In the 3rd Part, *Reality and Text in the Post and Post-Postdramatic Theatre*, some recent tendencies in the creation of the theatrical text are analysed, laying emphasis, as in the previous part, upon the role of the director and the acting ensemble in this process.

Swedish researcher Rikard Hoogland points out that one of the tendencies in the theatre of the past decades has been to reduce the importance of the dramatic text in favour of other theatrical elements. He sheds light on another recent tendency: the return of the narrative in the performing arts, arguing that in the performances of the groups SheShePop, Rimini Protokoll and Lola Arias the storytelling is central, with all of their productions using an elaborate aesthetic form. Stories are often told and performed by “real” persons, or relatives of the “real” person, sometimes by actors-performers. In some cases, the storytellers are trained actors telling their own story. The narrative is still there, but the author and the fiction seem to be missing. Rimini Protokoll has replaced the term “play” with “scripted reality”. These performances are mostly built from team work, with the director giving them aesthetic form, often utilizing multiple media sources.

Researcher Anneli Saro in her study analyzes recent praxis in Estonian theatre. She relates that the *off-programme* of the Estonian Drama Festival in 2010 was called “the author’s theatre” and under this title, the following types of production were presented: (1) dramas written and staged by the same person, (2) devised theatre, and (3) contemporary dance productions. The use of the term, “the author’s theatre” can be questioned, mostly because of its semantic ambivalence and its claim to be an avant-garde form of theatre making. Since this term and these forms of theatre making are quite popular, they also deserve closer scrutiny. In this article, the functionality, ideology and aesthetics of “the author’s theatre” is investigated. Anneli Saro concludes that because of the wealth of empirical material, only the first type of author’s theatre and some of its representatives (Ivar Põllu, Urmas Vadi, Andres Noormets and Uku Uusberg) merit closer attention.

Estonian drama and theatre researcher Luule Epner in her article examines postdramatic textual strategies at work in the cycle of productions by the Estonian theatre NO99, directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper: *Oil!* (2006), *GEP* (2007), *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009), *Unified Estonia Convention* (2010), and *The Rise and Fall of*

Estonia (2011). These productions deal with topical social and political problems, at both national and global level. They are created with the help of unconventional practices, constructed out of heterogeneous material without a pre-existing text. The article describes the particular practices NO99 has employed in creating these productions, essentially to achieve the general artistic aims of the theatre. It also analyses primary postdramatic strategies: recycling, intermediality, inter- and meta-discursivity, authentication (with regard to acting), and so forth.

The main focus of Latvian researcher Valda Čakare's investigation is directed towards the ways in which language metaphors have been staged in recent Latvian theatre productions. Drawing on two productions, one by Juris Rijnieks from 1994 and another by Valdis Lūriņš from 2011, she proceeds from the observation that language metaphors are frequently transformed into visual images which aim to reduce the figurative meaning of words or phrases to what we take to be their standard or literal meaning. The author points out that in order to clarify whether and how these attempts have contributed to the fulfilment of the artistic purpose, they need to be carefully examined. She does so by using Wittgenstein's view of language as *picturing* the world as a theoretical framework. Secondly, the conviction of logical positivists that all utterances can be reduced ultimately to protocol statements which can be shown to be true directly helps her to explain the meaning of the performances.

The article by Estonian researcher Madli Pesti looks at examples of postdramatic texts in Estonian, German and British theatre. Common traits between the writers in different countries are discussed in her study, and two young authors from Estonia are introduced. Madli Pesti stresses that Siim Nurklik's text *Am I Alive Now* and Kadri Noormets's text *Go Neo und Romantix* are both postdramatic, but carry different ideas. Nurklik's text has already been called his generation's manifesto. It could be seen as a collage of everyday statements, and it deals with the clash between society and the internet-based world of today's young people. Kadri Noormets's text deals with internal matters; it is like a stream of consciousness. The author compares the writing strategies of these young Estonians with those of some German and British playwrights. Reading Nurklik's text one will inevitably start comparing it with a classic of postdramatic writing—Heiner Müller's *Der Hamletmaschine*. Plays by Falk Richter, Roland Schimmelpfennig, Elfriede Jelinek, Martin Crimp and Tim Crouch are also discussed.

Stephen E Wilmer's article explores dramaturgical changes in Irish theatre at a time of dramatic cultural and economic change. Ireland has been undergoing huge social change, from one of the richest countries in

Europe *per capita* in 2007 to one subjected to virtual bankruptcy by 2011. As the author points out, at the same time the traditional literary theatre of such writers as J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Brian Friel, as performed by such theatre companies as the Abbey Theatre, the Gate, and Druid, has been transformed into a physical and multi-media theatre using verbatim, site-specific and postdramatic techniques. Stephen E Wilmer points out that many recent performances deal with current economic and social problems, and the changes in dramaturgy parallel the changes in social conditions. He focuses on some specific examples of this trend, notably the work of small independent theatre companies that are becoming more widely known internationally, such as Corn Exchange Theatre Company and Brokentalkers.

Nineteen different authors, nineteen different articles on the same subject. Perhaps their main conclusion could be this: the live process of drama and theatre does not depend on using *old* or *new* texts, methods and strategies. Live performance (in any possible format) happens when the director and actors are treating even classical, *eternal* plays and texts "as if Shakespeare had sent them to me that morning"—as theatre director Ivo van Hove has said. And when the creators of both new drama and theatre texts are not afraid to face real contemporary life, even if it is sometimes complex, disgusting and shameful.

We hope that this theme and collection of articles will enable our colleagues to discover particular features specific not only to Baltic theatre in the wider context but also to other theatre cultures. We hope, too, that this volume will stimulate professional discussion among both theatre theoreticians and also practitioners.

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PART I

**TRADITIONAL TEXTS IN CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE**

CHAPTER ONE

THE RUSSIAN *HAMLETS*: COLD WAR YEARS AND AFTER

ALEXEY BARTOSHEVICH, RUSSIA

Abstract: The changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers and first of all, by the theatre artists mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture. The main tenor of the every important moment of all post-Stalin period was perfectly expressed by the theatre productions of *Hamlet*: from Grigory Kozintsev's production in the Leningrad Pushkin Theatre, Nikolay Okhlopkov's in the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre (both 1954) and a decade later in Kozintsev's film with Innokenty Smoktunovsky as Hamlet (1964), Andrey Tarkovsky' interpretation (1979) till the recent modernised productions by Yuri Butusov in Moscow Art Theatre (2005) and by Valery Fokin in St Petersburg Alexandrinsky Theatre (2010). But the highest point of the Russian Hamlet's scenic history of 20th century's last decades was the Yuri Lyubimov's Taganka theatre production (1971). Hamlet played by Vladimir Vysotsky implicitly expressed the attitude of the generation that had experienced the rise and the tragic fall of the 1960s' social hopes.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Hamlet, Russian theatre, interpretation, tragedy, political history, Russian intelligentsia, stage design, acting, theatre directing.

The changing interpretations of *Hamlet* by Russian critics, writers, painters, composers, theatre artists, and others mirror with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture. For two centuries the Russian intelligentsia have regarded *Hamlet* as a reflection of their own essence and historical fortunes. Hamlet filled the lives of Russia's greatest theatre personalities: those who actually produced the play and those who were just meditating on it.

The theme of Hamlet, “the best of men”, “the Christ-like figure” is interwoven with Konstantin Stanislavsky’s life in art right up until his last years, when he worked on the play with his Studio’s young actors.

Throughout his life, Vsevolod Meyerhold was preparing to direct *Hamlet*. The more painful his life got for him, the more acute was his perception of the tragedy’s meaning. In the middle of the 1930s he asked Pablo Picasso to be the set designer of his *Hamlet* production, Dmitry Shostakovitch to compose the music, and Boris Pasternak to make a new translation. The great director’s idea wasn’t and couldn’t be realised. After the closing of his theatre in 1938, Meyerhold dreamed of writing a book—at least a book!—on *Hamlet*, but even for this he had no time: he was arrested and killed.

For more than twenty years, from 1932 to 1954, *Hamlet* was not performed in Moscow: quite atypical for Russian theatre history. At the same time Shakespeare was made an official cult figure in Soviet ideology. The best Moscow theatres produced *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and a lot of Shakespeare comedies; but not *Hamlet*. The main reason was that Josef Stalin, who generally favoured the classics, hated *Hamlet* as a play and Hamlet as a character. There was something in the very human type of this Shakespearean Prince that aroused “the great leader’s” scorn and suspicion. His hatred of the intelligentsia was transferred to the hero of the tragedy—with whom Russian intellectuals always tended to identify themselves.

Stalin never publicised his feelings about Hamlet—except in one case. The Party Central Committee’s famous Resolution (1946) launching a shattering attack on Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible* accused the director of turning the great Russian Tsar into “a miserable weakling comparable to Hamlet”. It is quite possible the document was composed by Stalin himself. Of course, the ban on *Hamlet* was not officially declared. The play became, silently, *non-recommendable* for the stage. The theatres had learned to catch these sorts of hints from the authorities.

Not surprisingly, the tragedy reappeared on the Moscow stage in 1954, immediately after Stalin’s death. In the middle of the 1950s *Hamlet* was staged all over Russia. Two productions were most popular: Nikolai Okhlopkov’s at the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre and Grigory Kozintsev’s at the Leningrad Pushkin Theatre.

In his recently published Diaries under the date October 1st 1953 (seven months following Stalin’s death), Kozintsev points out: “The beginning of *Hamlet* rehearsals. Feel myself like a dog coming to a tasty cube of sugar. Can this really be true? May I try it at last?”

At last the ban was lifted—theatres were now permitted to *try* the Prince of Denmark. But there was a more important reason for the play's enormous popularity at that time than the desire to taste forbidden fruit. *Hamlet* happened to express perfectly the main tenor of the early post-Stalinist period: a sudden recovery of vision, the collapse of illusions, and the painful re-evaluation of values. In the 1950s the mood of the first post-Stalinist generation was expressed primarily in stagings of *Hamlet*, and only later was it conceptualized by modern playwrights.

An apology for intellectual doubt as opposed to the official philosophy of unquestioning political faith, and a defence of *Hamletism* in the traditional Russian sense, were the central points in Kozintsev's theatre production—bold enough for 1954. To avoid official criticism, Kozintsev decided to finish his *Hamlet* in a most optimistic way. Fortinbras was cut—after Hamlet's death, the hero of the tragedy suddenly rose again to recite Sonnet 74. Behind the resurrected Prince the amazed audience saw the enormous shadow of Nike, Greek goddess of victory. The idea was: Hamlet is dead, but Shakespeare's art is immortal. Quite naive, of course, but these were just the first steps of the new era's theatre.

The director could not have foreseen the authorities' response. The Chairman of the Art Committee immediately demanded that the director present a detailed explanation why Fortinbras was cut. The reason was not any special affection for the Prince of Norway. State officials just performed their duty—to guard over a classical text, to defend it from any sort of free interpretation. This time perhaps they were not too wrong.

Ten years passed from Kozintsev's stage *Hamlet* to his cinema version of the tragedy (1964). The film was, and still is, extremely popular in Russia as well as abroad. The film is clear, clever, intelligent, and full of good taste. First of all, the director made a flawless casting choice—he had invited Innokenty Smoktunovsky to play Hamlet. Smoktunovsky performed Shakespeare's character as if it were written by the author of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. A few years before *Hamlet* the actor had played his best role in theatre—Prince Myshkin, Dostoevsky's sainted idiot. The character of Prince Myshkin deeply influenced Smoktunovsky's Prince of Denmark. His Hamlet's soul was like a perfect musical instrument, which responded painfully to the slightest falseness in people and the world. The best moment in the film was the recorder scene: "Though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me"; Hamlet's soft voice here became low and firm. This was the voice of a young intellectual who did not submit.

New audiences, as well as the new theatres, rejected the pathetic romantic style of traditional Shakespearean productions. The times gave

way to more radical interpretations. All the silks, velvets and other romantic paraphernalia were gone. Shakespeare's characters appeared on an ascetic, empty stage dressed in worn-out leather and hand-woven robes. The directors of the new generation—Anatoly Efros, Yuri Lyubimov, Voldemar Panso, as well as some of their older colleagues (above all, Georgy Tovstonogov)—brought with them a rough, tear-free Shakespeare. They tended to see the Bard's plays from the standpoint of Brechtian political theatre. The *Histories*, previously dismissed as hard to stage, suddenly advanced to the forefront of the Shakespearean repertoire. The *Histories'* content become projected on to Shakespeare's other plays, bringing about a whole series of politicised versions of the tragedies in the 1960s and 1970s, including productions of *Hamlet*.

Almost all that period's Shakespearean productions—for example, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, even sometimes the comedies!—in different ways treated the same problems of human existence under the conditions of an all-powerful totalitarian state. They tended to demonstrate the ruthless and dirty machinery of a murderous political order. In particular, the final scenes were interpreted in the same Jan-Kottish manner which came to be known as “the rondo principle”: Richmond and Malcolm followed in the footsteps of Richard and Macbeth and everything started all over again. Political history was moving in the same fatal circle. It was not important whether the directors had or had not read Jan Kott—the ideas expressed both by the Polish critic and the Soviet directors were in the air of the times.

The general trends of the period were represented in the *Hamlet* directed by Voldemar Panso at Tallinn's Kingisepp Theatre in 1965. In Soviet times the theatre movement in Estonia, as well as in Russia and elsewhere in the USSR, confronted the same socio-political realities and was characterised by similar artistic tendencies. The world of Panso's *Hamlet* was coloured in greys and blacks; lacking air or light. Silently tiptoeing across the stage were people in plain clothes spying on Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes and even Polonius. Athletically built young men, dressed in black leather, marched self-confidently up and down, always ready to execute any order from anybody on the throne. The court of Claudius was reminiscent of a military staff—the military-bureaucratic machine functioned faultlessly, turning human beings into unthinking components of “the System”. Neither Guildenstern nor Rosencrantz were born traitors and spies but the System, step by step, turned them into such—for they had once said “yes” to it.

The part of King Claudius was played by Yuri Yarvet, who some years later starred in Kozintsev's film *King Lear*. Claudius's fate was at the

logical centre of the production—maybe a little more than Hamlet’s. The King found himself the most unfortunate human being on earth. He was not born a killer. It was not out of lust for power that this small, weak man had spilled his brother’s blood. Being merely part of the System, a detail of the Grand Mechanism, had made him desperate. He craved freedom, and hoped to obtain it by ascending to the throne. Now that the crown was his, Claudius felt bitterly deceived, for nothing had changed. He was still a marionette of the System, a powerless component of the political machine, just a more important one. This stoop-shouldered king, his feet hardly touching the steps beneath the throne, presented a miserable figure. His wrinkled face expressed nothing except suffering and fear. He feared everyone, especially Hamlet.

Hamlet knew too well how the System worked. He knew that by pressing a button he could set the machine into motion. When in the final scene the Prince exclaimed: “O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock’d: Treachery! Seek it out”, the thugs in black leather immediately blocked off the entrance. They had got an order—that was enough for them. One of the lads grabbed Claudius from behind, so that Hamlet’s sword easily struck the defenceless king.

Hamlet in Panso’s production was nothing but an innocent youth. He had no illusions or hopes. He knew a lot and that knowledge was burdensome. He knew that political success could be swift and easy. All he had to do was press a button. But he also knew that touching this button would stain his hands and he preferred not to. At the end the young Norwegian towered above the bodies, holding the crown which had fallen from the head of the dead king. The cherished dream of Fortinbras had come true, but he felt no joy. He looked as grieved as Claudius did in the beginning. Fortinbras started his ascent at the point where Claudius had just fallen. The wheel of history had gone full circle. Nothing had really changed.

The most influential *Hamlet* of these times was Yuri Lyubimov’s production at the Moscow Taganka Theatre (1971), the *Hamlet* of my generation. It appeared at one of the gloomiest moments in post-Stalinist history (Soviet tanks in Prague, dissidents in prisons, the KGB in full power...). Paradoxically, however, it was a time of real flowering in Russian theatre. The stage was fed with the energy of opposition to the regime—not necessarily expressed in the forms of straightforward political theatre.

Shakespeare productions now reflected society’s prevalence of tragic sensibilities. In 1970 Anatoly Efros produced *Romeo and Juliet* at Moscow’s Malaya Bronnaya Theatre. The production was permeated with

a despair and pain that would have befitted *Hamlet*. Renaissance Verona appeared as a grim world dominated by crude force and leaving no place for hope. Shakespeare's lovers were stripped of their traditional sweetness. They looked like mature people, drawn together not only by love but also by a desire to resist the absolute power of loutishness. They knew they were doomed to die: as a critic said, that Romeo and his Juliet must have read *Hamlet*.

These Shakespearean productions by Efros and Lyubimov were then perceived as a spiritual challenge to dreadful times, as a lesson in courage and staunchness in insuperable circumstances. The stage imagery of the Taganka *Hamlet* was marked by a famous symbolic curtain. The critics (including myself) wrote the word with a capital letter: the Curtain. Moving across the stage in all directions, it presented an ambiguous symbol of the supernatural forces of death and tragic destiny. In some scenes the lighting made the curtain look like a gigantic spider's web where the actors, "like flies of the gods", were caught. Or it transformed into a wall of earth, or became an avid monster chasing its victims. The Curtain filled up the entire universe of the scene and nobody could escape it.

Hamlet, played by Vladimir Vysotsky, was every inch a Russian. Nothing about him suggested self-admiring abstract speculation or intellectual arrogance. The ways of the world aroused in him not a philosopher's melancholic reflection but real suffering, almost physical pain, which was breaking his heart. He had "lost his mirth" long, long ago. There was little new the Ghost could reveal to him. Vysotsky's Hamlet implicitly expressed the attitude of the generation that had experienced the rise and fall of the 1960s' social hopes, and was faced with the question of what could be done. The idea of the world as a prison was self-evident for this Hamlet. What mattered was finding ways of coping with the time that was "out of joint".

There were no logical motivations for resistance to the invincible forces of the tragic universe represented by the Curtain. But this angry Hamlet, in open-neck sweater, speaking, whispering, crying in a coarse, *scorched* voice, was driven by the righteousness of his impatience, by the blasts of his saintly hatred. He had thrown himself into rebellion against the whole world, against the Curtain. Hamlet's desperate struggle was like burning himself alive. In this battle the reward was not hope but the saving of dignity.

In the next period, however, the directors of *Hamlet* started to doubt the ethical lawfulness of Hamlet's cause. They proved their case with enthusiasm: in his endeavours to set right the time that was "out of joint", Hamlet had to resort to violence—at least five deaths are on his

conscience. That may be a commonplace for a Shakespeare scholar, but for the theatre this could be a sort of revelation. Behind this approach, new for the Russian stage, there was a mood of impotence and passionate self-accusation, notably intensified in the minds of the intelligentsia in the later years of the Brezhnev era.

Andrey Tarkovsky's production of *Hamlet* (1977) at the Lenin Komsomol Theatre in Moscow was the only theatrical work done by the great film director in his home country. This production, with all its drawbacks and imperfections (theatrical language wasn't native to Tarkovsky), conveyed an idea that was substantially religious in its meaning. Tarkovsky treated *Hamlet* as a story of the destructive impact which violence produces upon the human soul. He saw Hamlet's guilt in his readiness to be a judge of human lives. The director's concept was to reject a judgment—even a rightful one—that ended with blood. The last scene of Shakespeare's tragedy was followed by a dumb-show epilogue in semi-darkness. Hamlet slowly arose from his death-bed and raised all the victims (not only his own)—Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius. He called them out from non-existence, and carefully led them along the stage as if silently asking their forgiveness. The Christian moral subtext of this episode, as well as the whole Tarkovsky production, was evident to everybody (one should remember the official Soviet position of the time towards any expression of religion in art).

In these most unfavourable social circumstances (maybe partly because of them) the people created really great theatre, including a series of excellent Shakespearean productions. The energy of resistance accumulated by the theatre could be converted into genuine artistic values, not only political ones. Russian theatre has a rich experience of surviving under totalitarian power. The problem now is whether the theatre will be able to maintain its significance as the most important instrument of national self-consciousness and self-expression in conditions of political freedom.

In the early years of *perestroika* classical plays, both Russian and Western, which had traditionally occupied an extensive place in the repertoire, almost disappeared from the boards. Both society and theatre now had the possibility to discuss openly the political topics that were forbidden under the old regime. The *subversive* style of Shakespeare production, which formerly attracted the public as a chance to enjoy silent and safe opposition, was now completely exhausted. When the euphoria and illusions of the Gorbachev period gave way to the ordeals of the new reality in Russia, the theatre's interest in current political themes was gone.

Not so long ago, at the end of 2005, the Moscow Art Theatre put on *Hamlet* for the first time since the famous production by Gordon Craig. The young director Yuri Butusov's production aroused harsh polemics among both public and critics. Some considered it an adequate expression of a modern vision of the problems of tragedy, others scolded its levity and inanity. All those writing about this new *Hamlet* agreed only in one respect: their regard for his choice of translation. For the first time, we heard on the stage the early version of the translation by Boris Pasternak, made at the end of the 1930s at Meyerhold's request. When Meyerhold's theatre was closed, the head of the Moscow Art Theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, who was preparing to put on a *Hamlet*, came across this translation. Earlier, his MHAT had commissioned a translation from Anna Radlova and concluded an agreement with her. And then Nemirovich got hold of Pasternak's work. He wrote a fair letter to Radlova, saying that her translation was good, but Pasternak's was immensely better, and he was going to put it on. He ordered Radlova to be paid her entire fee. Alas, rehearsals were interrupted by the war and then Nemirovich-Danchenko died, so that the production was never performed. Since then theatres have not turned to this translation. It was forgotten. They did put on some later versions of the translation, perhaps more perfect from the point of view of literary style, but these lost something of the original living breath. Yuri Butusov rediscovered for us this amazing fruit of dialogue between two epochs, two cultures—the first meeting of two great poets.

Yuri Butusov's *Hamlet* impresses as a scenic performance. Butusov and his scene designer Alexander Shishkin see Hamlet as a northern play: somewhere very close to Elsinore there is a cold sea. The sea image reflects the ironical spirit of our days. It is made up of barbed wire and empty cans. The sea is like a camp fence: it is garbage, and this is this Hamlet's world.

In the eyes of the director, *Hamlet* is a play of no mystery. He constantly searches for simple (often too simple) and theatrically effective solutions. From beginning to end this *Hamlet* is extreme fun, with not a moment of boredom. The question is whether "fun" is an appropriate word for Shakespearean tragedy.

I take the risk of putting myself in a silly position: a theatre historian should not say to a director what play the latter should or shouldn't put on. Nevertheless, regardless of the level of the director and actors' talents, there is a time for *Hamlet*—or not. This play has its place in Russian culture because some invisible mechanisms of history, culture, and the Russian life style start to work, which at certain moments push Hamlet to

the surface. Alexander Herzen used to reason that the play appears in any epoch of great doubts and crises. This formula is great but the history of Russian *Hamlet* does not fit it entirely. What 1971 crisis could we talk about? Tanks in Czechoslovakia? It was not crisis, but rather the apogee of the Soviet regime. It was a stuffy, shameful time of frozen silence. But it was the time when one of the best Hamlets of the Russian theatre of our generation was born, an experience that we can not forget: Yuri Lyubimov's production with Vladimir Vysotsky as Hamlet. People came, and with Vysotsky's Hamlet amongst them could afford to raise their voice.

While I think that our times are fit for *Hamlet*, I am not sure that we are able to be worthy of this play. Our time expresses itself adequately not in tragedy but in the grotesque. The history of recent productions of Shakespeare's tragedies is a sequence of successful attempts to turn tragedy into ironical tragicomedy. Butusov put on a masterful *Waiting for Godot*—with the same actors, by the way, who play in his *Hamlet*. We understand from the very beginning that Beckett's Godot will not come: he does not exist in nature. If he ever existed he must have died a long time ago (along with catharsis). Absurdist tragicomedies are close to the theatrical style of Butusov—the success of his Ionesco *Macbett* in Moscow's Satyricon Theatre was not accidental.

“The rest is silence,” Mikhail Trukshin as Hamlet cries out these words with mocking despair. This last cry means: beyond lies emptiness, nothing. This feeling of a universal nothingness determines the production's philosophy, its lightly cynical bravura. But in tragedy Heaven cannot be empty. In a world deprived of supreme meaning, where nobody and nothing controls the order of things, in a world without God, tragedy cannot breathe. It dies of asphyxia or turns first into a gloomy absurdist grotesquerie and then into a volatile postmodernist tragicomedy which feels comfortable in the universal emptiness, endlessly laughing at it and itself.

In Butusov's ironical *Hamlet*, Death as an idea and as a moving force of events is absent. Apparently, the decision was made deliberately. In Butusov's production, Hamlet chats with the Ghost without ceremony. But this lovely elderly gentleman, really, might be talked to about everything—by the fire, or by an old boat after successful fishing. Old Hamlet tosses pieces of ice from hand to hand, like baked potatoes. He has probably brought them with him from purgatory. This is a very moving scene: the first serious conversation of an adult dad and a boyish son. But, as you can read in a Pasternak poem, “The whole of Shakespeare, perhaps, may lie in Hamlet chattering freely with the Ghost”. Freely, but with a *ghost*—with

an infernal visitor from the dead. *Hamlet*—I am sorry to repeat generalities—is all based on a frozen contemplation of death, on the touch of death, on a dialogue with nonexistence, on an attempt, so to say, to get used to death, to find out what it is like by its feel, to sniff its smell (the Yorick skull scene). This smell pushes him away and puts a spell on him. Certainly, the play may be interpreted in this or another way. But there are things which the director should take into consideration. I understand that the word “should” sounds silly or, as they say now, “posh”. In our days, no one owes anyone anything. But without this dialogue with death, it is difficult to understand Hamlet. These are the motives that put the plot into an organic whole and make this whole equal to the sum of its parts, where perhaps they undefinably preceded it. In Butusov’s *Hamlet* one does not leave with a feeling that the director has dealt with things that were important for him as a human, with things that influence how and what he would live with. I do not want to compare anyone to anybody, but Vysotsky played his Hamlet as if he died each night on stage. On stage, he experienced what to him as a poet and actor was vital. This should not sound as a reproach to Butusov and to his actors. This is rather a difference between times, a contrast of generations.

The most recent production of *Hamlet* (premiere on April, 2010) was made on the stage of the St Petersburg Alexandrinsky Theatre. On the time-honoured boards of the Imperial theatre, a famous embodiment of old scenic traditions, you were presented with something extremely far from any tradition. To begin with, the actors played a mixture of six or seven different translations (from XVII century Sumarokov to the most recent versions). In fact it was a freely modernised and radically politicised version by contemporary playwright V. Levanov.

Critics—some with enthusiasm, others with indignation—described all the details of *Hamlet* as produced by Valery Fokin, artistic director of the Alexandrinsky Theatre: in the background the stands of a football stadium, which is sometimes used for solemn state ceremonies like the inaugural presentation of a new king, with glittering salutes to the cheers of the crowd (we see only the backs and backs of the head of the football fans, who form the whole population of Denmark—it seems they don’t have faces at all); guards in camouflage with ferocious dogs; a pit, into which dead bodies are thrown—either shot dissidents or football fans crushed in a crowd; the episode with the actors in which Hamlet, as stage director, teaches them to read poetry in the archaic manner and they howl like old timers in the remotest province (such is the best company in the country!). Here, Horatio is a wandering student with a backpack on his shoulders, who has travelled from Wittenberg to Denmark not in a carriage but,

without any doubt, by hitchhiking; he's simply crushed by what has happened to his friend the prince. Laertes here is a cheerful sportsman, the manager's favourite, who has no troubles with it (ah, if the nephew was like him, Gertrude and I wouldn't have worried...).



Fig. 1-1: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, directed by Valery Fokin at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, in 2010

Claudius, a wimp trembling with fear, is scared to death of Gertrude, but asks her to protect him from this dangerous boy and shelters under the hem of her skirt in horror. Fokin shows Gertrude, not the henpecked Claudius, as the main villainess, cool-blooded murderer, mastermind and architect of old Hamlet's homicide. Monumental as a Wagnerian heroine, she despises her husband, but she needs some kind of a husband-king, so hides him indulgently under her skirt. In just the same manner, she then wipes the weeping Hamlet's nose with disgust and loathingly throws away her damp handkerchief, as far away as possible. Only at the end does she suddenly realise what she has become and, probably exhausted by living in a world of wimpish losers, drinks the bowl of poison at a gulp. One can go on describing the details, sophisticatedly created and provocatively anti-traditional, which by no means shatter the feeling of strict succession and committed energy directed at Hamlet.



Fig. 1-2: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, directed by Valery Fokin at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, in 2010. Dmitry Lysenkov as Hamlet

This boy, over-nervous, edgy, tensed to the limit, rushes all over Elsinore, over the stage and over the auditorium, driving himself to every extreme, permissible and otherwise. He lives in a state of unending fever,

to an aggressively pumping rap beat, on the very edge of mental affliction—and who said the prince of Denmark is an example of good health? Hysterical outbursts are followed by apathy, explosions of despair from which there is no place to hide and behind which there is only the pain of despised love, the sorrow of reflection, and finally simple grief for his dad, who was murdered, and for his mom, for whom he is nothing. He kills Polonius in a sudden flash of uncontrolled rage and immediately attacks the obese body of the old man, shredding him with a long knife, after which he drags the corpse away, turning the lifeless puppet over in this way and that (the actor is actually substituted by a puppet here: the terrible hysteric games of the prince would have been very dangerous for the elderly People's Artist, who knew what to expect from the creative range of Dmitry Lysenkov's Hamlet).

The question can be raised: is this *Hamlet* at all?

Relations between this play and the spirit of our present days are extremely hard. I am still not sure whether we are able to feel this play now, whether we deserve it, whether we can respond to its emotional requirements, to the moral imperatives which are suggested to or rather imposed on us by the tragedy. But there is one point I am sure about: if modern theatre ventures at all to start a fair dialogue with the history of the Prince of Denmark, if it tries to understand itself and its own time through Shakespeare's story line, the result will most likely be the one proposed by Fokin. In various epochs Hamlet reflects the very age, as the image of rebellious young people of each generation. Stanislav Wyspianski said of Hamlet: a poor boy with a book in his hands. The books which Hamlet holds in his hands change with the times as the very Hamlets change (Jan Kott wrote about it). One of the mysteries of this play is that Hamlets of different epochs and even different decades can be so different, even incompatible (what common features can be shared by the Hamlet of Mikhail Chekhov and the Hamlet of Laurence Olivier?): they do not have things in common with themselves, but they do have similarities with the spirit of their historical moment. The criterion "Shakespeare or not Shakespeare" should be applied with particular care (which does not mean that it can be completely forgotten!). The Alexandrinsky's Hamlet hardly has a book in his hands—more likely, if you will forgive me, a Smartphone. But his desperate pain is that of a real Hamlet: agonizing and forced buffoonery is Hamlet's as well.

Vysotsky's character had a sacred internal duty to history, to himself. This new Hamlet has almost nothing but rigorous fever, sickness and pain. If this is a revolt, then it is manifested in his childish teasing of all kinds of superiors, giving one performance after another. But it is not an impulse of

theatrical play (which Butusov's *Hamlet* has): this is the play of despair. *Hamlet* for a time of non-*Hamlets* was introduced to us on the Alexandrinsky stage.

In his production Fokin wants to identify the features of the new generation that is rapidly occupying the space of our life, trying to understand it, to gain an insight into the emotions of its soul. He almost admits that it is not always understandable to fathers and grandfathers. He does not really admire the grimaces and leaps of this wild boy, but he wants to understand him through Shakespeare's story, to understand the generation that is replacing our own, and he finds at least one indisputable quality: these fellows do not want to lie, do not want to participate in the "mouse races" of their fathers and grandfathers. The director observes such dangerous and abrupt early developers with curiosity, compassion, and maybe even secret envy. In the famous Lithuanian *Hamlet* directed by Eimuntas Nekrošius, the talk was of fathers' guilt for their children. Fokin's production talks pretty much about the same thing: it is we who make them the way they are, it is we who create the mental afflictions torturing them. All complaints should be addressed to ourselves, to those who made our times and our *Hamlets* the way they are (in reality, not only on the stage) It is easier for us to gain an insight into the motives controlling this Gertrude and this Claudius, while the souls of young people going mad in the streets are closed for us. One thing is vivid for us: they do not want to be us; we and our world are alien to them. Having entered into dialogue with Shakespeare, Fokin stages a bitter grotesquerie, not pretending it to be high tragedy. In the same way, the demonstrative modernised text by V. Levanov does not pretend to be an academically faithful translation. This is a version and nothing else, just like Valery Fokin's production itself.

This *Hamlet* harshly re-evaluates previous traditions, and sometimes severely scoffs at them, rebelling against all rules and practices that might suggest that the director stage the great tragedy of the Swan of Avon "as is appropriate in a civilised society". Like its young radical character, the production sometimes goes too far, especially in verbal escapades: one doesn't need to be a Shakespearean scholar to guard the classic text. One should admit that "the most sexy Ophelia" in *Hamlet*'s letter is too much, whether you like it or not (to my mind, Polonius's claim that it is an "ill phrase, a vile phrase" is fair). But in this way or another, this production managed to tell us many significant and sad things about ourselves, about our past, and, it would seem, about what is waiting for us.

In the final act of the Alexandrinsky *Hamlet*, to the deafening music of the same brass band that played during Claudius's inauguration, a neatly

dressed teenager is led on to the stage. This young Fortinbras is far from Hamlet's nonsense, and seems to come to replace the mad rapper. He looks indifferently at the triumph of death and gives short commands: take away the corpses. Which will be done without delay: the grave is right here.

Fokin's production, with the help of a great play, gives an impetuous, acrid image—at the same time one filled with real pain and compassion—of the contemporary world, of today's moment in Russian history, in contemporary politics, and, as it seems to me, paints a perfectly correct portrait of today's young generation, a portrait of Hamlet for our non-Hamlet times. The most hopeless of all I have ever seen.

The production immediately caused loud debate. Angry and revelatory articles appeared. A shattering satirical article was published in the popular St Petersburg Theatrical Magazine. Advocates of the production—and the number of enthusiasts was gradually growing—furiously opposed its detractors. Naturally, the debates touched not only upon the relation between the play and the performance (“Shakespeare or not Shakespeare”); they related first of all to modern political reality.

The young public, to which the performance knowingly appealed, started a passionate discussion on the Internet. Here are some random quotes from the blogs¹:

Name: Galina

Hi! It's the 5th day that I have been staying in shock after seeing Fokin's Hamlet. I could expect anything possible, since Hamlet is my favourite piece of art and I saw it in 5 stagings and the same amount of screen versions. But it is the greatest disappointment that I have ever felt. First of all, the absence of Shakespeare's wording is obnoxious. What does Shakespeare, claimed in the advertising bill, have to do with all that if he is not even there? I liked the actors' playing, but not the concept of the story itself considering the fact, that a permanently drunk Hamlet is in the spotlight. An interesting storyline involved a false actor playing Hamlet's shadow, Gertrude's tyranny, but on the back of drunken Hamlet they faded. I don't have anything against the actors. I am outraged with the concept. Polonius's body, drunkenness, pregnant Ophelia... I must be unaware of real art, but there was no Shakespeare in that performance. I believe (I will agree with Alina) it should be said that the performance was staged based on the play, and not based on the original.

¹ All quotations from the blogs were taken from the official website of Alexandrinsky Theatre (<http://www.alexandrinsky.ru>).

Name: Svetlana

Sirs! Shakespeare didn't create his pieces of art for classical storylines and beautiful costumes. He urged his audience to think! And we are often just so not into thinking, especially in the evening, all the more so in the theatre... We also don't like it when we feel ashamed, since it is an unpleasant feeling. But not only did Valery Fokin force Dima Lysenkov to writhe with moral pain, he made us, such modern and progressive playgoers, go through the same thing. Why us? We know very well what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. But this *Hamlet* sure turns our perception upside down. A great THANK-YOU to the Maestro, BRAVO to the whole creative team for frankness, absence of glitz and utmost bareness of nerve! That is why this performance catches so much, although it's a shame that not all of us. Nevertheless, the more we will see such performances, the less evil and low acts we will have in our world!

Name: Irina

The only thing that Alexander's Theatre should really print on their tickets is the phrase saying "Theatre for the thinking audience!" Costumed rote-reading of the text (which most people would call a "classical performance") is, fortunately, not welcomed there. All "classical" pieces of art were presenting burning aspects, thus being relevant and pressuring... then why can't they reflect modern life? That is the way it is supposed to be. That's what we call progress and development! Otherwise, theatre as an institution will become the rudiment of our culture.

Name: Vasily

Why would Fokin, the member of the Presidential Council for culture and art, oppose the state? It is the absolute indifference of the modern state to cultural values that has led to the reality in which the scenic art is being destroyed in the centre of St Petersburg in a magnificent building, full of ushers wearing white gloves, and everything is on the house.

Name: Mila

Bravo to the Maestro!!! Bravo to the whole creative team!!! It is to the uttermost a short-spoken and harsh theatrical story... It is a precise and clear story (if, of course, I "read" it correctly) speaking of the moral and ethical degradation of national elites. As we all know, fish rots from its head, so we are speaking of the degradation of society in general, and of Russian society in particular, as well as the challenges of this terrible spiritual fall... Indeed, they are terrifying, since while Fokin's Prince of Denmark is tortured by the "viciousness" of the situation and the imperfection of the surrounding world, on account of which the poor guy debauches in a drunken haze (which certainly stonifies, but doesn't help that much) from desperation and powerlessness and, in the end, outruns, then his yet another very young successor, offspring of an illustrious/and yet

not... name (who cynically ordered to get rid of the bodies) will hardly “lose his sleep” over such nonsense as what is “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “bad”, “moral” or “immoral”...

The Internet reliably reflects the mentality of the young Russian generation. Disputes over a director’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedy have every time turned into openly fierce polemics about the problems of modern Russian politics. It was inevitable. We can scold Fokin as much as we like—and probably it would be fair—for his forcible modernisation of the classic text, for his biased and one-sided interpretations. But it is impossible not to see that the Alexandrinsky *Hamlet* of 2010 is a phenomenon of the revived Russian political theatre, which had seemed to be fading away. Now, the anxiously changing reality of Russian social life itself prevents those artists who have not yet lost a feeling of social responsibility from turning arrogantly away from the pressure points of modernity. *Hamlet* has once again performed its usual mission—usual at least for Russia: to be a mirror of the historical moment, a goad to provoke awareness of our national destiny.

CHAPTER TWO

HAMLET: THE TEXT ON WHICH A WHOLE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL IS BASED

ADRIENNE GYOPAR NAGY, HUNGARY

Abstract: The text can be interesting when one is assessing the texture of a play. However, one should bear in mind that “the play’s the thing”—and actually played by actors. It means that the text in the theatre is always an adaptation. For the last 400 years, *Hamlet* has perhaps been the most frequently performed play all over the world. In 2010, the 7th edition of the International Shakespeare Festival of Craiova in Romania was dedicated exclusively to the “Tragedy of the Danish Prince”. Paradoxically, that international *Hamlet-Feast*, structured by and upon the greatest Shakespearean “text”, used and interpreted by several different theatres from different cultures stretching from East to West, in very different conceptions, styles, genres etc, could actually hold “a mirror up to nature” in its diversity alone, leaving even The Postmodern Man of Today as unique only in general terms.

Keywords: International Shakespeare Festival of Craiova, *Hamlet@omania*, Baltic visions, The Wooster Group, Ophelia, “Mother Earth”, Thomas Ostermeier, Schaubühne Berlin, postdramatic theatre, Marius von Mayenburg, Lee Youn-Taek, *glocalise*, South Korea.

“On the printed page, they’re just words, words, words. (..) Performance is not speaking from the card: it signifies beyond the image, beyond the book”, wrote W. B. Worthen in his *Drama between Poetry and Performance* (Worthen 2010, 108). The text for a performance is interesting when viewed as the texture of a play. “The play’s the thing”—actually played by actors, where acting supplies total credibility to the performance. But the synchronism, diachronism or even anachronism of a text’s effectiveness

depends on the actual performance. Text is only one of several means for a production to be put on the boards. Thus, the text in theatre is always an adaptation. Contemporary or not, that is the question; but the answer lies in the interpretation. Even a new text written today could seem awfully antiquated only some hours later on the stage; and it is a commonplace that Shakespeare is (mostly) our contemporary, through the deconstruction, reconstruction or any other kind of construction of his texts, so readily adaptable for our contemporary stage. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's plays were not written for eternity. The great Will provided material only for theatre companies and actor colleagues to adapt. "Ham" according to Webster's Dictionary also means "an actor performing in an exaggerated theatrical style". So, what about Ham-let?

We are acquainted with three or four different variations of Shakespeare's "original" *Hamlet*, taken just during the author's lifetime. However, during the last 400 years, *Hamlet* is perhaps the most frequently performed play all over the globe, in an uncountable number of adaptations, translations, versions, discourses, script-variations or *mises-en-scène*.

In 2010, in Romania, Emil Boroghina, the founding director and selector of a world renowned Shakespeare biennial, decided that an uninterrupted thematic cycle should end with a Hamlet Constellation. That is why the seventh edition of the International Shakespeare Festival of Craiova was dedicated exclusively to the tragedy of the Danish prince. The text itself became the centre of the event, a ceremony, and because of this laudable *hamletomania*, a part of Southern Romania transformed itself for more than two weeks into a kind of *Hamlet@Romania*. Thus, with the right to be let Ham, there were all genres of art based solely on *Hamlet* in the limelight: from music to costume design, from fine arts to arts and crafts, from photos to stamps, from exhibitions, competitions, book and CD launches, concerts, special radio reports and television broadcasts to several different conferences, with many types of participants (critics, scholars, artists etc.), or live talk-shows with the greatest stars, from Robert Wilson to Michael Pennington, plus all kinds of other happenings, one-man shows and films; Peter Brook's successful TV recording with Adrian Lester in the title role was included, as was Ryutopia Noh-theatre's marvellous performance with Hirokazu Kouchi—a last minute addition, since the Japanese company itself was unfortunately unable to come to play live, due to the volcanic eruption in Iceland. Anyway, from three continents, to paraphrase Polonius, there were

the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history... or old-philosophical-grotesque (from Bucharest), post communist postmodern

(from Wrocław), American-Chinese intercultural-pastoral (Shanghai Theatre Academy), earthy-global (Schaubühne Berlin), shamanistic-glocal (Street Theatre Troupe from South-Korea), avantgarde-multimedia (The Wooster Group, USA)... for the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.

This amazing *Hamlet Constellation* in Craiova was framed by the Baltic vision, from Vilnius. At the very beginning Oskaras Koršunovas and his company were searching for the human as well as for their actor's identity through a psychedelic theatre fantasy, while at the end one could see again Eimuntas Nekrošius's frosty, cruel nightmare played by his Meno Fortas company, even if the accents of this 13 year old cult production, an apocalyptic prophecy for the third millennium, had in the meantime been shifting back and forth.

This Ham-let Feast was rounded off in Bucharest by The Wooster Group from New York. In Elisabeth LeCompte's conception, Shakespeare's tragedy was re-imagined by *remixing* and *repurposing* the 1964 Richard Burton Broadway production, directed by John Gielgud, which had been shot from 17 camera angles and edited into a film. The idea of bringing a live theatre experience to thousands of simultaneous viewers in different cities was promulgated then as a new form, called *Theatrofilm*. Filmed in a live performance, it was shown for only two days in movie theatres across the United States.

Our *Hamlet*, in attempting to reverse the process by reconstructing a hypothetical theatre piece from the fragmentary evidence of the edited film, was like an archaeologist inferring the form of a temple from a collection of ruins (programme note from The Wooster Group).

W. B. Worthen was also right again when he declared:

Although the Wooster Group *Hamlet* attributes a generative role to the Burton film, which surrogates the function attributed to *Shakespeare's text* in more conventional productions, the performance actually dramatises the hollowness of that citation: what we see is the Burton film—like the text of *Hamlet*—as an instrument, a means, an agency for making a new work in a new scene of production (ibid., 132).

LeCompte's favourite actress, Kate Valk, played both Gertrude and Ophelia. It is not accidental that the female roles of *Hamlet*, especially Ophelia, have become more dominant for women directors in our centuries. For instance, in her sadomasochist conception of the Polish post-communist *Hamlet*, Monika Pecikiewicz's imagination transformed it into *The Tragedy of Ophelia*, played by Anna Ilczuk—perhaps as the

stage-director's alter ego. At random or not, even in Richard Schechner's Chinese *Hamlet—That Is the Question*, Ophelia also becomes a most remarkable character. So the "Father of the Avantgarde" in his Center for Performance Studies at Shanghai Theatre Academy, together with the very talented and very young actress Sainan Wang, created a modern, tomboyish Ophelia, who seemed to be Polonius's bodyguard, while she was absolutely her "father's daughter" wishing to be similar to him, as well as to protect him herself. Besides the actresses and their ambiguous roles in that play, Schechner even put in a "feminism plus", using real earthy loam in the graveyard scene—Earth being the female pole of I Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes.

In offering a sincere intention to give value to the objects and materials of the scenic action in general, a very interesting feature pervaded nearly the whole Shakespeare Festival. For instance, the "Mother Earth" mentioned above was characteristic in both of what I regard as the best productions of the Festival: at the front of the stage could be seen a "grave" of real earth, and the German jester, as well as the picaresque South Korean Hamlet, were balanced on the brink of it, or sometimes directly in it—between their real and surreal Fate.

Maybe it sounds a great paradox in connection with a Festival that is celebrating the greatest classical drama, but in the majority of performances of this *Hamlet* celebration one was able to discover postdramatic forms (see Lehmann 2006, 69, 72). Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet* conception for his Berlin Schaubühne was, especially, something of an illustration to Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory, if it is "a theatre of states and scenically dynamic formations" (ibid., 68). In this superb production, full of surprises in everything and every character, as well as their doubles or "metamorphoses with special pulse and unexpected meanings", it was possible to see things from Hamlet's point of view, even his ascendant madness, with geophagy included. Played by only six actors, constantly changing roles, with the marvellous Lars Eidinger as Hamlet, together with music, songs and video, it became a truly extreme postmodern nightmare vision. For this production, a whole new German translation was made by the full-time dramaturg at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Marius von Mayenburg, himself a world famous playwright with a well-known sardonic style, writing mainly about contemporary obsessions and oppressions and cruel familial passions without any compassion, characteristic of life today. That is why this *Berliner Hamlet*, with its cuts and its use of everyday expressions, becomes a contemporary play by Mayenburg as well as a genuine restoration of Shakespeare's most quoted drama.

The South Korean poet, playwright and stage director Lee Youn-Taek translated *Hamlet* himself for his Street Theatre Troupe. From its first night in 1996 until the performance at Craiova in 2010 he made more than 7 or 8 different variations or revivals, with three kinds of playscript. Lee Youn-Taek's aim had been to *glocalise* his *Tragedy of the Danish Prince*, which ended up being truly unique because of its consistent approaches to Shakespeare in terms of interculturalism as well. *Hamlet* turned out to be the most challenging play for the local spectators, as well as for the targeted spectators all over the globe. Their Shakespeare became an amalgam of intercultural universalism, and, besides being an especially old, traditional "Gut" version, it also used neo-orientalism in costumes, lighting design, dances etc. Both shamanic traditions and Christian iconography had a very strong impact on the whole. Its music was also a kind of mixture of East and West.

The female characters became more dominant. Not only were Rosencrantz and Guildenstern played by women, but also a female Horatio was featured as a mature storyteller. The South-Korean "picaro-clown-student Hamlet" had a very special relationship even with "Mother Earth", personified as the Gravedigger, played by an actress. Due to the persuasion, faith and cult of Asian people, the end of this *Hamlet* production by a South Korean stage director was different both from Shakespeare's well-known text and from the decadent Western point of view. According to Lee Youn-Taek, the dead Hamlet arises and walks away slowly, naked, into the back of the stage, perhaps to eternity, where all the dead characters of Shakespeare's play have ended up—already arisen. Hamlet is not only a victim of revenge, but also a universal symbol, or a victim of power versus love (see Dong-wook 2009, 91–117).

Thus, comparing the two differing concepts employed in the best *Hamlet* productions at the Shakespeare Festival at Craiova in 2010, we are able to assess essential differences between the Eastern and Western mentalities. To give but one example—Ophelia's death and her burial. In the German version directed by Thomas Ostermeier, we can watch, on a huge screen, Ophelia's despairing struggle with asphyxia. Judith Rosmair's acting is like an exaggerated drowning in a vast, dark, dirty basin of water. Then, at the funeral, Judith Rosmair becomes Hamlet's mother again, and Gertrude is in mourning not only for Polonius's daughter and Hamlet's fiancée, but also for herself—over her fate. In contrast in Lee Youn-Taek's version, no struggle for life is being shown. Moreover, during Ophelia's funeral service, the gravediggers are reciting long lines from the original text in the form of an old Korean funeral chant, and the funeral march is replaced by Händel's Sarabande. People in

black are mourning for Ophelia, staring at her dead body in the coffin, while among the mourners the ghost or spirit of Polonius's cloddish teenager daughter moves around in a white dress, dancing barefoot, handing out flowers etc. So the whole scene has a real *comic-relief* function, until the gravedigger's signal, when she stops dancing, just to walk down slowly to her tomb. At the beginning of the shovelling of earth over her coffin, Laertes jumps down into the grave, crying out the original Shakespeare lines...

Paradoxically, the 2010 *International Hamlet Festival* in Craiova, by taking the same plot, characters or even "text", used and interpreted by several different theatres, from different cultures stretching from East to West on this globe, by their very different conceptions, styles, genres and languages, could actually hold the "mirror up to nature" in its diversity alone, even to "The Postmodern Man of Today", as genuinely unique in every respect.

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CHAPTER THREE

DIALECTICS BETWEEN CLASSICAL TEXTS AND THEIR STAGING IN CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN THEATRE

LĪGA ULBERTE, LATVIA

Abstract: The article provides an overview of the most characteristic ways in which the relationship between texts of Latvian and world classics and stage productions has evolved. The main method used is theatre semiotics, which differentiates between the varying functionality of the theatre text, the text of staging and the text of performance. Examples of Latvian productions have been selected and examined in the discourse of *mise-en-scène*, using six possibilities for contemporary adaptation of classical texts offered by French theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis: archaeological reconstruction; “flat reading” of the text; historicizing; treating the text as a raw material; reading the text in pictures or understanding the text through *mise-en-scène*; dismantling the text into separate elements. Three basic types of staging and their manifestations in Latvian theatre are outlined, depending upon the treatment of the text: autotextual, ideotextual and intertextual.

Keywords: theatre text, semiotics, sign, *mise-en-scène*, staging, Latvian theatre.

European theatre, from Aristotle to the origins of theatre directing at the end of the 19th century, has functioned within a logocentric system, in which the word held primacy and was the element forming the meaning of performance. In the historiography of theatre the frequently quoted statement of French structuralist Roland Barthes: “Qu’est-ce que la théâtralité? C’est le théâtre moins le texte” (What is theatricality? It is theatre minus the text) (Barthes 1964, 41) is seen as a turning point in the

relationship between drama/text and performance/staging. Studies of theatre semiotics have expanded Barthes's thesis, offering a much broader concept of the theatrical text, adding into it not only the linguistic reality of the text but also the totality of and interaction between all signs used in a performance (a more extensive overview of the historical transformations of the correlation between text and staging is found in the international study *Historiography of Theatre* by Jan Lazardzig (University of Chicago), Viktoria Tkaczyk (Universiteit van Amsterdam) and Matthias Warstat (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) (see Lazardzig *et al.* 2012, 20–30).

If we accept the terminology of Christopher Balme (University of Munich), the relationship between the written text and its stage version is determined by two kinds of sign systems: first, *implicit signs* or the basic text of the play (the lines spoken by its characters); secondly, *explicit signs* or the secondary text (author's remarks, stage directions, characters' names, titles, etc.) (Balme 2008, 85). Both kinds of signs are available to the reader of the play's text; but the spectator's perception is primarily determined by the implicit signs, i.e., what is said on stage. This follows from the specific nature of explicit signs, as the only ones revealing the author's position in a drama. In contemporary theatre, starting with the 20th century, the director is the actual author of the performance, for whom secondary information provided by the playwright (on the time and space of action, characters' age, etc.) is no longer a mandatory pre-condition for interpretation, so that the objective of explicit signs is changing: in a performance today they reveal the position of the director, not that of the playwright.

One of the most typical examples from Latvian theatre in this context is the staging by playwright and director Lauris Gundars (1958) of the drama *Indrāni* (1904) by Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908), a founder of the realistic psychological narrative and drama in Latvia, in 2008. In the original play, events take place at the very beginning of the 20th century, and the title has been traditionally perceived as the name of the farmstead where the events take place. Lauris Gundars used the singular form of the name in the title of his production—*Indrāns*, thus shifting the focus from the house as the main cause of conflict to the surname of the protagonists—father and son—hence to the family relationship. The director justified his shifting the time of action to the 21st century by the universal remark provided by playwright in the secondary text: “Actions take place in Vidzeme, Ērgļi district, in the present” (Blaumanis 1958, 109).

Three planes of a text can be examined in the context of any staging (Balme 2008, 87–88): (1) text of theatre—a play or other type of written original, recorded and unchanging; (2) text of staging—in the process of staging the theatre text is adapted to the needs of the concrete interpretation and turns into the text of the stage/staging, which is conditionally constant; (3) text of performance—in the completed staging, when it is regularly performed, the text may change, depending upon the players' improvisation, or other factors not directly linked with the staging.

In the conventional repertory theatre the differences between the text of staging and the text of performance have traditionally been insignificant, since only the text of the performance is available to the audience in the process of perception. This approach to a large extent dominates also in Latvia, in mainstream performances in large theatre halls, for example, the regular staging of classics by Oļģerts Kroders (1921–2012) at the Valmiera Theatre: Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (1998) and *Hedda Gabler* (2005), Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (2003) and *Cherry Orchard* (2009), Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* (2006), Shakespeare's *King Lear* (2006) and *Hamlet* (2008), Schiller's *Maria Stuart* (2010), Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending* (2011) and Ostrovsky's *Without a Dowry* (2012).



Fig. 1-3: *A Man in an Overcoat* after Gogol's *The Overcoat*, directed by Yuri Dyakonov at Dearty Deal Teatro, Riga, in 2012. (Left) Kārlis Krūmiņš, Maija Doveika, Ivars Kļavinskis

However, in performances based upon the principle of play and improvisation the text of performance, which on some evenings may be different and significantly removed from the original, is decisive. One of the most recent examples in Latvian theatre is the first independent staging by the young director Yuri Dyakonov (1986) at the independent project theatre Dirty Deal Teatro, *A Man in an Overcoat* (2012). The performance is based on the story by Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*. Through targeted scenic technology, within a laconic interior design of a black set (designer Rūdolfs Baltiņš), Dyakonov together with four young actors creates a theatrical phantasmagoria, perceived via associations, about the numerous and changing faces of psychological violence, which can destroy in a refined and methodical way everything that is different. Contrasting psychophysics of the body is intentionally maintained in the performance. Actors Maija Doveika, Ivars Kļavinskis and Kārlis Krūmiņš, incessantly changing persona (names, details of costumes, wigs, body language, tone of voice, etc.), impersonate various “masters of life”, starting with the cloak-room attendant, who can decide to whom the overcoat will be handed. They are slim, attractive and fit, they feel and behave in a relaxed way. Akakiy Akakievitch (the only one who is called throughout the performance by the name of Gogol’s original character), played by Jurgis Spulenieks, is very slow moving, with peculiar features: clumsy, almost convulsively tense and seemingly mute from timidity, he hardly utters a single word during the performance. In Dyakonov’s production, the original theatre text has already been significantly transformed during the process of staging. At the beginning of the performance the actors read aloud Gogol’s story. After a couple of pages, however, they stop doing it, to present their own studies, brought about through the process of collective creation, only partially using the situations and texts of the original story. As the degree of improvisation is high and several episodes require the participation of the audience (in such cases the outcome is always unpredictable), the text of the performance also varies on different occasions.

In the age of the director, accepting the *mise-en-scène* discourse as essential for concretising any text in action, Patrice Pavis offers several possibilities for the director’s reading of classic or conditionally *outdated* texts, examples of which are found also in Latvian theatre (Pavis 1991, 183–184).

Archaeological reconstruction. The revival of a former performance, not the creation of a new one. The history of European theatre contains many examples of such reconstructions of performances created by Konstantin Stanislavsky’s, Bertolt Brecht’s and other sovereign schools of

directing. There is no ground to talk about successful archaeological reconstructions of classic productions in Latvian theatres, as these have mainly been created out of commercial considerations. For example, in the season of 2011/2012 the Daile Theatre in Riga announced as one of the central events of the season the revival of a very popular staging of 1982 of the folk play *John Neiland* (1881) by the first professional Latvian playwright Ādolfs Alunāns (1848–1912). Both productions had the same director—Kārlis Auškāps (1947), who in the revived version kept the stage design of the previous production in full (the original curtain painted by the important Latvian artist Juris Dimiters was of special importance), with the musical score, *mise-en-scène* and general interpretation, replacing only the performers and adding some contemporary allusions to the objectively archaic text. All these factors guaranteed the interest of the audience, but not the artistic quality of the production.



Fig. 1-4: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by J. J. Jillinjer at the Daile Theatre, Riga, in 2012

“Flat reading” of the text. The director aims only to reveal the text as a value *per se*. In Latvia recently this approach was embodied by the director of the Daile Theatre, J. J. Jillinjer (Dž. Dž. Džilindzers, 1966) in his stagings of Schiller's play *Maria Stuart* (2010) and Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (2012). When staging Schiller's tragedy, written

in verse at the beginning of the 19th century and based on historical material, Jillinjer has completely given up the irony, parody and deconstruction so typical of him, nor has he been interested in revealing the relevance of the situation depicted by Schiller in a contemporary socio-political context. His aim was to stage a classical performance in a serious, academic way, with actors reciting the text rather grandly, thus emphasising the significance and melodiousness of the spoken word. Accordingly, the shortening of Schiller's play was minimal and the first, somewhat outdated translation into Latvian was used, that of the Latvian poet Rainis (1865–1929) at the beginning of the 20th century. This approach only partially justified itself, as the quality of the actors' performances was very uneven. In the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* a contemporary translation was used and the play was significantly shortened.

Historicizing. The director focuses upon historical determinism in the context of three timescales: the age depicted in the play, the time when the play was written and the time of staging. The director chooses one of them as the dominant one and correspondingly subjects the interpretation of the text to it. In 2008 at the Latvian National Theatre the director Viesturs Kairišs (1971) staged the performance *School*, an original play by the Latvian playwright Inga Ābele (1972), commissioned for this production, based upon the concept of school as an aggressive system, which breaks down individualism. Ābele's play was created using the motifs of a number of classical Latvian prose works from the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, and the language used could be related to that period. The space and the costumes, however, created by artist Ieva Jurjāne, set up associations with the school interior design of the 1970s and 1980s, the time when the artist herself, the director and the author of the play went to school.

Treating the text as a raw material. The classical text is used only as a raw material, to show it from a new ideological or aesthetic perspective. One of the most interesting examples in this regard is the 2008 production by director Regnārs Vaivars (1973) *The Well-Known Bear and his Dr.* at the National Theatre. Its literary source of inspiration—A. A. Milne—was not even mentioned in the promotional material for the production. The performance was a witty fantasy, saturated with Freudian associations—a game without a consistent plot, for an adult audience, in which the well-known characters from *Winnie-the-Pooh and Friends*—Bear, Piglet, Rabbit, etc.—enacted various social situations.

Reading the text in pictures or understanding through mise-en-scène. *Mise-en-scène* is emphatically theatrical and visual. In such staging the text may be absent altogether or can be subject to actions, and the logic of

mise-en-scène creates a story which is parallel to the text or totally sovereign. This approach dominates in the pronouncedly metaphoric performances which have been consistently realised in Lithuanian theatre since the 1980s by the director Eimuntas Nekrošius (1952), staging classical European drama—Gogol's *Nose* (1991), Pushkin's *Little Tragedies* (1994), Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1995), Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1997), *Macbeth* (1999) and *Othello* (2001), as well as the performance based on motifs from the poem *Seasons* by the originator of Lithuanian poetry, Kristojonas Donelaitis (1714–1780). Nekrošius seemingly respects and maintains the logical regularities of the text, but also adds to them on principle, organising on the stage symbolic physical processes and visual images. A vivid example is his visualising of the creation of music. During the first part of Pushkin's *Little Tragedies*, *Mozart and Salieri*, Vladas Bagdonas as Salieri was composing his music, pragmatically moving the abacus beads, systematically like an accountant. In contrast Mozart, played by Algirdas Latenas, during the episode when he is playing his new musical compositions launches into a fascinating, energetic, expressive dance, thus affirming the unique, irrational nature of his talent.

Dismantling the text into separate elements. Destroying both the internal and external logic of the text is typical of both postmodern and postdramatic theatre practice. In Latvia two productions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be linked to this approach. In Liepāja in 1994, director Lauris Gundars produced the first conceptually postmodern performance in Latvian theatre history, completely dismantling the system of characters of Shakespeare's play, leaving as active characters only Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes and Fortinbras, turning the others into figments of Hamlet's imagination (for example, Ophelia was an artificial lily, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz two clementines, etc.), and Hamlet himself into a ridiculous and despicable "little" man. In 2012 Reinis Suhanovs (1985), winner of the 2007 gold medal of the Prague Quadrennial, one of the most active young Latvian stage designers, offered a similar deconstruction of *Hamlet*, as his graduation work in directing. In this hour-long version, the director retained only two characters, Hamlet and Fortinbras, the first being naive, even rather childlike and infantile, the second a sophisticated strategist, able to embody the role of Gertrude, actor and gravedigger, according to the need.

In his study *Staging between text and performance*, Patrice Pavis differentiates three basic types of staging, depending upon the treatment of text (Pavis 1987, 13–27), which can be seen also in Latvian theatre practice:

Autotextual (autotextuell) staging follows only the internal logic of the text and plot of the play, without taking into consideration any adjacent factors. The director deems it important to reveal the meaning of the text itself, as a value *per se*. This approach relates to the “flat reading” of the text, mentioned above, and is typical, for example, of German classical director Peter Stein’s (1937) rather monotonous stagings of recent years. He has also staged one performance in Latvia, producing Chekhov’s *The Seagull* at Riga Russian Drama Theatre in 2003. Stein literarily respects all Chekhov’s directions. In the beginning of the first act, according to Chekhov, “the sun has just set” (Chekhov 2007, 6) and the moon rises during Treplev’s performance. Stein’s first act proceeds in semi-darkness, slightly irritating because the actors’ faces are not properly visible. The second act is just the opposite: the stage is filled with brilliant white light, because Chekhov has stated “the sun is shining. (...) Midday. Hot” (ibid., 15). The atmosphere of the performance is created by changing light, subject to the hour of the day, by stage design details (*décor* by Ferdinand Wögerbauer), which not only imitate, but indeed perform the functions intended for them; Treplev actually plays the piano; Nina makes her first entrance on a real stage, the framework of which is placed centre stage during the first act, but later, ever more destroyed, retreats into the periphery; in the wardrobe trunk, which is filled with the dresses on which all Arkadina’s money is spent, on the dresses themselves (costume designer Anna Heinrihsone) each perfectly worked seam and lace can be seen from afar; the autumn wind is both heard and felt, because it twirls the autumn leaves; low singing comes from the direction of the lake. There was nothing cheap or careless in the visual and sound presentation of the performance. The psychological relationships, however, were revealed in an approximate and abstract way. Thus, the production of *The Seagull* in Riga shows a trend typical of Peter Stein’s productions of the 21st century: a pedantically accurate treatment of external details and a certain approximation in revealing the essence of the performance and the internal relationships.

It is possible to discuss the autotextual approach also in those cases when the director’s idea dominates, subjecting to it any material. For example, director Mikhail Gruzdov (1953) has regularly produced the classical repertory since the 1990s, dealing with the themes of sin and forgiveness, passion and duty. This dominated also in his most recent production of Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* at the National Theatre (2010). The performance is organised on the basis of parallels between three different models of relationship between a man and a woman: Anna—Vronsky—Karenin; Dolly—Stiva; Levin—Kitty and to a certain

extent also Nikolai and the prostitute Masha. The fragmentary nature of the stage adaptation does not allow us to follow any line of relationship in full (which is only logical, since without significant shortening it is impossible to transfer the epic scope of the novel to the stage). Only some emotional conditions of the protagonists are shown. In all cases the director's opinion is clear—succumbing to passion is a sin, which, in one way or another, will inevitably bring punishment.

Ideotextual (ideotextuell) staging principally differs from the autotextual approach in that the social, political and ideological context of the time of staging is decisively significant. It means that the classical text is intentionally subjected to the concrete receptive situation. This approach is applicable to all those many productions of classic works, when the time of the play is changed from the past into the present or the place of action is localised. For example, in 2003 director Galyna Polyschuk (1968) used this aesthetic approach at the Liepāja theatre to produce one of the most outstanding interpretations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the history of Latvian contemporary theatre. The large-scale, almost four hour long performance *Romeo and Juliet. The Myth* used Shakespeare's text as the basis, supplementing it with fragments from the play *Dzjulia and Romeo* (1996) by the contemporary Russian postmodern playwright and director Klim (Vladimir Klimentko, 1952). The action of the play was clearly transferred to the present, from costumes and accessories to the transformation of meaning: Capulets and Montagues represent two different street gangs, Mercutio is the leader of a small rock group, Tybalt the leader of a gang of bikers; Romeo and Juliet confess their feelings by mobile phone texting; Romeo dies of a drug overdose, which he bought on the street from a prostitute; the musical theme from the TV series *Brigade*, about contemporary Russian criminal circles, is used. The recognisably mundane details in the concrete production did not devalue the text and situation of the play. On the contrary, they made it convincingly relevant, showing the world in which teenagers live now, without a trace of romanticising.

Intertextual (intertextuell) staging. Here, it is emphasised that the concrete interpretation is one among many—allusions to others are intentional. In Latvian theatre this approach has been implemented in cases when a director repeatedly produces the plays of one author. For example, director Felix Deich (1937) has staged six productions at the Valmiera Theatre based upon prose and dramatic works by the Latvian classical playwright Rūdolfs Blaumanis. In only three cases could the drama material be considered as belonging to comedy—*The Evil Spirit (Ļaunais gars)*, *Trīne's Sins (Trīnes grēki)* and *From the Sweet Bottle (No*

Saldenās pudeles)—and in all of them the director changed the genre to psychological drama, since the seemingly comic misunderstandings between the characters of the plays brought also dramatic losses. To a large extent, in all his interpretations of Blaumanis, Deich was staging not only the concrete work, but also the author as a whole. Perhaps it is conceptually meaningful that for the Valmiera Theatre production of *From the Sweet Bottle* (2010), the stage designer Mārtiņš Vilkārsis used some details from another production, Blaumanis's play *Indrāni*, staged by Māra Ķimele at the same theatre (2008). In Latvian culture Blaumanis most vividly expresses the national character, but Felix Deich, a director of Jewish origin who speaks Russian in daily life and has been working in Latvia since the mid-1960s, is able to evaluate this Latvian mentality from a distance and embody it on the stage.

In general, the share of Latvian and world classics in the Latvian theatre repertory is consistently large, as it guarantees the stable interest of the public. There are no grounds to talk about one dominant tradition of interpretation: the general trend reveals respect towards the text as a value *per se*.

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CHAPTER FOUR

IVAN GONCHAROV'S *OBLOMOV*, DIRECTED BY ALVIS HERMANIS: AN ATTEMPT AT READING WITHIN THE AXES OF POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

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Abstract: The author shows in this article that it is possible to analyse *Oblomov*, staged by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, which, undoubtedly, belongs to the postdramatic theatre, within the axes of modernist aesthetics and philosophy. The production is characterised by surreal playing with time, principles typical of symbolism: the method of theatre within theatre, performance as a subjective message, the principle of deliberate uncertainty, psychological masks, the method of grotesque acting, essential for expressionism. Thus, it can be concluded that the postdramatic theatre has a greater genetic link with modernism than we assume in everyday practice, even though Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* has pointed it out. In *Oblomov*, parallel to transformed concepts of modernism, Hermanis also uses the perception, typical of postmodern theatre, of the impossibility of unbiased history, which is manifested in the simultaneous, side-by-side existence of opposite opinions.

Keywords: time, space, palimpsest, modernism, postdramatic theatre.

Palimpsest

The concept of a palimpsest originated in the Middle Ages and denotes a parchment or papyrus which is repeatedly used for writing, by scratching or washing away the previous text. Palimpsest became topical in the age of modernism, denoting figuratively the presence of an old text or drawing beneath a new text, written on the washed parchment. Hermanis's *Oblomov*

is a palimpsest of a kind, in which the shadows of dead ancestors, i.e., former performances, shine through the new text of stage language—from Hermanis's own creative work, as well as from works by other Baltic directors. The director himself is probably unaware of the presence of these elements from old texts: their origins are intuitive and express thoughts and images with which the artist continues to be preoccupied. The problems raised in previous performances have not been resolved in his life—both public and private—and are left unfinished. The presence of themes, images and atmospheres from previous productions in the new work functions by granting to the new enacted event a specific in-depth quality—archetypal meaning, i.e. the meaning of continually relevant causalities. Since the director himself has not publicly commented upon the influences of previous artistic work, the problem of the objectivity level in the perception and interpretation of the new production becomes highlighted, since not all spectators share an identical aesthetic experience. However, it is important to underline that during at least the last decade Hermanis's theatre has deliberately and provocatively forced each spectator to create his or her own opinion on what they see at the theatre, with regard not only to this but also to several other aspects. It conceptually rejects the possibility of one unbiased truth.

The Impossibility of Unbiased History

The image of a camera and photographs is a *leitmotif* of the *Oblomov* performance. Stoltz brings to Oblomov's apartment the modern technical miracle—a photo camera on a tripod. Stoltz wants to take a photo of Zakhar, but it ends in failure. All at once, however, the camera, flaring up with a brilliant magnesium light, operates independently. In Eimuntas Nekrošius's famous 1986 production of Anton Chekov's *Uncle Vanya* the camera was also assigned a prominent role. The people of the estate were posturing in front of it, proudly singing the *Slave Chorus* from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Nabucco*, thus expressing their indignation at Serebryakov's plan to sell the estate and rob them of their accustomed life. When the masters have left, a servant taps his finger on the camera lid, which is still on: the important moment has not been immortalised for future generations. In Hermanis's production, the theme of the impossibility of unbiased history—such as can be framed in a photo, one might say—the impossibility of history as postured is relevant. The camera took a photo, preserving for future generations an arbitrarily chosen scene—but what kind of scene we don't know. Likewise, we don't know to what extent this photo objectively reflects what was actually going on at that moment.

Thus *Oblomov* relates to the opinion prominent in the 21st century on the impossibility of an objective, official history, preferring subjective life stories of individuals instead. It questions the claim to understand life and art objectively. Framed photos of Oblomov's ancestors hang above his bed. At the beginning of Part II, some of them have fallen down, revealing faded patches on the wallpaper. When Oblomov has a stroke, the photos start falling down faster, until only a couple of them remain on the wall. It seems that past memories are disintegrating, that files are closing down in Oblomov's injured brain. The subjective memory perishes together with the person, leaving nothing for the objective one.

Mythical Light

Hermanis' interprets Oblomov as the different one, the Other. In this sense Kaspar Hauser, from Carol Dürr's play *The Story of Kaspar Hauser*, staged by Hermanis in 2002, is Oblomov's closest relative in Hermanis's oeuvre. The director indicates the otherness of his heroes with an external visual mark. Hauser differs from others in his height, being at least twice as tall as the others (in this performance adults were played by children, who, similarly to the Japanese puppet theatre *bunraku*, were manipulated by actors dressed in dark clothes, therefore invisible). But the nobleman Oblomov is unable to get up from the lair he has made in the sofa. The stage is often covered in semi-darkness, pierced only by the friendly snoring duo of the master and his servant sleeping on the stove. The performance is linked to a large extent with the world of myth, offering the opportunity to read it as a legend, a fairy-tale or a myth. It means that the protagonist is not quite a real man—he is both more and less than that: he lacks the traits of the so-called normal man, but has one exaggerated, almost mythical quality—his extraordinary and prolonged sojourn in the kingdom of sleep. In her review published in the newspaper *Diena*, Zane Radzobe focuses upon the fact that Oblomov's name is Ilya, like Ilya Muromets, the hero of Russian *bylina*, who spent the first 30 years of his life sleeping on the stove. The difference is that the most significant part of Muromets's life is linked to his awakening, but in Oblomov's case it is just the contrary, because he lives his life to its end without waking up properly.

The very placement of such a hypertrophied sleepyhead in the role of protagonist is a challenge to and a simultaneous questioning of today's publicly recognised image of an ideal person, who is industrious, shrewd, workaholic and takes care of his career. Hermanis used the same provocative strategy in 2003 in selecting characters for a performance

created together with actors—*Long Life* (*Garā dzīve*). Under the conditions of the cult of youth, he focused upon 80 and 90 year old lonely retired persons, forgotten by society.

Characteristics of a myth can be identified also in the relationship of Oblomov and his servant Zakhar. Vilis Daudziņš's hero with his caked, longish wig, which constantly gets into his eyes, his fingers crippled by arthritis, incessantly trembling upheld hands like bird's claws, moving around with half-bent knees, apparently because of painful joints, artificially blackened teeth, the poor clothes made from flax waste create an image of him as if an embodiment of a forest spirit. He is both eccentric nanny and playmate to his grown-up master in one person. Not only that, he is also Oblomov's double, his "alter ego", whose emphatically exaggerated submissiveness comically highlights his master's habits and lifestyle. Thus, Zakhar turns into Oblomov's trickster, a parody, even a caricature of his master, underlining his dual—simultaneously sacred and ridiculous—identity.

Another mechanism of non-psychological relationship can be identified, which dictates the relationship between Oblomov and Zakhar—they constitute almost a perfect example of the White and the Red Clown. Hermanis previously structured character relationships according to the laws of the circus in the performance *Sonya* (*Soņa*, 2006), based on Tatyana Tolstaya's story, in which Sonya, played by Gundars Āboliņš, was the White and the Narrator, played by Yevgeny Zamishlayev, the Red Clown.

Alvis Hermanis also challenges the audience with the appearance of his performance: glued on parts, wigs, (Oblomov also has an orange wig), make-up; in Daudziņš's Zakhar's case it even applies to teeth, creating an impression of rotten teeth. Strange, grotesque movements visually remind one of the caricatures of Russian noblemen at the Moscow Art Theatre during the 1930s and 1940s, a period of decline for this theatre. Why did the director need it? They seem to me peculiar masks, which perform at least two functions through the effect of alienation: first, to underline the unrealistic nature of the events, typical of a fairy-tale, myth or legend. Secondly, it helps to create an ironic attitude towards the characters, since these peculiar folk are played by young, attractive men, popular actors, transformed beyond recognition. That irony, mixed with movingly lyrical scenes, creates Hermanis's inimitable, lyrically ironic style.

System of Leitmotifs

From the very beginning of his creative work, Hermanis has never stated his opinion as a director about the on-stage events in his productions directly or unambiguously: his productions for the stage always have two parallel stories developing. The first one is a narrative message, expressed verbally and played through relationships. The second is formed by a complex system of *leitmotifs*, which manifests itself non-verbally—through the changing rhythm of sound, movement, light, intonation, action and speech.

The second attacks the first one, influencing, i.e., changing, i.e., deforming the intellectual content and emotional mood established by it. Thus Hermanis creates, for example, the inimitable emotional intonation of his performance, for which the most accurate description could be lyrically ironic. He turns his performances into conceptually conflicting narratives: the final decision rests with the audience, which can choose as its own one of the possibilities offered or, like the director, respect the simultaneous, different, conflicting opinions of one and the same phenomenon. One should add that the motifs are fragmented: they surface and disappear, to reappear after a while, often in a transformed shape. Such functioning of motifs is determined by the principle of deliberate uncertainty, which leads to difficulties in capturing the meaning and signals the complexity of the world, its ambiguity.

In *Oblomov* the image of sleep carries the most complex connotations. The scenes at lunch-time, when Āboliņš' Oblomov makes several attempts to get out of bed, but falls back helplessly, the way he calls Zakhar, in the halting voice of a sick child, to shake off a speck of dust from a napkin, are, of course, funny. But sleep, or rather Oblomov's connection to sleep, acquires a metaphorical meaning alongside this ordinary one. Moreover, it can be perceived on the metaphorical level in diametrically opposite ways. Sleep denotes a quality which the creators of the performance regard as being very significant and necessary, the absence of which would impoverish the world. There is unofficial, but indubitable information that Hermanis is interested in Buddhism—has been to India, has read relevant literature, and supported the idea of establishing a Buddhist monastery in Latvia. In this context sleep can be read as an image of spiritual contemplation, a Nirvana-like state, embodied by the absolutely attractive favourite of the audience Gundars Āboliņš as an undoubtedly attractive quality. He plays Oblomov as a big—helpless and charming—child, comical in his inadequacy vis-à-vis reality, but disarmingly attractive in his kind of humaneness. By creating an end radically different from that of

the novel, Hermanis emphasises that a being like that, unfortunately, has no future: it is doomed. Oblomov of the novel has a son; following Oblomov's death Stolz and Olga take it upon themselves to bring him up. Oblomov of the performance does not get married and has no successor, but a child, as is well known, is a sign of the future. In the time-space of performance two people mourn the loss of Oblomov—Zakhar has come to his grave to die, but Stoltz, curling up like a foetus, gets into Oblomov's bed. His position testifies of a wish, however impossible, to turn back time, to return to the womb, to be brought back into the world for the second time—no longer as Stoltz, but as Oblomov. Thus, sleep is like primal matter, from which man emerges and to which he returns. (Sand had a similar function in Hermanis's production about Kaspar Hauser.)



Fig. 1-5: Goncharov's *Oblomov*, directed by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, Riga, in 2011. (Left) Gundars Āboliņš as Oblomov, Vilis Daudziņš as Zakhar

With the titular hero of his production in Riga, Hermanis is continuing the theme of values destroyed by globalisation outlined in such performances as *Black Milk* and *Graveyard Party*—cows, traditions and seemingly useless people, different from the mainstream.

Oblomov's infrequent visitors—Kaspars Znotiņš's Terentyev and Ivars Krasts's Doctor, are physically quite active immediately after their arrival. Gradually some kind of invisible force, perhaps the essence of sleep on a

metaphysical level, seems to suck out energy from them. They become slack, start contorting into peculiar, grotesque poses, until they finally sink helplessly into the sofa and collapse there, or, as it were, surreally *merge* with the permanent inhabitant of the bed. They turn and toss and *whirl* while prone, looking for their own lost limbs, attempting to get away. This odd transformation does not affect Zakhar and Stolz, who treat Oblomov kindly. It affects the sly emissaries of the hostile external world, leading us to think about a partial application of the principle of monodrama, i.e. the events are not real, but are seen through Oblomov's eyes. This perception is a novel substantiation of the view of the room as Oblomov's inner space.

Oblomov's room as a peculiar *camera hypnosis* creates associations, unrelated to the basic plotline of the performance, linked with the moral crisis of our society of recent years, caused by a material crisis—but perhaps the sequence of these crises is reversed. Goncharov talks about the magic of sleep and the power of death. Since ancient times, sleep has been construed as the metaphor of death. As a curse, for example, in fairy-tales about bewitched princesses. Latvian writer Andrejs Pumpurs with his epic poem *The Bear Slayer (Lāčplēsis, 1888)* established in Latvian literature the traditions of the Island of Death—asleep, since cursed—which was further developed by the greatest Latvian poet Rainis, using elements from Pumpurs's epic poem plot, in his play *Fire and Night (Uguns un nakts, 1904)*, belonging to the trend of symbolism. The moment in the performance when I became aware of the possible parable of Latvia as the cursed land, because it is asleep, was dreadful. A Latvia which, if we follow the logic of the Island of Death, can be awakened only by love and courage, qualities it has repeatedly missed.

Performance as a Subjective Reality

The interpretation of space is important. Unlike the novel, and the film by Nikita Mikhalkov *A Few Days from the Life of I. I. Oblomov (1979)*, in which Oblomov is seen indoors and also outdoors, all events in the performance are restricted to only one room. It gradually turns into a metaphor for Oblomov's internal space, his consciousness. This principle justifies the subjectivity of the happenings; to a large extent the events and people of the performance are seen through the eyes of the titular hero. Even more, they depend upon processes in Oblomov's consciousness, i.e. the material world changes depending upon his dreams and imagination: both space, by expanding principally, and time, by losing its linearity and

starting to go helter-skelter in a surrealistic way, when chronologically later events come first.



Fig. 1-6: Goncharov's *Oblomov*, directed by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, Riga, in 2011. Ģirts Krūmiņš as Oblomov, Liene Šmukste as Olga

In one of the central episodes Oblomov dreams of himself in his childhood: the door opens, a young boy, seven or eight years old, dressed in a long, white shirt, enters the shabby room. With his entrance hundreds

of yellow sun speckles start running around the ceiling of the gloomy room, and the whole performance environment seems to have become dematerialised, turning into a totality of yellow light. But the boy sits down on the bed where Oblomov is sleeping and reads a chapter from Ivan Goncharov's novel, about a small boy watching estate workers taking a midday nap.

When Oblomov *wakes up*, by falling in love with Olga, the time of the performance also wakes up—it *breaks loose*, starts to hurry, runs ahead, then, having run a circle, returns. This process manifests itself in the following sequence of events: (1) Oblomov starts writing the letter, (2) Olga reads it, (3) writing of the letter that has already been read is completed.

Time stands still and freezes in sacred ecstasy under the influence of Oblomov's love, which transforms Olga into a celestial being, even though we see her as a chubby angel, a puppet-like, giggling doll. To make us feel what Oblomov feels, the director, who has no power to transform our visual impressions, contrary to what Oblomov's consciousness can do, transforms audio impressions: the aria from Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*, sung by Olga in a caricatured, shrill voice turns into an aria performed by an anonymous opera diva, in an immensely beautiful and moving performance, saturating the whole space of the stage. The clock, which has been counting the time since the beginning of the performance, with its ticking at times louder, at times quieter, needed by nobody, stops ticking at the moment the music sounds: time has also stopped in the face of this overwhelming beauty.

In Oblomov's imagination his love is materialised not only in the musical score, but also in creating impossible, functioning material objects. When the hero's feelings reach the climax, a fantastic thing happens in his room, i.e., in his consciousness—an enormous pale violet lilac tree slides through the door; on the bench below it Oblomov will meet Olga.

Norma's aria and lilac blossoms also become important *leitmotifs*. When Oblomov's and Olga's relationship disintegrates, without having formed, the lilac tree disappears, but a branch of lilac lies thrown on the floor near the bed as a souvenir, embodying past love. When Oblomov is dead, unknown hands plant a similar lilac tree on his grave. When the enormous pale violet lilac tree has wilted, the clock has resumed ticking and Oblomov, ruined by his own helplessness, lies in the bed, Zakhar tries to help him—with his back turned, the servant attempts to hum, poorly, as if coughing, the aria from *Norma* beloved by his master. And—a glimpse of a shadow from Nekrošius's performance *Pirosmani* (based upon a play

by Vadim Korostilyov, 1981)—can be seen in Hermanis's production: in it the director's imagination had created a mute servant for the Georgian painter, also a kind of *alter ego*, the only person who understood him, and who, for example, tried to cheer his master in moments of deep depression by playing a moving melody, pressing his lips at the neck of a bottle and blowing.

The scenes with Olga take place against a background of theatrical flats, which Zakhar places in the foreground of the stage: scenes of a park, porches of the manor house and river rapids on the background of serrated mountains. The flats are reminders of either backdrops used in the photo salons of bygone times, or the stage settings for 19th century melodramas. This principle *theatre within theatre* signals the theatricality of Olga's and Oblomov's romance, its probable pretentiousness. But at the same time it triggers a discussion whether the false, the illusion, if experienced truly, does not become more truthful than the real, the unambiguous formula of which nobody can state. The very image if awakening becomes foregrounded as a problem; asking the question, whether love for Olga was Oblomov's awakening or falling into even deeper slumber, i.e., the world of imagination. Because even if the love and the woman who inspired it were just a dream, nevertheless it was the most beautiful experience that Oblomov had had in his life. Thus, it cancels the necessity to look for psychological explanations for Oblomov's actions, when he again buries himself in bed and does not marry Olga, since it is impossible to marry a girl from the screen or the stage, or the realm of one's own imagination. The Olga who comes to visit the indisposed Oblomov is another woman—a chubby and peevish philistine.

Thus, dreams and the imagination manifest themselves as the only places, where a man can be happy. It questions the objective existence of happiness, underlines its illusory character, its total dependence on the inner world of a personality, the ability to believe—in a dream, illusion, fantasy. And consequently the seemingly unreal, this sweet delusion, can become more real than so-called objective reality. This theme was also elaborated in *Sonya*, staged by Hermanis, in which the title hero was played by Gundars Āboliņš. For seven years Sonya loved an imaginary character, Nikolai, created in a letter addressed to her by an evil friend, eager to ridicule. Sonya's love is true, even though the object of her love is nonexistent. Almost provocatively, the supremacy of unreality over reality is emphasised in Hermanis's performance *The Sounds of Silence (Klusuma skaņas, 2007)*. In the prologue of the performance young people sneak into deserted, empty premises which, as for Oblomov, turn into the space of their imagination. There they play out scenes from their parents' youth, the

time of hippies, which they have never seen, just as the concert of Simon and Garfunkel never took place in Riga, even though their music is played in the performance and inspires the actors. At the end of Hermanis's performance *Black Milk (Melnais piens, 2010)*, a Latgalian farmer is swinging idyllically on a swing together with his cow: sometimes he swings up in the air, sometimes it is the actress impersonating the cow. The curtain closes slowly, but they keep swinging and smiling, creating the impression that this will go on forever. We have the right to read this idyllic scene as a dream, since it is preceded by a naturalistic and harsh monologue about slaughtering cows under present conditions.

Hermanis does not strictly separate his scenes of dreams or imagination from the so-called realistic scenes, unless sometimes by using lighting, playing out intense conditions of rapture and ecstasy. On such occasions, grotesque exaggeration serves as a means of alienation, granting to the character ambivalent emotional content—lyrical and ironic simultaneously. This grotesque exaggeration has one more function—to make dreadful seriousness unserious, to face the fact that quite soon, to preserve self-respect, one might have to move totally into the realm of dreams. Or of sleep. And stay there. As an individual, or as a whole nation.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEXT AND CONTEXT: PRODUCTIONS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* THROUGH CHANGING TIMES

EDĪTE TIŠHEIZERE, LATVIA

Abstract: *A Streetcar Named Desire* was one of the few modern Western plays allowed to be staged in the Soviet theatre. The production at the Latvian National Theatre in 1969 was, in fact, breaking the rules of social realism. The play has become deeply rooted in the national consciousness. Society's historical memory and several other circumstances created the context, which made the text of the play sound quite differently. The productions of the 21st century, in their turn, acquired new artistic and theoretical principles, which existed in the European cultural space. These contexts of history, culture and theatre theory, which in various times helped to create different productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, are worth closer examination.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams, national identity, history, social realism, gender, text, context.

Tennessee Williams's plays came to Latvia during the period of Soviet power, under conditions of ideological censorship, but nevertheless became an important part of the national theatre culture. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was performed for an unusually long period of time, 12 years (1969–1981); it was in the repertory of the National Theatre (at the time the Latvian SSR Andrejs Upīts's Academic Drama Theatre), several generations of spectators grew up with it, it turned into one of the stage legends in Latvian theatre history. The next staging of this play followed 15 years after the life of the first production had ended, in what

was already a post-Soviet situation (1996). Two more productions followed (2000, 2009). Thanks to the first production, the play has become deeply rooted in the national consciousness. However, only the distance of time allows us to assess the extent to which the popularity of the production was facilitated by the conditions under which it was created and performed, by society's historical memory and by several other circumstances which as a whole created the context which made the text of the play sound quite differently. The productions of the 21st century, in their turn, acquired a new meaning, due not so much to the spectators' collective consciousness and experience as to the new artistic and theoretical principles which existed in the European cultural space and which Latvian directors could freely use after the fall of the *iron curtain*. These contexts of history, culture and theatre theory, which in various times helped to create different productions of Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, are worth closer examination.

The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at this point does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and the anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue,

Bakhtin, the outstanding Russian semiotician, wrote at the end of his life in his notes *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences* (1979, 384). This postulate held a special meaning in the Soviet cultural space: it was the context, i.e., the experience and knowledge of the audience, as well as their ability to enter the said dialogue, that could turn the text or the direct message of an artwork—be it in literature, theatre, cinema or painting—into an artefact, existing independently of political or ideological demands and censorship. To understand this peculiarity of the Soviet cultural space, one must understand why Tennessee Williams and his plays were so utterly popular in the former Soviet Union, and Latvia as part of it. What was the role of theatre as an art phenomenon in social life?

In the USSR as a closed system, culture and art, as well as mass media, were completely subjected to ideological censorship: any information appearing in official transmissions had undergone limitation and censorship. Even during the relatively liberated 1960s, after the death of Joseph Stalin, as part of the so-called Khrushchev Thaw, the view on what happened in the West was unambiguous and had become a strong formula or cliché: according to the theory of radical Marxism, the proletariat was fighting against the imposed order, and progressive artists displayed that in an adequate and realistic manner, while the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, not being able to deny the crash of the capitalist system, deformed the

consciousness of society with the use of a number of modernist approaches.

This formula defines the information that reached the consciousness of Soviet society. A special, ideologically-controlled organisation called the All-Union Administration for the Protection of Copyrights (*Vsesoyuznoe upravlenie po ohrane avtorskih prav*) purchased literary, musical and dramatic copyrights, translated and, if necessary, censored the works to distribute them across the USSR. It was practically the only way theatres could find out about plays written by foreign authors. This is exactly how, in 1961, the first of Tennessee Williams's early plays—*The Glass Menagerie*, *Orpheus Descending* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*—reached Soviet theatres. They were characterised by two key features that were possible, at least on a verbal level, to adjust to the necessary formula: (1) psychological realism, as a form of expression that corresponded with the demand of social realism to portray life in its own forms; (2) the outrage that the characters of the play encounter, their inability to live in accordance with social norms, which, in turn, corresponded with the demand for an exposé of the capitalist order.

However, these external factors which could be applied to social realism created an opportunity for Soviet-era theatre to stage plays in which an individual and society address the deepest issues of a psychological, gender-related and philosophical nature. While expressing a comprehension in words (mainly in playbills) that the conflicts shown in the performance can only be encountered under the conditions of capitalism, directors and actors, even if in a concealed manner, spoke about issues that *did not exist* in the Soviet Union: homosexuality, escapism, psychopathological states, etc.

In the 1960–1980s, theatre had a special value in Latvia (and the Baltics in general—that is, Lithuania and Estonia as well). Having been incorporated in the USSR only since 1940, they had managed to salvage their language, culture and identity under the conditions of Russification. Theatre, in its turn, as an art of immediate effect and collective perception, was a rewarding field for experiencing this identity or self-awareness in a shared art experience. As the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen stresses, in his description of ways and means of forming collective identity: “Collective experience can be worth fifty arguments. It truly resides in the whole body, not only in the mind” (Ēriksen 2010, 52).

A theatre performance was this kind of collective experience: intellectual, spiritual, sensual at the same time. In especially good and popular stagings their effect can be multiplied by a unified flow of energy and euphoria in a great mass of people. The Latvian language could be

heard in the theatre, nationally significant truths were expressed, which the public easily grasped. Actors and directors were perceived as representatives of the highest ideas, and they had great prestige in society. Theatre became artistic *resistance*.

Belle Rêve: a Dream of Lost Harmony and State

The first staging of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Latvian in 1969 outgrew the limits of a simple show: it was performed for 12 years, people came to see it repeatedly. In accordance with the traditions of repertoire theatre, the performance grew deeper, became more nuanced over these years, yet neither the performers nor the production concept changed. The performance as an artefact influenced society during the whole of the 1970s. Viewed from today's perspective, theatre was perhaps even over-valued in the life of society. It was the time of Leonid Brezhnev's stagnant politics, when the post-war hope of Latvia regaining its status as an independent state had been lost, society had adjusted itself to the situation of doublethink, and those fields of art where subtext, metaphor and allegory were the most important means of expression were especially successful.

Streetcar was staged in the National Theatre by the director Alfrēds Janušāns (1919–2008). The role of Blanche DuBois was played by the outstanding Latvian actress Antra Liedskalniņa (1930–2000). The influence and meaning of the performance can be analysed from several aspects: (1) as a work of psychological realism, in which the acting, structure of staging and visuality directly affect the spectator's emotions; (2) as a story that reaches out to the historical and affective memory of the audience through subtext, and, on a deeper level, relates even to the mythological conceptions of the nation; (3) as an artefact in the collective intellectual and spiritual context of art in the 1970s.

As reported by critics in the 21st century, Janušāns's staging was: "(...) the deepest study of human fate, often as real and surreal as a nightmare" (Dzene 2006, 177). The space was overfilled—objects, furniture, dishes were piled upon each other. All scenes of the action were arranged one after the other on the edge of a revolving stage. While the circle was revolving, the actors moved in the opposite direction, and this synchronised movement, changing one narrow habitation into another, one hysterical action into another, created a hypnotic impression of a useless and aimless, cyclical and never-ending existence. It was a homeless life in a streetcar.

Alfrēds Janušāns, together with the actors, had developed a detailed psychological profile of each role, strictly following Peter Brook's thesis

that a director is bound to observe moral neutrality towards a play's characters. Therefore, the nature of each character and their physical manifestations had a clear causation. Following the Stanislavsky method, the actors had built their roles knowing their characters' past, traumas and motifs dictated by the subconscious: each of them had their own truth and an inwardly justified cause of action. As the director has said in a conversation with the performer of Stanley's role—like a raging bull with his eyes and mind blinded by red mist, he can only have one feeling at a time, see only one truth, and there is only one possibility—using force to destroy that which he finds wrong and harmful. Without depriving Stanley's role of its psychological reasoning, flexibility, nuances and detail, the director used violence and force as the main colours of the character.

Blanche, portrayed by Antra Liedskalniņa, arrived as a representative of civilisation, so much did her beauty and elegance differ from the rest. Even the actress's stage costumes stood out, in their pure colours, against the background of the other actors' greyish, worn-out clothes. Although all the actors performed in one style of psychological realism, Blanche was also distanced from the others with the help of stage plastique and *mise-en-scènes*: she resisted the others' circular motion for a long time, trying to preserve her immobility, to stand outside the circle of the stage and create a void around herself as much as possible.

She avoided contact with other people, so that any physical touch—hugging her sister Stella or holding Mitch's hand—was a sign of special trust. When Stanley rapes Blanche—the director interpreted their sexual act unambiguously—it was a brutal infringement of physical boundaries, the violent demolition of a personality.

Although the director observed “moral neutrality” in the psychological motivation of the characters, the historical memory of the audience influenced the power balance of Williams's play. Blanche DuBois and her lost ancestral home *Belle Rêve* (*Beautiful Dream*) relate on a subtextual level to the common loss of the audience—their state, their national home. In this context, Stanley symbolised the brutal force that violently breaks with the past, to which culture and beauty belong. From this layer of historical allusion emerges another, deeper layer of shared allusions: a masculine, animal power that destroys the feminine, creative, civilised world. Such was the world of interbellum Latvia, perhaps idealised, that existed in the consciousness of the audience.

Although the feminist movement hasn't developed steadily through Latvian history, as early as before World War I women had achieved rights and possibilities for higher education, and were perceived not only



Fig. 1-7: Antra Liedskalniņa as Blanche in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Alfrēds Jaunušans at the Latvian National Theatre, Riga, in 1969

as sustainers of biological life but also as creative personalities. In interbellum Latvia, the opinions of society were greatly affected by the female writers Elza Rozenberga (under a significant alias—Aspazija), and Anna Brigadere, whose fundamental status of a loner and virgin was respected by society; by the handicapped female philosopher Zenta Mauriņa and by the press magnate Emīlija Benjamiņa, who published several magazines and newspapers and directly influenced, among other things, literary processes. The Soviet occupation destroyed this world of female equality: Benjamiņa was deported to Siberia and died of hunger there, Mauriņa emigrated and continued her work in Germany. This world was replaced by a patriarchal system, where women's equality was solely declarative: they could work as bulldozer drivers or astronauts, yet they could not influence political resolutions or take positions in the government. The story of how Blanche DuBois, a Southern beauty, symbol of an old and rich culture, is violently destroyed by Stanley Kowalski, a man without roots, an immigrant, is also, in an allegorical and affective way, a story about the Latvians' destroyed state. This stream of subtext, which in this case is also the socio-political context, cannot be ignored when thinking about the reasons for the popularity and longevity of the performance.

There is no doubt that such a perception narrowed the interpretation of the play. The director had moderated the negative side of Blanche's character—squandering that led to the loss of a home, alcoholism, sexual indecisiveness, seduction of an underaged schoolboy. However, it was exactly this romanticised and idealised image that the audience craved for and what made *Streetcar* a cult performance.

The Silent Hero on Both Sides of the *Iron Curtain*

Exactly because of the enormous response the performance received from the public, it is possible to see it in a broader context of culture and art of that time. The 1970s are a time of bloom for Latvian female poetry and drama. Many copies of several poetry collections by the talented Vizma Belševica are being published, and the female poet and playwright Māra Zālīte is writing her first plays. Their work shows direct parallels with contemporary feminist theories, which were analysed by the Latvian-born American literary scholar and anthropologist Inta Ezergailis in her works *Nostalgia and Beyond* (1998) and *The Woman and the House* (1997). Ezergailis compares Belševica's and Zālīte's works with theories propounded by French feminists, for example, Helene Cixous. As stated in a paper about Ezergailis's essays on Latvian female poets:

We are talking about post-structuralist feminism, which means constructing the female identity with the aid of language. Assuming that, over the course of thousands of years of patriarchy, a woman was deprived of her language, its place was taken by silence, muteness, ellipses and breaks. A woman finds herself in lingual exile. Words, language, notions have been constructed by patriarchy and therefore do not correspond to the deepest feelings of a woman. A female writer lacks terminology, therefore breaks, muteness and forced silence (Avena 1999, 24).

This description can be applied to the analysis of the structure of *Streetcar's* staging, its construction, methods of acting, stage design. Narrative breaks, silence, lack of articulate language, substitution of notions with allegories and metaphors are the means Antra Liedskalniņa uses to reveal Blanche's character. However, the most significant means of expression given to Blanche was—silence. As much as she tried to plastically surround herself with an area of emptiness, she also tried to create an area of silence. During the most tense conflicts or, on the contrary, in moments of greatest candour, Blanche fell silent. She suddenly lapsed into silence when telling Mitch about her youth and the tragic death of her husband. The director gave Blanche one bestial scream of despair when Stanley broke her personality, letting her bottle up afterwards. Only in the final scene, when doctors from the madhouse arrive to take her, Blanche suddenly breaks out of the prison of her own silence. For a very long period of stage time, around five minutes, Blanche dresses herself without saying a word, puts on her gloves, puts on and adjusts her hat, while the doctor waits for her, politely as a Southern gentleman. Then she puts her arm under the doctor's and silently utters a single sentence: "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," and, guided by the doctor, slowly steps off the stage and leaves through the audience.

It has to be noted that Blanche's silence had, at times, a rather Soviet reason, which the director turned from a defect into an effect. Namely, the homosexuality of Blanche's husband had been censored in the play. This notion was a taboo in the social space of the Soviet era, and, for this reason, this motif was also cut. When talking about the tragedy of her youth, Blanche suddenly fell silent, covered her ears, and, in this silence, an inappropriately cheerful polka started playing, which was cut off by a gunshot. Such a course of the scene had a strong influence on the affective memory of the audience, developing allusions which were foreseen neither by the author nor by the censorship. For the viewers, some of whom had experienced deportation, the abolition of the Latvian army, and people's sudden and mysterious disappearances, this silence reminded them of

historical events that had occurred only a few decades ago, one generation earlier.

Only the distance of time allows us to compare the experience of Latvian theatre in the Soviet years with the theoretical and analytical works of Western authors from the same period, revealing how much these cultural spaces, separated by the *iron curtain*, had in common. Yet sometimes a manifestation in both the aforementioned cultural spaces is a sign of something quite different, even contrary. The silence of the protagonist is one among such manifestations.

In 1988, looking back at the time when Blanche, played by Antra Liedskalniņa, keeps silent on a Latvian stage, Robert Brustein wrote about the new, inarticulate hero, which had found the most vivid manifestations in the staging and screen production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the study *America's New Culture Hero: Feelings without Words* he characterises the antipole of Blanche—Stanley Kowalsky:

The stage, motion pictures, television, and even popular music are now exalting an inarticulate hero, who—for all the dependence of these media on language—cannot talk. (...) He squeezes, he grunts, he passes his hand over his eyes and forehead, he stares steadily, he turns away, he scratches, then again faces his adversary, and finally speaks. What he says is rarely important but he has mesmerised his auditor by the effort he takes to say it. He has communicated not information but feeling; he has revealed an inner life of unspecified anguish and torment (Brustein 1988, 7).

Thus Stanley, as embodied by Marlon Brando, turning him into a concrete social type, with predecessors in the plays of Eugene O'Neill and his successors, in the American art of the 1950–1970s: social outcasts, who, in their revolt against culture and society, are agonizingly trying to attract attention. In a completely different historical, political and social situation, the inarticulate hero wins over the audience's compassion. Congested, verbally inexpressible feelings, with deep but—for the spectators—understandable reasons, lead to empathy and compassion, create the dialogue, the light, that illuminates the posterior and the anterior, as Bakhtin described it in his notes. And this dialogue between the text and the context, in a paradoxical way, unites protagonists on the opposite sides of the *iron curtain*.

***A Streetcar Named Desire* in the Context of Postmodern and Postdramatic Theatre**

Alfrēds Janušans's production and its established tradition of perception might have scared any other director away from working with this play: in the Soviet situation. As long as the topic of homosexuality in the play was censored, it was hard to imagine a staging that could be fundamentally different from the legend created in 1969. The possibilities of subtext and context were also almost completely explored by Janušans's performance. Therefore, the next important staging of *Streetcar* took place in Latvia more than 30 years later, already in the situation of post-Soviet culture.

A quite notorious staging of *Streetcar* was made by Valdis Liepiņš in 2000 in one of the biggest and most prestigious theatres of Latvia—the Daile Theatre. Williams's play was interpreted in categories of postmodernism, essentially tearing down the borders between opposites: male/female, good/evil, ethical/non-ethical, love/death. The thesis of Latvian theatre researcher Silvija Radzobe has to be acknowledged, when she says that in Latvia and the former Soviet cultural space in general, postmodernism emerges as a denial not of modernism (for there is simply no such stylistic variety in the experience of Eastern European artists), but of social realism as an ideologised and canonised form of psychological realism (Radzobe 2004, 150). In Latvia more than in the West, postmodernism manifested itself as a way of thinking that lets one question both imaginary and substantial values; combine styles, form, philosophy, psychology in any way; toy with any notion, idea or object.

Valdis Liepiņš not only refused to follow the tradition of 1969, but deconstructed the play as such, stressing some and ignoring other elements of it. The form of the performance was plastic and flexible, it developed in space and time, reminiscent of Robert Wilson's visual theatre; the methods used in the production were part of what Hans-Thies Lehmann defined as *postdramatic theatre*. Especially expressive was the conceptual layer of the performance which was created by spoken text, music, voices, noises, and what Lehmann calls *soundscape*, categorically dividing it from the musical score of realistic theatre that derives from text and stage direction.

The space and time of the play is changed from New Orleans in the 1940s to New York at the turn of the last century. The city was a separate and independent character in the performance: dynamic, rhythmically pulsating in the rhythms of rock music and neon lights, full of sexual permissiveness and hysteria, embodied in plastic interludes—the dancing of revue girls and streetwalkers. Blanche was blatantly out of place in these surroundings, her stylistically subtle, white, Marilyn-Monroe-like



Fig. 1-8: Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Valdis Liepiņš at the Daile Theatre, Riga, in 2000. Indra Briķe as Blanche, Andris Vilcāns as Mitch

costumes looking provincial next to Stella's black gothic image. Moreover, the director freely introduced motifs from other Williams works into the play, for example, Mitch's character becomes a double of Val Xavier—artist, seducer, the stranger from *Orpheus Descending*. He has come to reveal a glimpse of another, better existence to the frustrated, provincial Blanche, who has no place in Stella and Stanley's inner-city apartment where there is no hint of constraint or poverty. Mitch's—*Val's*—relation to *Orpheus* is even more grounded by the fact that his role was played not by a professional actor, but by a professional musician, the author of the musical score for the performance. Mitch and Blanche's meeting was developed outside of the text, in a plastic episode—not a short conversation that lasts a cigarette, but a tender and sensual love scene, metaphor of a flight, a reminder of the footless birds in *Orpheus Descending* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* that could only rest while sleeping on the wind, and land only when they are dead. Therefore, Stanley was twice as violent towards Blanche—by interrupting her flight with Mitch and by rudely confronting her with his prosaic, urban, mechanistic world. In fact, the centre of this interpretation was the contrasts of the male, not the female essence. On one hand the biological, mentally destructive force,

represented by Stanley oriented merely towards physical reproduction. On the other, man as demiurge, the uplifting force that cannot be consistent with daily life, epitomised by Mitch.

The women, Blanche and Stella, were dependent on men as the bearers of both sensual and spiritual energy. In any of her features, a woman was merely the appendix of a man; Stella, who tried to resist Stanley's physical attraction, was, however, slavishly addicted to it; the provincial Southern beauty Blanche sought a man's shoulder to rely on, but turned out to be unworthy of the charismatic and creative spirit of Mitch. Another hypostasis of a woman were the streetwalkers who existed in the performance space as a perpetual refrain and represented the biologically lowest part of femininity, openly purchasable. The finale of the performance was also significant. It was not Blanche's tragic departure for her last resort, the madhouse. Blanche, still wearing the wig and dress of Monroe's look-alike, sits in a separated area on one of the levels of the stage construction and watches television, where her dance with Mitch is shown over and over again—the flight, now a work of art and therefore immortal. The poetics of the performance were intricate and multilayered, but the director's idea was very clear: it is the male creative force that brings peace and harmony to the world.

This chronicle of stagings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* under varying social, political and informational circumstances lets one come to a paradoxical conclusion: in the circumstances of ideological censorship, when the opinion of society was deliberately estranged from sexual issues, theatre was able to reveal problems of women and femininity in a wider philosophical, historical, social and gender context. The production of the turn of the centuries wasn't affected by ideological censorship and the director had unlimited possibilities to obtain information about the contemporary tendencies of art, philosophy and anthropology. Nevertheless it was concentrated solely on one aspect of the female essence—the biological. Woman was interpreted not as a gender, but merely as a sex, and the conflict of the play was developed in patriarchal traditions: as a woman's *natural* subordination to the inferiority of the man and the rules of his game, or the inevitable defeat when trying to rise against this order.

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CHAPTER SIX

ANDRIS DZENĪTIS'S OPERA *DAUKA*: THE INTERPRETATION OF TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY OPERA

ILZE ŠARKOVSKA-LIEPIŅA, LATVIA

Abstract: The production of works by younger generation of Latvian composers is not a frequent occurrence at the Latvian National Opera. The last years, however, have marked changes in this respect. The season of 2012/2013 was launched with Andris Dzenītis's opera *Dauka* (based on the story *Crazy Dauka* by Sudrabu Edžus). *Dauka*'s theme clearly reverberates with the range of narratives typical of many Western 20th century operas, centring on compassion towards the weak (often, the artist's fate in a society where material values dominates). Dzenītis's opera to a large extent continues the trend that allocates a rather significant place to the textual, or narrative, revelation of the idea. *Dauka* reflects a main tendency in European opera houses, in which music is only one element among many, where the directing is based upon the interpretation of the idea and plot collisions. Latvian opera theatre is thus turning into a theatre of directing, rather typical of the 20th and 21st century, in which the dramatic theatre becomes enshrined in *pure opera*.

Keywords: Latvian opera, Latvian contemporary music, text in music.

Works by Latvian opera composers staged during the last decades represent various styles and approaches to musical material, from monumental epics to psychological period drama, from multimedia avant-garde performance to postmodern musicals, from the interpretation of Biblical or classical themes to plots from contemporary literature for children. The persons staging the operas also cover an extensive range of attitudes towards the text, which in the context of opera as a genre is an

especially multi-layered and complex category, being attributable to components of various levels and specific features.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, composers' treatment of the text has undergone rather fast changes, varying from a relatively accurate following of the text's intonations to deconstruction of the text; from attempts to reveal accurately the essence of the text's content, its meaning and subtexts, to using the text only in the role of a phonetic, auditory element. Thus, the treatment of the verbal text pertains to these three main aspects: semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure) and phonetic (sound).

The opera music of Latvian composers in the 20th century retains the traditional approach to text, with the dominance of the semantic (meaning) aspect. Due to various political and ideological circumstances (the age of colonisation, the period of Latvian national consolidation, the evolution of national ideology and the sense of being under threat, the need for national self-preservation up till the end of the 20th century), factors external to the music have always held special relevance in Latvian music: topical ideas are expressed in both verbally musical and purely musical form. Not in vain have a number of Latvian composers defined as one of their main creative tasks the objective "to speak in their native language" in their music. At the end of the 1980s Pēteris Vasks emphasised going into the world as being of utmost importance—to talk in our mother tongue, to tell about the most important, essential things for us, about our sorrows and joys. Since the 1960s *Aesop's language* was used in music in a sophisticated way: meaningful elements were used—European languages as the textual basis, musical stylisations or specific musical quotes. These and other techniques created in the audience a certain flow of associations, reminding them of the world *outside the socialist reality* or the world *prior to it*—the world before World War II.

Changes in the influence of narrative can be identified already in the mid-1990s, when a new generation—the generation of composers born in the 1970s—comes on the stage, to which composer Andris Dzenītis (1978) also belongs. Already in the mid-1990s it tried to position itself as an alternative to the musical traditions of Latvia's recent past and follow in the steps of the post-war avant-garde, which because of ideological considerations had been impossible under the conditions of the Soviet regime. Composer Jānis Petraškēvičs wrote:

The link with the traditional colours of Latvian music is dissolved, in favour of integrating various stylistic and aesthetic features, while the national element more likely remains an unconscious by-product, not a conscious musical category (Petraškevičs 2003, 30).

The audio material itself has now turned into an idea—self-sufficient, based only upon the aesthetics of sound. Among the composers of his generation—avant-garde followers Jānis Petraškēvičs, Santa Ratniece and a number of others, Dzenītis is nevertheless of a different persuasion, having a simultaneous sense of belonging to the previous generations (Pēteris Vasks, Maija Einfelde and others). Composer and musicologist Santa Bušs states:

Dzenītis begins work on every new composition with the message or narrative—everything in his music is derived from an idea, a character, and a story, clearly formulated to himself (Bušs 2011, 27).

Mastering various technologies, Dzenītis unites contemporary avant-garde means with traditional concepts. His world of sounds is dramatically saturated, harsh, expressive, contrasting, filled with exaggerated colours and emotions.

The production of works by younger generation Latvian composers is not a frequent occurrence at the Latvian National Opera. The last five years, however, have seen marked changes in this respect. The season of 2012/2013 was launched with a new work, Andris Dzenītis's opera *Dauka*. This follows a series of productions of works by young Latvian authors, which started a few years ago—Ēriks Ešenvalds's (1977) *Joseph is a Fruitful Bough* (2007), the collaborative work *The Irrepressible*, and the joint multimedia work by the French composer Gilbert Nuno (1970) and the young Latvian composer Santa Ratniece (1977) *War Sum Up* (2011), thus showcasing the creative potential and diversity of young composers.

Dzenītis's new work *Dauka* allows us to identify a couple of features typical of Latvian music, opera productions and text interpretation in the broader context of opera music, first of all as regards impetus for ideas and original samples of texts.

The plot chosen by the composer is based upon the story *Crazy Dauka* (*Dullais Dauka*), written in 1900 by Sudrabu Edžus. This writer is far from being a mega-star in Latvian literature; his name is mentioned in its history predominantly because of the said work. His protagonist, a boy (or youth) living in a poor fishing village, has lost his father and is cared for by his mother and guardian. *Dauka* is inquisitive and obsessed with the question of the Earth circling around the Sun. Searching for an answer, he turns to the priest, to school teachers, to other people around him. His curiosity and unsuccessful quest for the horizon, when he runs away out to sea on his own in a boat, has earned him the nickname *Crazy Dauka*. The thirst for knowledge, high school, lack of understanding among others, physical and emotional abuse, the boy's unwillingness to blend into the

surrounding community and join a primal fight for survival by following the craft of an underpants maker, are the reasons that force him into the unknown, in search of the place where the earth meets water. Once he sets out towards it across the ice-frozen sea... This story, known to every Latvian from school days, carries an archetypal load—Latvian literature has plenty of sad stories about schoolboys who face the harsh reality of life or society, neglecting mental longings or kindness of heart. The child of Latvian fishermen or farmers, or *the pale youth, the widow's son*, who has to suffer or perish, has created a rather typical perception of a Latvian in the society of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century—one of the first among the industrious intellectuals of the enlightenment: the prototype of an artist whose longings find no resonance in society.



Fig. 1-9: Andris Dzenītis's *Dauka*, directed by Ināra Slucka at the Latvian National Opera, Riga, in 2012

Thus, it is no surprise that the theme of *Dauka* has been taken up in Latvian culture a number of times. Starting with animation (a successful animation film studio in Riga is even called *Dauka*) and ending with dramatic theatre and music, this character has been enshrined in both dramatic and avant-garde versions (for example, the variation of the *Dauka* theme in the play *Crazy* by Krista Burāne and director Mārtiņš Eihe, staged at the Daile Theatre in 2011).

Dauka's theme clearly reverberates with the range of narratives typical of many Western 20th century operas, centring on compassion towards the weak and helpless (often an artist's fate in a society where material values dominate). Preference is given to the real world; or, quite to the contrary, ageless characters and plots enter operas (for example, Orpheus or Prometheus). In this sense the character of Dauka in the Latvian context is quite close to that of a mythical hero, who has not lost his relevance in the course of time, with the changes of political regimes and ideologies.

Dzenītis states:

In my imagination Dauka is not so much the embodiment of an individual's conflict with the grey mass of people, but rather the collision between art and the reality of this world. Art, an artist will never find the correct and absolute answers—they just do not exist. (...) the truth of art is distant, like the unreachable, ever receding horizon (...). There will always be those who, upon seeing a contemporary, controversial work of art, will mutter quietly: "An idiot!" Isn't art and those linked to it always perceived as being peculiar? (Dzenītis 2012)

The generalisation of the character is emphasised by the fact that Dauka's role is allocated to a baritone, an adult, but in the video projection, rather disturbingly, Dauka is played by an old man (fragment from Act I, Dauka's boat-flight towards the horizon). The characters of the video projections live and reside in a contemporary environment—a poor, Godforsaken corner.

It is noteworthy that the libretto of Dzenītis's opera was created by the man currently named as the most brilliant and mature Latvian poet of the young generation—Kārlis Vērdiņš (1979). His text deals with the plot line in a condensed way, including elements of both prose and poetry, yet rather accurately implementing the traditional plot line and flow of events, thus giving resources for creating diverse musical material. Monologues and dialogues are presented in a tense, dissonant interval structure, very carefully ensuring the enunciation of every word (the opera is in Latvian) and highlighting the intonations of incessant questions. Only occasionally, when a different treatment of the text appears (the boys' choir scene, learning letters under the teacher's supervision in Act I; the singing of the carol in an archaic interpretation of the language; the song of the German girl, a young baroness, at the beginning of Act II; the grotesque ensemble in Act II, in which Dauka is involved in a discussion of the merits of underpant making; or the epically presented legend of the Emperor's son, who discovered the naked truth) does the musical material acquire features of stylisation—the text of the boys choir is presented in a polyphonic

imitation for two voices or typical presentation of chorale, the girl sings a strophic song in German. The use of language thus brings in a contrast, not only as to the content, but also aesthetically, while the text of the legend is embodied as an epic ballad.

The general development of the musical material is based upon the continuity principle, which prevents the actions, the texts sung by the characters, or the musical process from stopping—the text of the music grows from one sound in unison (introduction to the opera) and masters the space in waves, up to the ultimate registers, making the low registers of metal wind instruments collide with the warm, emotional tones of woodwind and stringed instruments, contrasting the cold indifference of the world with the humanely alive childhood world.



Fig. 1-10: Andris Dzenītis's *Dauka*, directed by Ināra Slucka at the Latvian National Opera, Riga, in 2012

The composer grants a pace of its own to the actions of the opera, its individual flow of time—slow, incessant, unrelenting, creating associations with the sea. The sea—grey and infinite—is the associative component of the performance, visualised also in video projections. In the beginning the orchestra creates an ambiguous, saturated background which turns into the driving force of the action, by the end of the opera conceptually moving into the foreground with an extensive instrumental closing, an ecstatic

apotheosis of the whole concept, which is also known as Dzenītis's stand-alone symphonic work—*Postlude Ice*. The verbal musical version is replaced, purely musical means of expression take over, together with a change in the colour palette of the video projection—from consistently black and white throughout the entire opera to the brilliant colours of sunrise during *Postlude*. As a whole, *Dauka* is a pronouncedly orchestral opera, as the material intended for singers is rather homogenous, symbolically grey and harsh; while the main contrasts and the idea are shouldered by the orchestra's part.

The video projections also carry a certain content load, becoming one of the most significant elements of the performance. They function as part of the stage design and become an important part of the opera score with their own independent plot line and textual interpretation (at times the hero of the video projection, the boy character *Dauka*, simultaneously voices mute text, sung by the singer). The dynamic activity and saturation of the video projections balances out the static nature of certain of the sung opera characters, which is more typical of concert performances.

As a whole the performance acquires the outlines of an extraordinarily balanced, monolithic creation: all its components work, with each of them having its own, individual line, but together they create a strong and reciprocally reinforcing effect. Here it is worth recalling that the Latvian National Opera to a great extent continues Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) operatic tradition (connected with the fact that the composer was present in Riga in the capacity of Kapellmeister, 1837–1839). These traditions propose opera as “a form for synthesis of the arts”, in which the sum total of all components (music, dramaturgy, directing) functions organically, with music at its apex. Simultaneously the repertory of the National Opera reflects the main trends in European opera houses, positioning itself as a producer's opera, allocating a significant place to new, contemporary versions of the traditional, classic opera repertory. This has been achieved by inviting directors who have entered opera from the dramatic, *spoken* theatre. They are the ones who determine the specifics in the production of operas by Latvian composers, in which music is only one element among many, where the directing is based upon the interpretation of the idea, plot collisions and text. Thus, Latvian opera theatre is turning into a *theatre of directing*, rather typical for the 20th century, in which the dramatic theatre becomes enshrined in the *pure opera*.

It is worth noting the almost symbolic appearance of director Alvis Hermanis in the capacity of opera director in the new theatre building following its reconstruction. In 1995, he directed a production of the epic, monumental Latvian opera classic by Jānis Mediņš, *Fire and Night* (1913–

1919), based on the famous play by the outstanding Latvian poet Rainis—historical and contemporary at the same time, with multi-layered and controversial content.

Dzenītis's opera, following Latvian opera tradition, to a large extent continues the trend that allocates a rather significant place to the textual, narrative, revelation of the idea, reinforced by involving Ināra Slucka, an actress and director from a dramatic theatre, in the production.

The path of opera composers of smaller national schools towards international audience has always been problematic, mainly due to the language barrier. However, with *Dauka* the composer continues his consistent search for national identity, which can be read in all elements of the opera (in its use of the Latvian language, the archetypal recognisability of characters and the utilisation of central cultural codes, the slowed down pace of the opera, the colour palette of the stage design, the traditionalism of the musical language and the reference to the beginning of the 20th century and the highly-strong emotional quality of the music). These all are indubitable values, not only in the context of Latvian opera, but also in a broader international context.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

OBSERVATIONS ON THE USES OF TEXT IN THE CHINESE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

PENG TAO, CHINA

Abstract: Text is not an isolated concept in classical Chinese aesthetics. Speech and mind are unified; text and theme are unified. Both are manifestations of the artist's heart and soul. In the traditional Chinese theatre, the author does not simply pursue the beauty of the words, but the overall artistic concept. Within this concept, the text itself, the performance of the actors, the music, the customs—all play a part. This study will attempt to analyze two cases: the first, *The Peony Pavilion* (2004, produced by the well known Chinese writer, Pai Hsien-yung) is from a leading contemporary traditional theatre in China. In this play, the original classical script is completely unaltered. The performance and the classical poetic scripts are integrated seamlessly. It demonstrates the pursuit of *harmony*, the highest aesthetic value in the traditional Chinese theatre. The second case is *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot* (1998, directed by the leading director Lin Zhaohua). In this drama production, the director has interwoven Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* into one play. The production gained artistic success even though it was a box office failure. Chekhov's text and Beckett's were both significantly abridged by the director. In the production we can see that the scripts are presented as two split parts, one from Chekhov and the other from Beckett. We can also sense the director's own inner conflict and split, which, essentially, is the same inner conflict and anguish as that of the contemporary Chinese intellectuals of the 1990s.

Keywords: Chinese traditional concept, theatrical text, *Three Sisters*, Chinese contemporary stage, youth version of *The Peony Pavilion*.

In Chinese classical art of aesthetic concepts, the art work renders the artist's inner world of the soul. In the theatrical art, there are three ways to present an artist's soul: *body*, *speech* and *mind*. The *body* refers to the actor's physical performance, and all the other material elements of the stage, including costumes, props and so on. The *speech* refers to the dramatic text, music and singing. The *mind* refers to the dramatic content of the work: the theme, the *mood* and all other elements.

The highest pursuit of Chinese classical aesthetics is a search for harmony between nature and man. The theatrical text belongs to the *speech* category, which is the way for the playwright to express his inner world. In the classical Chinese theatre, the body performance, dance, singing, dialogue of the actors as well as the music—they are all the construction elements that the playwright uses to express his inner world. Here, I want to introduce two plays which represent contemporary work in China: one is the dramatic production, *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot*; the other is the traditional opera *The Peony Pavilion*. Let us examine how the text relates to the whole performance.

The dramatic production, *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot*, premiered in 1998, directed by the renowned Chinese director Lin Zhaohua. Western scholars have written about the influences of Chekhov upon modern theatre, especially upon the Theatre of the Absurd; Lin Zhaohua combined *Three Sisters* with *Waiting for Godot* through his intuition—not as a result of deliberate academic research. The reason why Lin Zhaohua combined *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot* together lies in his thoughts and feelings involved in the theme—“waiting”, which hides in both of the plays. In *Three Sisters*, there is a kind of longing for the hometown of Moscow—for the beautiful life and the future. Lin Zhaohua says that this represents the “classical waiting”. On the other hand, the theme of *Waiting for Godot*, or “waiting for Godot who will never arrive”, is “modern”.

In the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals experienced a painful period. After the Cultural Revolution, the political movements made them feel depressed; the illusion of constructing a Western democratic political system encountered once again frustration and disillusionment. In their deepest of hearts, the intellectuals experienced a widespread crisis of belief, a crisis of painful value choice. They began to think about Chinese culture and history, to examine and compare it with the complicated elements of the Western cultural system. *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot* came into life in such an environment.

“The Cultural Revolution” not only demolished the Confucian cultural tradition, but also led to a kind of belief crisis of the whole nation. There will not be any God in the heart of the Chinese people, who can save the

world. Neither religion nor the ideals of humanism will ever arouse enough enthusiasm in the Chinese people. If the absurd feeling in the heart of Vladimir and Estragon comes from the saying, “God is dead”—from disappointment about materialism—then the common and true absurdity in the heart of the Chinese people comes from skepticism. The political enthusiasm of the Chinese people who were ready to give and sacrifice in the Cultural Revolution had died out. People felt cheated—nothing can reliably be believed in.

Indeed, the Chinese intellectuals of the 1990s are all “waiting” and “depressed”. What is called “classical waiting”, essentially, a belief in a kind of ultimate value to be found in the mundane life, is the waiting for a beautiful future; the “modern waiting” on the other hand, is an agitated and depressed waiting following the loss of belief in the ultimate value. Lin Zhaohua’s *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot* hovers between the “classical waiting” and the “modern waiting”, between the expectations of the beautiful future life and the depression of the reality, between the belief of the humanist ideal and the doubt.

The stage designer put a pond on the stage. Olga, Masha, Irina live on a lonely island on the water. The image of the “lonely island” stands for the provincial town far away from Moscow. At the same time, it is a metaphor for the loneliness and depression of Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s.

Lin Zhaohua made extensive cuts to the text of Chekhov. What he kept was only the figures such as Olga, Masha, Irina, Tuzenbach, Vershinin. The actors who played Vershinin and Tuzenbach also played Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. In the cold grotesque production of Lin Zhaohua, the spiritual connotations of Chekhov’s play were kept in an unimaginable way, i.e., as summarised by Nemirovich-Danchenko: the depression caused by longing for “the beautiful life”.

While Irina calls out “to Moscow! to Moscow! to Moscow!” on the lonely island, Vladimir is helping Estragon to remove the boot from his foot. On one side, the characters of Chekhov are debating as to what the life of human beings would be like, after two or three hundred years; on the other side, Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon are quarrelling with each other, killing time in boredom.

The fragments of *Three Sisters* were constantly interrupted by the fragments of *Waiting for Godot*. Two different voices rise in the heart of the director: on one hand, it is the voice of Chekhov—the expectation and belief in the beautiful future of human life; on the other hand, it is the absurd mockery of the characters of Beckett about the existence of human beings.

Chekhov's text and Beckett's text were significantly abridged by the director. In the production, we can see that the scripts are presented as two split parts: one part is from Chekhov and the other part from Beckett. We can also sense the director's own inner conflict and split, which is the same inner conflict and anguish of the Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s.

Another case is *The Peony Pavilion*. This is a romantic masterpiece in Chinese opera history. In 2004, Pai Hsien-yung, the renowned Chinese writer, living in the United States, planned, created and rehearsed the youth version of *The Peony Pavilion*. He invited over 80 excellent artists from China's mainland and Taiwan to form the most powerful team. The author of *The Peony Pavilion*, Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) was one of the greatest dramatists of ancient China, and also a contemporary of Shakespeare.

The play has the following story: one day, Du Liniang, daughter of an upper-class family, is watching the spring, accompanied by a servant girl, in the garden of her own house. She sees the beautiful views of all the spring flowers, and in her heart there is a longing for love and sex. After her walk, she falls into a deep sleep in the garden. In her dream, she meets a young man (Liu Mengmei) with a willow branch in his hand. In other words, the two young people meet each other in the dream. With the help of the Flower fairies, they sleep with each other. When she wakes up from her dream, Du Liniang longs for the lover in her dream, day and night. She falls ill because of the heartache and longing. Before her death, she paints a self-portrait and asks her family to bury her under the plum tree. At the same time, Liu Mengmei, the young scholar, dreams of a girl (Du Liniang), who stands under the plum tree and tells him that they both have a destiny of marriage.

Three years later, Liu Mengmei goes to the capital city for an imperial examination. By the Peony Pavilion, he finds the self portrait of Du Liniang and falls in love with the girl in the portrait. The ghost of the soul of Du Liniang is moved by the love of Liu Mengmei and goes to his bedroom. She says that she is the neighbour who lives nearby. The two young people live together ever since. Afterwards, the ghost of Du Liniang tells him her real identity saying that if he digs up her coffin, she will come back to life. With the help of a Taoist shaman, Liu Mengmei digs out the coffin. Du Liniang indeed comes back to life, and after an intricate story they are married in the real world.

The original work of Tang Xianzu consists of 55 scenes. While keeping the essence of the original work, Bai Xianyong, when putting it on stage, shortens it to 29 scenes. The performance consists of three parts, all together lasting more than 9 hours. It was played on three consecutive



Fig. 1-11: *The Peony Pavilion*, produced by Pai Hsien-yung at Su-Zhou Kunqu Opera Theatre, Su-Zhou, in 2004. Yu Jiu-Lin as Scholar, Feng Ying-Shen as Belle

evenings. Since 2004, the production has been shown in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, England, Greece and America almost 200 times, and was highly praised by both audiences and critics.

Bai Xianyong made cuts to the text while maintaining loyalty to the original play. Tang Xianzu, the author of the original work, aimed at praising “love” as part of human nature. He did this in order to fight against his contemporaries’ (those who lived in 17th century China) understanding of Confucian doctrine and the doctrinal understanding of morality. With the text of Bai Xianyong, the play is also about the theme of “love”. Part I is about the “dream of love”; part II—about the “love between man and ghost”; part III—about “love in the human world”.

Here, we will try to analyze the most famous scene “the interrupted dream” in the text: After her walk in spring, Du Liniang returns to her bedroom and falls into a deep sleep. In her dream, the Flower fairies bring a young man, Liu Mengmei, into her dream. The young people fall in love with each other and have sex. The sex scene is depicted through metaphor and suggestion. Tang Xianzu wrote a lot of erotic poetry. In the stage play, Bai Xianyong made discreet cuts to the original text. From the overview, he keeps the original pattern of the text.

Let us see the following part of the stage text:

Scholar:

Ah! Lady

I have looked all over

Here you are!

Just in the garden I plucked

A willow branch.

Lady, you are versed in poetry

Why not compose an ode in praise of this willow branch.

Belle:

I have never met that man

Why is he here?

Scholar:

Lady, my heart is filled with love for you.

(singing to the tune of Red Peach in the Mountain)

Because of your beauty that flowers

With the flowing of time.

I sought you everywhere. But

You languish in your chamber.

Lady, let’s talk over there.

Belle:
Where?

Scholar:
Well... around this peony lattice,
Tight by the pond side hill;
Undo our collar buttons,
And loosen our sashes
Bite the ends of your sleeve
And bear with this tender sleep.
Have we met somewhere before?
Gazing at each other,
As we come together, wordless in this wonderful place.
(*enter* Flower fairies)

Fairies:
Shining sky over glorious scene,
Myriad purple and red in bloom,
Like jewels set in latticed railing.
Coloured clouds surrounding all.
To oversee the guarding of flowers,
Less they are scattered by morning breezes.
Let beauty and gallant
Rejoice in their dream.
The pond side hills, pond side hills,
Veiled by clouds and misty rain.
Beyond latticed railing, latticed railing
Red and green gowns turn in pairs,
Rousing restless bees and courting butterflies
Destiny of the “thrice-born stone”,
Is not only a dream,
But a dream of fairyland,
Taking both by joyous surprise.

Scholar:
This brief moment is made in heaven
Pillowed on grass, bedded on flowers
Red petals dot billowing hair,
Jade hairpin loose to one side.
Holding you tight ever so tender,
Flesh to flesh to mould into one
Such sun-rouged allure damp with rain
Splendid!
I must leave but long to stay,
Gazing at each other, wordless
As we come together in this wonderful place

Lady you are tired
 Rest a while
 I will go now.

It is: I leave with love like spring's gentle rain...
 Wonderful!
 She sleeps under clouds of witch's Mount."

The Flower fairies, from a spectator's point of view, suggest and describe a metaphor of the sex scenes between the young man and woman: "Beyond latticed railing, red and green gowns turn in pairs, rousing restless bees and courting butterflies..."

In the following paragraphs, Liu directly recalls the sexual love scenes of the two:

This brief moment is made in heaven
 Pillowed on grass, bedded on flowers
 Red petals dot billowing hair,
 Jade hairpin loose to one side.
 Holding you tight ever so tender,
 Flesh to flesh to mould into one.

Via the Flower fairies' indirect description and Liu's direct memory, the love scenes of the two are in the dream presented to the audience.

The poet integrates the sexual love scene with the spring scenery of nature in the garden, and thus depicts his attitude toward love: it is part of human nature.

From this part of the performance we can see that all the means employed on the stage, including the performance of the actors, the music and costume are intended to depict the conception and the connotation of the theatrical text. The theatrical text merges harmoniously with the stage performance of the actors.

So far, we have analysed two different performances. For *The Peony Pavilion*, the dramatic mood of the text provided the core of the show. Or, we can say, the performance of the actors, the text and the whole performance are in a harmonious relationship. But in the production, *Three Sisters / Waiting for Godot*, we sense that the text of the drama itself is fragmented and full of conflict. The encounters and the division reflect the director's own inner conflict.

From the point of view of Chinese ancient theatre aesthetics, the "dramatic text" points to the inner world which is constructed by the author and the actors of the play. I would like to illustrate this relationship

between the “dramatic text” and the “inner world of the author of the play”, with an ancient Oriental tale:

It is like when someone points his finger at the moon to show it to someone else. Guided by the finger, that person should be looking at the moon. If he looks at the finger instead, and mistakes it for the moon, he loses not only the moon, but the finger also.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AT THE CROSSROADS OF TEXTS: KRISTIAN SMEDS'S VERSION OF PAUL AUSTER'S *MR VERTIGO* AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF FINLAND

PIRKKO KOSKI, FINLAND

Abstract: The essay examines Paul Auster's *Mr Vertigo* at the Finnish National Theatre as an example of how the postdramatic discourse contributes to the understanding of a "dramatic" performance with "postdramatic" stylistic features, and, in addition, reviews the consequences of playing with theatrical presence. It first focuses on the space, then explores the story itself and the manner in which it unfolds through individual theatrical images, and as a conclusion, analyzes the performance in the light of "stage presence". In *Mr Vertigo*, adapted and directed by Kristian Smeds, the audience is initiated into the process of artistic creation: the physical struggle, the overcoming of self, and the burden of stardom. The line between reality and fiction is revealed, blurred and erased. The tale of Walt the Wonder Boy and his companions becomes a dramatic narrative in which fact and fiction merge to create a mesmerising theatrical tour-de-force. Auster's classically American story is set into the context of Finland's national stage, overlapping layers of both history and show-business.

Keywords: adaption, stage presence, cultural memory, directing, physicality, interculturalism.

Finnish director Kristian Smeds adapted and directed Paul Auster's *Mr Vertigo*¹ for the Finnish National Theatre in 2011². In transferring the original novel to the stage, Smeds also combined elements of the source culture with specific references in the target culture, thus bringing the tale closer to the audience. This approach has long been typical of Smeds's work, which also reflects some of the main trends in Finnish theatre since the 1970s: simultaneity, bodily presence, playing with presence/absence, etc.—in fact, methods which today are often described as postdramatic (Lehmann 2009, 154). Smeds is a storyteller, but his style of story-telling exploits a wide range of theatrical forms. He creates a conceptual image out of the original novel and concretises—recreates—it in terms of theatre.

My aim is to examine *Mr Vertigo* as an example of how the postdramatic discourse contributes to the understanding of a “dramatic” performance with “postdramatic” stylistic features, and, in addition, to review the consequences of playing with theatrical presence. I will initially focus on the space, which in this case is both unconventional and meaningful, as a kind of exposition to the main themes of the production. Following this, I will explore the story itself and the manner in which it unfolds through individual theatrical images. Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999) and Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* (2001) provide useful methodology for this survey. In conclusion, I will analyze the performance in the light of “stage presence” as defined by Jane Goodall in her book *Stage Presence* (2008). Smeds's production discusses mystery and blends fact with fiction, techniques which are also mentioned in Goodall's analysis and therefore make her methods relevant in this context (2008, 4–6). The focus will be on the *mise-en-scène*, but the sequences referred to are also made significant by the masterful cast: Tero Jartti (Walt), Jukka-Pekka Palo (Master Yehudi), Kristiina Halttu (Mrs. Witherspoon), Tea Ista (Mother Sioux) and Esa-Matti Long (Aesop and others), as well as the musicians, Verner Pohjola, Aki Rissanen and Joonas Riippa.

Before *Mr Vertigo*, Smeds's artistic approach had evolved in the course of several previous productions. For example, his interpretation of *Three Sisters* at the small Kajaani Theatre (2004) drew the attention of the media across Finland (see Koski 2006), and spawned a nationwide public debate on the new-found significance of Kajaani Theatre. This intense discussion was conducted on the real-life homepage of one of the play's

¹ First published in the United States in 1994. Published in Finnish in 1997 by Otava, Helsinki. The production text by Auster and Smeds is published in Bergroth 2011.

² First night at the National Theatre of Finland, Large Stage, on October 28, 2010.

fictional characters, Vershinin/Vesterinen. *The Unknown Soldier* in 2007 at the National Theatre (see Koski 2010) included many features that left it open to misguided interpretations: transgression of conventions, refusal to meet expectations, the apparent absence of a unifying idea, cross-over of genres, images seemingly irrelevant to plot development (cf. Lehmann 2009, 62–63). In the context of these productions, the tools of postdramatic theatre had already been taken over by the mainstream.

The Space

The Finnish writer Outi Nyytjä has described Smeds's productions as real stories in theatrical space. Smeds's theatrical interpretations have tended to spread beyond the stage into the auditorium and, conversely, to bring the outside world on to the stage in the form of video footage. Moreover, he has created work for both traditional stages and *found spaces*. In *Mr Vertigo*, these two practices are combined. The theatrical institution in which the show is performed could not be more representative of tradition, but the site is used in an unconventional way, eliminating the audience's traditional experience of the space. The spatial environment is imbued with a certain mystique as its history is drawn into the here-and-now: former, deceased famous actors of the National Theatre are referred to as if they were present (Helminen 2011, 90; Moring 2011, 107). It is the use of space which turns the story into a tale about the art of the theatre, its performers and audience (Helminen 2011, 96).

Smeds himself has mentioned that his impression of a given space is often his inspiration. He has described standing on the stage of the National Theatre after a performance of *The Unknown Soldier*, and staring out at the empty auditorium:

There is something both mournful and comforting in the atmosphere. Like a metaphor for life itself. (..) Would it be possible to convey this, and if so, was there anything meaningful in it to be conveyed? (Smeds 2011, 18)

In his imagination, Smeds pictured a boy floating high above the stalls, bringing to his mind Auster's novel, with which he had always felt a great affinity. The thought led to a production about the world of theatre,

a world which is always drifting across the mysterious ever-shifting territory of reality and fiction, in time which stretches in every direction at every single moment (ibid., 19).

The opening sequence of Smeds's *Mr Vertigo* introduces the frame and the mode of the performance through the audience's spatial experience. As the play begins, the audience is seated on a purpose-built structure situated behind the fire curtain, on the revolving platform of the National Theatre's hundred-year-old stage. The iron fire curtain is down and the spectators find themselves in an environment which is probably unfamiliar to many of them, one where theatre's sleight of hand is seen for what it is: technical equipment and black walls are exposed to view as the audience is rotated beneath chandeliers and surrounded by men in black lighting innumerable candles. The space is designed to emphasise the notion of *backstage*, but with exaggerated mystery—it is theatricalised. This is a fictive theatre set inside a real theatre. On one side we see a dressing room. Behind it, the back wall is plastered with old posters of the theatre's performances from the early part of the 20th century. Photos of former star actors adorn the dressing tables. On the opposite side and to the rear are makeshift platforms which function as stages. The technicians are all visible and their presence is felt. In one corner, a jazz trio plays at regular intervals. When the fire curtain is raised, the fourth wall, now seen from the other side, opens up to reveal by turns either the back of the plush red velvet curtain or the empty auditorium, bathed in the beautiful, shimmering glow of the house lights.

In the second act, the audience is shepherded from one place to another: after the interval, the audience is guided into the main auditorium; later the spectators are invited back on stage but this time the seating is placed around the revolve. Towards the end of the second act, the audience rises and congregates, standing shoulder to shoulder, in the middle of the stage. The curtain rises and there, high above the empty seats of the softly lit auditorium, Walt the Wonder Boy floats in the air, a mystically beautiful vision in slow motion, swaying to the jazz melody played by the orchestra. The stage revolves until the close of the performance.

Building the Story

Auster's *Mr Vertigo* (1994) is a story about American show business and making the impossible come true. Its themes are

recognizing talent, the painful process of taking control of one's gift and its eventual loss, (...) submitting to the demands of one's calling and coming to terms with death (Bergroth 2011, 145).

In Smeds's interpretation the novel's story becomes "a tale of the artist's rite of passage" (ibid., 11). Theatre is the springboard, as is made clear to

the audience before the performance proper begins: Welcome to the theatre—the world of fiction! According to Smeds, even the characters are drawn from the world of American movies rather than from the real world (Moring 2011, 129). In rehearsal, the actors improvised scenes Smeds chose from the novel and combined them with their own free association, such as Tea Ista's recollections of performing in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. A new draft emerged from this process which the director then developed into the final text of the performance. Some sequences of even the final text were left open for further improvisation (Heminen 2011, 79).

The story on stage begins with the novel's first words, narrated by Walt the Wonder Boy: "I was twelve years old the first time I walked on water", and he goes on to tell his tale. Master Yehudi meets the street urchin Walt and strikes a bargain with him, promising to teach him to fly. The first act traces Walt's rite of passage. Walt undergoes his painful initiation into the art of flying, as the revolving stage spins to follow his running trajectory. Walt learns to levitate, and gradually, after an initial set-back at a country fair, wins over his unseen fictional audience, as well as his real one. The first act bursts with energy, and its progress is fuelled by the dynamic action of the central narrative. The scenes are highly imaginative and full of irresistible humour. There is physical power in the performances; we see bodies and bodily functions. But all this also becomes a story about the inherent challenges and sacrifices of the creative process.

After the interval, the narrative pace is calmer, as the focus shifts to the love story between the Master and Mrs Witherspoon. The performance takes on a more elevated style, in parts almost reminiscent of opera. Although the plot material is taken from the novel, the play here is a departure from the spirit of the original. The concluding scene nevertheless draws all the different themes and plot-lines together. In a monologue delivered just before the play closes with Walt's final magnificent flight, Master Yehudi, perched on a stool and surrounded by the closely packed audience, tells the story of his own demise, as the revolve starts to turn slowly once again.

The theatre's locality and the nature of dramatic art place their own demands on the narrative. The compact nature of drama's structural form inevitably meant that some of the novel's major turning points and events were cut from the stage version. The play includes two of the novel's ethnic characters: the elderly Native American, Mother Sioux, and the gifted African-American boy Aesop. In the novel, these two characters are murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Aesop's character is played by Esa-Matti Long, a white male Finn who doesn't even pretend to be African, but the

racist banter to which he is subjected by Auster's narrow-minded Walt, is nevertheless included in the script. Aesop's role remains a very minor one in this play, and Long plays many other roles as well. Mother Sioux is played by the officially retired actress Tea Ista, who is almost as illustrious an institution as the Finnish National Theatre itself. Since the thematic focus of the first act is shaped around the world of theatre and the role of the artist, the brutal deaths of Mother Sioux and Aesop are absent from the stage adaptation (see also Helminen 2011, 80).



Fig. 1-12: Paul Auster's and Kristian Smeds's *Mr Vertigo*, directed by Kristian Smeds at the Finnish National Theatre, Helsinki, in 2011. Jukka-Pekka Palo as Master Yehudi

Images

Especially in the first act, the narration emphasises bodily presence, includes strongly comic and carnivalistic elements, and makes use of live music. Individual scenes create theatrical images according to the collaborative mode phenomenology defined by Bert O. States, whereby meaning is attributed as a result of the active interaction between the spectator and the events on stage. According to States, the main idea of the collaborative mode is "to break down the distance between an actor and audience and to give the spectator something more than a passive role in

the theatre exchange” (see State 1995, 29, also 23: “there is always a ghost of a self in his [actor’s] performance”).

In *Mr Vertigo*, by the time we reach the interval, Walt is already a master at his art but his levitation skills have so far only been presented in a comic or implicit way. The performance thus builds dramatic tension almost by example. From its vantage point on stage, the audience witnesses Walt’s first failed attempt to perform at a country fair, sabotaged by a drunk, as well as his unfortunate but hilarious preparations *back-stage* for his later successful performances. These ostensibly take place on the other side of the closed red curtain, beyond which we can hear the enthusiastic applause of a fictional audience in the Finnish National Theatre’s real auditorium.

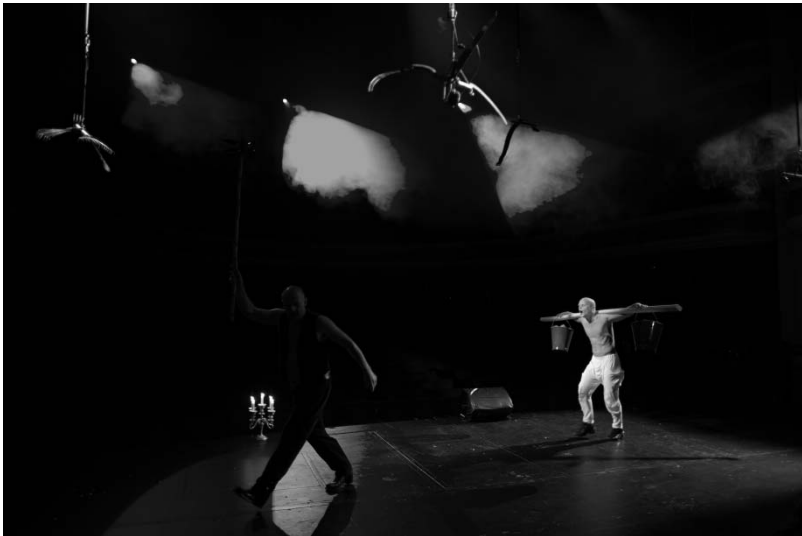


Fig. 1-13: Paul Auster’s and Kristian Smeds’s *Mr Vertigo*, directed by Kristian Smeds at the Finnish National Theatre, Helsinki, in 2011. (Left) Jukka-Pekka Palo as Master Yehudi, Tero Jartti as Walt.

Walt’s comments after his show offer the audience comic views of success (“The President fainted! Everyone stood up”), the artist’s hubris (“There were four empty seats. Can you imagine how it feels to play to half-empty houses!?”) and audience stereotypes (“One thousand five hundred culture-starved women! Of all sizes and ages!”) (Auster and Smeds 2011, 52–54). Likewise we are given only a small hint of Walt’s

flying skills when he escapes from Uncle Slim, as the latter rambles on to us with his back turned to the fleeing boy.

A picture of nostalgic glamour against the backdrop of the set's dressing-room, Tea Ista is thoroughly captivating as she delivers a monologue in which she weaves her memoirs of touring America with Buffalo Bill with familiar references to Finland's entertainment history. Mother Sioux's monologue initially follows the text of the novel but slowly merges with Finnish topics, simultaneously acquiring bold exaggeration, with the result that the Finnish entertainment business eventually seems more incredible than humans flying in real life. This scene illustrates Smeds's strategy of adding familiar features to the original story and then shifting perspective through theatrical irony, carnival or other means. We concentrate on the storytelling, the present body and other matters on stage, rather than on the narrative—or at least our attention is divided between the stage reality and the fiction.

As the fulfilment of dreams is one of the main themes of Smeds's production, Walt returns before the end of the first act to tell us he has a dream. His dream is promptly fulfilled and made visible. The revolving stage turns to place the audience facing the auditorium. The curtain rises and a substantial choir (playfully named after the genuine KOM-theatre choir), consisting of all the actors and technicians in the production, enters to sing the following words plucked from the last page of Auster's novel:

Shut your eyes / stop being yourself / let yourself evaporate / feel your soul
pouring out of you / that's where it begins / like so / that's where it begins /
the way to wonder.

Walt, or rather the actor Tero Jartti, dances a brief, awkward ballet to the accompaniment of the choir. The act comes to an end and the smiling audience is sent off to the interval to ponder the meaning of dreams. The ideas of *dream* and wonder recur in mystical form at the very end of the play, when Walt is seen floating over the auditorium, a vision both incomprehensible and magnificent.

Discussion

Questions and even doubts, are often raised as to the wisdom of adapting major epic novels for the stage, although perhaps less so in Finland, where stage adaptations of prose works are a long established part of the Finnish theatre tradition. Most often, however, such adaptations take the form of a linear retelling of events, a depiction of the narrative tale. Kristian Smeds's work belongs to a different school of dramatisation technique, of

which the previous generation's Jouko Turkka was one of the most significant radical promoters and reformers. In the 1980's, Jouko Turkka's stage adaptations broke the linear time-line and placed the emphasis on theme in simultaneous action and rapid-cut scenes. In his later work, he often exploited a carnivalistic blend of fiction and reality. Smeds's form of expression clearly descends from the Turkka tradition, but parallels can also be drawn with a number of other directors and directorial approaches, including trends found in the Baltic countries.

In Smeds's *Mr Vertigo*, the audience is initiated into the process of artistic creation: the physical struggle, the overcoming of self, and the burden of stardom. There is a cyclical principle to the production, both in the circle which turns on the stage and in the way the ever increasing rings of history and the mind are explored. The line between reality and fiction is revealed, blurred and erased. We are simultaneously in *Mr Vertigo*'s America and in the Finnish National Theatre, and paradoxically in this powerfully localised interpretation, locality loses importance. The Finnish National Theatre's production of *Mr Vertigo* is a form of director's theatre, but one which in turn relies on perfectly balanced ensemble work.

Surveying the process from page to stage, one can note that this production does not comment on the original work, the novel and its interpretations, as does e.g. Smeds's *The Unknown Soldier*. This time Smeds derives his rich tableau from the novel's atmosphere, recreating the tale, if not to the letter, then in spirit. His basic technique has not, however, changed much—it still reflects the methods used in *The Unknown Soldier*: the performance acquires a “postmodern” approach which is applied to create “modern” theatre. The tale of Walt the Wonder Boy and his companions becomes a dramatic narrative in which fact and fiction merge to create a mesmerising theatrical tour-de-force. Auster's classically American story is set into the context of Finland's national stage, overlapping layers of both history and show-business.

Mr Vertigo's scenic space can easily be described as a metonymically functioning space, in Lehmann's terms, as it continuously blurs the relationship between the audience and the fictive world (see Lehmann 2009, 271). Smeds's interpretation takes this a step further however: even the concept of presence is reassessed by including historical references, repositioning the audience and mystifying the current action. The space is given emphasis, as is common in postdramatic theatres (ibid., 271), but its presence is estranged by becoming an object for the eye to see. The emphasis on physicality is also subject to postdramatic techniques: the body becomes manifest more as a provocation (such as in scenes depicting

violence, sexuality or bodily functions) than as a signifier; presence is more relevant than meaning (ibid., 338–39).

In his study of postmodern recycling, Marvin Carlson comments on theatre's practice of ghosting or playing with the audience's individual and collective memory of past phenomena. The intellectual recycling that commonly takes place between productions is not normally recognised as a feature of performances "with a strong commitment to artistic originality". By contrast, exploiting cultural memory has always been inherent to theatre. In postmodern artistic expression, recycling is often ironic and "the audience's previous knowledge of or experience with some elements of the dramatic production reveals to them an incongruity between the apparent situation onstage and what they know or assume to be the real situation" (Carlson 2001, 166–67). Present-day theatre also often purposely draws the audience's attention to the construction of the performance and to its incongruous elements (ibid., 173). Memories, as well as the irony with which they are presented, are an essential feature of *Mr Vertigo's* stage adaptation. Likewise, the unreliability of memories plays a part, as the border between physical presence, memory and fiction is frequently crossed in both directions, and moreover in a way which is often underlined.

When the shaman does his dance, nobody says: could you do a little less, please. When the great comedians, the great clowns walk on stage, we know we are in the presence of something else, something well known to us but outside our experience,

Jane Goodall quotes here Simon Callow (who refers to Stanislavsky). And draws a conclusion:

Naturalism in its consummate form may produce something approximating transcendence, yet it seems that where the stage presence is concerned there is no getting away from the strange and the uncanny,

quoting Simon Callow who speaks about Mikhail Chekhov (Goodall 2008, 10–11). All in all, to me *Mr Vertigo* on stage leads to this kind of presence: familiar and strange—uncanny and captivating. Presence is relevant to the whole *mise-en-scène*. It relates to the way the audience and its memories are unashamedly addressed, to the way the actors' bodies are materialised in performance, and to the way various details such as props or audio and visual effects are made tangibly real. *Mr Vertigo* on stage arouses our curiosity, puts familiar incidents into a strange context, and constantly forces the audience to re-read the performance. The production's

essence could simply be called a strong presence, paradoxically, of the mysterious attraction of theatre. This is also symbolised by Walt the Wonder Boy floating high above the stalls: the impossible is shown to be possible, but how it is achieved remains a secret.

Translated by Eva Buchwald.

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PART II

NEW PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS: DIRECTOR AND ACTOR AS A TEXT-WRITER

CHAPTER ONE

NEW SWEDISH PLAYS: A NEW GENRE?

CHARLOTT NEUHAUSER, SWEDEN

Abstract: At a time when there is talk about the changing position of drama in the Swedish theatre, the situation for Swedish playwrights is benefiting from the Playwrights' Grant, established by the Swedish government in 1999. The new grant has had an effect on the way the theatre looks upon both playwriting and playwrights, as well as on the work processes involved in writing new plays. The grant and its prehistory is the focal point of my research. In order to try to make more visible how a new classification or genre is being established, I have chosen to describe the New Swedish Playwriting as a Bourdieuan sub-field of the larger field of Swedish drama and theatre. In this study I shall discuss how the construction of the grant encourages a certain kind of playwriting and how two contradictory perspectives of playwriting work under the auspices of the grant.

Keywords: new Swedish plays, creative processes, theatre, dramatic text, playwriting process, sociology of art, Playwrights' Grant, author function.

After having been rejected by the theatre, Henrik Ibsen published his first play *Catilina* in 1850 with financial help from a friend. During its first year in print only 40 copies of the play were sold, but *Catilina* was reviewed in four papers. When the theatre turned its back on the playwright he received attention from the literary world. It would take another 31 years until the play reached the stage. August Strindberg's first play *The Free Thinker (Fritänkaren)* was published in 1870 but didn't get a world première until 2003. The Swedish female playwright Alfhild Agrell's play *Why (Hvarför?)* was published in 1881, the same year as it opened at the Royal Dramatic Theatre.

In Sweden today, it is highly unlikely that a playwright will try to publish a play which has been refused by the theatre. It is also unlikely, even if such a play does get published, that it would be reviewed in the press. Despite having a literary position, as manifested by numerous Nobel prize laureates, a play in Sweden today rarely gets attention before it reaches the stage.¹ In those rare cases when plays do get published in Sweden today, the author has to be well established and, preferably, well known in another literary field.² For the remainder of playwrights the options are few: publishing at one's own cost or by print-on-demand services, such as the DramaDirekt website.³ Besides, published plays are rarely considered to be review material by the literary editors of Sweden's daily papers. Swedish playwrights, therefore, rely on a working network of directors, actors and dramaturgs or agents for their work to be read and considered for production by the theatre. The competition for a place in the repertory has always been fierce, but the conditions for the struggle change. A play that has been written only on the dramatist's initiative in the quiet of his or her study, which was common during Ibsen's and Agrell's times, rarely reaches the stage today.

The creation of the Playwrights' Grant⁴ in 1999 strengthened the playwrights' position and gave them a higher status in the theatre field. During the 1990s, a new way of conceiving plays had been developing, putting the dramatist in the background of the theatres or at the ensemble's command.⁵ My contention is that these two contradictory views of the role of the playwright have been enhanced under the auspices of the Playwrights' Grant and, furthermore, that commissioning of plays has become more common as a result of the grant. As the Swedish government established the grant, it signalled a new turn for the Swedish drama, as

¹ Playwrights who have received the Nobel Prize since the first Nobel Prize: Björnstjerne Björnson 1903, Selma Lagerlöf 1909, Maurice Maeterlinck 1911, Gerhard Hauptmann 1912, Jacinto Benavente 1922, William Butler Yeats 1923, George Bernard Shaw 1925, Luigi Pirandello 1933, Eugene O'Neill 1936, TS Eliot 1948, Pär Lagerkvist 1951, Albert Camus 1957, Jean-Paul Sartre 1964, Samuel Beckett 1969, Wole Soyinka 1986, Derek Walcott 1992, Dario Fo 1997, Gao Qingjian 2000, Elfriede Jelinek 2004, Harold Pinter 2005. Source: the Official Website of the Nobel Prize; www.nobelprize.org.

² The tradition is different in other language areas—France publishes *un-played* plays, Britain and the US as well.

³ The website www.dramadirekt.se is digital library administered by the Dramatists' Guild and not easily accessible for the general public.

⁴ In Swedish *Dramatikerstödet*, literally "the playwrights' support".

⁵ The work processes were similar to the work during the 1970's, as described by Margarata Wirmark in her study *Nuteater* from 1976.

well as facilitating the establishment of a new genre, or a field in a Bourdieuan sense: the field of New Swedish Playwriting.⁶ The field's hierarchy of values is revealed in the discourse of what counts as its topics, style and relevant work processes. For example, a play does not qualify as belonging to the field just because it has been recently written, and a playwright does not necessarily get to express his/her own artistic vision just because he or she may get properly paid. One idea of the grant was to support the new drama for it to become strong in its own right—in order for it to have a life after its first production. But not many of the plays that receive the grant experience a second production. The majority of the plays that do get the grant are so called *commissioned plays* (beställningsdramatik).

The number of original plays that reach production in Swedish each year is approximately 200–240 since the mid 2000s. All in all, circa 350 plays written in Swedish are produced by the Swedish theatres each year.⁷ The Dramatists' Guild has around 660 members who write and translate for film and theatre.⁸ Swedish original drama makes up more than half of all theatre productions each year.⁹ Playwrights received governmental support before 1999, but the focus had been on the process of writing the play. The new Playwrights' Grant underlined the particular circumstances of playwriting and signalled to both the literary and theatrical worlds that drama is an art form of its own. As late as in 1990 and 1995, in the political discussions and in the government's surveys of living standards for artists, playwrights were not listed as a separate segment in the statistics. They were placed in the large group of authors together with their capitally and more culturally prestigious colleagues writing fiction (SOU 1993:39, 1995:84¹⁰). The aim of the grant is to support new drama in Sweden by supporting the working conditions of the playwright. The grant is qualified: the theatre has to contribute with a third of the amount of the total grant, and the grant is not paid in full until the opening date of the play. The theatre and the playwright have to apply for the grant together, which creates an awareness of the particular circumstance of playwriting, namely, that it is a collaborative work between theatre and

⁶ A literal translation would be: newly written Swedish plays, *nyskriven svensk dramatik*.

⁷ Statistics from www.scendatabasen.se (Swedish ITI), for the years 2007–2010.

⁸ Members 2011, according to the Dramatists' Guild's website, Sveriges Dramatikerförbund www.dramatiker.se 03.10.11.

⁹ According to www.scendatabasen.se and *Teaterårsboken 1998–2002*.

¹⁰ In the latter the number of members of the Dramatists' Guild is mentioned, however.

playwright. With a well-established jury and by holding on to a high level of peer reviewing, the Playwrights' Grant has become a mark of quality and recognition.

The history of Swedish playwriting is filled with quarrels and fights over the position of Swedish drama in the theatre. The discussions have treated similar issues throughout the 20th century. Why are so few Swedish plays produced by Swedish theatre? Why does there seem to exist an invisible wall between the playwright and the theatre? The theatres complain about the dramatists' lack of practical theatre knowledge and the dramatists in turn complain about being locked out. One fight in the early 20th century started with a complaint by the newly established Dramatic Society that the Royal Dramatic Theatre's artistic director, Tor Hedberg, did not allow enough new Swedish dramas to be produced on the national stage. The quarrel resulted in an official demand by the Society that Hedberg resign from his position, since his selection of plays signalled nepotism and superficiality.¹¹ Tore Hedberg kept his position, but the debate reverberated throughout the Swedish press and cultural world.

An example from the 1940s is the establishment of the Swedish Dramatists' Studio (*Svenska Dramatikers Studio*) in reaction to the situation that many plays by contemporary dramatists lay around in the artistic offices of the theatres, never reaching the stage. The Studio became a prolific stage for new playwriting and new directors despite slim economic support. Ingmar Bergman, Wilhelm Moberg, Bertil Malmberg, Rudolf Värnlund and Brita von Horn were some of the dramatists and directors who did early work for the studio.¹²

The fights between the playwrights and the theatres deal mainly with access to the established institution, and getting decently paid for writing a play. In 1958 Karl Ragnar Gierow, artistic director and himself a playwright (also a member of the Swedish Academy) captured the complicated situation of the dramatist in an article in the daily paper *Svenska Dagbladet*:

The stakes in producing a play are much higher than in publishing a novel. Disregarding the economic situation, what's more important is the artistic. (...) The script leaves the artistic director and travels on to the ensemble and

¹¹ Freddie Rokem has given a detailed description of the argument in his dissertation *Tradition och förnyelse* from 1977, see specifically pp. 52–56.

¹² The founders of the Swedish Dramatist's Studio also established the Swedish Dramatist's Guild, an organization that was meant to be a sister organization to other international guilds during WWII, in order to facilitate transnational exchange and help of authors in occupied countries.

director, who are creative artists in their own rights. And they too have to believe in the work (Gierow 1958).

He continued and argued against governmental support of new playwriting, perhaps bearing in mind the demise of the Swedish Dramatists' Studio during this same period: "Swedish playwriting is much better of being produced because it is good rather than because the theatre could get financial aid for it" (ibid.).



Fig. 2-1: Playwright Agneta Pleijel

The 1960s and 1970s' independent groups, dealing with social and political issues, were to discover collaborative writing as a new way of creating plays. The dramatist's individual voice had to step back in favour of a collective authorship. The aftermath of political theatre in the late 1970s and early 1980s is represented by names like Agneta Pleijel, Staffan Göthe, Kristina Lugn, Jonas Gardell and Lars Norén (Liljenberg 2000).

They all represent strong authorships, but the Swedish drama was considered to be in crisis, challenged by new foreign plays. A joint effort was made in 1989 to promote new Swedish drama by a group of representatives from both employers and employees in the theatre.¹³ Swedish theatre started to glance abroad at the success of the Royal Court and Die Baracke. The economic crisis in the early 1990s pushed the situation further, when theatres were facing decreasing financial support and lower audience numbers. Original plays written with a particular theatre in focus became an attractive option as many theatres found a need to strengthen themselves artistically. To commission topical plays was one of the ways of showing closeness to the audience and position the theatre in its geographical and political context. Thus, in the early 2000s, theatres hesitant of taking on the responsibility of commissioning a play could do so with a chance of receiving a grant. In receiving the grant, the theatre's artistic direction was forced to be more involved in the work process, from the commissioning to the writing of the play.

There are some unaccounted for effects of the grant. If the grant is awarded to a theatre, it makes it cheaper to commission a play rather than buying the rights to a second stage performance of an existing play. The required involvement by the theatre in a grant-supported play is changing the way commissions are made. It is rare today for a commissioned playwright to get to write what he or she feels like (perhaps he is restricted only by practical circumstances). Today's commissions are more focused, with a clear idea of the context, the content and the audience group for which the play is meant. Many plays may, in fact, have their origins in the artistic board at the theatre, not in the mind of the playwright. Because of this, the playwright has to be more open and flexible to the demands of the theatre. These types of commissions also coincide with the Swedish theatre's interest in postdramatic theatre and methods. As a result, the playwright has got (and is sometimes forced to get) closer to the work process in the theatre, since he is more frequently expected to be participating in the rehearsals. The dramatic texts as complete, unified works of drama have become less important and the focus lies, instead, on plays for production, not plays for the future nor the past (the canon) as New Swedish Drama has become equivalent to commissioned plays.

New Swedish Playwriting, in turn, is being used as a concept for categorizing, designating a certain kind of drama. In order to grasp what lies in the term, or the concept, New Swedish Playwriting can be described as a Bourdieuan subfield of a larger drama field of drama in the Swedish

¹³ The *Foundation for New Drama (Stiftelsen ny dramatik)* was not long lasted and a unique initiative.

theatre. Within the subfield, the common denominator is that the writing is “close” to the theatre and its audience, and deals with issues that are concurrent with the writing, either in terms of time or geographically. The majority of these plays are commissioned. To be successful within the field, most of these criteria have to be met and complied with.

In the lecture *What is an Author?* Michel Foucault discusses how the author’s name serves as an ideological figure, embodying certain functions by which the culture defines, structures and locks the meaning to a literary work. Foucault talks about this as the “author function” (1969). We use the author in order to interpret the text and to place it in a hierarchy, which constructs meaning. In the theatre, the author’s (the playwright’s) position is undercut by the many levels of interpretation the work has to go through until it reaches the audience and is presented as a performance—which, of course, is the goal of the play. The author’s name can be called on and used in situations of doubt—one can, of course, ask the author to come and explain what he or she meant (if the author is alive). But many different *ideological figures* are at work in the rehearsal space, existing simultaneously and competing with one another, putting the author’s function outside of a central importance. One such ideological consideration is the director’s interpretation, another is the way the specific work process is planned; a third may be the way the ensemble has become accustomed to speaking about the text. Comprehending how these discourses work is very much a part of belonging to the field.

When the Dramatist’s Grant was installed, the playwrights as a group were described for the first time in cultural politics. The survival of the New Swedish Playwriting was secured by a political decision. In practice, this meant that Swedish playwriting preserved, safeguarded the possibility for a long term development within the field, without becoming dependent on changes outside the field. The grant is a crucial element in defining the territory of New Swedish Playwriting as an autonomous field, both by the economic incentives and by the heightened prestige a certain type of drama will bring from the grant.

Both institutions and playwrights consider it important to position themselves within the field of New Swedish Playwriting. Recognition and artistic credibility is reached by staying close to the right theatre, the right persons and by writing the right types of play. Inside the field of New Swedish Drama it is standard, for example, to get paid according to a central agreement or by getting new commissions, which subsequently increase one’s cultural capital. Nowhere near all newly written plays can be included in the group. Producing new Swedish plays in the proper manner has become a way of positioning your theatre within the field—

within the group, where, in Bourdieu's way of analyzing, the producers produce for the other producers within the field—in the, so called, group of “restricted production” (see, for example, Bourdieu 1993, 39). Within this group, this aforementioned kind of drama represents what is new. If you belong to this group you will understand how pointless it would be to try to define the author of a new adaptation of *Pippi Longstocking* at the private theatre, Göta Lejon, in Stockholm, as a member of the group.

In the field of New Swedish Playwriting, the criteria for good playwriting become apparent each time the grant is awarded. The chairman of the jury for the grant, Jesper Söderström, does not want to define the criteria which determine a play as a good new drama. Each round of applications is evaluated, in relation to the other applications. However, when studying the statistics, it becomes clear that some aspects are more predominant within the applications. For example, there is an equal or even a higher number of female than male playwrights receiving the award, which is not representative of the total group of playwrights. The doxa of New Swedish Drama is announced each year, when the grant is awarded. The autonomy of the field is measured by the distance between the exceptionally high status of a play supported by the grant and the low status of the commercial drama.

Some of the questions I presently deal with in my research are: what happens to the playwright's role when the author's function is defined by other ideological figures? How is the playwright's work affected in the context where the author's function becomes diminished—where it is dissolving or changing? What is being put in the place of the author? What is the actor's relationship to that of the author? To what extent is it possible to be free in the relationship to the author's function within the field of New Swedish Playwriting?

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CHAPTER TWO

“PLAYWRIGHTS ARE TAKING TO THE STREETS...”: REFLECTIONS ON THE LATVIAN NATIONAL PLAY COMPETITION

IEVA STRUKA, LATVIA

Abstract: This study analyzes the situation in playwriting in Latvia through the results of the recent competition for playwrights organised by the Latvian National Theatre. The theatre received more than sixty new plays from established professional writers, young professionals and non-professional authors. This variety of texts reflects one common tendency: the need to turn and face the reality of life in today's Latvia. This is the main difference between the situation today and that which existed ten years ago, when a large number of Latvian plays reminded one of “a bunch of hen's eggs that had been matured in an incubator”. The most recent Latvian plays reflect true-to-life aspects involving Latvia and Latvians: perhaps they are not exportable, but in turn they offer an opportunity to feel what exactly Latvia of the 21st century is, and how its citizens feel about living there.

Keywords: playwright, play, competition, reality, self-expression, modern technologies.

For the most part, any interest in national playwriting among stage directors in small nations seems to awaken only when they step outside the theatre and are suddenly confronted by the notion that some things in the nation's life have drastically changed: increasing strains in the population's ethnic relationships, constant reminders that citizens are leaving *en masse* for abroad, or the stark fact that the population is dying out.

Then there are the curbs on freedom of speech, the lack of support for creative or unconventional artistic pursuits—last but not least the discovery that the State Culture Capital Foundation has distributed 70% less money in the current year to various creative activities than it has in the previous year, or the year before that. The artist's opportunities for self-expression are being seriously stymied. At the same time, his ego still permits him to dream of staging tragedies by Sophocles, or the latest interpretation of *Hamlet*... or putting on Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* in the Latvian National Theatre's Large Hall.

In these moments of fright, the national self-awareness of a number of artists gets switched on at a subconscious level, and they are ready to speak up about what is happening in the nation: it appears to them important to comprehend *where they are coming from*. Either they turn to writing or composing for themselves, creating their own plays, or they turn to collaboration with writers who, they sense, could become *fellow travellers* in the process.

But there are those directors who, even after their world has seemingly survived the stresses of postdramatic theatre, can recognise playwriting's hidden meanings, and search for plays that might take on themes reflecting real-life situations. In June of 2011, the Latvian National Theatre, aware of these interrelationships and sensing that an especially confusing period for artistic pursuits was about to arrive, announced a new play competition, not limiting authors in their selection of themes, only asking them to bear in mind that the plays would eventually be intended for the National Theatre's repertoire. By September 1st, the theatre had received 67 new plays submitted by 49 authors—precisely the number that had been originally anticipated.

The contributing authors were drawn in proportionate numbers from professional playwrights, young professionals (those who have recently graduated or are still studying), and non-professionals or, as I would like to call them, authors from the *folk*. In recent years, the National Theatre staged a very successful play by a teacher, Danskovite, from the rustic area of Latgale, called *Latgola.lv*, evidence of the fact that plays of sufficient quality can be offered by writers from among the *folk*, capturing not just the director's but also the public's interest. Their distinct plus is the unmistakable feeling for a theme's current significance and dialogues *copied* from life; the minuses an inability to colour in distinctly strong characters or maintain episodes in a consistent manner for the duration of the entire play. On the other hand, the authors from the *folk* sometimes show a higher level of intelligence and erudition than the average actor,

who composes material for plays from his own limited aesthetic experience in the closed off world of the theatre.

The quality of the plays submitted has improved noticeably over that of previous years: only a small percentage could be classed as a *mistake*, where even the conception of the piece shows no originality in plot or characterisation. Themes and characters feature the situation in Latvia during recent years. I will take the liberty of quoting the theatre's long serving literary adviser, Rita Melnace, who, in my view, precisely identifies the cause of this: thirty years ago a professional, even more a non-professional writer would show up in the theatre with a rough draft—either handwritten or typed—that had been rewritten three, five, even seven times. These were pages “he had caressed with his eyes”—in a purely physical sense—and through *hand to paper* contact had nurtured and felt every single self-created word, from which he was not about to part at any price.

A text produced by means of modern technology experiences alienation from its creator. The most conscientious author, having looked at his own created text on the PC's monitor screen for hours, does not feel the slightest remorse or physical stress in exchanging one word for another better suited to a specific situation. Every morning, when he sits down at his computer, a *get-acquainted* ritual with his own already existing work begins anew. And, while rereading the text, he *succumbs to the author*, as if it has been written by someone else.

That permits an improvement of the text, making it more professional, prior to its submission to an evaluator. Consequently, the overall level of playwriting is much higher than before. The other reason, of course, is the pedagogical skills of the Latvian Academy of Culture lector, Lauris Gundars, and the Latvian Writers' Union's Literary Academy lector, Dainis Grīnvalds, which permit new writers to acquire new craft skills, not allowing new work to be shaped by mere talent or pure *on the spot* inspiration.

But now, a word about the essence which is to be extracted from the *bouquet of aroma and colour* offered by the entire gamut of the 67 new works and which, in the most direct manner, reflects that particular Latvia in which we live. The assessments that follow are already summarised in the title of my article, “Playwrights are taking to the streets...”. That is the main difference between the situation today and that which existed ten years ago, when a large number of almost identical Latvian plays reminded one of “a bunch of hen's eggs that had been matured in an incubator”.

It is highly probable that the need to turn and face the realities of life was encouraged by one more factor besides the socio/economic/political ones that I have named—one which has also significantly contributed to the changes that have altered the entire fundamental picture of Latvia's theatre, and that is the profound dissatisfaction with what was being offered by Latvian playwrights. Consequently, for almost five years now, the directors themselves have turned to the creation of their own theatre texts, starting with the director Alvis Hermanis, the charismatic leader of the New Riga Theatre (Jaunais Rīgas teātris), who is also quite well known abroad, and who created a performance series dedicated to Latvian themes; and continuing with a number of other young directors such as Viesturs Meikšāns, Valters Sīlis, Andrey Jarovoy and Mārtiņš Eihe.

What else was there for the established playwrights to do? They were accused of not knowing or understanding modern life and theatre. Honestly speaking, they were simply ignored, as more and more self-created and much livelier texts appeared in the theatre repertoires. So the erudite playwrights in turn had to roll up their sleeves and create texts which would not insist on unchallengeable units, where every word would be engraved in the text by the author, but versions that might be viewed as a raw material, which in the process of developing the play could be transformed, and in the process of its adaptation to the performance could be altered with the participation of the author. The winners, from my point of view, would be all parties: the directors, the playwrights, and the audience.

Times and Locations where Action is Taking Place in 2011

The landscapes characterised by Latvian playwrights in our cities and rural areas are quite different. In the country, neglected homesteads are still inhabited by Latvian families, but half of the family is either earning its living in Ireland or England, or about to leave to seek employment there. Latvian men, for the most part, are in a drunken stupor and have taken over the habits as well as the viewpoint of the former Soviet time—it is noble to avoid work, steal others blind, cheat, enrich oneself at the expense of someone else and complain about a life of incredible hardship. To be a *loser* is the norm here. The *abnormal* ones are those who look after their homestead (according to the slothful, they must have access to European Union funds and connections to the county administration, the city council, or the politicians in Riga) or those who are returning after their jobs abroad and trying to resume life in their home country.

In the play by the new author Agnese Rutkēviča, *Water Pistol* (*Ūdenspistole*), a policeman, Māris, is telling Valdis, who has just returned from Ireland: “You cannot change things in a day! That is not possible. Over a period of five years, you have changed. But, also here in Latvia, everything has changed.” An individual who has been absent from Latvia for an extended period can be categorised as a *dead soul*—no matter how active his life is and how good his contacts with his native Latvia, he is not around when he is needed the most. The fact that the problem has grown to unbelievable proportions is brought out into the open by Daina Ozoliņa in her play *The Greatest Christmas Present* (*Lielākā Ziemassvētku dāvana*). However, it is a play for children. Its heroine is the 12 year old Kate, who receives a message from her mother in England that she will not be coming home for Christmas: she has to work. And the girl’s classmates suggest a simple but ingenious idea to get the mother to return home for a visit: Kate, who until now has been a prize pupil, is told by the boys to start earning failing grades, be absent from classes and even smash some windows. Then the teachers will be forced to ask her mother to come back to Latvia and the mother, indeed, will be compelled to come.

What is also interesting is that in the rural regions, as well as in the cities, Latvians no longer speak good Latvian. According to the playwrights’ understanding, a generous selection of Russian language layers has entered into daily conversation, as well as a whole raft of Anglicisms. What’s more, the language spoken by the young as well as those of pension age, not to mention the unemployed or representatives of mixed families, has been contaminated.

Latvians residing in the cities do not have an easier time, for there one finds a complete loss of any sense of values and in its place a *disjointed* social milieu, brought on by life in essentially identical apartments, provided by identical public housing, which have been acquired due to the availability of easy credit, thus offering no sense of belonging to the community. In these apartments resides a whole layer of society, from the middle class downward. On account of the demographic characteristics in the family, there are usually no more than two offspring. More often than not, they are each from some previous relationship. In such an economically confusing household situation, stresses have been built up, starting with “who is the one who will buy the bread” and ending with an argument as to who can reprimand which youngster with respect to his/her use of alcohol or drugs. For while their life is very much on shared premises, the youngsters belong to each partner separately.

Furthermore, the city provides a milieu where the various ethnicities have completely unrestricted borders. In the Soviet era, when the population

of Latvians living in Latvia decreased to 54%, the problems of non-Latvians were simply not addressed by Latvian playwrights, as if there were no non-Latvians in the population. Twenty years after the re-establishing of Latvia's independence, ethnic Russians are shown by Latvian playwrights as equivalent and logical characters mixing in as members of the family, in very close contact with Natalya, Nina, Misha or Svetlana. It is possible that economic hardship is a more genuine problem than the nationality question, or perhaps the much cultivated ideology of Soviet times about friendship between nations and one single nation, is now bearing fruit.

Characters 2011 and Play's Adaptation to a *Quasilitary* Theatre or Searching for a Form

According to Goethe the mission of art is not to characterise *your pug* as it is, but as it could be. A pug is a dog, but these words can equally be related without irony to the 21st century theatre as well as its playwrights, if the great majority of plays are as they are, disconnected from life. This image is by no means complimentary. In fact, it implies a lack of faith, conviction, confidence, love or a healthy nervous system, among people who are childless or have children who are not loved, living only at subsistence level and without sympathetic parents.

Enumerating all this, I came to the realisation that the playwrighting of the 21st century has come a complete circle and has returned to the times of Zola and Tolstoy, to the period of naturalism in aesthetics, that either reflected life in realistic fashion or escalated life up to the forms of recognizable naturalism. The new plays offer no movement upward or forward, completely rejecting any spiritual verticality. I, as an observer, am able to say: yes, that is exactly the way I feel, it is exactly how my relatives in the country live, it is exactly how my neighbours go about their life in Riga. But I don't want to identify myself with the heroes of these plays or pursue such a life or value-system as they exemplify. And, while reading these plays or imagining their potential staging, I cannot come up with the answer as to how one can survive in this consumer oriented epoch, or what would the epoch be like that is to follow, or how should I change in order to adapt myself to it.

Possibly the only work that offers an answer is the prose writer Ieva Melgalve's play, *Monsters (Necilvēki)*—about the 22nd century and *cyborgs*, who will inhabit the Earth. However, the play has not so far received the jury's attention. Maybe the author reached into a too distant future and it was too obscure for the Latvian National Theatre.

The mission of the postdramatic theatre—to reject sense in the text, but to open up its structure—is fully implemented in more recent plays. These are shaped by linear texts as well as the inclusion of dialogues and monologues, or short sequences of scenes leaping back and forth in time. In contrast to the plays of previous years, stage directions have an ever decreasing purpose, as playwrights realise that it is necessary for the director to have space for his own imagination and stage directions are a kind of *authoritarianism* with respect to the director.

The unlimited possibilities of the theatre have encouraged the appearance of a whole series of unreal characters, very similar to those in plays involving symbolism, romanticism or the absurd, but, to my mind, the most interesting ones are the two appearances of a pig on the stage—a homegrown pig in the comedy *Pig's Luck* (*Cūkas laime*) by Ēriks Vilsons, an actor at the Liepāja Theatre, which in the closing scene goes from uttering pig sounds and squealing to speaking in the Latvian language—dictating to the hero Jānis his further moves, namely: to burn himself together with the pig, but not to go to England; and the pig, Mētra, discovered in the picnic grounds in the play by the established playwright Jānis Jurkāns, *Līgo*, which becomes the psychotherapist or confessor of the plays hero, Helmutis.

Post Scriptum

Three plays won prizes in the competition: the anniversary tribute to the final years of the most famous Latvian tenor, Jānis Zābers, with his life reflected in a drama, *Antiņš*, by Lauris Gundars; a serious comedy by Lelde Stumbre, *Picture* (*Bilde*), about an artist's life one metre above ground, which others are exploiting for selfish purposes while at the same time calling him *crazy*; and Māra Jakubovska's debut play *The Little Flame in the Ashes* (*Uguntiņa pelnos*), a tragic love story from Latvia's rural life.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSFORMATION OF COLONIAL NARRATIVES IN POSTCOLONIAL DRAMA AND THEATRE IN THE BALTICS

BENEDIKTS KALNAČS, LATVIA

Abstract: This study looks at how, during the latter part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between the dramatic text and its actual staging has undergone changes as evidenced by the practices in the Baltic theatre. Special emphasis has been placed on social content, which, following the restoration of independence in Latvia in 1991, has determined the development of its theatre and literary prose. The article observes how the local artistic process has been influenced by a new relationship with the global community and the wider theatre world. As an example, the approach of the stage director, Alvis Hermanis, and the New Riga Theatre (Jaunais Rīgas teātris or JRT) activities, is examined. Especially highlighted is the process by which, in the preparation of the stage performance, the sense of reality has been transformed: what rules have defined the theatre's artistic approaches; and in what ways has the New Riga Theatre's work altered our understanding of the significance of content in today's theatre world?

Keywords: postcolonial criticism, Baltic theatre, Latvian theatre, the New Riga Theatre, Alvis Hermanis.

The methodology of this study stems from recent developments in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial criticism emphasises the importance of colonial discourses and their interplay with anti-colonial approaches. Postcolonial critics emphasise that rulings handed down by the imperial power, whose more or less rationally established aim is to form a unified model system, are based on stereotypes with regard to the subjugated territories and their base populations, thus justifying the imperial and

colonial policies which result in social and cultural hegemony. One of the marks of the decolonisation process, on the contrary, has been the shaping of a new anti-colonial message in which subaltern national and social strata voices, ignored up to that point, are revealed. It is this previously subjugated dialogue with the colonial culture that can cast a more penetrating glance into hitherto undiscovered layers of the subconscious. At the same time, the new attitudes generated during the postcolonial period tend to provide a connection to the earlier era and the traces left by the footprints of the previously dominant culture, a process which manifests itself in an unavoidable sense of hybridity.

In the context of such a view, to the attitudes of the decolonisation process belong also the manifestations of the cultures of the Baltic countries formed during the period covered by the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. Inevitably, these also shape a dialogue with the experience inherited from the colonial past. Furthermore, in the context of the history of the Baltic countries, it is possible to speak of two waves of colonisation: one taking place in the 12th and 13th centuries, connected with the global crusades and the forced establishment of Christianity in the northern territories of the Baltic region (Estonia and Latvia of today); the other, colonisation from the East from the 18th century onwards, manifesting itself in all of the Baltic territories coming under the subjugation of the Russian Empire.

In the middle of the 20th century, after briefly emerging as new independent nations, the Baltic countries, following conflicts between imperial powers brought on by the World War II, again became their victims. In the course of the war, a threefold occupation took place, which finally resulted in Nazi Germany's defeat, followed by the unchallenged colonisation of the Baltic territories by the Soviet regime.

In the postcolonial period, after the restoration of independence at the end of the 20th century, remnants of the Soviet-devised colonial rule and its ideological and economical influences have still survived, which escalate social tensions, as well as making themselves felt in the new and not infrequently problematic ties with the European Union and, in a wider sense, with the Western world's political and economic structures. Consequently, the Baltic national cultures bring forth their contemporary writing under contradictory circumstances which recall global conflicts.

This study traces postcolonial developments in Baltic theatre, choosing a particularly vivid example in the experience of the New Riga Theatre over the initial years of the nation's independence, a period of about two decades, and connecting it with the activities of the internationally recognised leader of the theatre, its artistic manager, Alvis Hermanis.

Special attention has been paid to those highlights in the New Riga Theatre's activities that disclose characteristic postcolonial tendencies.

Alvis Hermanis, a graduate of Latvia's State Conservatory, upon receiving his diploma and after a brief stint in 1989 as an actor, at the very outset of the political upheaval and aspirations for the nation's independence, departed for the USA, where he remained for a number of years, initially being closely connected with the Off-Broadway theatre in New York. After returning to Latvia, Hermanis turned to theatre directing, starting with a play based on the scenario created by the American author, Steven Soderbergh, *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. This became the opening production of the New Riga Theatre in 1993; during its initial period, Hermanis was only one of the directors of the theatre, whereas in 1997 he also took over the artistic directorship.

From the very beginning, it was clear that the director was approaching his work with a deliberate consistency and clearly conceived strategy. He made it known that he would be pursuing an intellectual bent, as one interested only in elitist works. During the initial stages, these were texts that had made their appearance in other cultures.

During the first part of the 1990s, a similar tendency was prevalent in all theatres: the theatre tended to aspire to an amusement/entertainment type of function. The theatre researcher Jeff Johnson explains the heightened interest in foreign plays primarily as a struggle to survive financially, coupled with a desire in this very stressful period to preserve nevertheless artistically wholesome expressiveness in their performances: "To counter this aesthetic turn to pragmatism, many Baltic theatres 'discovered' (as it were) Western dramas" (Johnson 2007, 14). However, this period's defining characteristic was also an environment that excelled in a wider context of cultural insecurity. This situation is best characterised by one of the most prominent representatives of postcolonial criticism, Homi Bhabha:

Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity—between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private—as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation. It is from such narrative positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples (Bhabha 1994, 175).

In the context of the emerging Latvian culture during the 1990s, Alvis Hermanis set himself apart from the rest: in his directed plays, none of the popular or canonised values cherished in Western cultures were being

utilised. He rather selected authors—Soderbergh, Yukio Mishima, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Oscar Wilde and others—who, while integrating themselves in Western cultures, at the same time remained members of a marginal segment. A number of these texts, unquestionably, reflect typically characteristic signs of modernity, namely, that modernity is being shaped by two distinct messages—social and aesthetic. This process has been characterised by the literary and art critic Matei Calinescu as follows:

Modernity in the broadest sense, as it has asserted itself historically, is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the sets of values corresponding to (1) the objectified, socially measurable time of capitalist civilisation (time as a more or less precious commodity, bought and sold on the market), and (2) the personal, subjective, imaginative *durée*, the private realm created by the unfolding of the “self”. The latter identity of time and self constitutes the foundation of modernist culture. Seen from this vantage point, aesthetic modernity uncovers some of the reasons for its profound sense of crisis and for its alienation from the other modernity, which, for all its objectivity and rationality, has lacked, after the demise of religion, any compelling moral or metaphysical justification (Calinescu 1987, 5).

Modernity’s typical characteristic is its awareness of a conflicting relationship between culture and society. It can manifest itself in the self-confidence behind the bringing forth of modernist art’s realisations, as well as in seemingly separate and distinct paths of development—*avant-garde* and *decadence*. On closer examination, however, these poles turn out to be quite akin to each other, and gradually result in aesthetic modernity’s transformation into products of mass culture—*kitsch* and *postmodernism*.

As pointed out by the theatre researcher Valda Čakare, a characteristic of Hermanis’s first stage productions at the JRT is the convergence of technological optimism and modernism with various forms of mass culture. The director mixes a variety of aesthetic principles, democratizing them, or, more precisely, profaning the aspirations of modernist art’s attempts at the sacred. However, in a paradoxical fashion, it is precisely this kind of approach that enhances his elite artist’s reputation (Čakare 2006, 459).

In Hermanis’s initial stagings, such heroic utterances are heard, which quite frequently find themselves in liminality to their relationship with civilised society, thus manifesting a sort of writing from the margins. That is one way in which the director is attempting to connect the Western experience to his own society’s and generation’s marginality of feelings. He creates a feeling of intimacy with this marginal culture and its refined

aesthetic aura but at the same time shows the impossibility of dissimilar cultural phenomena merging in their entirety. This incompatibility Hermanis conceptually assimilates in the production *Sounds of Silence* (*Klusuma skaņas*, 2007), about a concert in Riga by the American musicians Simon and Garfunkel, which actually never took place. In this production, where characters seemingly hear strains of music, to the audience they remain inaudible. This approach can be characterised as a confrontation of cultures, where curiosity, deep interest, and respect prevail, but at the same time mutual incomprehension remains. This phenomenon is demonstrated particularly vividly in the creating and staging the play *The Story of Kaspar Hauser* (*Stāsts par Kasparu Hauzeru*, 2002), through the main character's incompatibility with the surrounding society of *marionettes* (characterised by children, members of a music school, presented as dolls led around by human figures dressed in black—actors of the JRT); it has also been described as the most peculiar, fanciful and perhaps also the most serene and beautiful of Hermanis's shows (*ibid.*, 473).

On becoming the JRT's artistic leader in 1997, one of the director's most important steps was marked by differentiated experience. Much yearned for, but not sufficiently assimilated Western impulses were put side by side with the deeply subconscious and identifiable cultural tradition of the Soviet period. In staging *The Promise* (*Mans nabaga Marats*, 1997), by the Russian author Aleksey Arbuzov, which was the first manifest of the new period of JRT and survived in the theatre's repertoire for fifteen years, Hermanis spoke explicitly about the need to actualise the experiences of his parents' generation:

I would not want to forget those art treasures with which my parents' generation grew up. That was their youth, and people fell in love and also had their ideals, their dreams. I am fascinated by and have a deep interest in the flavour and atmosphere of that period. It is important for me to understand what is that refined, that unites people, irrespective of the times and political systems (Zeltiņa 2007, 242).

At the root of Hermanis's theatre's unique form, therefore, there are two different paths of experience which have further led to his search for national identity as the period's most telling form. One of the determining factors in this process is an experience based on the portrayal of genuine reality, the profound investigation of which is often carried out from the vantage point of marginality or subalternity. From now, unrecognised, suppressed stories become equally significant in reflecting the personal and collective identity of the people.

This experimental approach also corresponds to contemporary research methods in social sciences and the humanities. For example, the *leitmotiv* of the new historicist school of thought is the utilisation of the widest variety of source material in gaining an understanding of the social processes. In describing the genesis of the new historicist methodology, its founders, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, emphasise:

In the analyses of the larger cultural field, canonical works of art are brought into relation not only with works judged as minor, but also with texts that are not by anyone's standard literary. The conjunction can produce almost surreal wonder at the revelation of an unanticipated aesthetic dimension in objects without pretensions to the aesthetic. It can suggest hidden links between high cultural texts, apparently detached from any direct engagement with their immediate surroundings, and texts very much in and of their world (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 10).

This new, historically oriented and principally broadened understanding of reality is the context in which we should consider the often quoted pronouncement by Alvis Hermanis:

Any person's own life story is a much more potently dramatic text than all of Shakespeare's plays put together. And each individual's life drama is worthy of being considered for a performance's purpose, to a much greater degree than any fictional fantasy (Naumanis 2006, 260).

Alvis Hermanis's inspired production, *Latvian Stories* (*Latviešu stāsti*, 2004), is shaped by narratives created by the actors themselves, at the basis of which are personal revelations by concrete individuals. In these stories everyday experiences are revealed alongside current political events; the creators of the performance leave the assessment of the ideas entirely to the audience. The directness of the reality in some of the monologues is accentuated to a degree where these stories can become questionable as theatrical facts; however, the minimalism of the stylistic means and the marginality of the messages is a part of a deliberate artistic strategy. Use has been made of a variety of theatrical approaches—the actor's apparent identification with the individual being characterised; a retelling by a third person; or a merging of both methods, typically shaped so that each recitation has an individually differentiated rhythm. It can begin by reluctantly edging along, hesitating, then proceeding without a clearly defined purpose. As, for example, in the *Soldiers' Story* by Andris Keišs:

Not sure exactly what I want to relate... let's see... to tell you... something that happened... well, anyway... not worth telling... I am telling you, it all occurred like in a fog... all has past by... (Keišs 2006, 8)

It is also very characteristic, however, that emphasis has been placed on the character's awareness of his personal role, as formulated, for example, in Vilis Daudziņš's *Story of a Chauffeur*:

That is my thought and, whatever anyone else's view is, as seen from a different perspective, pardon me, my dear friends, but it is of no concern to me (Daudziņš 2006, 155).

In the production of *Latvian Stories*, the people's experience is brought out in the open, and the tales are told from a personal viewpoint. Therefore it is also possible to discern in them the historical forms of narrative as shaped by social transformations. For example, in the literary critic Erich Auerbach's interpretation of the representation of reality in Western literature, dealing with the changes that took place following the collapse of the Roman Empire, the author discusses the texts created by the medieval cleric, Gregory of Tours. As Auerbach emphasises:

Gregory is no longer situated in a place where all the news from the *orbis terrarum* is received, sorted, and arranged according to its significance for the state. He has neither the news sources which were once available, nor the attitude which once determined the manner in which news was reported. (...) A large part of his work, doubtless the most valuable, consists of what he himself witnessed in his own diocese or of what was reported to him from the neighbouring territory. His material is essentially limited to what has been brought before his eyes (Auerbach 1968, 84–85).

The perspective indicated in the production of *Latvian Stories*, urging closer attention to seemingly marginal viewpoints, is further developed in other Alvis Hermanis productions shaped in close collaboration with the JRT actors. In this sense, the approach of the troupe corresponds to the practice, familiar in contemporary theatre, of creating and structuring the production's narrative texture in the process of rehearsal. As formulated by theatre makers:

[The] script is a composition in itself and therefore capable of dramaturgical analysis. However, even such analysis is likely to provide hints and starting points for a development of the work into performance (Turner and Behrndt 2008, 35).

Characteristic of those performances in which the trend initiated by *Latvian Stories* is continued, is the more complicated structure of the text. This process is quite vividly apparent in the performances *Latvian Love* (*Latviešu mīlestība*, 2006) and *Ziedonis and Universe* (*Ziedonis un Visums*, 2010).

In the production of *Latvian Love*, alongside several monologues, the greater portion of the performance is taken up by encounters between two people, which help to structure the mutual relationships among five actors, the scenes transmuting from one into another, occasionally binding one with the other using the alienation techniques of the epic theatre. In the opening scene of the show, five of the actors in the troupe, Baiba Broka, Guna Zariņa, Vilis Daudziņš, Ģirts Krūmiņš and Kaspars Znotiņš are reading dating advertisements. The actors are dressed in everyday outfits; and the initial personal ads suspiciously resonate with characteristics which could very well be those of the members of the group themselves. But before too long their content differs from any possible resemblance to the troupe's own biographies. In subsequent scenes, each one of the actors appears in very different roles, even if an ironic interplay among actors in certain episodes is sometimes preserved. It is noteworthy that in *Latvian Love* the marginal messages more frequently mark the contact points with the national patriotic narration. For example, in the scene where a librarian (Guna Zariņa), together with another character (Ģirts Krūmiņš), discusses distinguished Latvian cultural personalities, authors and texts, in one breath they are both citing important lyrical fragments and carrying on a discussion about the details of various poets' private life. Artistically convincing, this synthesis marks also the final episode of the play, where, during the Latvian Song Festival, the two chorus members' comical encounter is transformed into the unison song of the combined grand chorus.

In the production *Ziedonis and Universe*, the artistic director, in collaboration with the lead actor, Kaspars Znotiņš, and the entire cast, carries out a balanced merger of the sacred and the profane. The separate episodes are tied together by the pervading personality of the Latvian national poet Imants Ziedonis. The poet is not in the least being idealised; from his writings, rather marginal details, including remarks uttered during interviews, are put to the fore. The play's strategy reflects the postcolonial society's essential ingredients—its many-sidedness and vitality. As emphasised by Homi Bhabha, the national narrative is assuming form by countering and unifying the pedagogically supportive and the performative aspects:

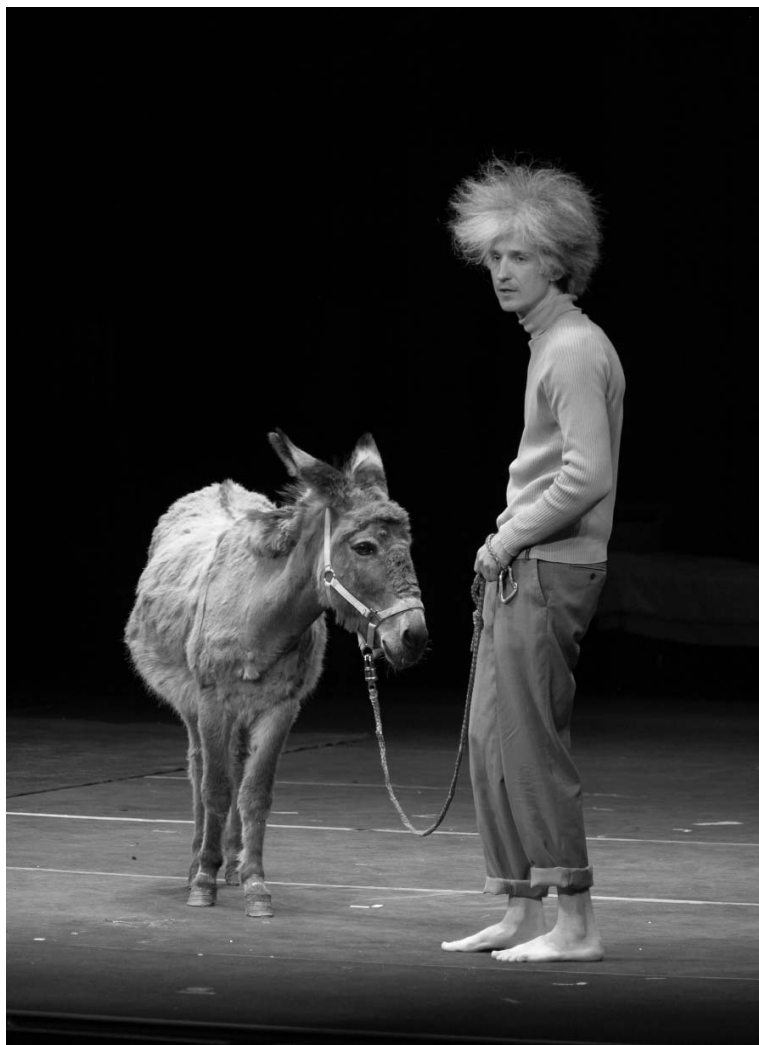


Fig. 2-2: *Ziedonis and Universe*, directed by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, Riga, in 2010. Kaspars Znotiņš as the poet Imants Ziedonis

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpolates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuous,

accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (Bhabha 1994, 145–146).

In terms of the text's organisational sense and content, the topic of national identity reaches a level that is difficult to surpass in the performance written and enacted by the actor Vilis Daudziņš, *Grandfather* (*Vectēvs*, 2009). It reveals the personalised sense as well as alienation, following the established principles of the epic theatre; at the same time the shape assumes, from an idea standpoint, a deliberately many-sided, yet artistically unified performance, whose fundamental message can be combined in two mutually connected accents: a revelation of present and past identities in a deliberately many-layered, dissonant message.

The play's structure is seemingly simple—the plot line is provided by the central character's wish to find his grandfather, lost without trace in the war, about whom there has been no news for the last 65 years. In the course of his search, he meets three different individuals that have his grandfather's last name and, personified by the actor's monologues, these encounters become the intriguing play's binding element. These are basically different stories, in each of which a radically different point of view is drawn about events before, during and after the war. These stories are revealed to us as real and at the same time fictitious—these are as bits of a once existent, but now irreversibly lost and shattered history of a nation.

In the stage production of *Grandfather*, the epic theatre's fundamental principles come to life, where the actor, Vilis Daudziņš, becomes an interpreter of a variety of human character qualities, as well as an intellectually oriented artist, who in the search to define his character's image attempts to unify in reality no longer existing national characteristics. Very much like the street scene described by Bertolt Brecht, in place of a dramatic action, an attempt at restoration of past events is occurring.

The show starts with a mutual greeting, in which the personality of the actor and that of the show's hero merge into a complex actor-to-audience relationship model.

Good evening! My name is Vilis Daudziņš. I am looking for my grandfather... in the last war he disappeared without a trace. *Propal bezvesti...* that is how it was stated in one of the papers which my grandmother received after the war. His name was Augusts Savickis (Daudziņš 2009, 1).

In the step that follows, the actor employs a classical alienation technique: his impersonated hero turns the spectator's attention to the grandfather's image.

I will show you his picture... See? This is my grandfather's first known photograph. Here he is in Latvian army uniform, when he was serving in the Daugavpils Aviation Brigade. He met and got to know my grandmother in 1930, at the candy factory "Laima". My grandmother worked there as a candy wrapper, but my grandfather was a driver (ibid.).



Fig. 2-3: Vilis Daudziņš's *Grandfather*, directed by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, Riga, in 2009. Vilis Daudziņš as a Man who is looking for his grandfather

Further events unfold, which can no longer be included in the narrator's verifiable portion of information. Therefore, the grandmother is given her turn to speak—the following episodes are tales that she relates.

Grandmother told me, that once a little boy had run up to her, pressed a bunch lily-of-the-valley into her palm and said, "These are being sent to you on your Name Day." Then he ran off and disappeared, without saying from whom. My grandmother was a young, beautiful and energetic young

lass, about 19, and immensely popular with boys. She decided that those flowers probably came from the “Laima” plant’s drivers. Only, precisely from whom?—Must think! There could be three or four of them... And then she had gone to all the drivers and addressed each individually; she said “thank you” and looked each in the eye. The drivers had looked at her: “Thank you for what?”... and when my grandfather August’s turn had come, he blushed enormously... (ibid.)

The play’s character’s field of knowledge with regard to the events that follow is extremely limited. Illustrating some episodes from the years of independence, it stretches until the moment when the narrator’s grandmother, together with his grandfather, had gone as refugees from the war to Russia, where the grandfather somehow disappeared.

What follows is Vilis Daudziņš’s process of search for traces of his lost grandfather. The story ends when seemingly a point of reference is obtained to what had been long sought:

The telephone rang.

—Hello, am I speaking to Vilis Daudziņš?

—Yes.

—We are calling from the State Archives: can you tell us whether your grandfather was Augusts Savickis, the son of Aleksandrs?

—Yes.

—It seems we have found him (ibid., 23).

Such is the play’s ending. No further clarification follows: the different life stories of the characters met along the way have clearly indicated the impossibility of retrieval, restoration from obscurity and the doubt-cleansed historical landscape and the people in it. The potential, concrete discovery will not provide the key to the generalisation of the definitive history of the nation which is being sought.

The play’s character’s story, in the course of the narrative, outgrows the boundaries of the theatre performance. One person’s message, told through the perspectives of different characters, becomes a description of an entire people’s destiny, in which the impossibility to retrieve the story’s thread of truthfulness is emphasised. By preserving intellectual control over the material’s layout, created by the actor himself, he shares also in his own personal and intimate experience, which becomes an ir retrievable precondition for generating the artist’s and the viewer’s mutual trust.

The solo performance of Vilis Daudziņš is an excellent example of how the text’s epic structure attests to the lost, searchable and retrievable (or perhaps ir retrievable) relationships among different generations in the context of colonisation and war. The visualisation of the story is shaped by

the image spectrum from the first to the last available photo of the actor's grandfather:

I will show you a picture... See, this is my grandfather's last photo. It is Chelabinsk, I believe—the summer of 1942. That is where my grandfather worked for a time as a chauffeur. Then he was drafted into the Red Army, and there he disappeared without a trace. That is all that I know about him. To put it more precisely... that is all that we know for sure—as the rest are unclear, conflicting versions and rumours (ibid., 2).

Vilis Daudziņš's achievement in creating a unified narrative and character impersonation and contributing to a variety of visual characters being brought to life attests to today's enormous possibilities for an actor who creatively participates in a play's formative stages. In its ideal form, today's theatre is a "band of soul-brothers", united in a common point of view with regard to their sense of social responsibility; and the JRT, in the first ten years of the 21st century, has approached this ideal remarkably closely. That is especially significant in an era when the art of the Baltics, similar to that of other postcolonial societies and cultures, comes into contact with perceptions of deep social and moral crisis. In such a situation, the theatre bears a special responsibility toward how it responds to events outside its walls. What conditions determine the selection of the material and its adaptation? What is meant by "the text of today" and how is its perception shaped? What then will be the text of today, and why are we choosing it?

The theatre director Erwin Piscator, in his reminiscences about the late 1920s in Germany, characterised the prevailing political conditions as follows:

[It was] a time when there was the greatest unrest in all spheres of life (..) a time which was torn and split by the crassest political, social and intellectual conflicts (..) a time when every man who could see beyond his own personal interest had to feel committed (Turner and Behrndt 2008, 39).

The 1920s were also the time when Bertolt Brecht's theory of the epic theatre was attaining its maturity from the embryo stages. In 1927, Brecht wrote:

It is understood that the radical transformation of the theatre cannot be the result of some artistic whim. It has simply to respond to the whole radical transformation of our time (ibid., 40).

Today's Baltic theatre makers' artistic and social experience reveals that the restoration of political independence has not diminished conflicts that are of global dimensions. The accomplishments of JRT's director, Alvis Hermanis, and the acting team broaden the political possibilities of the theatre art as well as developing the theatre's relationship to the script, audience, society and current realities. At the same time, their cultural inventiveness is inseparably connected with tradition—and of that we are reminded by T. S. Eliot's words:

The historical sense involves not only the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal—and of the timeless and the temporal together—is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place, of his own contemporaneity. No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone (Eliot 1932, 14–15).

Only by being conscious of our fragile, colonisation's totally despised, and, to a large degree, irretrievably lost tie with the recollections and traditions of the past in terms of family, community and national history, can we be sufficiently cautious and sensitive in our handling of the rapidly vanishing sense and value assessments and sufficiently persistent in confirming their significance. Perhaps it is going to be precisely that awareness of social sensitivities and the proximity of personal self-respect and their combined balance that will determine the future survival potential of the Baltic's cultural and theatre world.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FROM COLLECTIVE TO INDIVIDUAL AND BACK AGAIN: STRATEGIES OF STAGING PERSONAL MEMORIES ON THE CONTEMPORARY BALTIC THEATRE STAGE

JURGITA STANIŠKYTĖ, LITHUANIA

Abstract: During the first years of independence the Baltic theatre stage has served as a place to restore previously erased memories of the nations' past and to give voice to the life narratives banned from the stage for the last fifty years. However, with the arrival of the new generation of theatre creators a shift has occurred on Baltic stages, from abstract and symbolic representations of collective memory to the more direct portrayal of subjective and personal experiences of the past. During the second decade of Independence the “locus of recall” shifted from community to the individual as more attention began to be paid to the dimensions of subjectivity and so called “autobiographic memory”. The article provides an overview of strategies of staging personal memories in contemporary Baltic theatre and focuses on the most visible and innovative approaches to the communication of an individual experience on stage.

Keywords: Baltic theatre, collective memory, autobiographic memory, historical narrative, text.

The affinity between theatre and memory has been recognised and analysed by many scholars. As Marvin Carlson declared in his seminal book *The Haunted Stage—Theatre as a Memory Machine*:

The retelling of stories already told, the reenactment of events already enacted, the re-experience of emotions already experienced, these are and

have always been central concerns of the theatre in all times and places (2001, 5).

In the theatre of the three Baltic countries, the urge to talk about memory and history became even more visible after the fall of the Soviet regime. During the first years of Independence, the Baltic theatre stage has served as a place to restore previously erased memories of the nations' past and give voice to life narratives banned from the stage for the last fifty years. The main objective of the period was to bring on stage the *silenced reality*, to symbolically map the uncharted territories of the collective memory of the nation. However, performances dealing with questions of remembering often failed to escape the canonised theatrical language of symbols and metaphors, avoiding the direct *documentary* approach towards experiences of the past. For example, Lithuanian theatre of that period focused on displays of the collective memory of the nation—generalised, abstract and often represented on stage by the symbolic figure of a suffering protagonist. As Piret Kruuspere concludes, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the problems of national identity and memory in Estonian drama were expressed either allegorically, through archetypes and symbolic analogies as well as visions of *fatherlessness* or *displacement*, or with a socio-educational objective. “For a short period of time our (i.e. Estonian, auth.) theatre halls functioned almost as lecture rooms, where additional lessons in national history were given” (Kruuspere 1999, 86).

However, with the arrival of the new generation of theatre creators a shift occurred on Baltic stages, from abstract and symbolic representations of collective memory to the more direct portrayal of subjective and personal experiences of the past. During the second decade of Independence the “locus of recall” shifted from community to the individual as more attention began to be paid to the dimensions of subjectivity and the so called “autobiographical memory”. On the other hand, the need to acknowledge the fragmentary nature of the “remembering subject” as well as the socially conditioned nature of memory itself forced Baltic theatre artists to rethink their representations of the past on stage and to look for different ways to examine remembering as the communication of an individual experience within a particular socio-cultural context.

One of the most visible tendencies in contemporary Lithuanian theatre is to present personal stories/memories within the framework of classical drama texts. This use of pre-existing cultural templates produces a double effect of emotional identification and critical distance. Particularly good examples of this double coding of performance text or “hidden personal

memories” can be found in the works of Lithuanian theatre director Oskaras Koršunovas. He speaks about his own personal experiences as well as the fate of his transitional generation, analyzing the ways of remembering and forgetting, repression and obsession with the past, with the help of conceptual interpretations of classical texts—Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* (2002), Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (2008) and *Miranda* (2011), based on *The Tempest*, as well as a postmodern drama that plays intertextually with mythical representations, *P.S. File O.K. (P.S. Byla O.K., 1997)*. In his performances Koršunovas is constantly working on the idea of his generation as the one that is not able to solve the Oedipal nightmares of the unconscious belonging to the totalitarian system (Soviet regime) and is forced to commit perpetual patricide, which in turn becomes an empty ritual, unable to provide any salvation: the past always reappears as the Father’s ghost and takes on various shapes of power.

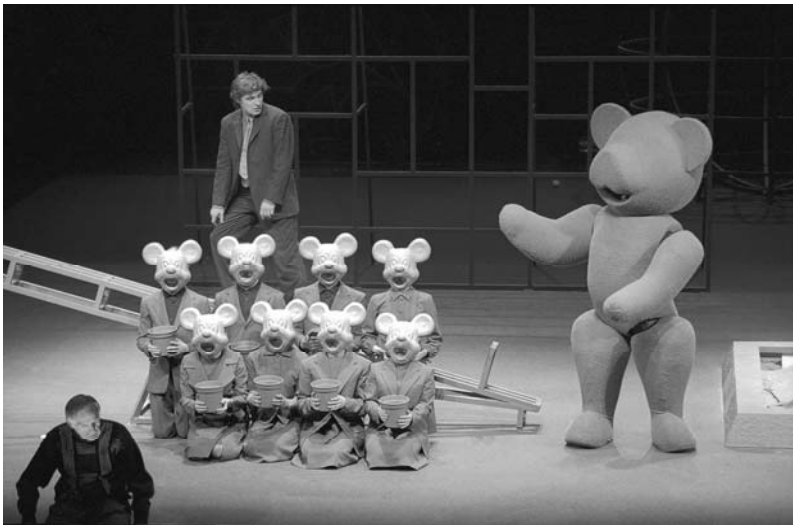


Fig. 2-4: Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*, directed by Oskaras Koršunovas at the Theatre of Oskaras Korsunovas, Vilnius, in 2002. (Left) Laimonis Noreika as Laius’s shepherd, Dainius Gavenonis as Oedipus

In his interpretation of Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*, the myth is used as a framework through which those experiencing radical change—the transitional post-Soviet generation—can reconcile past and present. The performance becomes the manifestation of the exposure (or even deconstruction) of the power of the past, which haunts every aspect of the

human psyche and life, but always remains invisible. The performance *P.S. File O.K.* attempts to link personal memories with canonical representations in a different manner. Its main theme is memory, presented not only as subject-matter, but also as “memoried structures”, to cite Jeanette R. Malkin—repetitions, citations, overlapping, simultaneity, intertextuality (Malkin 1999, 1). Koršunovas’s interpretation of *Hamlet* can be perceived as a display of the operation of “theatre of memory”. The director seems eager to show how one’s personal story (the story of Old King Hamlet, Hamlet and Koršunovas himself) is being told and interpreted/constructed at the same time by means of theatre (Koršunovas 2009, 40). The strategies employed in these performances can be interpreted as examples of symbolic equation of the personal experience to the mythical narrative, encompassing the traditions of visual resistance of the Soviet period, but at the same time open to new, complex forms of artistic contribution. However, in order to fully grasp the potential of these performances one has to employ a quite complex interpretational matrix, wherein the metaphorical layer of such performances can remain undetected by the general public.



Fig. 2-5: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, directed by Oskaras Koršunovas at the Theatre of Oskaras Koršunovas, Vilnius, in 2008. Darius Meškauskas as Hamlet, Nele Savičenko as Gertrude

One of the strategies that deal directly with individual memories is autobiographical performances. They are becoming increasingly visible in Baltic theatre, together with so called “performance-investigations” or documentary theatre, where real identities, different styles of acting and autobiographical material are combined. In these stage practices, actors construct stories from their own experience and mix them with themes from popular political discourses as well as everyday reality. The intention behind the autobiographical performances of such theatre groups as *Open Circle* (*Atviras ratas*, Lithuania) working with the personal stories of their actors (school memories in particular) is “to reach a level of maximum authenticity possible in theatre”¹. This “stage authenticity”, according to the creators of *Open Circle*, can be achieved only through *real* material—authentic personal narratives directly uttered on stage by the young actors.

In the autobiographical performances of *Open Circle*, the staging is made to look as loose as possible, almost without any directing, to come as close to a real storytelling situation as possible. Great attention is given to the authenticity of language and the effect of immediacy. Usually the performance space is located in very close proximity to the spectators, who are addressed directly. The effect should be created that the experience of the performers is not closed, trapped in the textual frame, but rather leaves a lot of space for improvised action. However, even if the actors present real autobiographical material and talk about things that actually happened to them, on stage these stories take on a theatrical dimension and become fictive and dramatic. Most of the stories about school years seem to fit the frames of cultural scripts and publicly available discourses of acceptance, defiance and exclusion. Actors *carve* their own personal experiences according to the shapes of already existing cultural templates or, to use the term of Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet, narrative models. All three narrative models identified by Chanfrault-Duchet are present in the performances of *Open Circle*: the epic (identification with the values of the community), the romanesque (the quest for authentic values in a degraded world), and the picaresque (an ironic and satirical position in relation to hegemonic values) (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991). We can state that this kind of performance produces nothing more than an effect of authenticity or, to quote Konstantin Stanislavsky, the illusion of the first time: carefully staged, scripted and determined by the perception of the audience.

Performances of personal memories are often regarded by their creators as the source of an authentic presence. One can state, that the

¹ Biographic improvisation Open Circle: <http://atvirasratas.lt/spektakliai/atviras-ratas>, accessed January 11, 2012.

“urge for the authentic” demonstrated in such autobiographical performances is similar to the desire for objectivity in historiography. The performers are concerned with the possibilities of translating unmediated experiences in theatre, which in the light of contemporary debates about the nature of theatrical presence seems almost impossible². However, in the context of the Lithuanian theatre tradition of metaphorical representation or Aesopian language, where almost every message is hidden behind several layers of visual signs, this need to engage in direct and unmediated communication with the audience seems natural. Nevertheless, as Thomas Postlewait has remarked in his writing about autobiography and history, it is almost impossible to separate “face and mask, presence and absence, public and private personality, life and art” in such performances (Postlewait 1989, 248). We can think about theatrical autobiographies as a process in which personal stories are *dressed* in a specific *mise-en-scène* in order to retain *credibility*. It creates an impression that authentic narratives and actions told and carried out *here and now* have a real dimension, at the same time hiding the fact that they stem from deliberately employed means of directing the audience’s attention and controlling their reaction.

Precisely the urge to play with the binary opposition of fictional and real while dealing with personal memories is present in some performances of the young generation of theatre creators in the Baltic States. These performances consciously focus on the key role of the spectator as the addressee of particular artistic strategies. For example, the performances *Lithuanian Day / Brave Country* (*Lietuvos diena / Drąsi šalis*) by Cezaris Group (Cezario grupė) and director Cezaris Grauzinis (2007) and *Clinic* (*Poliklinika*), created by four actors and director Agnius Jankevičius (2008) can be interpreted as playing tactically with the personal and fictional. Both performances started from the *zero point* in terms of traditional theatre making, as the script of both was created during the rehearsals. The collective blueprint of the performance was open to change through the experiences of the creators, as the main *tactics* of producing the performance was the investigation of everyday reality. The starting position was the willingness of the creators of the performances to address

² From the critique of a *metaphysics of presence* by Jacques Derrida expressed in his essay “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation” (1967), to the theories of theatre scholars such as Elinor Fuchs, who argues that traditional forms of theatrical presence based on the illusion of *spontaneity* may be overcome through staging the *quote*. Staging the quote would expose the fact that all theatrical speech, characterization and gesture, has always been written (or rehearsed), and can never be fully *present* before an audience (Fuchs 1985, 163–173).

the topical issues of everyday life—from political realities and the image of Lithuania abroad in *Lithuanian Day / Brave Country*, to the presentation of four schematic types of young Lithuanian that constitute the contemporary social fabric in *Clinic*. The directors of both performances searched for the directorial vision together with the actors and had no preconceived notion of the narrative structure of their work. Articles in newspapers, street slang, stereotypical notions of the constituents of *Lithuanianness*, fragments of mass culture imagery, voices from the online communities and the creators' attitudes towards the phenomena of present-day reality constitute the amalgam at the core of these performances. Although the actual performances encountered difficulties in terms of finding acting techniques adequate to the *authentic* language of the *real*, both examples can be seen as steps towards the notion of playing with reality and personal experiences on the Lithuanian theatre stage.

A much more direct way to engage with critical as well as self-reflexive questions about the personal stories of artists and their relations with society can be found in the performances by the Estonian theatre group NO99, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009), or *The Rise and Fall of Estonia* (2011), directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper. The starting point of the performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* is *real* material—speeches given by the Estonian Minister of Culture, real artefacts from the history of conceptual art and personal experiences of the artists of the troupe. It starts as a homage to Joseph Beuys's happening of the same title, and later develops into a performative investigation of various issues that revolve around societal (communicative) aspects of art: from discussions on the contribution that the artist can bring to society to direct questioning of the cultural politics of the Estonian state.

The patterns of stage experiments refer to (or openly cite) well known examples from the history of conceptual art—from Joseph Beuys to Christo or Oleg Kulik. This intertextual homage to the history of creative experimentation is constantly interrupted by the appearances of the actress playing the Estonian Minister of Culture Laine Jänes, whose name—Jänes—translates from Estonian as “hare”. The political stiffness and *artificial* or rehearsed nature of her speeches is juxtaposed with the authentic *sweat* and somewhat desperate attempts of the improvising performers and clearly demonstrates fundamental miscommunication. The relationship of the artist to his/her environment is displayed very boldly in the performance, illustrated not only through the figure of the minister but also through monologues (personal stories) that represent the voice of the general public, questioning the value of experimental artistic practices: “Why do I have to support art that I don't understand?” This view is

voiced through several perspectives, ranging from the *common-tax-paying-folk* to the artisans who participate in the production of a *tales to stupefy* type of entertainment. The scenic confrontation and straightforward portrayal of a politician on stage in *How to explain pictures...* at times seems uncanny, at times bordering on vulgarity. The mind that has long been treated to the metaphorical rhetoric of theatrical sights is not easily captivated by this kind of social and political commentary. However, it is exactly this bold and direct investigation of the conditions in which the contemporary artist is forced to operate that illustrates the break with the Soviet tradition of symbolic resistance. This Estonian performance demonstrates that there is a place for direct questioning of the political environment that can be performed with brave and personal self-revision and self-reflexion that does not have to be hermetic.

Playing with personal memories with the help of fictional extensions of them is present in the performance *Grandfather* (*Vectēvs*, 2009) by Vilis Daudziņš and Alvis Hermanis of the New Riga Theatre. In it the personal history of the grandfather of actor and playwright Daudziņš is linked with three interchangeable fictional personal stories that reflect three different versions of Latvia's historical past. According to the Latvian theatre critic Valda Čakare, the actor demonstrates how a personal urge and passion to construct or find any facts about his grandfather, missing since World War II, transforms into a supra-personal performance, giving a broad panorama of an epoch of Latvian history (in fact post-Soviet history) together with the grand narratives of World War II historiography (Čakare 2010, 39). On stage we witness fictional extensions of the personal history—three characters, all by the name Savickis, tell three different stories: the story of a Soviet partisan, a former legionnaire of the German army and a man who managed to serve both camps. They all *remember* the same historical period with the emphasis on the personal and totally different aspects of memory, thus demonstrating the inevitable difference between individual memory and the public understanding of history. All the characters struggle to compose a narrative that would reconcile past and present and give them a coherent sense of self, however these attempts seem useless. As Valda Čakare notes, “the way the stories are organised shows that the past does not turn up by itself; it is the result of construction and impersonation” (*ibid.*, 41). *Grandfather* demonstrates that personal memories are the products of creation, constructed in order to compose a past that one can live with. At the same time performance emphasises the social and contextual aspects of memory as well as the complex relationship between individual and collective memory.

The performances that I have discussed here offer different possibilities of establishing a complex relationship with collective and personal memories that is probably most relevant to the contemporary cultural context. The increasing body of contemporary performances in post-Soviet Baltic theatre that deal with autobiographical material focuses on the notions of dislocation and paradox, on the imaginative or playful (as well as emotional) aspects of historical narratives and emphasises the interplay between reality and fiction, present not only in the performative displays of individual memories but also in the nature of historiography itself.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE DRAMA-CENTRIC TRADITION AND NEW TEXT STRATEGIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIAN THEATRE

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Abstract: This study provides an overview of text usage strategies employed in performance which have appeared in Lithuanian theatre over the past five years (2006–2011). The premise of the article is Hans-Thies Lehmann's proposition, that there could be different degrees of radicalism in postdramatic theatre. The play *The Phonebook* (directed by Vidas Bareikis), performed by the Theatrical Movement No Theatre, is cited as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in theatre. The drama *Expulsion*, by a famous Lithuanian playwright, Marius Ivaškevičius, is presented as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in drama. In terms of self-reflection, *The Phonebook* addresses the problem inherent in all postmodern art—the identity of the theatre and its ability to express human needs. It is the first play featuring an entirely new format in Lithuania, an example where postdramatic concepts are discussed comprehensively. Marius Ivaškevičius play, *Expulsion*, is characterised by the features of a new drama: fragmentation, lost identity, narrative structure, polyphonic language. Speech becomes the epicentre of the play, which involves significant events and removes any specific spatio-temporal continuum as well as the logic of the characters' relationships. In this sense, the play does not constitute a pattern of text entirely liberated from the genre canon. However, it does present an example of a dramatic text inspired by contemporary developments in the theatre.

Keywords: postdramatic degree in theatre and drama, drama-centric tradition, collective creation, reality effect, new drama text strategies, polyphonic language, diegesis and mimesis, narrative situation, linguistic level, hybridisation, intertextuality of the speech act, polivocal text, dynamic structure of language.

The multi-directional, postdramatic theatre movements which have been discussed by theatre researchers for some time now have become more evident in the panorama of Lithuanian theatre during the period 2006–2011. The Lithuanian theatre, which was formed purely under the concept of dramatic theatre, is still escaping the clutches of *text repression*. However, the situation seems to be changing. Plays resembling more the specificity of postdramatic theatre, having previously been isolated examples or the exceptions that just proved the rule (such as the theatre of Benas Šarka), have emerged as a meaningful trend in recent years. The premise chosen by me for this report was Hans-Thies Lehmann's proposition that there

(...) could be different degrees of radicalism in postdramatic theatre, that could be specified from “almost still dramatic” theatre to a form where not even the rudiments of fictive processes can be found anymore (Lehmann 2010, 106).

Extensive radical varieties of postdramatic theatre were until recently hardly seen in the panorama of Lithuanian theatre. I shall present some notable current examples. The performance *The Phonebook* (directed by Vidas Bareikis) performed by the Theatrical Movement No Theatre will be cited as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in theatre. The drama *Expulsion*, by a famous Lithuanian playwright, Marius Ivaškevičius, will be used as an example of the postdramatic degree of radicalism in drama.

As one of the new text utilisation strategies in Lithuanian theatre, I would cite the creation of collective and documentary texts for the plays. This approach to text creation has become a more and more popular strategy among young, non-state theatre groups in recent years. Those performance texts which still hover between “almost still dramatic” and “dramatic”, we can ascribe to a separate trend. Such personal texts of the actors are called “narratives” by Lehmann, who states that their authors primarily aim at emphasising presence rather than representation through individuality of text. Within the Lithuanian context, I would call such a text-building strategy, which has in mind *searching*, an alternative to the contemporary Lithuanian drama, which no longer satisfies the needs of the theatre (Mažeikiene 2010).

The *Open Circle* (2006), a performance by the Theatre Laboratory Open Circle, was perhaps the first successful example of the collective creation of a text, and apparently an inspiring one. Each actor in this play tells the audience a few personal stories; the narration is performed with sparing theatrical means. The audience is involved in an authentic

experience of sharing the act. A similar collective text-writing approach also underlies other Open Circle performances: *Runaway to the Acropolis*, *Goodbye, Idiots*, *Antigone (Not Myth)*. These latter plays, however, have moved dangerously close to traditional drama writing and stage interpretation techniques, with individual passages of the text being re-arranged into a model of a finished, solid fictional world. The texts for *Runaway to the Acropolis*, *Goodbye, Idiots* and *Antigone (Not Myth)* could be described as dramatic texts, on the grounds of their finished dramatic structure, representing and interpreting storytelling.

The Cezaris Group (Cezario grupė), led by director Cezaris Graužinis, is another company that uses authentic texts creatively. *Lithuanian Day / Brave Country* (2007), like the *Open Circle* performance, is based on actors' individual experience, one difference here being that their personal texts express their relationship with the presence, everyday life and prevailing stereotypes of Lithuania. The performance *Everything or Nothing*, based on texts by Graužinis, unfolds as "single fragments combined in a collage", rejoicing in the autonomy of speech and words. Critics have identified it as "theatre of visions", one that renders the polyphonic performance text and rejects any hierarchical relations between text and image.



Fig. 2-6: Vidas Bareikis's and Marius Macevicius's *The Phonebook*, directed by Vidas Bareikis at Theatrical Movement No Theatre, Vilnius, in 2011. Darius Miniotas as Adolf Klise, theatre dictator

The principle of collective/non-dramatic text-building underlies the performances of *Decalogue* by the Theatre Utopia, *Mono Sapiens* by the Trupė Liūdi, and *Clinic* by Agnius Jankevičius (2008). In these plays, the authentic text is employed as a tool to break free from literary fiction and the dictates of drama. Their reliance on fragments of individual experience, self-reflection, and free stage composition, rather than a strict dramatic logic (the finished plot), is more vivid. Fragmented, random, complementary polyphonic texts are becoming the central element of stage performances of this type. Nevertheless, these performances rather frequently balance on the boundary of dramatic or “almost still dramatic” theatre, since the text here often remains a very important, if not the most important, determinant of the performance logic. The use of an authentic text and narration in the performance are not always identifiable with postdramatic awareness. The degree of “almost still dramatic” theatre could be named.

The performance *The Phonebook*, staged by the Theatrical Movement No Theatre, offers an example of a much more radical postdramatic theatre. Directed by Vidas Bareikis and his “affinity” company, it became a sensation and a most striking theatrical event in the season. The very title of the play attests to the authors’ claim to challenge those apologists of traditional drama theatre who had never accepted the famous saying that “even a phonebook can be used to make a performance”. In other words, the formality, asexual language and single plot of the phonebook are presented as the antithesis of a dynamic, efficient, logical, and meaningful drama world. *The Phonebook* notes that the starting point for the playscript without a plot (consisting only of first names, surnames, addresses, and numbers) was the theatre world itself: “We wanted to talk about things bothering us, personal and painful things” (2011). Thus, it is clear that for the authors of the play a phone book was just a pretext, a reference to the nature of the play, free from the dramatic text. In terms of self-reflection, *The Phonebook* addresses the problem inherent in all postmodern art—the identity of the theatre and its ability to express human needs. However, the extent of postdramatic radicalism in this performance is not determined by the metatheatrical format alone. The play is constructed as a study of theatre anthropology, as a sociocultural phenomenon. In this respect, *The Phonebook* resembles the performance staged by the Estonian theatre group NO99, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. But more important is the fact that *The Phonebook* is the first play of entirely new format in Lithuania, in which postdramatic concepts are discussed so clearly.



Fig. 2-7: Vidas Bareikis's and Marius Macevicius's *The Phonebook*, directed by Vidas Bareikis at Theatrical Movement No Theatre, Vilnius, in 2011. The main image of *The Phonebook*—Monkey Theatre

The Phonebook begins with a deceptive fiction: the players, in strange monkey costumes, are performing rhythmic synchronised motions with sheets of paper. The actors-monkeys create a performance similar to metaphoric theatre and ritual, with claims to intelligence and the associative postmodern stylistics. Suddenly a book (I think it is a text metaphor) appears on stage (as it happens, a phonebook), sparking off its destruction, and the Monkey Theatre winds up in complete chaos with a monkey sitting on the toilet in the posture of a Lithuanian Sorrowful Christ. Suddenly, a man in the audience gets up: he happens to be an actor. He claims that he can no longer stand this *superintellectual* phonebook scene-ritual and snaps out an utterance on the essence of theatre and the responsibility of artists for the stuff thrust upon the audience. The actors, standing on the stage without any text, objectives or director and striking stiff grotesque attitudes, are trying to make *theatre* out of nothing, just to satisfy the viewers' weird demands. Gradually, the deconstruction of theatrical segments in the play assumes grotesque dimensions. The *real stage* comes to life and lifts up its voice, even physically responding to the acting. As in the cinema, the same scenes are repeatedly *fast-forwarded* and *rewound*. Scenic representations, like the text, appear absolutely spontaneously, without any sense or reason.

The performance is not devoid of irony, parody, and pastiche, but the play does not become an ordinary black comedy or a theatrical parody with a postmodern twist. The peculiar quintessence of the western theatrical tradition, including all the conflicts, ideological fractures and traumas inherent in contemporary theatre, is exposed to the judgement of the audience. An insipid storyline, stereotyped characters, acting clichés, a dictatorial relationship between director and actor, an obscure audience-theatre interaction, commerce, theatrically false and pseudo intelligence, demagoguery and personal responsibility are only a few of the themes articulated in one form or another in this play. All of them are developed simultaneously, not necessarily in words or the actors' texts. Which is precisely why the performance "(...) becomes more a process than a product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information" (Lehmann 2010, 157). Lehmann's statements about the density and overabundance of signs typical to postdramatic theatre are worth remembering. The dialectics of overabundance and shortage of signs makes the viewer's imagination tune in. However, the abundant flow of information in this performance is still being managed as though distrusting the perceiver's ability to arrange values independently. The end of the performance suggests quite straightforward conclusions about the dictatorship of theatre leaders who hold executive powers, the monsters

spawned by rational-material-consumerist thinking, and the destructive force of such logo-centrism.

While addressing the problem of intertwined fiction and reality, the real-world intrusion into the *real* time of the play is glossed over in the performance. The authors try to prevail against the *reality effect*, but they do it differently from the avant-gardes of turn-of-the-century theatre. They no longer foster naive illusions of escaping from the spatio-temporal continuum of the play and somehow turning the theatre into reality (Stanyškytė 2010). As I mentioned before, this is just a game, a bluffed intrusion to reality. The illusion of reality is instant: the viewer quickly realises that the supposedly ordinary man in the auditorium is an actor who is performing a role just like the other actors, who are in turn pretending they are not characters. Likewise, the actors' apparently live chat on a cell-phone with a random subscriber is a pre-recorded audiotape, although it sounds like real-time communication. However, even such a petty intrusion of reality (or rather, its representation) reminds the viewer of the conditionality of the theatrical process throughout the play. According to Lehmann, because of the tentative nature of the situation, the viewer should make up his own mind whether it is reality or fiction: "The theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness both emanate from this ambiguity" (Lehmann 2010, 135). There are more attempts to connect to reality in *The Phonebook*, such as regular announcements of the exact time remaining before the "start of the play" (meaning in fact the end of the performance). In this way, a repeated attempt to confuse the boundaries of the performance (fiction) and life (reality) is made. A similar effect is achieved at the end of the performance, when stage hands begin to dismantle the stage before the audience has had a chance to respond to the end of the show. An interwoven transition from the performance to the reality of life once again stuns the audience, which has already become weary of the reality vs fiction dilemma addressed throughout the play.

Marius Ivaškevičius's play *Expulsion* deals with emigration, with spiritual and physical presence *elsewhere*, in an *alien* territory. The play is characterised by the features of new drama: fragmentation, lost identity, the narrative structure, polyphonic language, etc. Nevertheless, the play is dynamic, efficient and, I dare say, even dramatic. It is worth taking a closer look at the construction methods of the text that allowed it to break away from and, at the same time, stay within the framework of the dramatic text. One of the writing strategies of the play is the interweaving of narration and spoken dialogue (diegesis and mimesis). When describing the principles of narration in theatre, Lehmann writes:

One often feels as though one is witnessing not a scenic representation but a narration of the play presented. Here the theatre is moving between extended passages of narration with only interspersed episodes of dialogue (ibid., 164).

The quote defines precisely the narrative situation in Ivaškevičius play. Ben, a key figure in the play, starts his theatrical performance with presentational acting, telling the audience the circumstances of his emigration, and finishes by representing the first character in the play, Vandal. A direct *speech act* in the play is constantly interrupted by Ben's stories and comments. The *question/answer* system, specific to dramatic language, here becomes a language-game instead of a dialogue. Ben's direct speech may pass into a narrative and then, all of a sudden, re-assume the form of a normal dialogue. There is a situation in the play when Ben, left alone, listens to Freddie Mercury's songs and Freddie's character springs up right next to him. They talk in a mixture of English and Lithuanian, now and then inserting the lyrics of a popular song performed by Freddie Mercury. The dialogue is gradually transformed into a phantasmagorical trance, reflecting a dissonance between artistic fiction/ideals and real life. The consolidation of texts of different nature reflects the intertwining of fantasy and reality and simultaneously creates a dramatic event/tension or an adventure at the linguistic level.

Similarly, the principle of hybridisation (or let us call it intertextuality) underlies more than one situation in the play. Speech-act becomes the epicentre of the play, which involves significant events and removes any specific spatio-temporal continuum, as well as the logic of the characters' relationships. At the phonetic level of speech, a number of comic situations develop from combining different languages. Ivaškevičius discovers unexpected linguistic relationships and paradoxes, e.g. the Lithuanian word "eagle" sounds like "ugly" for the English-speaking character. It can be easily noticed that, unlike traditional drama, where in order to show character a certain manner of speaking is sought, characterisation in this play is integral to the common language of the play as a whole. The speech of individual characters makes a single linguistic formation, identified as "polivocal text" by Paul C. Castagno (2001). Thus, the language itself, not just the ideas it expresses, is a social, cultural and economic sign. The dialectical language, slang, and all foreign expressions are discovered in the play as speech strategies. When reading this text—abundant in meanings—it is not worth following the plot-twists closely, or analysing the logic of the character actions, or interpreting the events. A closer look, however, identifies the text of the play as an extremely lively dynamic structure by virtue of its language. The playwright does not

abandon the development of the action; on the contrary, he is building the text to a hyperactive effectiveness and shaping more or less reasonable character relationships. In this sense, the play does not offer a pattern of text entirely liberated from the genre canon, but it does present an example of a dramatic text inspired by contemporary developments in the theatre. The principles of postdramatic theatre are applied to the play by the playwright, who has been working a great deal in the international field of drama in recent years. While some Lithuanian drama researchers are “mourning the self-inflicted death of drama”, Ivaškevičius, by contrast, discovers fresh potential for expression in the deconstructed dramatic body.

These examples show that theatrical forms with a radical slant and a significant text usage have emerged in Lithuanian theatres and finally ventured to challenge the drama-centric tradition prevailing until now.

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PART III

REALITY AND TEXT IN THE POST AND POST-POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

CHAPTER ONE

REAL REALITY ON STAGE? LOLA ARIAS, ALECKY BLYTHE, RIMINI PROTOKOLL AND SHE SHE POP WORK WITH REALITY ON STAGE

RIKARD HOOGLAND, SWEDEN

Abstract: One of the tendencies in the theatre of the past decades has been to reduce the importance of the dramatic text in favour of other theatrical elements. Hans-Thies Lehmann has named it the “Postdramatic Theatre”, and one of its main features is the decline of the narrative text. In my contribution, I focus on another tendency: the return of the narrative in the performing arts. In the performances of SheShePop, Rimini Protokoll and Lola Arias, storytelling is central. All of these productions use an elaborate aesthetic form. The stories are often told and performed by “real” persons or relatives of the “real” person, sometimes by actors/performers. In some cases, the storytellers are trained actors telling their own story. The narrative is still there, but the author and the fiction seem to be missing. Rimini Protokoll has replaced the term “play” with “scripted reality”. The performances are mostly built on team work, sometimes with a director giving them aesthetic form, often utilizing multiple media sources. But the media are primarily used for underlining the storytelling—not for confusing the situation, as was often done in postdramatic theatre.

Keywords: postdramatic, performance art, reality, Hans-Thies Lehmann.

Hans-Thies Lehman stated that a major shift occurred in the theatre during the second half of the 20th century. “Postdramatic Theatre” has become a frequently used (perhaps overused) term when describing contemporary theatre, but a lot of recent productions, both in performance art and in theatre, point in a different direction. It could be questioned whether the “Postdramatic” is as dominant as is sometimes maintained. I would also

put into question the border between performance art and theatre. In all of my examples, the relation between fiction and reality is in focus.

In 1972, Michael Kirby wrote: “We are not concerned, for example, with the degree of ‘reality’ but with what we can call for now the *amount* of acting” (1972, 3). He presented a scale in five steps from not-acting to acting. One of his conclusions was, “all acting is by definition ‘unreal’ because pretence, impersonation and so forth are involved. From another point of view, all acting is real” (ibid.).

One definition of performance art is that something should change irrevocably during the performance. This fits perfectly with acts such as Marina Abramovich’s *Rythm 10* and Yoko Ohno’s *Cut Pieces*. But both Abramovich and Ohno reproduce their works, and Abramovich has also made re-enactments of performances made by other artists. The question is whether or not they have thus entered “the economy of reproduction” and as a result have betrayed and lessened “the promise of their own ontology” (Phelan 1993, 146). Today, however, these forms of definition no longer seem to function. I would like to identify the theatre’s increasing use of occasions and stories from real life as one of the main reasons why it is no longer possible to talk about the two genres as separate entities.

Today there are numerous ways of using reality on “stage”, from verbatim theatre to the use of real people. All the four examples that I examine here are based on storytelling. In two of the cases, the story is told and performed directly by the people involved; and in one of them by people closely related to the personal histories performed. The fourth example is played by actors/singers who do not have any direct connection to the lives being interpreted on stage. The role of the dramatist is quite different in all of the cases, but none of those involved would like to be seen as a dramatist in the traditional sense.

Lola Arias’ *My Life after*

In this production, all the professional dancers and actors on stage play their parents, to recount how their lives were during the military dictatorship in Argentina. They use documentary material such as super film clips, TV news clips (one of the parents was a news presenter), photos, cassette recordings, postcards, letters, diaries, maps, clothes etc. The production is clearly directed, with a strong beginning where a lot of clothes are thrown on to the stage and one of the actors, hidden in the heap, finds her mother’s jeans and puts them on. Intermediality is used during the whole show, such as the direct video transmission of a photo

when one of the actors draws circles around some of the people she talks about.

The actors are on stage as themselves but also represent their parents (and sometimes other people, when playing situations). They all use their acting skills and step in and out of different characters. The Argentine artist Lola Arias formed the artistic frame, selecting the materials and arranging the combinations of media. In 2010, she published the script in German. It is now possible for any other company to buy the production rights and produce their own show based on the script, without any personal connection to the people portrayed. Currently, no such production has been made. In a short diary from the production, it is clear that the text has been elaborated during the rehearsals, and that not all of the actors who were engaged in the project took part in the final production.

Rimini Protokoll and GarajIstanbul *Herr Dagacar* und die goldene tektonik des Mülls

Rimini Protokoll use the term “scripted realities”. In this production, the on-stage storytellers were collectors of garbage for re-sale in Istanbul. Led by Mr Dagacar, who started the business, they told the audience how they had found “gold” on the streets. On a stage filled with giant trolleys and sacks used for collecting garbage, they told how they worked, but of more importance were the stories of why they had decided to move from the eastern rural part of Turkey to Istanbul: the area where most of them had lived had been partly destroyed by an earthquake. During the performance (spring 2011), they spoke of how the earthquake and tsunami in Japan had awakened their own memories. They gave descriptions of the difference between their lives in the village and in the giant city, and how they still tried to uphold their traditions. One of the performers described the long bus journey to Istanbul. This scene was performed with the help of *karagöz*, the Turkish traditional shadow theatre.

The performance combined different forms of media, such as video and stills, as well as objects from Istanbul and rural Turkey. It was based on narrative, and the stories were told directly to the audience. Sometimes, direct communication in Turkish between the audience and the performers occurred. The performers were neither professional actors nor amateurs.

On stage, they also discussed the strange situation of being on tour, and the impossibility of going back to their previous occupations. This raises the question of what happens when you take ordinary people from everyday life out of their environment; and what responsibilities a production team such as Rimini Protokoll has with regard to their future.

Helgard Haug, one of the founders of Rimini Protokoll and one of the producers of *Herr Dagacar*, has explained that the group was started because they found that contemporary theatre was only about acting skills used in the service of great texts which did not concern the people on stage. She also argued that actors of today are not allowed to react when something irregular happens on stage (Haug 2011). This description of contemporary German theatre could be argued against, but it must be accepted as the point of departure for the team.

Florian Malzacher has analysed the structure of some of Rimini Protokoll's performances. In his article he notes the combination of script and journal (as a translation of the German word Protokoll): "This creates a micro-macro structure that fluidly switches between close-up, detailed anecdotes and wide-shot, big-picture contexts" (Malzacher 2010, 83). The imperfection is important: if the performers become too perfect and start to build roles on stage, "(..) the piece loses more than just its charm. Insecurity and fragility are the defining characteristics of what is understood by many to be authenticity on stage" (ibid., 84).

SheShePop and their *Fathers: Testament*

Four members of the German performance group SheShePop appear with their real fathers. There are three females and four males on the stage. Four of them can be seen as professional performance artists, one of them is a trained actor. The fathers have no skills in acting, even if, in their professional lives, they have been used to talking in front of large gatherings. The performance is about inheritance: how it should be divided, and how the retired fathers should be treated. They use Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the dividing of the country between the three daughters as one of their points of departure. The daughters (and one son) give their view of their fathers and what kind of inheritance they would find reasonable, and their arguments are commented on by the fathers.

The Fathers enter the stage in an almost ceremonial way, one after the other. One of the Fathers marks the event by sounding a flourish on a trumpet. They are placed in armchairs, and a video transmission projects their faces on three frames at the back of the stage. During the performance, it was possible to follow the fathers' reactions in close-up. The performance appears to have been put together after a rehearsal period based on improvisation, but during the performance itself it was almost impossible to interrupt or improvise parts.



Fig. 3-1: *Testament*, produced by SheShePop at the Hebbel Theatre (HAU 2), Berlin, in 2010

There was no direct verbal contact between the stage and audience. The performers (both the professionals and the fathers) played themselves and did not impersonate anyone else. The parts from *King Lear* were more read than performed. During the performance, one of the fathers said that he found that he played the part of himself rather well.

As well as the video screening of the faces of the fathers, *MS PowerPoint* was used and also a flipchart. Objects were also used, most remarkably a coffin made of corrugated paper. One of the fathers was “buried” and his son was able to ask him questions that he did not have the opportunity to ask during his father’s life. The performance that I saw in May 2011 was presented in the framework of *Theatertreffen*, selected as one of the year’s most outstanding German speaking productions (the others were all theatre performances).

In her article, Annemarie Matzke (one of the members of the performance collective) writes about the way in which she finds that their productions cannot be seen as traditional theatre:

We are not playing any dramatic roles; instead we present a staging of ourselves. We are not using any literary texts, instead we are writing our text by ourselves or working out concepts for the situation on the stage. In this situation the text could be improvised. We do not work with the great directors, instead we work as a collective. (...) We are seen as members of the group, not as specific actors. The theatre critics mention our names only as an exception (Matzke 2011, 109–110).

Using Matzke’s description and my own impressions of the performance, it is clear that its most remarkable characteristic is that the actors are not impersonating any fictional character: but the process of self-staging could be further analysed.

Alecky Blythe / Adam Cork, *London Road*

Alecky Blythe works with verbatim theatre and uses a technique which was developed by Anna Deavere Smith:

The technique involves going into a community of some sort, recording conversations with people which are then edited to become the script of the play. (...) The edited recordings have been played live to the actors through earphones during the rehearsal process, and on stage in performance. (...) They copy not just the words but exactly the way in which they were first spoken. Every cough, stutter and hesitation is reproduced (Blythe 2011).

The production of *London Road* was different. It is based on interview material, but some of the parts are made into songs. The composer, Adam Cork, was keen on keeping the original rhythmical way of talking in the songs. The performance is called a musical, but the subject is quite different from the normal genre. In the small town of Ipswich, five prostitutes were murdered in the area of London Road during December 2006. Blythe started to record interviews in 2006 and ended them in 2008. In January 2007, a neighbourhood organisation was founded in London Road. One of the results was to start a Garden competition *London Road in Bloom*. The organisation strongly supports the efforts of the police and social work organisations to help the prostitutes out of drug abuse and get them off the streets.



Fig. 3-2: *London Road*, devised by Alecky Blythe at the National Theatre, London, in 2011. (Left) Nick Holder, Hal Fowler, Howard Ward, Paul Thornley, Rosalie Craig, Nicola Sloane and Claire Moore

The performance at the National Theatre in London started with some authentic audio clips from a meeting with the neighbourhood organisation. The two hour 20 minute performance ended with a similar audio clip. The performance was built up of scenes in the neighbours' homes, at the pub, during the garden competition, meetings with the organisation, at the police station and at the court. The performers were professional actors.

Compared with the three other examples, this performance has a more traditional dramaturgical form, with a murder case as central to the play script. But the performance focus was on ordinary people trying to understand what was happening in their community and how to handle it.

When I saw the performance in July 2011, I overheard audience members who had seen the production several times. Their interest was clearly not the outcome of the trial; instead it was the portrait of the neighbourhood society.

Summary

Alecky Blythe does not consider herself a playwright. Could she be seen as a scriptor in the sense of the Rimini Protokoll production? The difference between the two is that “real” people are not on stage in *London Road*. But is it possible to say that they are impersonated when there are no fictive characters and no fictive lines? At the National Theatre, the performance is seen as theatre or musical. At HAU in Berlin, the performance is seen as performance art. Without doubt, borders have become blurred since the attempts at establishing definitions in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann presents a panorama of the genre. Amongst other things, he points out the irruption of the real and hyperrealism. He also finds that the traditional role of the spectator has changed; it has now a more uncertain position:

The aesthetic distance of the spectator is a phenomenon of dramatic theatre; in the new forms of theatre that are closer to performance this distance is structurally shaken in a more or less noticeable and provocative way (Lehmann 2006, 103).

But is it possible to place these four productions in the genre of postdramatic? One of the main points in Lehmann’s book is that the narrative text no longer has a central position; the text is just a sign amongst others in a collage. In all the four examples mentioned above, the storytelling and the narrative text are central. But there is no author: and she or he could, following Roland Barthes, be replaced by the scriptor who is not the genius, the God (1996, 146).

Lehmann uses the term “performance text”, but in his notion text here stands for everything that happens in the performance (Lehmann 2006, 85). It could be signs from different sources without any hierarchy, which he names Parataxis (ibid., 86). The signs could be pointing in different directions in a fragmentary way. In all the productions described here, a

multitude of signs are present. But the text seems to be hierarchically placed above the other signs. The other media forms and the acting/performing are used to elucidate the story.

The value of the acting is different in the four examples, as is the way in which the performers are professionals or amateurs. The Fathers in the SheShePop production and the Performers in the Rimini Protokoll production are in both cases amateurs, more exactly not actors/performers. In the Lola Arias' production, all the performers are professional actors or dancers; in the production at the National Theatre in London, all the artists are professional actors trained at acting schools. The difference between the two is that in the case of Arias, they are playing their own stories about their parents' lives, while in *London Road* the actors are playing parts, but not ones created through traditional role building.

Going back to Lehmann's term "Performance text", it could also be interesting to see who is "writing" the text, putting together the different signs and sources; creating a montage, like Piscator in the 1920s or Peter Weiss in the 1960s. Weiss has written an interesting text about the documentary theatre, where he discusses the writer's new function (Weiss 1968, 160–167). The writer selects and combines different sources. He gives the material new rhythms, as a way to arrange them thematically. Here, it is also possible to see interesting differences between the examples. It is clear that Lola Arias is the arranger of her whole concept, while in the example of *Herr Dagacar*, it is the production team from Rimini Protokoll that is the scriptor, not the performers. In *London Road*, it is more complex: there are, beside the scriptor, a composer and a director.

What becomes clear is that there is a complex relationship between performance art and theatre. It is too easy to see postdramatic theatre as the only groundbreaking shift in contemporary theatre. The use of reality and reality effects in theatre make the question acute. Is it possible to see two parallel movements, one that goes in the direction of a more complex and abstract stage landscape, the other going in the direction of storytelling based on real people and situations without any artistic representation?

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BIRTH OF NEW AUTHORSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY ESTONIAN THEATRE

ANNELI SARO, FINLAND

Abstract: The *off-programme* of the Estonian Drama Festival in 2010 was called “the author’s theatre” and under this title, the following productions were presented: (1) dramas written and staged by the same person, (2) “devised theatre”, and (3) contemporary dance productions. The use of the term, “author’s theatre”, deserves serious criticism, mostly because of its semantic ambivalence and its claim to be an avant-garde form of theatre making. Since this term and these forms of theatre making are quite popular, they also deserve closer scrutiny. In this article, the functionality, ideology and aesthetics of “the author’s theatre” will be investigated. Because of the wealth of empirical material, only the first group of the author’s theatre and some of its representatives (Ivar Põllu, Urmas Vadi, Andres Noormets and Uku Uusberg) will receive closer attention.

Keywords: contemporary Estonian theatre, director as playwright, authorship in theatre, cultural decentralisation.

The *off-programme* of the Estonian Drama Festival in 2010 was called the “author’s theatre” Under this title, three types of production were presented: (1) dramas, which were written, staged and often also designed by the same person (director or writer), (2) so-called “devised theatre” or a production staged by a troupe, and (3) contemporary dance productions, which were not based on any specific dramatic text. One can detect three forms of authorship here. In the first case, it is a development toward some kind of *super-author*, who aims to fill several positions in the creative process or in extreme forms, to achieve total control over theatre making. The model where the playwright is mostly also the producer of his own text is familiar to us primarily from the theatre of antiquity, but some

famous examples (Molière, Brecht, Fo, etc.) can also be found in more recent times. In contrast to this, “devised theatre” as a collaborative creation is a rather new model of theatre making, which stems from the late 1950s to early 1960s, and became popular especially among *alternative* and *feminist* groups. Devised theatre exemplifies the democratisation of theatre and dispersal of authorship. Contemporary dance productions can represent both models of theatre making, but—most importantly—texts do not play a central part in them.

The term, “author’s theatre” (in Estonian *autoriteater*) deserved serious criticism, mostly because of its semantic ambivalence. Especially in English, the word “author”, in the context of theatre, refers first of all to the writer and could be understood as a play by a certain playwright, an imaginary theatre of a playwright or a theatre dominated by a writer and a text. Since the author’s theatre at the festival was presented more or less as an “avant-garde” form of theatre making, its novelty could also be questioned. Despite this criticism, the terms and forms of “theatre making” have been quite widely spread, thus the features behind it also deserve closer examination.

Ivar Põllu, author of the term “author’s theatre”, has explained his notion as follows:

In the author’s theatre, the people behind an idea are leading processes until the first night of the production. (...) Author’s theatre is an individual art, it is a mild response to the conventional conveyor-belt theatre, where first there is the play, then the translator, then the selective/picky artistic director, then the chosen professional director, etc. Author’s theatre is the fastest way to a solution. The fastest way does not guarantee the best solution, but often is—it proves to be more startling, unexpected and fresh. (...) The play is gradually replaced by the idea or a dream, the text is not a decision-making tool or a basis for a project, the text is a part of a process that is formed only during the production (Põllu 2010).

Here one has to consider that Põllu has worked for five years as a dramatist with Endla Theatre in the Estonian provincial town of Pärnu and is resisting here the temptation to employ the working principles of an institutionalised repertoire theatre.

Luule Epner, who has analysed critically the uses and the connotations of the phrase “author’s theatre”, has indicated that it is probably modelled on the French term “cinéma d’auteur” or the “author’s film” (Epner 2010). An author’s film can be defined by its formal characteristics: a film where the same person fills several functions (both as script writer and director); or, by content or/and ideology, a film where the director is not just an interpreter or a scene-manager but is trying to overcome the routine of the

film industry through experimentation (Kärk 2004). Thus, these two (in fact, altogether three) criteria, functionality, ideology and aesthetics of the “new wave” of author’s theatre, are also investigated in this article.

There are more than 15 directors and 6 or 7 groups representing the author’s theatre in the field of Estonia’s drama theatre. Because of a wealth of empirical material, the complicated nature of the phenomenon and the limitations of this study, I am concentrating on the first group of the author’s theatre—the so-called, “super-authors”. Only four persons (Ivar Põllu, Urmas Vadi, Andres Noormets and Uku Uusberg) will deserve special attention here, because they are representing different features of the phenomenon. Luule Epner investigates the devised theatre in Estonia more thoroughly in her article.

Ivar Põllu (1974) is a musician and theatre critic, who established the Tartu New Theatre in 2008. He stages his own plays and creates possibilities for other author-directors to make theatre outside of a big institution. He is also both the inventor of the term and the *mouthpiece* of author’s theatre in Estonia. The Tartu New Theatre has become a centre of the author’s theatre, because most of its productions (so far 12 out of 16) are staged by author-directors. At first, these people have only an idea, which is either turned down or accepted. When accepted, it is developed further by the leaders of the theatre. The author usually continues writing the play, which, depending on a particular author or text, might be modified during rehearsals, but usually not very much.

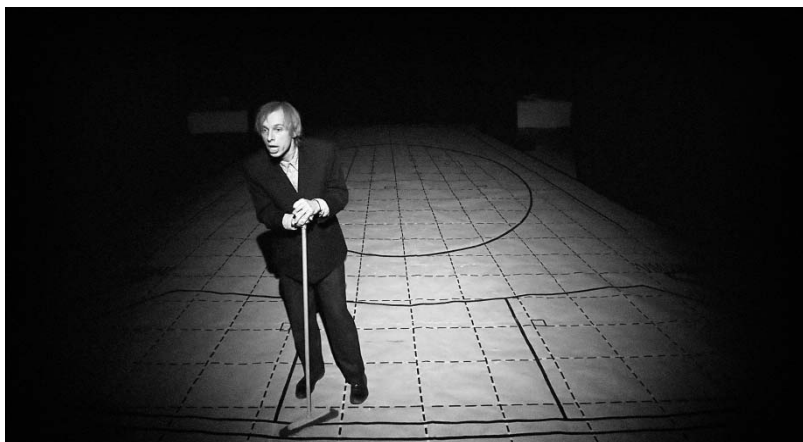


Fig. 3-3: Ivar Põllu’s *IRD, K.*, directed by Ivar Põllu at the Tartu New Theatre, Tartu, in 2010. Nero Urke as Kaarel Ird

Põllu himself has staged four productions. Three of them were based on his own texts and two on documentary sources about famous theatre people in Tartu—*EndSpiel* (2008), *IRD, K.* (2010). The latter won the annual theatre award for the best new play and for the best actor (Nero Urke) as well as the Baltic theatre awards for the production’s conception, musical design (Ivar Põllu), and best actor. According to literary poetics, Põllu is writing rather conventional epic plays, but his trademark actually lies in the content. Mixing facts and fiction while remaining basically true to facts, he creates outcomes that often seem bizarre or absurd to outsiders, but nevertheless give a condensed, authentic picture of the historical persons and time. In principle, Põllu’s works could be staged also in the big state theatre institutions, because nothing aesthetically or ideologically extreme can be detected. Thus, these productions represent author’s theatre, first of all by functional (author fills different functions) and then by ideological (resisting conveyor-belt theatre making) criteria.

Urmas Vadi (1977) is a writer and radio editor who has also lately become a recognised director. In theatre Vadi has staged altogether three productions¹, in radio one, all based on his own texts. Two of them deserve special interest: *The Last Kiss of Peeter Volkonski* (in 2010, given the annual literary award for the best new play) and *Rein Pakk Is Looking for a Wife!* (in 2011). Both Peeter Volkonski and Rein Pakk are real people: Volkonski is a well-known actor and Rein Pakk is known as a businessman, cultural theorist, writer, actor, director, and more. Vadi wrote the plays especially for them, knowing that Volkonski and Pakk had agreed to perform themselves on the stage in semi-fictional plots (the latter is kept as a secret from the audiences). On the metatheatrical level, the plays are investigating interconnectedness and the interdependency of reality and fiction/appearance—not just in theatre, but also in life. Both texts use similar poetics: long epic monologues by men, which are sometimes interrupted by an actress as a character (Laura Peterson and Helena Merzin, respectively). Nevertheless, the contents are quite different. *The Last Kiss of Peeter Volkonski* is about an old actor’s reflections with respect to his own profession, addressed to a young actress who turns out to be a theatre researcher. *Rein Pakk Is Looking for a Wife!* analyses beauty and the cult of the body and its possible consequences—on stage confronting the physical bodies of actors and digitally altered photos. Vadi’s author’s theatre, “realisation of his dreams” (*Vadi and Pakuga* 2011, 45) seems to be mostly functional, not so much ideological or aesthetic.

¹ The first one in small private theatre VAT and two in the Tartu New Theatre.



Fig. 3-4: Rein Pakk's and Urmas Vadi's *Rein Pakk is Looking for a Wife!* Directed by Urmas Vadi at the Tartu New Theatre, Tartu, in 2011. Actors Helena Merzin and Rein Pakk

Andres Noormets (1963) graduated as an actor from the theatre school in Tallinn but for most of his career has been working as a director in institutional theatres². He is also known as a poet and playwright. Noormets first started writing dramatisations (in 1990s) and plays for children (in 2000s), but has quite recently also written plays for adults: *Silence and Cries* (2010, a radio play which won Prix Europa), *The Beginning* (2010), *Hamlet Anderson* (2011). Noormets states that he has always written plays just as an outline of ideas for his forthcoming production and, because of that, he is mostly the first one to put the texts on the stage. Inventing new stories is not his forte, but Noormets has a need to tell certain stories from different points of view or with different sensibilities (Saro 2011). These works hardly follow any strategies of well-made plays and their true impact lies in multimodality (including parodies of musicals). Noormets, who stages most of his works in state repertoire companies, represents author's theatre functionally and aesthetically, trying to widen the artistic expectations of local theatre managers and audiences.

² 1988–94 and 1996–2005 in Viljandi and from 2005 in Pärnu (both are small provincial towns).

Uku Uusberg (1984) graduated as a director from the same theatre school as Noormets. Right after graduation he was hired by the Estonian Drama Theatre, the most distinguished company in Estonia. His first production (in 2008) in this theatre was not a big success, so he continued his stagings outside of the big institutions, maintaining his contract as an actor with the Estonian Drama Theatre. Uusberg has admitted that working with big stars is rather a frightening task for a beginner. For now, Uusberg has written and staged five and a half plays (one in collaboration), the last one again in his home theatre. The poetics of the works is rather traditional, dialogue and conflict based, but the ideology is mostly characterised as “new sincerity”, which is quite a new concept in Estonian culture. Thus, one can conclude that Uusberg has practised “author’s theatre” functionally, ideologically and aesthetically.

The thesis of this article is that the birth of the institution of “author-director” in contemporary Estonian theatre is a sign of democratisation and decentralisation of the entire theatre system, but it can also be viewed as a search for new theatrical means. In the 20th century, Estonian directors have also been writing, predominantly dramatisations of prose works, and some dramatists have had the lucky chance of staging their texts (Nikolai Baturin, Andrus Kivirähk), but entering the field of theatre has acquired a certain amount of symbolic capital because theatre is expensive and a public art-form. One must also bear in mind that during the Soviet era, professional and amateur theatre were divided into two separate domains. Only a few directors had a specific educational background as directors, because this diploma could not be acquired in Estonia. In Moscow or Leningrad the competition was severe, so that the most common way of becoming a director was first to pass actor’s training and then, having secured a job as an actor, to stage one or several children’s productions, then perhaps a comedy, and then, quite possibly, the individual may have one day earned for himself his artistic freedom. It means that the profession of director could be attained through quite a winding road. It was a closed club, despite the fact that there had been a constant dearth of good directors. At the end of the 20th century, the situation gradually started to change, mainly because of an increasing number of theatre institutions.

Another aspect that, at the beginning of the 21st century, made the rise of author’s theatre possible, was the good reputation of original Estonian drama over the last ten years. Approximately 40% of drama productions are based on Estonian literature. This means that spectators are interested in local topics and trust local (and also contemporary) writers, which is quite unusual in the context of Estonian theatre.

The last argument supporting my thesis is the changing role of directors in contemporary theatre and society. In the 20th century, a director has been considered to be the author of his productions, in spite of the origin of the text or material that the production is based on. But different degrees of authorship can be detected. Jean Alter has proposed the following classification of directors: “absent”, “collective” and “individual”. “Individual” directors are effectively responsible for the staging, viewing it as their personal creation. Their productions stand out as “rewritings” or “deconstructions” of classical texts and by an individual style of staging. “Collective” directors are those who collaborate in group staging, combining several personal contributions³:

(..) “absent” directors: all those agents of the directorial function who cannot be identified, usually because that function is not clearly tied to distinct individuals (Alter 1990, 246).

Of course, wider audiences have always preferred the so called absent directors, who more or less follow certain theatrical traditions and “perish in actor(s)”, i.e. the outcome of their work is hidden behind or in acting. Two fundamental features of mainstream theatre productions are that they are based on a verbal text and on a staging/acting tradition. Nowadays, theatre makers are expected to have an explicit and active relationship with society and the art world, thus individual directors have come to the fore.

When investigating the Estonian theatre, one must conclude that plays, nevertheless, still have a central role in the process of “theatre making”, but the notion of the play has changed. It has been enlarged considerably, to the extent where one just prefers to use the word “text”. Also, an increasing number of theatre institutions have provided opportunities for new writers and theatre makers to realise their visions on the stage. Despite the plurality of topics, styles of production and working methods, the birth of the new authorship has not brought about an explicit, aesthetic renewal—unless one considers it to be the exploration of the margins of theatre and theatricality itself.

³ Devised theatre is also creation of “collective” directors.

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CHAPTER THREE

POSTDRAMATIC TEXTUAL STRATEGIES: THE CASE OF THEATRE NO99

LUULE EPNER, ESTONIA

Abstract: This article examines postdramatic textual strategies at work in the cycle of productions of the Estonian Theatre NO99, directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper: *Oil!* (2006), *GEP* (2007), *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009), *Unified Estonia Convention* (2010), and *The Rise and Fall of Estonia* (2011). These productions deal with topical social and political problems, on both the national and the global level. They are created with the help of unconventional practices, i.e., constructed out of heterogeneous material, without a pre-existing text. The article describes the particular practices NO99 employs in creating these productions, essentially to achieve the general artistic aims of the theatre. It also analyses primary postdramatic strategies: recycling, intermediality, inter- and meta-discursivity, authentication (with regard to acting).

Keywords: Estonian contemporary theatre, Theatre NO99, postdramatic theatre, textual strategies, practice of devising, recycling, intermediality, interdiscursivity, authentication.

This study examines postdramatic strategies at work in the cycle of five stage productions of Theatre NO99 (Estonia). NO99 is a small state-subsided theatre, founded in 2004 and led by the artistic director Tiit Ojasoo and his wife, scenographer Ene-Liis Semper, who usually works in creative tandem with her husband and has also co-directed most of the NO99 plays. At present, the troupe includes ten, mostly young actors. NO99 clearly represents a departure from mainstream tastes and practices. Its aesthetically provocative work (like that of the Von Krahl Theatre) has markedly changed the Estonian theatrical landscape (Rähesoo 2008, 260, 262).

Though the five productions under discussion (all directed by Ojasoo and Semper) proceeded from different reference points and employed a variety of artistic devices in their staging, all of them have been concerned with topical problems of Estonian society and mentality, and therefore could be placed in the category of “political theatre”. For that reason the cycle has generated much debate both in Estonia and internationally. *Oil!* (2006) was preoccupied with problems arising from an assumed end of world oil resources and was critical of the “over-consumerist” emphasis of capitalist society. *GEP (Hot Estonian Guys, 2007)* dealt with the demographic crisis and a possible extinction of Estonians; *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (2009) was about the marginalisation of the arts in the present-day society, but also questioned the very essence of theatrical art; *Unified Estonia* (2010), the most unusual piece of the cycle, was a fictitious, highly populist political movement, culminating in a *Convention* (a one-off event); and finally, *The Rise and Fall of Estonia* (2011), performed in the theatre building before video-cameras and watched on screen in a big hall next to the theatre, aimed at providing an overall picture of Estonia’s contemporary history and its present-day lifestyle.

In terms of the text—performance relationship, all the above-mentioned productions belong to the postdramatic theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann has aptly noted that postdramatic theatre is by no means theatre without a text—it is drama that tends to disappear, not text (Lehmann, 2007, 47). However, in contemporary postdramatic theatre practice the notion of a text has been addressed and its relationship to the performance reassessed. With respect to the cycle of Theatre NO99, the producers have made use of the practice of devising, creating a production “from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script” (Heddon and Milling 2006, 3). This method shifts emphasis to the process of creating text which is simultaneous to and closely intertwined with the process of preparing a particular production. Texts “... as a record rather than a recipe, can be assembled during the preparation time of a performance, during the ‘actual’ performance, as well as after the ‘event’,” as noted by Stephen Chinna (2003, 138). Devising, as a generally collective approach to text-making, typically produces a non-dramatic text: fragmented, non-linear, displaying multiple perspectives and viewpoints.

The starting point and the driving force of a devised performance is usually some social and/or artistic problem or idea, which is then developed by the whole artistic team. However, in the case of NO99, one cannot speak of “full democracy”. Instead, the authorship should be attributed, first and foremost, to directors Ojasoo and Semper: as a rule

they are the authors of the original idea, and the whole process of making a production is firmly under their control. In Ojasoo's words, the goal of their method is "to be very coherent" (Helme 2010): to find the most adequate textual and theatrical means for expressing their ideas. Ojasoo believes that devising practice—starting from meanings and searching for words, actions and images to convey those meanings—contributes to a better self-understanding of the artist(s) (ibid.). A good text is never a goal in itself, but mere pretext: in the first place the text should give the impulse for creating an emotional situation.

The texts of the productions under examination were compiled primarily by *bricolage*. During the preparation time, various documents, texts, stories, and ideas, more or less relevant to the topic of the production, were collected, including personal experiences drawn from the performers' lives. The special characteristic of the creative process was extensive and long-lasting *fieldwork*: interviews with experts in the given field, carried out by the theatre's dramaturg, Eero Epner, and the directors Ojasoo and Semper. *Oil!* was created on the basis of conversations with the leader of the Estonian Green Party, Marek Strandberg; for *GEP*, population scientists were interviewed; *Dead Hare* included a video-lecture by a renowned art historian, Eha Komissarov, on Joseph Beuys (whose performance of 1965 gave the title to the production) and on avant-garde art in general.

It took two and half years to prepare the *Unified Estonia* project, conducting interviews and conversations with people who knew the *backstage* of Estonian politics; a media expert, Daniel Vaarik, who had been employed as a government adviser, was engaged as a consultant and co-author of some texts. In addition, relevant research results, primarily drawn from sociological studies, as well as various cultural and media texts, were also employed. This heterogeneous material—partly purposefully collected, partly *found*, was either directly quoted in the performance or utilised as a raw material for dialogues and scenes written by the dramaturg or the directors. The actors, too, made a contribution to a greater or lesser extent: dialogue was modified through their improvisations, or scenes could arise from improvisations and talks in the rehearsal room, which were then recorded and learned (this is particularly relevant to *GEP*). To give an example: the actors' spontaneous talk in the rehearsal room about their low salaries was quoted in *The Rise and Fall* but re-contextualised—performed in the situation of a wedding party—to create an alienation effect.

Strategies at work in NO99's devised productions have definitely been influenced by the more general artistic aims of the theatre. Their opening

production, *Sometimes it Feels as if Life Has Gone by without Love* (2005) was already to some extent devised, as it combined improvisational physical exercises performed by the actors in the first part, with the enactment of texts by the Japanese writer, Yukio Mishima, in the second part. In this manifesto-like production, *pure presence*, produced by the extreme inner intensity of the actors, was set as one of the aesthetic goals of the new theatre. Indeed, NO99 has been seeking for a kind of synthesis or symbiosis of theatre and performance art; their search manifests itself, for instance, in an interest in so-called abstract images, based on pure performance. One could contend that the aesthetic of NO99 has been quite strongly affected by the artistic interests of Ene-Liis Semper, who is not only a scenographer but also an internationally recognised video installation and performance artist.



Fig. 3-5: *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, produced by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper at the Theatre NO99, Tallinn, in 2009

NO99 also arranges “one-time actions” on a regular basis—events that are ontologically and aesthetically close to performance art. Quite often, some of the artistic problems related to a particular stage production are worked through in the action, preceding the opening night. For instance, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* was preceded by an action, *Peking Opera*, in which various theatre games were presented to the

spectators and acted together with the spectators. *Unified Estonia Convention* was prepared by an action entitled *6500 will be made of 200*, testing the reactions of the audience to various techniques of manipulation. On the other hand, the *Convention* itself could be interpreted as a large-scale political and/or theatrical one-time action.

The verbal texts of the five productions function rather as a script or a score for the performance: they do not dominate, let alone prescribe it, but work together with non-verbal means of expression, more often than not only barely referred to in the written text. This is particularly relevant to *Dead Hare*: the script for the performance, lasting about 2.5 hours, is no longer than 15 pages. The script is extremely heterogeneous and fragmented, interspersed among other descriptions of audio- and video-installations; a video-lecture by an art critic; a performance of a modern dance; songs; terse descriptions of the scenes without words, based on improvisation thought up in rehearsal or inspired by the classics of performance art; free improvisation on stage (without words), etc.

I would accentuate that in the case of NO99, the textual and performative strategies, devices and solutions intertwine. They interact with each other already during the process of making the production. The most essential postdramatic strategies used by NO99, in my view, are: recycling; intermediality; inter- and meta-discursivity; authentication (creating an effect of authenticity).

Recycling—a broader notion than the all too familiar intertextuality—is quite characteristic of postdramatic theatre, which reemploys large amounts of cultural material. One can see a self-reflexive use of “the archives” also in the cycle of productions brought forth by NO99. Two rather opposite examples are: one, the recycling of the modern classics of conceptual and performance art (*Dead Hare*); and, two, the formats of popular entertainment and those of the advertising industry (*Oil!*, *Unified Estonia*).

In *Dead Hare* an artistic idea was taken over and utilised in a novel way, resulting in impressive theatrical images: a naked dog-man (trademark of Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik), expressing an aggressive and shocking facet of modern art; an exhibition of photos, the titles of which (quotes from different literary works) have no connection with what is represented in the pictures (resembling Ilya Kabakov’s installation *Where Is Our Place*); the actors packing up all the objects on stage and, at the end, pulling the packaged-up material toward the ceiling, so that it is left there hanging over their heads—reminiscent of the wrapping of various objects by the American artist Christo. In contrast, *Dead Hare* also contains an invented national game of urinating into a

dipper—a piece of rather coarse entertainment that resonates to an extent with *Oil!*. In *Oil!* serious ecological and economic problems were enacted, using the aesthetics of revue and cabaret (song and dance numbers, short slapstick-style sketches), as well as the game entitled *The Ark*, invented by the artistic team, which re-used the format of popular TV shows like *Estonia looks for a Superstar*. *The Ark* was “a survival game”: the contestants had to solve tasks to find the hardiest Estonian, who will manage in a post-apocalyptic world.

TV and video screens are also typically part of the stage space in NO99's performances. Verbal text is, as a rule, delivered by different media, combining live and video-recorded speech and, in some instances, projection of a written text on the screen. More generally, one can talk of intermediality, as the troupe makes use of several modern media: video projections (both pre-recorded and live feed), electronic sound effects, microphones, etc. Impressive images have been created with technological devices (such as multiplying the figure of the dancer on the screen in *Dead Hare*), but of more importance is the interplay of theatrical and technological media in NO99's productions. Intermedia aesthetics profoundly affect the ways in which the performance is perceived, particularly when new perspectives, differing from the axis of the spectator's gaze, are involved. In this respect, *The Rise and Fall* comes into notice with its live broadcasting from the theatre house to the big screen.

This strategy of intermediality worked especially powerfully in the *Unified Estonia* project. This 44-day project both began and ended in mass media: its starting point was a press conference, where the ideological platform of a fictitious political movement was introduced, while its culmination was the *Convention* (as a simulation of a political event), broadcast in the online news portals. The artistic team of the project invented not only ideologies, but also media strategies in order to attract public attention. Indeed, *Unified Estonia* remained at the very centre of media attention for six weeks—as remarked by the criticism, “society started to write the project back and forth on its own” (Pilv 2011). The project demonstrated expressively how the media, with their techniques, construct social reality, and called forth a shift in non-theatrical discourse (political, advertising, etc.).

Inter- and meta-discursivity is in a sense an *umbrella* term for most strategies of NO99. The discourse is defined as a certain manner of linguistic performance, which also encompasses creating and interpreting texts and forms of socio-cultural behaviour. In a wider sense one can talk



Fig. 3-6: *Unified Estonia*, produced by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper at the Theatre NO99, Tallinn, in 2010

of discourses as practices “that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 2009, 54) and thus construct social reality. In the texts and productions of NO99, elements from different discursive practices are combined and related to each other, for the sake of a critical reflection of the current modes of speech and thought, of the exploration of their inner mechanisms and dominant rules. For example, in *Oil!*, social criticism, scientific discourse (lots of data and figures used to illustrate the claim that oil supplies are being exhausted) and popular entertainment were combined. Thus, the production worked simultaneously on two levels: it addressed topical social problems, but also demonstrated ways of camouflaging troublesome problems with the help of mass media. In *GEP*, the national romantic discourse, powerfully conveyed by songs from the period of the new national awakening of the 1980’s and poems of beloved Estonian writers, was made to collide with sophisticated academic discussion about a nation as a mere cultural construct.

Collective devising raises the question of what happens when an actor turns into an author. One can expect this to contribute to an effect of authenticity (as opposed to fiction). Indeed, the actors in NO99’s productions not only perform under their own names (most of the time) but also appear to deliver texts as if they had composed them themselves,

openly and spontaneously. However, one cannot be sure that they really have done so. For instance, there is a scene in *Dead Hare* where the actors discuss improvisation as an acting method. It is authentic in the sense that the dialogue was compiled from spontaneous discourse (talk) recorded during rehearsal. Yet, in the performance, the dialogue has been redistributed: the actors repeat partly their own sentences and partly those of someone else. In the *Unified Estonia Convention*, the actors deliver speeches of a very personal intonation: some have been written by themselves and some by the dramaturg; in both cases they did not express their own point of view at all. As some prominent politicians (such as the former Chancellor of Justice, Allar Jõks) also give speeches in this event, the lines between the authentic and the fictional become rather blurred. In general, the actors of NO99 are expected to change their mode of acting with great flexibility. Often they appear to oscillate between “playing” and “being themselves” or, more precisely, acting “in the regime of sincerity”, regardless of whether or not they speak their own text and express their own point of view. Thus, an effect of authenticity is basically produced, depending on the actors’ ability to convince the spectators.

In summing up, one should emphasise that NO99’s method of working across different discourses, as well as employing different art forms, may produce a result which is blurring borders between theatre and other artistic and cultural practices. The production acquires an ambivalent status: is it theatre or performance art (in case of *Dead Hare*); a theatrical or a political event (*Unified Estonia*); theatre or a video-film show (*The Rise and Fall*)? Obviously, postdramatic strategies embrace both alternatives, destabilizing the spectators’ perception and interpretation of the performance and thus calling into question whether or not “theatre” still is as it has been traditionally understood.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PERFORMING METAPHORS: ATTEMPTS AT POSITIVIST REDUCTION OF FIGURATIVE MEANING IN CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN THEATRE, 1990–2011

VALDA ČAKARE, LATVIA

Abstract: The main focus of my investigation is directed toward the ways in which language metaphors are staged in recent theatre productions in Latvia. Drawing on two productions, one by Juris Rijnieks from 1994 and another by Valdis Lūriņš from 2011, I proceed from the observation that language metaphors are frequently transformed into visual images which aim to reduce the figurative meaning of words or phrases to what we take to be their standard or literal meaning. In order to clarify whether, and how these attempts have contributed to the fulfilment of the artistic purpose, they need to be carefully examined. To this end, Wittgenstein's view of language as *picturing* the world is employed as a theoretical framework. Secondly, the conviction of logical positivists that all utterances can be reduced ultimately to protocol statements, which can be shown to be true, directly helps to explain the production of meaning in the performances under consideration.

Keywords: metaphor, similarity, transfer, reduction, positivism.

As Winfried Nöth, linguist and semiotician, has noted, two concepts appear in the majority of traditional definitions of metaphor—similarity and transference (Nöth 1995, 128). Metaphor is a figure of speech, in which a word or a phrase denoting an object or action of one kind is used instead of another object or action, on the basis of similarity (Guralnik and Friend 1968, 925). The idea of transference is manifest in the etymology

of the word—the Greek word *metaphorein* means transferring from one place to another (Guralnik and Friend 1968, 925). One of these “places” is formed by the sphere of literal meaning, the other by the sphere of figurative meaning. Both are linked by a parable or an unnamed simile; “flame of love”, for instance. If the tension between the literal and transferred meaning disappears, metaphor becomes part of everyday life (“bottom of the pot”), if the original literal meaning disappears, opaque metaphors appear (“authentic”—from Greek *authentēs*—someone, who does everything himself, a murderer. Guralnik and Friend 1968, 99) and finally—dead metaphors, the literal meaning of which are known only to an etymologist (“a journal”—from Latin *diurnalis*—everyday. Guralnik and Friend 1968, 791). These are the four stages of metaphoricality of a metaphor (or its degrees of intensity), which differ as to their originality and innovation, as well as to the visibility of the contrast between the figurative and literal meaning.

Metaphor is an iconic sign, since an iconic sign represents an object on the basis of the similarity between the sign and what it signifies (Nöth 1995, 128). However, not all iconic signs are metaphors. One form of theatre—the so called “illusion of life” theatre—makes the audience perceive the performance as a direct picture of the world imagined by the playwright; others offer a metaphorical portrayal, with only a very general structural similarity between the sign and the object. For example, in Alvis Hermanis’s production *Grandfather* (*Vectēvs*, 2009), the actor Vilis Daudziņš first comes on stage representing his own self; thus achieving absolute similarity between the sign and the object. However, the similarity may be less obvious, but rather stated, declared, perceivable in connection with the context, and we have to reach our own conclusions as to what is compared with what. For example, one of the visual metaphors of Hermanis’s production *Ziedonis and Universe* (*Ziedonis un Visums*, 2010) can be verbalised by the sentence “Ziedonis is a donkey”. The similarity between the signified “donkey” and the signified “poet Imants Ziedonis” is contestable, conditional: stubbornness, obstinacy is what they could have in common. It should be emphasised that the sign is created and understood as a metaphor only when the creator/perceiver of the sign is aware of the tension between the literal and the figurative meaning of the sign. To put it differently, he knows what a donkey is and he knows who Imants Ziedonis is. Or the green mat in the stage version of Andrejs Upīts’s novel *The Green Land* can be perceived as a metaphorical replacement of verdant fields, on the basis of one common property—the colour green.

Theatre has inexhaustible visual possibilities for creating metaphors. However, we frequently encounter the opposite technique, i.e., reduction of metaphors. These are the cases when linguistic metaphors are visualised in images that abolish the transference of meaning, returning to the literal meaning.

It is typical that the most brilliant representative of Lithuanian metaphorical theatre of the 1980s and 1990s, Eimuntas Nekrošius, uses reduction of metaphor in his stage figurativeness. In the production of Pushkin's *Little Tragedies* (1994) the linguistic metaphor "to light the flame of passion" is visualised by Don Juan and Anna throwing lit matches at each other, which flare up briefly, leaving behind them a wisp of smoke and a stench of brimstone. Love and flame are similar in the way they both are hot, both peter out and leave behind traces in the shape of smoke or memories. The performance which was created on the basis of Chyngyz Aitmatov's novel *A Day Longer than a Century* (1983), has an episode in which the metaphor "heartache" in the meaning of unrequited love is reduced to a physical heart attack, to be treated with drops of medicine.

Such a return to the literal meaning correlates with the view held in positivism (which is also called neo-empiricism) that sensations are the source and purpose of cognition. All scientific statements in philosophy, natural sciences, etc., must be verifiable empirically, through the senses. If these are not like that, they must be reduced to the level on which they can be verified. In other words—our notions, our ideas about the world are either sensory perceptions or connected to such sensory perceptions. Statements, which cannot be verified (that have no link to our sensory perception, experience), are "void". Wittgenstein in his early work held a similar opinion—if words in an expression are not linked to objects, the sentence which we can build from these words, will express nothing. As in a painting—unless points on a canvas are linked to points in space, i.e., with structures existing in reality, the painting which the painter will be able to paint will express nothing (Wittgenstein 2005, 41).

In artistic practice, the surrealists were the ones who started reducing metaphors to an empirically verifiable level. André Breton, writing about surrealist painting, demands that the eye of the artist/perceiver of the artwork exist in a savage state (Breton 1965, 1). Michael Richardson, the researcher of surrealism, pointing to the inaccuracy of expression, rephrases Breton's demand: "We need to learn to place the eye in such a state of receptivity that it becomes able to see in a savage way" (Richardson 2006, 10). Similarly, Antonin Artaud, the reformer of theatre, wanted to create the impossible: a language which would not only express

his thought, but also inspire his thought (Artaud 1991, 121–23). Thus, both Breton and Artaud emphasise the role of experience, the necessity to aim towards those artistic expressions which allow verification, through the senses, of whether they conform to structures existing in reality.

The researcher of surrealist cinema, Linda Williams, has aptly observed that surrealists keep realism on the level of the signifier, but give up realism on the level of the signified, i.e., the level of content (Williams 1981, 48). It is vividly seen in the programmatic work of surrealism—Luis Buñuel’s film *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), in which concrete events and images seem to be recognizable, placeable in structures of everyday reality, but at the same time their meaning cannot be logically deduced, since the connection of separate elements is determined by coincidence, by a whim. In other words—*Un chien andalou* records the way of experiencing the imagined.

Man Ray’s film *L’Etoile de mer* (*The Sea Star*, 1928), inspired by a poem of the same title by Robert Desnos, has an episode in which the text “beautiful as a flower of fire” appears on the screen. The text is followed by a frame of a female figure with an armour helmet on her head and a spear in her hand, then in the following frame a fluttering flame. First, in viewing “the flower of fire” as a metaphor, we have to arrive at our own conclusions as to what is compared to what—the flower to fire or the fire to flower. It is also possible, that this is not a metaphor at all and that “the flower of fire” denotes a real flower. Secondly, the metaphor “flower of fire” is first of all connected with the signified “woman”, thus creating a new metaphor “woman is the flower of fire”. The next frame, showing a flame of fire, concretises the signifier “flower of fire”, replacing it with the signifier “Joan of Arc”, thus creating another metaphor “Woman is Joan of Arc”. Thus, the meaning is constructed that a woman burns in flames of passion like Joan burns in flames of fire. However, there is an expression in French “se mettre dans le feu” (literally “to put oneself in the fire”). If we perceive the series of images seen on the screen as a visualisation of the phrase “se mettre dans le feu”, it can be considered that Man Ray abolishes the transference of meaning, returning to the literal meaning of “se mettre dans le feu”.

Buñuel’s *Un chien andalou* contains a textbook episode, in which a man watches his palm, and ants crawl out from the hole in his palm. This episode (like the entire film), is traditionally connected to associations with Freudian, erotic fantasies. However, it can be seen as a visualisation of a linguistic expression. In French (“avoir des fourmis dans la main”) ants can be found on one’s hand in the meaning that the hand has gone numb (Zandreitere et. al. 1973: 302). Buñuel literary visualises this process.

Similar examples can be found also in Latvian theatre. The question that should be posed in connection with the examples is whether and how the reduction of transference facilitates the revelation of artistic intent. Juris Rijnieks's staging *The Seven from Malēnija* (*Septiņi malēnieši*, 1994) has an episode with the song "It's so good, it's so good in the land of my father, the hare can hop around in loops, the grouse can drum away". At the line "hare can hop around in loops", an actor runs on the stage with an ear-flapped hare's cap on his head and a lasso in his hands, which he sways above his head, trying to catch a game. The phrase "hop around in loops" has the figurative meaning "to go, run, drive roundabout" (Ceplītis 1973, 190). Rijnieks restores the literal meaning. However, it could be visualised also in a different way, for example, by making the hare to knit or crochet. The choice of a lasso is understandable, since it is visible to the audience in the hall.

In Valdis Lūriņš' production at the Latvian National Theatre *Thus, and only thus!* (*Tikai tā!*, 2011) Aleksandrs Kublinskis's song *Strawberry Field* is used, with lyrics by Dagnija Dreika: "Strawberry field, only the strawberry field sounds like music in my memories..." In the song, which once became popular when performed by the group *Eolika*, the strawberry field is a metaphor of childhood, youth, love. Specifically—composer Aleksandrs Kublinskis wrote it in memory of John Lennon. In Lūriņš' production, which uses popular songs to tell the story of Latvian society spanning a century, the song is played in tones of Irish folk music, and also elements of Irish folk dances can be seen in the actors' movements on stage. The strawberry field as such is not directly visualised on the stage, however, the image is created, linking the signifier "strawberry field" metaphorically with memories of childhood and adolescence, but also very literally, with strawberry fields in Ireland, where Latvian people, who have failed to find jobs in their motherland, work.

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, staged by Mikhail Gruzdov at the same theatre (2011), visualises the metaphor "fallen woman". "A fallen woman" is a depraved woman—an adulteress or someone selling love for money, i.e., a prostitute (Ceplītis 1980, 432). In Gruzdov's staging, society sees Anna as "a fallen woman", and the director reveals this opinion by making Anna not only fall from a chair, but also fall and stand up several times while walking across the stage.

However, these examples differ. Why does Anna's fall from the chair allow us to accuse the director of didacticism, when throwing loops or the association with a strawberry field seem to be artistically successful solutions?

A metaphor creates an image connecting two distanced realities. When the metaphor is reduced to its literal meaning, the signifier “strawberry field”, “hopping in loops” or “a fallen woman” remains the same. The signified changes, abolishing the distance between the two linked realities. In two cases—“strawberry field” and “loops”—when the literal meaning is restored, the moment of surprise is very important. The visualisation of the literal meaning is innovative and paradoxical, since images with a stable metaphorical meaning are used as a raw material. Thus, the range of meanings in the performance is expanded, i.e., new information about Latvians’ and a hare’s behaviour is offered. But Anna Karenina’s falling from the chair is predictable: it only reaffirms what is already said in the performance by other means. Moreover, falling, as opposed to “strawberry field” and “hare’s loops”, is shown as a realistic movement, which can be read in the context of everyday behaviour, which, referring to Breton, does not “shatter” perception, does not foster the eye’s ability to see in a primeval, savage way.

The abovementioned examples, in my opinion, show that even a naturalised metaphor retains a potential, revivable image, which goes unnoticed in the everyday usage of the language. As emphasised before, figurativeness is a question of linguistic confidence: a linguistic sign is created and understood as a metaphor only if the speaker/listener is aware of the tension between the literal and figurative meaning of the sign. But language users recognise various linguistic norms—and thus also metaphors—differently (as the audience observes the rules of the play). Thus, it can be concluded, in order to appreciate an image of a performance as a metaphor or a reduction of a metaphor, the cultural context should be understood, the image should be perceived in the total system of signs of the performance, and proficiency in verbal and nonverbal theatre language is needed.

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CHAPTER FIVE

POSTDRAMATIC TEXTS IN ESTONIAN, GERMAN AND BRITISH THEATRE: DISCERNIBLE NATIONAL TRAITS?

MADLI PESTI, ESTONIA

Abstract: The article looks at examples of postdramatic texts in Estonian, German and British theatre. Common traits between the writers in different countries are discussed. Two young authors from Estonia are introduced. Siim Nurklik's text *Am I Alive Now* and Kadri Noormets's text *Go Neo und Romantix* are both postdramatic, but they carry different ideas. Nurklik's text has already been called his generation's manifesto. It could be seen as a collage of everyday citations; it deals with the clash between society and the internet-based world of today's young people. Kadri Noormets's text deals with internal matters. It is like a stream of consciousness. I compare the writing strategies of the young Estonians with those of some German and British playwrights. Reading Nurklik's text one will inevitably start comparing it with a classic of postdramatic writing—Heiner Müller's *Der Hamletmaschine*. Plays by Falk Richter, Roland Schimmelpfennig, Elfriede Jelinek, Martin Crimp and Tim Crouch are also discussed.

Keywords: theatre, drama, postdramatic text, postdramatic theatre, text analysis, Estonian playwrights, German playwrights, British playwrights, national characteristics, international truths.

In the study that follows, I will introduce and analyze examples of postdramatic texts in Estonian, German and British theatre. I will focus on a play that, in my opinion, is the best postdramatic theatre text in the Estonian language—Siim Nurklik's *Am I Alive Now*. I will compare this text with German playwriting and I will also introduce some British postdramatic authors. I will introduce two young authors from Estonia,

who have won a prize at the biennial playwriting competition organised by the Estonian Theatre Agency. Both Siim Nurklik's text *Am I Alive Now* and Kadri Noormets's text *Go Neo und Romantix* are postdramatic, but they carry different ideas. I call them "texts" as they are by no means traditional plays.

Nurklik's text was staged by the young director Lauri Lagle at the Estonian Drama Theatre in 2010. It has also been published as a book. The layout of the book is only in black and white. Its cover represents a non-working TV set. The author and the title of the book are manually crossed out. The text is divided into scenes. Between the scenes are headings or slogans. Some examples of the slogans: "One screen is asking the other, what programme are you watching today?"; "What does your character think of that?"; "Sale: all people—50%". The first slogan of the play is: "This is not really happening."



Fig. 3-7: Siim Nurklik's *Am I Alive Now*, directed by Lauri Lagle at the Estonian Drama Theatre, Tallinn, in 2010

The text won the second prize at the biennial playwriting competition in 2009 and was also nominated for the prize for the best literary debut in 2010. Nurklik's text has already been called his generation's manifesto. It could be seen as a collage of everyday citations; it deals with the clash between society and the internet-based world of today's young people.

The director of the play was also young, but the staging was not very successful. The director put the text in an unnecessary frame that was not intended by the author. One can see the interior of an office: four actors are occupying it, at night time, as criminals. There were questions about this frame. The text represents the voice of young people (late teens and twenties), but two much older actors were cast in the staging and that simply wasn't convincing.

Reading Nurklik's text one will inevitably start thinking about a classic of postdramatic writing, Heiner Müller's *Der Hamletmaschine*, which has a very cryptic text. Müller was one of the most avant-garde writers in Germany. Though he died in 1994, his heritage is still very actively discussed at universities, conferences and in the media. He was a very controversial writer, a communist born in the DDR, but forbidden to be played there for years. His *Hamletmaschine* (1979) can be regarded as one of the basic postdramatic texts (as discussed in the book *Postdramatic Theatre* by Hans-Thies Lehmann, 2005). The text is 9 pages long, a fragment, a comment, a compilation of citations on themes from Shakespeare and the world at that particular point in time. There are hints of the Cold War, the *iron curtain*, etc, but the text also tells us about the world nowadays. Müller doesn't use much dialogue or action—he sets a person's individuality in question (the first line of the text: "I was Hamlet"). Müller writes an accurate reflection of a post-modern society. Almost every line in the text is a citation, but it has a classic composition as in Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare has five acts, Müller has five scenes that can be seen as monologues by Hamlet and Ophelia. The first and fourth scenes are dedicated to Hamlet, the second and fifth to Ophelia; in the third scene we can read the only (two-line) dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia. *Hamletmaschine* features a somewhat vague and cryptic text, but in spite of that has been staged a lot and has had hundreds of different interpretations.

So what links Heiner Müller with the young Estonian writer Siim Nurklik? Strangely enough, I could immediately see similarities when I read Nurklik's text, although I told the author that, of course, it was apparent that he had not read Heiner Müller (although he had been inspired by another German, Falk Richter). In fact, I found his text genuinely original. It is not possible to compare him with any other writer in Estonia but I do see some similarities between *Hamletmaschine* and *Am I Alive Now*, mainly in style and general attitude. They are both elegant and harsh reflections on the present-day world. Both plays are clearly postdramatic: they make use of different kinds of text. Both are full of

citations. Nurklik uses citations, but they are combined in an original way and a poetic generalisation grows out of it.

Another link here is Falk Richter's play *Electronic City* (2004). Richter is one of the best known playwrights (and directors) in Germany. He usually sets his characters in a cold world without compassion that is loaded with technology. At first glance, *Electronic City* is a usual enough story about a relationship, but if you read on you start to suspect that the characters are virtual. Nurklik, too, has written a characteristic scene that takes place in MSN Messenger:

I want to have an electronic relationship, where I don't need to hold hands, where we don't need to go to the movies together, where we don't have to discuss our day with each other, where we don't need to watch TV sitting next to each other (Nurklik 2010, 56–57).

At the end, the characters in *Electronic City* drown in a sea of numbers (Richter 2002, 35). In other words, the characters were not people of flesh and blood? Everything exists only inside our heads? Nurklik, too, plays with virtuality and numbers. In a scene about friendship, the sentences are transformed into virtual figures—zeros and ones (Nurklik 2010, 112–121).

Another new Estonian postdramatic text that defies comparison with any other is Kadri Noormets's *Go Neo und Romantix*. The subtitle is: *a heavyweight play*—as if in wrestling terms. Noormets's text won third prize at the playwriting competition in 2011, so the text is brand new and not yet staged. In her foreword the author says:

The aim of this text is to be part of the staging process—to be an impulse, an active partner. The ambition of the text is not to get performed 100%. The text is not fixed, not unchangeable—it's not outgoing, it's not a compromise. The aim is to be an equal partner with the director, the actors and other professionals that take part in the process. The aim is to find a reader who is not stuck reading classical dialogue-plays. Do not discuss whether it fits within the borders of a play.

This statement is very postdramatic. The named cast is as follows: Cucu, Gooma, Miss Mix, Maatrix, Neon, Romaan. The text is structured between them, but there is almost no dialogue. The text feels like one continuous flow. One citation:

Cucu: “then i don't know whose truth it is out there, that is shown to the whole world. the whole world's truth. whose truth. i'm hearing a rhythm. i'm hearing only a rhythm. whose rhythm... then it's not my rhythm... i'm tortured, tired out, stretched. i'm a space suit. benumbed and feelingless.

i'm dried meat—dried fish—but i'm also alive yet... alive dried fish... how?" (Noormets 2011, 10)

She uses lower case letters, not capitals, and this also makes the text feel like a flow. The world she describes is very thoroughly felt throughout—it seems an honest text—but that world seems alienated. There are not very many links to the outside world. It deals with internal matters. When read, it feels like a stream of consciousness.

Another female writer whose texts can be seen as a stream of consciousness is Elfriede Jelinek, the Austrian essayist, novelist, playwright and Nobel prize winner of 2004. In German-language culture, Jelinek is well known for her feminist writing and hardcore political statements. One of her latest texts, *A Merchant's Contract* (*Kontrakte des Kaufmanns*, 2009), is as harsh and demanding as all of her texts. Written before the global financial crisis, in fact it predicts it. As is typical in a postdramatic text, Jelinek uses many different sources: she combines documents, letters, articles from the media, memos, reports etc. The text is 100 pages long, written in one flow, without any breaks. In the foreword, Jelinek says you can start reading the text at any place you wish.

I will also point out some other German and British playwrights whose texts have postdramatic traits. In my opinion, Roland Schimmelpfennig from Germany and Martin Crimp from Britain can be compared as writers. Their dialogue is minimalistic and simple. Schimmelpfennig is a very productive playwright (sometimes also directing his own plays), who writes easily, happily, poetically. At first glance, their texts are only about everyday matters, but they always aim at poetic and serious generalisations. For example, Crimp's text *Fewer Emergencies* (2005) is a pretty radical postdramatic text: there are no individualised characters (characters are numbered) and no evident action. The characters talk about everyday matters and, in this way, the text criticises our hypocritical welfare society. *Fewer Emergencies* can be read as a polyphonic sound symphony. For both authors, the rhythm of the text plays an important role. Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon* (2009) and Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* have one common trait, a formal one but one that also affects the atmosphere of the play: the characters in the plays utter remarks or speak (at some point) of themselves in the third person singular. That creates a kind of *verfremdungseffekt*—meaning: not living through the characters nor the action. The theme of *The Golden Dragon* is hatred toward strangers: the problem of immigrants. Being very good at composition, Schimmelpfennig puts the Chinese restaurant *The Golden Dragon* into the centre of the action. The characters in the play are Chinese immigrants working in a restaurant and some of the restaurant's

clients (some stewardesses, for example). An example of the style of the play:

Man over sixty: We are standing around the Small Guy in the tiny kitchen of a Thai-Chinese-Vietnamese fast food restaurant. Don't scream—how he is screaming (Schimmelpfennig 2009, 2).

As a last example, I would like to point out an author who is probably not as well known as the previously discussed authors. Tim Crouch is a British theatre director and actor who has been writing plays since 2003. His text *England* (2007) is radically postdramatic in its form—and the form affects the perception of its content. Again, the characters are not individualised. The author indicates two actors, but the text is not divided between them. Very slowly, the reader realises what the two characters are talking about in the beginning of the play. They address their talk to the audience. Their sentences feel like citations. Slowly the reader begins to understand that one of the characters has had a difficult operation, a heart transplant. A conflict rises between the British and the Muslim world. One of the themes is—“lost in translation”: how are we communicating with each other? How many of our thoughts are really getting through?

In general, the play criticises the functioning of our society. The theme is organ donation. The text should be performed in an art gallery. The form of the text is radical. For example, in the beginning, it is not possible to understand what the play is about or who is talking. One of the characters is also played by the audience—this character is to remain silent.

As a conclusion, I would like to answer the question asked in the heading of this article: “Postdramatic texts in Estonian, German and British theatre: discernible national traits?” Nationality is almost never an issue in postdramatic texts. There are other common traits: the texts do not feature individual characters; their structure is hectic, put together from different sorts of texts; the texts deal with the outside world and they have their own point of view (standpoint). It is distinctly characteristic that the texts do not deal with ideas belonging to a national society, but deal with international truths. However, they do question these popularly known truths. They try to dig under the layers of citations in order to see what lies beneath them.

In my article, I have introduced a number of more or less well-known authors. My aim was to draw attention to them and, especially, to two young but outstanding Estonian authors and to show that they fit well into the European context.

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CHAPTER SIX

POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE IN A TIME OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN IRELAND

STEPHEN E WILMER, IRELAND

Abstract: This article will explore dramaturgical changes in Irish theatre in a time of dramatic cultural and economic change. Ireland has been undergoing a social upheaval, from being one of the richest countries in Europe *per capita* in 2007 to one subjected to virtual bankruptcy by 2011. At the same time the traditional literary theatre of such writers as J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Brian Friel, which has been performed by such theatre companies as the Abbey Theatre, the Gate, and the Druid, is transforming into a physical and multi-media theatre using verbatim, site-specific and postdramatic techniques. Many of the recent performances deal with current economic and social problems, and the changes in dramaturgy parallel the changes in social conditions. I will focus on some specific examples of this trend, notably the work of small independent theatre companies that are becoming more widely known internationally such as Corn Exchange and Brokentalkers.

Keywords: postdramatic, Corn Exchange, Brokentalkers, Michael West, Gary Keegan, Irish theatre, Fintan O'Toole, sexual abuse, Roman Catholic priests, Celtic Tiger, Hans-Thies Lehmann.

When I first moved to Dublin 27 years ago, Ireland was in the midst of a severe economic recession, with thousands of Irish people emigrating to the United States and the United Kingdom to seek work. I was constantly asked why I was moving to Ireland when everyone there was trying to leave. Today there is again a major economic recession in Ireland, with the country's financially bankrupt, and my students again forced to go abroad to find work when they graduate. And so it might seem that nothing has

changed. However, in the intervening period there have been major social and economic changes in Ireland. First, the Irish economy has experienced an extraordinary boom and bust. In the 1990s, the so-called Celtic Tiger economy in Ireland expanded rapidly, and by 2005 the *per capita* income of Irish people had become one of the highest in Europe. Secondly, the population changed dramatically from what seemed like a largely homogeneous population in the 1980s to a much more diverse and polyglot population by 2011. With a huge increase in employment, Irish people, who had emigrated in the 1980s, came flocking back to take up jobs, and people from other countries were attracted to the booming economy and expanding workforce and formed a new immigrant population, especially from Central and Eastern Europe. Polish became the second language in Ireland, with the advent of locally produced newspapers in Polish and a regular bus route from Warsaw to Dublin, and citizens from the Baltic countries also migrated to Ireland in great numbers. (In fact, the Latvian President became so alarmed at the loss of so many Latvian citizens to Ireland and the UK that at one point he begged Latvians to remain in the country so that the Latvian language and culture could survive.) Thirdly, what had been one of the most devout Roman Catholic populations in Europe became increasingly secular and critical of Roman Catholic teachings. This transformation was generated as a result of a series of scandals about child abuse coming to light. Court cases involving paedophile priests who raped children in their care and the systematic abuse of children by institutions run by priests and nuns became everyday news. Moreover, the attempt by the Church hierarchy and the Vatican to cover up these scandals and protect their priests made matters worse. When I arrived in Dublin in the 1980s, priests and nuns were revered members of society and proudly wore their clerical robes in public. Today priests and nuns tend to wear civilian dress so that they won't be attacked in the street, and the number of people entering the clerical profession (despite the recession) has been reduced to a trickle.

During these years, there has been an equally profound transformation in the dramaturgy of the Irish theatre, which has tended to reflect some of these social and cultural changes. Traditionally, Irish theatre has been text-based and known as a literary theatre where the playwright ruled supreme. Directors served the text of the playwright without question, and little physical movement or innovative design featured in the repertory. In the last twenty years, the emphasis has changed from dramatic to postdramatic dramaturgy, from literary drama to multi-media theatre, from text-based performances to physical theatre, from character and plot-driven plays to image-driven performances, and from single-authored texts to plays

devised by theatre companies, or spliced together from documentary testimony and verbatim sources. Fintan O'Toole, the leading Irish theatre critic, has reflected on the enormity of these changes, and referred to the Dublin Theatre Festival in October 2011 as "the most significant in 30 years" (O'Toole 2011, 8).

These theatrical developments are not of course specific to Ireland. On the contrary, Irish theatre has responded to trends that have been occurring throughout Europe. However, what is unique is how Irish theatre artists have adapted these innovative techniques in such a way that they reflect the changes in Irish culture and society. In discussing the trend from dramatic to postdramatic theatre, it is perhaps useful to recall the features of postdramatic theatre as identified by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006): first, in dramatic theatre, *synthesis* is central within the fictional stage frame. Now, in postdramatic theatre, the spectator is denied most kinds of synthesis. Second, postdramatic theatre does not represent a *fictional time span* within the stage frame, but instead puts time in its very particular timeliness, in its progressing nature on display. Third, postdramatic theatre and performance practice renounces the *unity of drama* and dramatic representation; most of the time, "drama" (in the original sense of the word) is not even (re)presented anymore. Fourth, the *plot* is not presented in a closed, coherent or progressive form with a beginning, middle and end; postdramatic theatre productions move away from the idea of representing a fictional and imaginary world. Fifth, *dialogue* loses its central position in postdramatic theatre. If dramatic texts are used, they are often de-dramatised, or enriched or used as material rather than as a fixed and completed piece of work. Sixth, in postdramatic theatre there are no conventions for *theatrical spaces and location* anymore. Usually artists choose stages other than the proscenium or fourth wall stage and look for new locations and spaces in order to develop and establish new and special actor-spectator-constellations/relations and performance situations. Seventh, while in dramatic theatre *the actor* was to dissolve behind the character, in postdramatic theatre, the actors do not even act/represent roles anymore, but enter the stage mainly as themselves. And even if they do embody a fictional character and play a role, they are still very present in their own physicality and corporeality.

Related to the development of postdramatic theatre in Ireland has come the reliance on multi-media work, specifically incorporating live and recorded video, images and sound into performances as well as verbatim and documentary material. Performances often combine a variety of postdramatic features, often coming across as a collage of theatrical elements rather than as a coherent story.

Now I would like to turn to some specific examples of this new type of theatre. One kind of postdramatic theatre is to start the production process without any text at all but to devise a production based on a theme or a variety of stimuli. This is an approach used by Corn Exchange Theatre Company in their two most recent productions, *Freefall* and *Man of Valour*. *Freefall*, which premiered in 2009 and was presented in the Abbey theatre in 2010, and received awards for Best Play and Best Director, is advertised as being written by Michael West, but it was developed through improvisation with the actors. It is based around the event of a middle-aged man experiencing a cerebral haemorrhage and seeing his life coming to an end. Part of the inspiration of the piece was the story of a woman who had a stroke in her thirties. She described how she had suffered from a clot in the right side of her brain, which is the language side that makes events comprehensible. Annie Ryan, the director of *Freefall*, commented: “Because she lost her language centre, the only thing that’s left is physical awareness... For us as performer’s, that’s the kind of sensibility we’re after” (West and Ryan 2010a).

Because the man in *Freefall* is confused by what is happening to him, the story progresses in fragments backwards and forwards through his life. Developed during the period of the crash of the Irish economy and the scandals of clerical abuse, the story of the dying man acts as a metaphor for the downfall of the Irish economy and the disintegration of Irish society. The techniques used include visible multi-media effects that are presented in a theatrical manner such as an actor peering into a camera that is projected onto a large screen at the back of the stage to convey the impression of the character looking sympathetically at the dying man in a hospital bed. Likewise, sound effects for the hospital ward and other scenes are made visibly by the actors at the side of the stage making sounds into microphones. The fragments of the man’s life come together as a moment of mourning for a dying society. Annie Ryan, the director of *Freefall*, commented on the genesis of the production:

...there was a sense of denial about the atrocious things that were going on under people’s noses. Now, between the Ryan Report [into clerical abuse of children] and the failing economy, everyone has been on their knees this year. And it’s unfortunate that no one in power has been able to step up and say “what are we doing, what have we done?” (West and Ryan 2010b)

A second type of postdramatic approach is to start with verbatim or documentary texts and blend them into a theatrical event. There has been a spate of such productions, mainly by young companies, focussing on social issues in Ireland, primarily sexual or child abuse by Roman Catholic

priests and nuns. Some of these performances have taken place in site-specific locations, such as *Laundry*, directed by Louise Lowe of ANU Productions, about the Magdalene laundries that incarcerated unmarried pregnant women in workhouses. The conduct of these laundries, which came to light only recently, has prompted “An international torture watchdog” to demand

a statutory inquiry involving the religious congregations who ran the homes... [It has] raised grave concerns over the failure of the state to protect the hundreds of girls and women involuntarily confined in the Magdalene Laundries between 1922 and 1996—when the Sean McDermott Street site [the site specific location of the performance] finally closed (Stack 2011).

Rather than a conventional seated audience in a proscenium arch theatre, the production of *Laundry* allowed only one or two audience members at a time into the site of the former laundry to

travel through a labyrinth of rooms and a chapel inside the imposing convent to experience the 90-minute multimedia production, featuring actors, audio and visual installations (ibid.).



Fig. 3-8: *The Blue Boy*, directed by Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan at the Lir theatre, National Academy of Dramatic Art at Trinity College, Dublin, in 2011

Other productions on similar themes have taken place in conventional theatres, such as Mary Raftery’s *No Escape*, which was based on verbatim

documents from a government report into abuse in state funded institutions for children in Ireland, and was performed in 2010 in the Abbey Theatre accompanied by *James X*, a performance by artist and theatre-maker Mannix Flynn, who was himself a victim of institutional abuse. Another production called *The Blue Boy*, based on one of the industrial schools run by religious orders, was performed by Brokentalkers as one of the first performances at the Lir Theatre in our new National Academy of Dramatic Art at Trinity College that opened in September 2011. *The Blue Boy* comprises various postdramatic techniques: video clips, photos, sound recordings and documents from the history of the school are mixed with choreographed mimed performance by masked actors playing the role of the children in the industrial school. Gary Keegan, the director of the show, sat at the side of the stage and presented his own personal memories of the Artane Industrial School that he lived near when he was growing up. The school was labelled as a reformatory, but was used for child labour, e.g. making rosary beads, and the children were severely disciplined and punished with beatings and other forms of abuse. One adult recalled being taken there as a four-year-old child when both of his parents died. He was incarcerated there for many years, and recalled the savage beatings of the children. The director also mentioned his own adoption as a baby from an unwed mother, which he juxtaposed with the statement by a government minister in the 1970s that a child was better off being given up for adoption than being raised by an unwed mother. The performance also presented information about the strong historical links between Church and State as the Roman Catholic Church became the guiding moral force in post-independent Ireland and ensured that the importance of nuclear family values was written into the Constitution. The masked actors on stage physically present the types of routines that the children might have undergone in their workplace as unpaid labour, presenting sequences of repetitive movements that echo the drudgery that these children endured and expressing physically their silent anxiety. There is little coherence to the story—more a collage of impressions.

As mentioned earlier, Fintan O'Toole, the leading Irish theatre critic, has remarked on the significance of the 2011 Dublin Theatre Festival in terms of the changes that it reflects in both theatrical innovation and social change:

What makes this festival so important is the way it has brought together a number of younger artists who are not just dancing on the grave of the well-wrought play but actively inventing new ways in which theatre can function in a public and highly political space. You don't have to go along with the notion that literary drama is dead (and I don't) to be excited by the

evidence that a serious and consistent alternative is finding its voice (O'Toole 2011, 8).

In conclusion, by developing new modes of postdramatic dramaturgy, Irish theatre has become a vehicle for representing the profound changes that have been occurring in Irish society and culture and raising serious social issues that need to be addressed. However, rather than presenting a clear and cogent analysis of a social problem and its solution, postdramatic Irish theatre tends to avoid closure and challenge metanarratives and demands more interpretative work from the spectator.

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