

Space as an Active Agent. On Performative Space in Estonian Contemporary Performing Arts

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Abstract: This paper discusses examples of the use of performative space in the Estonian performing arts. It shows how a performative space is arranged as an interactive and shared space, what the features of an installation space are, how the audience perceives immersive space, and how a socially communicative space is formed. The paper studies the ways in which space can be an active agent and affect the perception of the spectator.

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In performance theory, space is considered a central aspect in theatrical communication. Theatre can even be defined as a particular mode of spatial organisation, looking at the ways the space of performance mediates the playtext and the socio-political and sociocultural context of both text and performance (Ubersfeld 1981, 53). Over time, performance researchers have conceptualised this central aspect, the spatial organisation, in various ways: a space could be conceptualised as a stage space, scenic place, theatrical space, theatre space, dramatic space, etc. This paper will take a closer look at some of the possibilities of how spatial arrangement affects audience perception in contemporary performing arts. In order to do so, the concepts of *performance space* and *performative space* are used.

The researcher who has most extensively written about space in performance is Gay McAuley (2000). He has formed his own taxonomy for analysing spatial relations in the performing arts. McAuley's taxonomy addresses five major areas: the social reality of the theatre experience (consisting of theatre space, audience space, performance space, practitioner space, and rehearsal space), the duality of physical reality and fictional space (comprised of stage space, presentational space, and fictional space), spaces connected to location and fiction (to highlight that fictional space functions according to its location in relation to the physical reality), textual space (turns attention to spatial structures contained in the playtext and their importance in the genesis of the performance, including geographical names, descriptions of places, verbs of movement, etc), and, lastly, thematic space (its importance in the construction of meaning and its connection to both text and performance) (McAuley 2000, 24–32). For the focus of this paper, McAuley's notion of

performance space (which belongs to the abovementioned area of social reality) is relevant. In the performance space, “two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience” (26). The performance space is fundamental to and even constitutive of theatre, and it remains even if the theatre space is not in a building.

Another comprehensive concept that is substantial for this research is Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *performative space*. In her view, theatre spaces (whether permanently installed or provisional) are always performative spaces, i.e., performative space is the space in which a performance occurs. The performative space “opens special possibilities for the relationship between actors and spectators and for movement and perception. Whatever the ways in which these possibilities are used, applied, realized, treated, or, alternatively, subverted, they affect the performative space” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 107). She highlights the effect of the audience’s perception of the performative space, which influences the performance and affects all participants reciprocally so that energy begins to circulate in the performance space (59). Depending on the audience’s position, the relationship between the actors and spectators changes: whether the audience is sitting frontal to the stage, encircling the stage, standing in the audience space, moving around a rectangular or square stage, or the manner by which the audience is separated from the stage (footlights, a podium, decorations, furniture, etc) (107).

Spatial arrangement offers the audience a wide array of perceptual possibilities, and a number of these will be studied in this paper. The part played by the space of performance in the spectator’s experience is fundamental insofar as space is the condition of the spectator and the performer coming together, and it’s the space that determines the nature of the spectator’s experience (McAuley 2000, 274–75). For example, the size of the theatre, the size of the auditorium, and the visibility of the spectators are of vital importance, considering the focus of the spectators’ attention and the priority given to the performance over the social event of which it is part.

Both Fischer-Lichte’s and McAuley’s concepts of performative and performance space are very similarly argued, and both find it relevant to include the relationship between the audience and the performer.

In the following paper, I will discuss how space can be an active agent in contemporary performing arts, i.e., how space can have the capacity for acting and exerting power. I will show how performative space is arranged as an interactive and shared space (performances *It Stays as It Is* and *****), an installation space (*The Round Table*), an immersive space (*People and Numbers*), and as a socially communicative space (*supersocial*). I chose the latest examples from the Estonian performing arts

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– all five of the discussed productions premiered in 2020. These works of contemporary performing arts “disrupt the spectators’ habits of viewing” (McAuley 2000, 268). In this paper, I will show how this disruption happens.

Performative space as an interactive and shared space

In the context of the Estonian performing arts, an unusual spatial experience is offered by the production *It Stays as It Is*,¹ whose authors and performers are three performance artists with different backgrounds: an actor, a dramaturg, and a contemporary dance artist. The spectator of this performance is not a witness of events nor a mere viewer, but one who physically experiences it.

Performers Mart Kangro, Juhan Ulfsak, and Eero Epner sit together with the spectators in the audience hall of the Kanuti Guild Hall in Tallinn. The fact that the performers perform in the same space where the audience sits changes the usual perception of space, i.e., the performance takes place on the seats, between the rows, next to and under the audience seating. Right in front of the seats, a wall of the same grey tone as the theatre space’s usual grey walls has been set up. The physical change of the space, the narrowing down of the usual perspective to the spa-



Figure 1. *It Stays as It Is* (2020, Kanuti Gildi SAAL). Mart Kangro and Juhan Ulfsak. Photo by Alissa Šnaider.

1 Original title *Kas te olete oma kohaga rahul*. Authors-performers Mart Kangro, Juhan Ulfsak and Eero Epner, dramaturg Maria Arusoo, lighting designer Oliver Kulpsoo, sound designer Artjom Astrov. Co-producer Kanuti Gildi SAAL. Premiere 24.08.2020, Kanuti Gildi SAAL.

scious hall, not only sharpens the spectator's phenomenological perception of space, but also transforms the spatial experience into the subject of the entire production. When reading the title of the production, one could ask whether one is satisfied with one's place (or seat²) in the theatre hall, one's place of residence, or one's place (or function) in life. All these thematic layers come to the foreground. The performers perform monologues; whether these are autobiographical or fictional is not even important. One performer talks about building his own summer house; the other performer describes his first real estate experience living on the first floor of a Soviet-style block building. With these personal monologues, the performers activate the audience's own perceptual and emotional space.

In addition, the production allows the audience to lift the lid from their own memory spaces. As is known, space is considered a central element of our memories (Bachelard 1992). The production takes the spectator on a mental journey into his or her own personal spaces, activating his or her memory. Next, the performers activate the awareness of the audience's physical space. During the action, Mart Kangro sets up a big and heavy grey plate right in front of one audience member's seat. The audience member is encouraged to contemplate on his or her own possible perspective, prospective, and physical possibilities to observe what is happening. Then the plate in front of the audience member is lifted and the field of view again changes.

It Stays as It Is activates the spectator's perception of a number of spaces, both physical and metaphorical: theatre space, performance space, emotional space, memory space, space of experience, etc. From the perspective of the audience, it seems that physical and metaphorical space act together. While the playtext of the performers enlivens the audience member's emotions, memories, and experiences, the action of the performers in the physical space activates the audience member's perception of the concrete physical space that s/he inhabits. In this case, the performative space enlivens the spectator's memory.

The joint production of the Von Krahl Theatre and the Paide Theatre *****³ incorporates elements of theatre and contemporary art (for example, installation, environment art, light art or luminism) and blurs the boundaries even more consist-

2 Estonian *kohaga* could be translated either as "with your place" or "with your seat." Both are applicable in the context of the production.

3 The authors are Mart Koldits, Kairi Mändla, Jan Teevet, Joosep Uus, Johannes Richard Sepping, Ursel Tilk, Kirill Havanski, Kalle Tikas, Jari Matsi. Performers are Jan Teevet, Joosep Uus, Johannes Richard Sepping, Ursel Tilk, Kirill Havanski. Premiere 4.09.2020 at the Von Krahl Theatre.

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ently than the production of *It Stays as It Is*. ***** is a performative spatial installation that sharpens the audience's reception mechanisms in an unusual way.

The production can be contextualised as interactive theatre⁴, where spectators of the performance become participants whose choices can influence the course of the performance. In the first part of the performance at the Von Krahl Theatre in Tallinn, the audience members, who have been specifically organised in the space



Figure 2. ***** (2020, Paide Theatre and Von Krahl Theatre). Photo by Mart Koldits.

(numbers are written on the floor, and the audience member entering the space gets a number from the actor and goes and stands by the number accordingly; by the end of the first part, the audience is evenly scattered around the black box), reads the performance text for themselves according to instructions presented on screens (this special arrangement in which the audience itself performs is reminiscent of Ivana Müller's *We Are Still Watching*, 2012, where a text written on paper was lying on every seat and every audience member, one after another, just as it was indicated in the text, started reading the text – and that was all the performance consisted of)⁵. In the course of this reading, with the audience standing scattered over the space, there occurs a heightened awareness of one's own presence

4 https://teater.ee/teater_eestis/teatriterminoloogia/aid-7872/Osav%C3%B5tuteater

5 <http://www.ivanamuller.com/works/we-are-still-watching/>

and of the space since the audience members see each other and can interact with each other in the space. However, if someone were to hesitate too long with reading the text or performing the prescribed activities, the performers would probably wait a while and still move on (the serial number of the text reader appears on the screen).

This reflective and interactive scene is followed by a long scene that takes place together with the performers. To McAuley, “audience space [can] facilitate (or discourage) types of social behaviour and social interaction” (2000, 25). Here, the performers and participants are on the same level; there is no distinction between the presentational⁶ space and the audience space, and thus a common performance space is created. The performers enter the performance space almost completely covered with monk robes. The monks move between the audience members, the atmosphere is casual, they drink beer and offer it to the audience, they take out old photos of the performers themselves and they show the photos to the audience (as if to activate the audience members’ memory space). In this scene, the performative space turns into a shared space that is “experienced, used and [. . .] shared equally by performers and visitors” (Lehmann 2006, 122).

Then the performative space is transformed again: the performers compress the audience into a claustrophobically dark corner of the hall by building a black panel wall in front of them. One can notice that the artists’ aim to lead people to a borderline situation: “space is a means of control and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 1991, 26). Here – to use Hans-Thies Lehmann’s expression – “the aesthetic distance reached a new minimum” (Lehmann 2006, 124), i.e., the distance between the subject and the object is minimised: the claustrophobic compressing of the participants into a pitch-dark room is potentially hazardous, and a claustrophobic atmosphere arises in the space. Theatre “becomes a moment of *shared energies* instead of transmitted signs” (Lehmann 2006, 150) with the reduction of distance between the performers and the spectators. As Erika Fischer-Lichte notes, “the fact that the performance space structures and organizes movement, perception, and the overall relationship between actors and spectators does not automatically imply that it controls them entirely” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 108). Thus, the action of the performers who physically change the space puts the spectators/participants in a crucial role. The audience members have the opportunity to violate the performers’ plan. During one of the performances, such an obstructive situation did indeed

⁶ In McAuley’s taxonomy, *presentational space* is formed by the physical presence of actors and by their bodily behaviour on stage (McAuley 2000, 29).

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arise when one audience member did not let the performers close the dark corner of the performance space with the panels. One of the characteristics of performative space is the “possibility of being used in unintended ways, even if some participants considered such an unpredictable use inappropriate and infuriating” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 108). The performers did not know what to do, so they were just standing by the panels. The performance continued when the audience member finally allowed it (and took his foot away from the doorway to install the panels).

After a while, the audience is “rescued” from the claustrophobic space by the performers. The “workers” cut a hole in the wall, and the spectators move to another space as if from hell to heaven: from a dark room, the audience enters a room bathed in blissful light and covered with soft foam⁷. This experience allows us to view ***** as an immersive space, which engages all five senses of the audience. The direct relationship of the audience with the surrounding performance is characteristic of such a theatre, and it is perceived and experienced sensually.⁸ The spectators “do not observe but experience themselves inside of a time-space” (Lehmann 2006, 152).

Another artist who combines the fields of visual art and theatre in the Estonian performing arts is Kadri Noormets. Exemplary of her creative practice is her interdisciplinary interactive performance *The Round Table*.⁹ As the first impulse for her performances, Kadri Noormets always has a spatial image, a visual image, in mind. She starts by visualising what she imagines to be on the stage (Noormets 2020). Then, she connects the spatial image, for example, the round table, with the actions on stage. This time, the title of the production – *The Round Table* – reflects the spatial arrangement and largely determines the spectators’ perception of space.

Noormets has invented a unique genre definition for her work: the “production as a situation.”¹⁰ Firstly, it emphasises the playing situation as such: during the performance, the performers play different board games and social games on stage.

7 Atmospheric spaces of the artist Olafur Eliasson come to mind. This artist’s focus is on the widening of the audience’s perception; Eliasson is an artist who conducts spatial research and enhances the viewers experience with art objects, installations, and spaces made of light, water, and air, such as smoke.

8 https://teater.ee/teater_eestis/teatriterminoloogia/aid-7883/Meelteteater

9 Original title *Ümarlaud*. Performers Kadri Noormets, Maarja Jakobson, Helgur Rosenthal, Ekke Hekles and Martin Kork, dramaturg Aare Pilv, author of the painting Kairo, sound designer Taavi Suisalu, lighting designer Karl Marken. Premiered 10.10.2020 at the Tartu New Theater.

10 In original: “lavastus-situatsioon”.

Hans-Thies Lehmann conceptualises the "situation" as follows: while entering the theatrical space, the spectator becomes a "participant" and has a heightened awareness of his/her own presence, and this physical proximity to the actors might bring the spectator into direct contact with the performers and other spectators (Lehmann 2006, 123). Indeed, by defining the production *The Round Table* as "the situation," Noormets also suggests that the performers and the audience equally experience and use the space in the live situation as is suggested by the concept of shared space. With that, a common ground is formed from which the performers can start playing (together with the audience members if they wish).



Figure 3. *The Round Table* (2020, Tartu New Theater). Photo by Talis Taim.

In the case of *The Round Table*, the involvement of the audience is not obligatory; the performers see it as an opportunity. Kadri Noormets and other performers communicate softly and warmly with the audience. Noormets has a special talent for creating a relaxed atmosphere where no one feels threatened or uncomfortable. The central scene in the performance is the role-playing game *Mafia*. At the start of the game, each player is secretly assigned a role of a mafioso (one or two players) or an ordinary villager (the rest of the players). The game has two phases: during the "night" the mafioso covertly kills a villager and during the "day" the surviving players debate the identities of the players and vote to eliminate a suspect. The game continues until the mafioso or the villagers win. In the performance, the performers actually play the game, i.e., without knowing who their colleagues embody

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in the game, there is real opportunity for the audience to help the performers in order to move the game forward more quickly and thus the performance.

One of the topics of the production is memory: memory of places, memory of people, memorising as a physical act. Each spectator has his or her own memorable moments with the games the performers play (this aspect is comparable with the production *It Stays as It Is*, which highlighted the spectator's memory connections with his or her own places of residence).

As for spatial memory, Noormets manipulates the spatial arrangement in *The Round Table*. She wants to save the spatial arrangement of the performance space in the memory of the spectators. In the hall of the Tartu New Theatre, all sorts of objects have been randomly scattered around the performance space: glasses, cages, parts of planks, cords, etc. It seems that these objects have been left there from the rehearsal period of the production. The audience has the opportunity to sit on the seats on four sides of the room, but in order to do so, the seats placed upside down must be arranged and the objects must be pushed away. At the end of the performance, however, the audience has the task of restoring the space to its original order (or apparent chaos).

In this article thus far, we can see the different ways space acts as an active agent in a performative situation. The spatial relations of all three performances activate the participants' emotional space, memory space, and the space of experience. An important common aspect is that the spatial arrangement triggers personal memories. The spectators start to contemplate their own past: how they have perceived spatial relations in different stages of their lives. The analysed productions show how an active performative space can involve the audience's hearing, sight, smell, and touch, i.e., the audience is directly surrounded by the performance and perceives and experiences it sensually.

Installation space of the performance

In addition to affecting the spectators with interactive space (to a different degree), there is another striking common feature to all three of the productions discussed above – the use of installation space. In installations, the space itself is in the centre of the meaning making process; the space functions as a subject whose qualities are transformed during the performance (Petersen 2015, 43). Spatial relations of such performances are an integral part of both form and content.

Characteristic to installation space is the organisation of the space in front of the audience during the performance. In both performances, the Kanuti Guild Hall's *It Stays as It Is* and the Von Krahl Theater's *****, heavy panels are lifted in front of the eyes of the audience, which change their perception of space. The same

applies to Kadri Noormets' performance, *The Round Table*, though the space here does not transform as completely as it does in *****. In the middle of the performance space at the Tartu New Theatre, the massive round table is relocated. During the performance, the table moves up and down and is presented as a table, a floor, or a ceiling. Since the table is massive and covers roughly half of the performance space, the raising and lowering of the round table changes the perception of the audience. It should be stated that the installation performance does not seek illusion, but rather reveals the process of installation, changing the space (Raudsepp 2017, 65–66). Installation performances use the space as a whole, which creates a special spatial experience for spectators.

Additionally, installation performances offer a new perspective on traditional theatre spaces. Theatre space as a term refers in particular to a building specially constructed or adapted for theatrical performance. The building affects both the performers and the audience and how the performance is received and interpreted (McAuley 2000, 24–25). The three productions discussed above take place in usual theatre spaces but offer new perspectives on those spaces. As the performances take place in familiar theatre houses, they are not site-specific (this means they are venues outside the usual theatre buildings). However, they can be called space-specific because they offer a new and (in the Von Krahl Theater) sometimes unrecognisable view to a known space. These productions rethink the theatre space, and the audience gets a chance to look at the common theatre space in a new way.

The three productions discussed above sharpen the spectators' sense of space right from the beginning of the performance. The productions have changed the usual layout of the space, and two of them specially organised the spectators' entry. Kadri Noormets lets the audience enter the performance space from the audience space together with the performers one after the other. Entering the hall of the Tartu New Theatre, they stand together with the performers around the massive round table – a playground that fills the space. A common area for playing has been established and the game can begin. At the Von Krahl Theater, the performers of ***** also allow the audience to enter the performance space one by one. The spectators have to take an unconventional way through the theatre's offices (i.e., the practitioner space – McAuley 2000) to get to the performance space. Throughout the performance, the performers move the walls and build new ones; they completely change the space around the audience, and it deeply activates the audience's perception of presence.

Performative space as immersive space

The site-specific promenade performance *People and Numbers*¹¹ consists of many different elements and progresses through many different spaces. The production thematises the functioning of the state and the freedom of people; it starts and ends in the studio hall of the centre of the performing arts Vaba Lava / Open Space in Tallinn. The production brings people from the theatre hall to the bus, to the streets of Tallinn, and then to four apartments, which the audience visits on a tour in a small bus. During the performance, the performers take on the roles of enthusiastic statisticians/trainers/guides. The introductory “training” in the theatre hall introduces the topic: what is the median salary and the income quintiles, consumption weights, and equivalent net income of a household member.



Figure 4. *People and Numbers* (2020, director Birgit Landberg, Vaba Lava). Audience with the performer Kaarel Targo. Photo by Ilja Smirnov.

The director Birgit Landberg was triggered by statistical information that 2.4% of Estonians live in absolute poverty and 21.7% in relative poverty (as of 2018). The director is interested in looking behind these numbers. Her idea is to take the audience to a private space – a home. According to Adam Alston, immersive theatre

11 Original title: *Inimesed ja numbrid*. Director Birgit Landberg, dramaturg Mihkel Seeder, set designer Illimar Vihmar, lighting designer Emil Kallas, performers Kaarel Targo, Märt Koik, Mihkel Kallaste, Karl Edgar Tammi and volunteers. Premiered in the curatorial programme of the performing arts centre Vaba Lava/Open Space in Tallinn 20.10.2020.

audiences “receive their own presence and involvement within an immersive space as important aspects of a theatre aesthetic” and the audience members are “frequently invited to engage with their own feeling bodies as an aesthetic site” (Alston 2016, 35). The production *People and Numbers* triggers the feeling bodies of the audience members and offers an experience of immersive space: the participant of the performance smells the home of a stranger, sits on a stranger’s bed, sniffs the houseplants on the windowsills, peeks into refrigerators. The audience of *People and Numbers* is driven to “inspect” four different apartments whose residents have incomes in different income quintiles: one of the apartments is a rundown dormitory room for extremely poor people; another is a typical Soviet style apartment in a block building; yet another is a renovated middle-class apartment in a building from the beginning of the 20th century; and the fourth one is a spacious high-end apartment located in a renovated medieval building in the Old Town of Tallinn. The audience meets the “residents” of the apartments sitting apathetically on the living room sofas. It takes a while to realise that the “residents” are performers, volunteers. Questions of authenticity and reflexivity topical of contemporary performing arts are established. The audience is faced with questions: Who are the people we see in the apartments? Do they live here? What are their lives like? How would I feel if I lived in such and apartment? Am I satisfied with my place of residence?

In *People and Numbers*, the visited apartments become co-players of the performance. They present themselves; they “speak” their significant stories about life in a certain income quintile. Inspired by Hans-Thies Lehmann, one could state that the spectators cast an “aesthetic gaze” into the apartments:

When a factory floor, an electric power station or a junkyard is being performed in, a new ‘aesthetic gaze’ is cast onto them. The space presents itself. It becomes a co-player without having a definite significance. It is not dressed up but made visible. The spectators, too, however, are co-players in such a situation. What is namely staged through site specific theatre is also a level of *commonality* between performers and spectators. All of them are *guests of the same place*: they are all strangers in the world of a factory, of an electric power station or of an assembly hangar. (Lehmann 2006, 152)

Because of the performance’s shared bus trip, the commonality could also be felt both within the small group of spectators and with the performer/guide. An extreme strangeness could be felt in all four of those apartments: spaces made visible to the eye of the spectator, almost like a *tableau* or a visual image. These apartment spaces function chronometrically and become “places of traces”

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(Lehmann 2006, 152) insofar that the events (i.e., life) has already happened in those spaces and we as spectators see the traces, time compressed in those spaces. The production crew has made traces of the living visible to the spectators. Here the installation characteristics of the space come to the forefront: spatial relations are an integral part of both the form and the content of the performance. The space itself is in the centre of the meaning making process and it functions as a subject.

A few aspects of *People and Numbers* are reminiscent of the practices of two international contemporary performance makers. SIGNA, a group of immersive and interactive theatre from Denmark, creates realistic gameworlds as spaces of experience, and they always use found spaces. Their site-specific theatre is often connected with a certain space (a factory, a school, a hospital, etc). For example, in the performance *Schwarze Augen, Maria* (2013), the performers lived in the former Elise-Averdieck-Schule, a school building in central Hamburg. The performers embodied eccentric family members whose children exhibit social abnormalities with peculiar social and physical defects but with unusual talents. The performance event is contextualised around the idea that the families of the community want to present themselves to the public. The audience can move around the school building throughout the day and meet the community members, i.e., to experience the performers in different rooms in various actions. SIGNA's immersive performances place great emphasis on smells, touching objects, and experiencing the space, as does Landberg's *People and Numbers*.

People and Numbers is also linked to the many promenade performances of Rimini Protokoll, the internationally renowned performance group of political interactive theatre, which often offers diverse liminal experiences. For example, the documentary performance *Cargo X* has the audience seated in a truck and taken to places connected with a city's transit and trade routes while truck drivers tell stories of their lives. Or the site-specific audio-walk *Remote X*, where a group of people sets off into the city to perceive the known from an unknown perspective. As with these examples, *People and Numbers* also touches on the limits of human perception and experience. Like Rimini Protokoll, *People and Numbers* offers the spectators a unique spatial experience: it is very unusual to get the opportunity to visit apartments where the income of the residents is several times lower or higher than that of the performance spectator.

Social space as applied theatre

In addition to the specific organisation of physical space, theatre can also focus on social space and expand the space of communication. An example of this is

*supersocial*¹² by Üüve-Lydia Toompere and Siim Tõniste, an applied theatre experiment that creates a temporary community. *supersocial* tries to create a social space among the participants of the performance. According to Henri Lefebvre, social space is any space where people interact (Lefebvre 2009, 186–87). Theatre is a social event; the spectators' reception of the performance is part of a social experience (McAuley 2000, 25). Thus, any theatrical space is a social, experiential space, but *supersocial* focuses on this social space, sharpens its perception. One can apply relational aesthetics to the context of the production: relational art consists of interaction, offering human experience (Bourriaud 2002, 44), and the aim of *supersocial* is indeed to focus on the interactions of the participants.



Figure 5. *supersocial* (2020, authors Üüve-Lydia Toompere and Siim Tõniste, Kanuti Gildi SAAL). Photo by Rene Jakobson.

The authors and performers of the production are interested in the formation of public opinion: How does a social environment affect the formation of and adherence to free opinion? What is worth compromising and what is the health of democracy in general? Will our principles remain steadfast under social pressure or not?¹³ Spatial metaphors are useful here: the production seeks to find a “political common space” (Rancière 2006, 9) among the participants, a space where participants can

12 Authors Üüve-Lydia Toompere and Siim Tõniste. Performers Üüve-Lydia Toompere, Siim Tõniste and Maryn-Liis Rütelmaa, sound designer Dillon Sutherland, set designer Mari Škerin, lighting designer Henry Kasch. Co-production Kanuti Gildi SAAL. Premiere 28.08.2020 Elektriteater in Tartu.

13 <https://saal.ee/en/performance/6532/>

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form and express their views on politically and socially burning issues and position themselves through their opinions and actions.

As far as physical space is concerned, *supersocial* is designed to facilitate communication: performers and participants are on the same level, so there is no distinction between the presentational space and the audience space, and thus the common performance space is created.

supersocial can be experienced as a performative social studies lesson. The performers ask the audience various socially and politically relevant questions (for example, should the elderly be cared for in a nursing home or is it the responsibility of the family?). The audience is asked to form groups according to their opinions. The performers then ask the groups to interact with each other and if they find common ideas, then the groups come together. The questions do not trigger any heated discussions among the participants. However, the results of the performance are more likely to manifest in so-called real life, not during the action itself, so hopefully these potentially young participants further discuss the proposed topics outside of the performance.

This links the production to the context of applied theatre, because its purpose is not just the aesthetic (Prentki, Preston 2009, 9). In applied theatre, performances take place outside theatre premises: all performances of *supersocial* occurred in different places and in different towns, such as the railway station, youth centre, cultural centre, or museum (eventually performances were also given in the theatre space at Kanuti Guild Hall in Tallinn). The aim of such an applied theatre could be to create a temporary community. Most often, spectators go to the theatre as members of subgroups (couples, groups of friends) and “through the process of responding to the performance” (McAuley 2000, 250), they become a collectivity, forming a group with a particular quality that can be perceived by the performers. In addition, *supersocial* has an educational goal for young people. And, on top of that, the performances were available to everyone free of charge. In an interview, the authors have stated that it is important for them to involve people that we live together with in society, to understand and hear their thoughts.¹⁴ Thus, *supersocial* is an attempt to create a common social space where the performative space becomes a shared space experienced equally by the performers and participants to form a temporary collectivity.

14 Interview to Priit Raud. See <https://vimeo.com/447420052>.

In conclusion

This paper presented a discussion of space as an active agent for the use of performative space in the Estonian performing arts: the arrangement of space as an interactive and shared space, the features of an installation space, the audience's perception of immersive space, and the formation of a socially communicative space. It discussed quite a wide range of possibilities for applying this concept of active space in contemporary performances. The interactive and shared space of the performances *It Stays as It Is* and ***** triggered the audience's perception of a familiar theatre space and activated the spectators' personal memories, emotions, and experiences. The installation space of *The Round Table* encouraged memorisation as a physical act: performers played real games on stage, which triggered each spectator's own memorable moments while playing those games. Such productions rethink the theatre space more intensively, and the audience gets a chance to look at the common theatre space in a new way. The immersive space of *People and Numbers* exemplified how the audience sensually perceives and experiences the performance when directly surrounded by it. The applied theatre experiment *supersocial* created a temporary community with a potential discussion field stretching beyond the time and space of the theatre event, providing an example as to how theatre can focus on social space and expand the space of communication, in addition to the specific organisation of its space.

This paper was interested in the performative space of contemporary performance, i.e., the space in which a performance occurs. By now, it should be clear that unlike *architectural-geometric space* (Fischer-Lichte), performative space does not represent only artifacts. By its nature, the performative space belongs to events rather than works of art (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 114). This is also shown in the study above. In addition to the "eventness" character of a performative space, one can also apply the concept of a "situation" (Lehmann): the spectator becomes a participant and becomes aware of his or her own presence (his or her position in relation to other people in the space, etc). Additionally, physical proximity might involve direct contact between the performers and spectators (Lehmann 2006, 123).

The productions discussed in this paper do not represent traditional theatre, which distinguishes between *fictional* and *real space* (McAuley). In these productions of contemporary performing art that disrupt the spectators' habits of viewing, the fictional and real spaces co-exist and do not oppose each other; perhaps it can even be said that the fictional and the real space are indistinguishably aligned.

The paper revealed the ways that space can be an active agent and affect the perception of the spectator. This study offered a possibility to look at space as an

aspect of performance that activates audience involvement and showed how the course of the performance may depend on the action or inaction of the audience.

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Ruum kui aktiivne agent. Performatiivsest ruumist Eesti nüüdisaegses etenduskunstmis

Madli Pesti

Võtmesõnad: etenduskunstid, performatiivne ruum, interaktiivne publik, installatiivne ruum teatris, sotsiaalne ruum

Artikkel käsitleb ruumi organiseerimise viise uuemas Eesti teatris ning osutab, kuidas ruumilised suhted mõjutavad publiku taju. Analüüsitakse viit 2020. aastal esietendunud lavastust: „Kas te olete oma kohaga rahul“ (autorid Eero Epner, Mart Kangro ja Juhan Ulfsak, Kanuti Gildi SAAL), „*****“ (autorid Mart Koldits ja trupp, Von Krahli Teater), „Ümarlaud“ (lavastaja Kadri Noormets, Tartu Uus Teater), „Inimesed ja numbrid“ (lavastaja Birgit Landberg, Vaba Lava) ning „supersocial“ (autorid Üüve-Lydia Toompere ja Siim Tõniste, Kanuti Gildi SAALI kaasproduksioon).

Ruum on teatrikunstis määrav mõõde ning üks võimalus teatrit defineerida ongi näha seda ruumi eriomase organiseerimise kaudu. Teoreetilise raamistikuna vaadeldakse artiklis Gay McAuley' viiest alast koosnevat teatriruumide taksonoomiat. Esimeseks alaks on McAuley' taksonoomia järgi teatrikogemuse sotsiaalne reaalsus, mis koosneb teatriruumist, publikuruumist, etenduse ruumist, töötajate ruumist ja prooviruumist. Teiseks alaks on füüsilise reaalsuse ja fiktsionaalse ruumi duaalsus, mis koosneb lavaruumist, esituse ruumist ja fiktsionaalsest ruumist. Kolmanda alana toob McAuley välja ruumid, mis on seotud asukoha ja fiktsiooniga, rõhutamaks, et väljamõeldud ruum toimib vastavalt oma asukohale füüsilise reaalsuse suhtes. Neljanda alana käsitletakse tekstilist ruumi, mis pöörab tähelepanu etendusteksti ruumilistele struktuuridele ja nende tähtsusele etenduse geneesis, hõlmates muu hulgas geograafilisi nimesid, kohtade kirjeldusi, liikumist väljendavaid verbe jms. Viienda alana toob McAuley esile temaatilise ruumi, mille tähtsus seisneb tähenduste loomises ja mis on seotud nii teksti kui ka etendusega. (McAuley 2000, 24–32) Käesolevas artiklis võetakse sellest taksonoomiast kasutusele etenduse ruumi mõiste, mis kuulub teatrikogemuse sotsiaalse reaalsuse juurde. McAuley' etenduse ruumis töötavad kaks gruppi, etendajad ja vaatajad koos, et luua ühine etenduskogemus. Etenduse ruum on teatrit määratlev ruum ning eksisteerib ka siis, kui pole olemas teatrit kui hoonet. (McAuley 2000, 26)

Teiseks ja peamiseks teoreetiliseks raamistuseks tuuakse artiklis mängu Erika Fischer-Lichte performatiivse ruumi mõiste. Performatiivne on Fischer-Lichte (2008, 107) määratluses ruum, milles etendus ilmneb, ja see ruum sünnib etendajate ja vaatajate koostoimes. Performatiivne ruum avab mitmekesiseid suhteid etendajate ja vaatajate, liikumise ja taju vahel. Nende suhete ükskõik millisel viisil muutmine või kehtestamine muudab performatiivset ruumi. Performatiivset ruumi nimetab Fischer-Lichte ka vahepealseks ruumiks ja etenduse käigus on see pidevas muutumises. Selle ruumi käsitletakse esile etenduse tajumise aspekti: publiku taju mõjutab alati etendust ja kõiki selles osalejaid, nii et etenduse ruumis hakkab ringlema eripärane energia (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 59). Lisaks muutuvad suhted näitlejate ja vaatajate vahel sõltuvalt publiku asetusest: olenevalt sellest, kas publik istub saalis vaatega lavale, kas publik ümbritseb lava või seisab publikuruumis hajutatult, kas publik liigub ümber ristkülikukujulise või ruudukujulise lava või siis sellest, mil viisil on publik lavast eraldatud (projektorite, poodiumite, dekoratsiooni, mööbli vmt-ga) (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 107).

S U M M A R Y

Artiklis arutletakse ruumi kui aktiivse agendi üle. Lavastuste „Kas te olete oma kohaga rahul“ ja „*****“ kaasav ja jagatud ruum ärgitab publikut tajuma tuntud teatriruumi uuel viisil ning aktiveerib vaataja isikliku mälu, emotsioonid ja kogemused. „Ümarlaua“ installatiivne ruum aktiveerib mäletamise kui füüsilise toimingu: etendajad mängivad laval päris mängu ja see vallandab iga vaataja enda elu mälestusväärset hetked. Sellised lavastused taasmõtestavad teatriruumi ja publik saab võimaluse tajuda tava-pärast teatriruumi uuel viisil.

Lavastuste „Kas te olete oma kohaga rahul“, „*****“ ja „Ümarlaud“ ruumilised suhted aktiveerivad osalejate emotsionaalse ruumi, mäluruumi ja kogemuste ruumi. Oluline ühine aspekt on see, et ruumiline paigutus käivitab isiklikud mälestused. Vaatajad hakkavad mõtisklema oma mineviku üle: kuidas nad on tajunud ruumilisi suhteid oma elu eri etappidel. Analüüsitud lavastused näitavad, kuidas aktiivne performatiivne ruum võib hõlmata publiku kuulmis-, nägemis-, lõhna- ja taktilise taju, s.t etendus ümbritseb osavõtjaid ning nad kogevad etendust eri tajude abil.

Lavastus „supersocial“ on näide sellest, kuidas lisaks füüsilise ruumi spetsiifilisele korraldusele võib teater keskenduda ka sotsiaalsele ruumile ning laiendada kommunikatsiooniruumi. See rakendusteatrina tajutatav lavastus lõi ajutise kogukonna, mille potentsiaalne aruteluväli ulatub väljapoole teatrisündmust nii ajas kui ka ruumis.

Käesolevas artiklis huvituti nüüdisteatri performatiivsest ruumist, s.t ruumist, kus etendus toimub. Erinevalt arhitektuurilis-geomeetrisest ruumist ei esinda performatiivne ruum ainult füüsilisi artefakte. Oma olemuselt kuulub performatiivne ruum pigem sündmuste kui kunstiteoste juurde (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 114). Lisaks performatiivse ruumi sündmuslikkusele on siin kohaldatav ka situatsiooni mõiste: vaatajast saab osavõtja ning seeläbi saab ta teadlikumaks oma kohalolust (oma positsioonist teiste inimeste suhtes ruumis), lisaks võib füüsiline lähedus hõlmata otsest kontakti etendajate ja vaatajate vahel (Lehmann 2006, 123).

Kokkuvõtvalt näidatakse artiklis, kuidas ruum võib olla aktiivne agent ja mõjutada publiku taju. Artikkel pakub võimalust käsitleda ruumi kui etenduse aspekti, mis aktiveerib publiku, ja näitab, kuidas eten-duse kulg võib sõltuda publiku tegevusest või tegevusetusest.

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