

The Shifting Point: Rewriting the Theatre Tradition on the Margins of Postmodern Culture

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In recent decades Lithuanian theatre has experienced many changes, especially concerning the most important elements of theatrical performance: the text, the actor and the spectator. Changes in the theatre's social status, together with the theatricalisation of everyday life resulted in considerable shifts not only in the functions of theatre but also in its aesthetics.

The end of the 1980s and 1990s were notable for Lithuanian theater as a period for rethinking its nature and identity, its means of expression and social functions. Having lost its exceptional status in society, the theater was forced to reconsider its potential for influence in a transitional social and cultural situation and to develop a new model for interrelationships with reality. During the period under discussion, Lithuanian theater began searching for sources of renewal, turning both toward the history of the national theatre and to the experiences of Western culture and theater. The new generation of theatre artists making their debuts at that time attempted to mix the traditions of Lithuanian theater with new local trends and global tendencies, thus creating the hybrid and complex character of contemporary Lithuanian performances. The transformations of contemporary Lithuanian theater and especially the changes that occurred after the shift in the sociopolitical situation have been discussed in various articles, but the emerging modes of representation still lack articulation in the framework of poststructuralist theory, which can provide useful insight into its developing trends. Although Lithuanian theater critics recognized the changes that were occurring, reviews and critical articles merely named one or another feature of performance as postmodern. Poststructural and postmodern theories permit the tracing of broader trajectories of change, rather than merely labeling certain characteristics of style as **postmodern**. Furthermore, theoretical analysis allows an understanding of such changes as elements in the overall cultural process, rather than as random phenomena.

In the course of analysing Lithuanian theater of the final decades of the 20th century, it was noticed that features of postmodern aesthetics were appearing not only in the performances produced by the young generation of Lithuanian theatre artists, who publicly profess postmodernism as their artistic program, but also in the works of their older colleagues. The dissemination of postmodernism in Lithuanian theater can be conditionally divided into two types – performances based on postmodern aesthetics and modern – or even traditional – performances where certain fragments of postmodern sensibility can be found. It is more accurate to talk about the postmodern in contemporary Lithuanian theatre not in a chronological manner, but instead through identifying certain problem areas,

which the aesthetics radicalizes. Indeed, the emerging formations are most visible where they radicalize or destabilize those areas of theatrical structure that have been the most problematic throughout Lithuanian theatre history, and that have already been described as “troublesome territories”: the self-reflexive condition of the theater in a transitional society; the problematic relationships between drama text/interpretation of director/spectator and the relationship between the actor’s identity, body and role.

Notwithstanding the transformed political, social and cultural situation, the conditions for the appearance of postmodernism in Lithuania differ considerably from those of the Western cultures. The so-called canonical or Western version of postmodernism cannot be found in its “pure” forms in Lithuanian art. Some trends of postmodern aesthetics (visuality, self-reflexivity and intertextuality) became more entrenched in the sphere of contemporary Lithuanian theater. Others, however, such as the reflexion of the use of body and new information technologies, did not find favorable ground, and these are not strongly represented in contemporary Lithuanian theater. The postmodern transformations linked with the institution of the director are more vivid in Lithuanian theater of the last decades. Meanwhile, transformations in acting or dramaturgy are more rare and random. Certain changes influenced by the postmodern paradigm closely interact with the existing cultural tradition, thus creating the patterns of **local postmodernism**. For example, performances deconstructing popular culture take on an artistic expression of pseudo-social realism, as in works by Oskaras Koršunovas, Gintaras Varnas, Jonas Vaitkus and Benas Šarka. Furthermore as part of the local postmodern agenda, the texts or images of the national cultural tradition are deconstructed. Finally, the influence of poststructuralist theory is not as substantial as in the Western tradition of postmodern theatre.

In this article, I propose to address emerging new modes of representation in contemporary Lithuanian theatre that can be conceptualized as **self-reflexivity** and **the post-representational body**. These closely-linked tendencies concern themselves with the global transformation of notions of language, body and perception in contemporary culture and critical theory as well as in local models of theatrical representations.

Self-reflexivity

At the end of the 20th century, after the declared crisis of traditional as well as modern notions of representation, theatre as an art form had been pushed to a marginal position; its modes of expression and representational devices had been put into question by critical theories and cultural practices. Furthermore, the search for new forms of theatrical representations seemed to be futile, since innovation in the postmodern cultural framework was no longer perceived as the driving force of artistic expression. Thus, both the apprehension of the impossibility of innovation as well as the limits of theatrical means of representation forced contemporary theatre creators to question and to rediscover the locus

of theatre in the contemporary cultural context. Moreover, in transitional Lithuanian society, the postmodern, self-reflexive character of theatre performances was strongly conditioned by the changing socio-economical situation. The self-reflexive character of contemporary Lithuanian theatre can be interpreted both as a result and a remedy; an illness and a cure; an attempt to investigate the principles of theatrical representation as well as to reconsider its boundaries. Faced with the loss of touch with social reality, theatre started to reflect upon its own nature and to deconstruct its own past; it is from itself, its own substance, that theatre proliferated by imitating, repeating, parodying, retracting its own representational devices. As the traditional notion of theatre was being transformed, artists were looking back at past performances, at theatre and cultural history in order to investigate and challenge romantic and modern models of representation. The self-reflexive nature of contemporary Lithuanian performances is multi-thematic and multi-layered. Performances can be grouped in the following three categories: a) re-vision of the theatrical representations of historical and national archetypes or images; b) self-reflexive investigation of the mechanisms of theatrical representations as well as juxtaposition of these representations with other media; c) auto-reflection. In the Lithuanian context the auto-reflexive strategies are linked mainly with the institution of the director, which is the central subject of theatrical reflection, as a result of a long tradition of the theatre of an *auteur*. Lithuanian theatre critic Audronis Liuga defined the self-reflexive nature of performances directed by Eimuntas Nekrošius, Rimas Tuminas and Jonas Vaitkus, as the production of an introverted play with the director's own concepts, methods and themes from past performances. According to the critic, this way theatre redoubles itself and avoids its sociocultural function. It projects only an authorial self-image, concerned entirely with "theatre about theatre". (Liuga 1997.) However, while analysing the self-reflexive character of contemporary Lithuanian theatre, I would suggest that one has to move away from formalistic labels to more complex sociocultural contexts that influence these transformations, as well as to acknowledge the complex dialectic of disruption/reinvention produced by this kind of performance.

One can trace at least two dimensions of self-reflexivity in contemporary Lithuanian performances: the critical and the playful. Examples of both can be found in works directed by Oskaras Koršunovas. One of his latest performances, the ironic parody of "Hamlet" – "Playing the Victim" (2005) by the brothers Presniakov can be read as a playful representation of self-reflexive *mise-en-scène*, where the director uses and abuses his own artistic imagery, cites his previous performances, laughs at the narcissistic character of his theatrical language, and parodies the state of becoming canonical. The self-reflexive strategy in this performance can be interpreted as an attempt to become an auto-ironic subject instead of becoming the object of parody. However, it is important to discuss the possibility of maintaining a critical function in performances which at first glance may be considered formal. A good example of this kind of self-reflexivity is Sigitas Parulskis' "P.S. File O.K." (1997), directed by Koršunovas.

At first, this may look like an experiment in formal utterances, but a closer reading will find it concerned with narrative frames and mental systems that subvert the traditional sense of meaning and perception in theatre. The text incorporates the experiences of the creators of the performance, as the writing of the text was an ongoing process, closely linked with the rehearsals. One of the objects of this performance was the self-reflexive construction of identity and the collective writing of the personal historical narrative. “P.S. File O.K.” rejected the conventional bases of drama – plot, character, and dialogue – and instead created a collage of contrasting styles and fragmentary images to mirror the contemporary mindscape. Parulskis inserted fragments from canonical works by William Shakespeare, the Bible, the myth of Oedipus, and fragments from Lithuanian theatre history, and juxtaposed them with the Soviet experiences of the creators of the performance. For example, the actor playing the student at a Soviet school tells the story of Oedipus as an anecdote, as a “funny thing” that has happened to him, demonstrating that his experience could acquire the shape of the canonical. Another example is the *mise-en-scène* at the beginning of the performance, where detectives dressed like bunnies are waiting for the father’s ghost to appear, as if referring to William Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” as well as to the recent performance of “Hamlet” by Eimuntas Nekrošius. Thirdly, at the end of the performance, the structure of the biblical story is changed and Isaac sacrifices his father Abraham, instead of being saved by the grace of God. The myths and religious texts were rewritten in order to translate them into local social context, to tell local stories by borrowing the codes, conventions and cultural associations of the canonical. The stage design and organization of space charts the geography of the fragmented mind (stage designer Žilvinas Kempinas). It can be interpreted as a purely psychological landscape, a place of memory inhabited by objects or symbols. This stage represents the level of the subconscious, only partly visible to the spectator. It emphasizes the hallucinatory nature of the performance. Dream quality, doubling of the action and multiplying characters are all present in “P.S. File O.K.”; every figure or character carries the personalities of others within it. The main character played by Arūnas Žebrauskas is the Son, Pupil, Soldier, Hamlet, Oedipus and Isaac, with additional allusions to the characters from previous performances directed by Nekrošius and Koršunovas’s teacher, Jonas Vaitkus.

As a result of intertextual and counter-canonical strategies, Soviet history in this performance was presented as hallucination. In “P.S. File O.K.” history (as personal narrative of the playwrights) was first told and then translated into pseudo-mythical situations, demonstrating that reality and fiction are both constructed in the same performative manner. The performance of “P.S. File O.K.” does not so much express the urge for an alternative, as the need to acknowledge the arbitrariness and fictionality of any historical or canonical narrative or representation.

This kind of self-reflexive strategy can be defined as critical due to its exposure of the

constructedness of historical reality. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, such reflexivity is compatible with a politically significant artistic stance interested in de-naturalizing and revising existing cultural power systems. It challenges inherited modes of theatrical representation in at least two ways, disturbing both the theatre's means of expression and the larger cultural assumptions about theatre. (Hutcheon 1988.)

Post-representational body

Another emerging "new language" of contemporary Lithuanian theatre, closely linked with its self-reflexive character as well as the redefinition of the role of text in performance, is the use of the actor's body as a culturally coded sign. Although Lithuanian theatre has long been a director's theater, where the director's concept dominated over all other representational elements in performance, the role of actor has always been important, at least theoretically. Especially during the Soviet period, actors were perceived as prophets, performing sacred and mysterious rituals of transformation or even sacrifices on stage. As new tendencies of self-reflexivity and exploration of representational devices made themselves visible, a new approach to acting appeared on the Lithuanian stage.

Some recent movements in Lithuanian theatre toward separating the actor from the role have led to the recognition of the actor's body as cultural text. In order to escape a logocentric position, and due in part to the influence of poststructuralist ideas, theatre practitioners have been turning their attention to the actor's body and identity as alternative way of self-reflexive acting. Specifically, poststructuralism stresses the view that the body is socially and culturally coded, and as such is unable to overcome its ideological encoding. If modern performance theory subjected the actor's body to the discipline of the drama text or to archetypal psychic impulses, repressing as well as ignoring its materiality, the postmodern actor acknowledges ideological and cultural codes and deconstructs their representation with the help of self-reflexive acting, or by displaying the discursive aspects of the human body. In such performances the actor's body is rendered and perceived as an historical as well as a cultural construct, as a performative and material location, where social and ideological meanings are inscribed. The real body of an actor, together with its material history – scars, body shape, wounds, sores, etc., as well as its real bodily reactions (sweat, tension, fatigue) is not hidden under the illusory contours of a fictional character, but rather revealed onstage. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, one characteristic of postdramatic theatre is self-contained corporeality, when the body of the actor does not represent any themes, but itself constitutes the theme (Lehmann 2004: 149–150). On the postmodern stage, the body that used to be repressed by the ideology of representation (acceptable images of clean, erotic, beautiful bodies), and by the codes of the drama text (the transformation of the actor's body to correspond maximally to the image of the fictive character or to the director's conceptual imagery), is displayed directly. The actor strives to investigate what it means to be his/her

body, or to have the body of someone else, that is the character. He or she is trying to understand how these conditions are similar and what the differences are between them. In postmodernist aesthetics, the actor's body is displayed onstage as a material body that is unable to become neutral at any stage. The exposure of the material body on stage or the use of non-acting techniques, when non-professional actors are used as signs on stage, can be traced in various performances: William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" (1997) and "Othello" (2000) by Eimuntas Nekrošius; Bernard Marie Koltes' "Roberto Zucco" (1998), Mark Ravenhill's "Shopping and Fucking" (1999), Marius von Mayenburg's "Fireface" (2000), Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" (1999) by Oskaras Koršunovas; or performances by Benas Šarka, just to name a few. In the performance of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" by Koršunovas, yet another dimension, the physical drama of actor's body, is displayed. The semantic dimension becomes secondary, as the spectator's attention is driven towards physical action and its outcomes on "real" body. The spectator is confronted with the trampled down, pushed, suffering, falling, stumbling, sweating body of the actor. The actors interact only through real physical and seemingly painful actions. In this kind of performance the materiality of the actor's body is staged against the textual symbolism, thus forming an additional layer of corporeal drama. Taken out of the natural environment, the actor's body operates in a cultural, symbolic space, but is displayed as object telling its real story with its own words – traces of sweat, scars, and sores. Although this example is only a fragment in an otherwise quite conventional structure of performance, it illustrates Lehmann's idea that in traditional theatre drama takes place in-between two actors, whereas in postdramatic theatre drama takes place in the body of the actor (Lehmann 2004: 275).

Such exposure of the real body of the actor as well as the juxtaposition of acting (re-presenting the role) and non-acting (just "being" on stage) raise critical questions about the nature of acting itself, or on a larger scale, about the nature of **presence** in theatre. The notion of live presence is also being challenged in performances that employ new technologies in order to juxtapose presence and absence, live and mediated performance.

In light of postmodern identity theory, the notion of performance itself is reframed: the assumption of roles, the conscious presentation or construction of a self, the idea of the body as a culturally produced object, and the idea of a fragmented, schizophrenic subject embodying numerous contradictory subject positions run counter to the modern acting tradition, urging contemporary theatre creators to look for alternative ways of embodying theatrical meanings. More often, through actions, choreographies, or even speech, the performers are seen as sharing a constituency of texts in which their own part or parts must be worked out, or in which their role is fluid, subject to play and change. For example, in the performances of

Šarka, the spectator is confronted with the deconstruction of traditional notion of character, as the identity of the actor is melted into different roles, constructed and deconstructed before the eyes of the spectator. Here the actor is an intertextual persona, consisting of fragments of his own identity and role, being simultaneously constructed and deconstructed. As another example, the presence of brothers Viktoras and Jonas Baubliai on the stage of "Othello", directed by Nekrošius, disturbs audience expectations about traditional role play, since it is impossible to grasp the thin line between acting and just being oneself on stage. In his production of "Roberto Zucco", Koršunovas doubled the main character, Roberto Zucco, with a non-professional performer, exposing the artificiality of theatrical representations, thus making visible the split between the self-image and imaged self. In various ways, these performances employ a strategy of hyperrealism: their spatial, narrative, and technological design exaggerates the simulational dimension of reality, suggesting that realities, identities, subjectivities and bodies are merely constructs, doubled by the representations of theatre. These developments are less departures from the mimetic tradition (realist or poetic-metaphorical), than a reworking of it. At the same time they are generative of alternative modes of representation.

Conclusions

Lithuanian theatre is closely linked to modern and pre-modern indigenous traditions, as well as to a range of influences from the outside. Together these give rise to the hybrid character of contemporary performances. Thus it can be claimed that postmodernist aesthetics activate the groups of problems specific to local theater culture. Postmodern aesthetics foster or disrupt specific problem fields that were previously active in the Lithuanian theater tradition: the status of the theater in society (self-reflexive strategies); the role of the drama text and its relationship with the director's concept (postmodern construction or disruption of meaning and perception); the relation between actor and character (post-representational identity and the body of the actor).

In many instances, this kind of theatre can be thought of as postmodern because of its tendency toward a deconstruction of the process of theatre production and its intrinsic technologies of representation. Typically postmodern formations of perception (quotation, recycling, pastiche, parody, simulation) present in these contemporary performances destabilise any categories or hierarchies of difference between original and copy, spatial and temporal coordinates, live presence and recorded versions. Self-reflexive techniques and intertextuality are both used to challenge the common assumptions about reality and unmediated presence, the distance between performance and experience, fact and fiction, public and private. Exposure of the actor's body helps deconstruct the notion of theatrical presence. Such exposure of the real body of the actor as well as the juxtaposition of acting

(re-presenting the role) and non-acting (just “being” on stage) raise critical questions about the nature of acting itself, or on a larger scale, the nature of presence in theater. The intention in all cases is to expose dominant discourses, theatrical conventions, and genres as constructed.

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Nomadismist

Knut Ove Arntzen

Mõiste *nomaadid* kasutamine filosoofias on seotud metafoorse mõtlemisega, nagu seda demonstreerivad Gilles Deleuze ja Félix Guattari oma raamatus „Nomadoloogia: sõjamasin“ („Traité de nomadologie: la machine de guerre“, 1980). Nad käsitlevad nomaadidega seostatavat mobiilsust kui sõjmetafoori. Viimane viitab faktile, et ajaloolised nomaadidest sõdalased, näiteks mongolid, suutsid hobustel kiiresti edasi liikuda ning ootamatult rünnata. Riigi loomine sai võimalikuks vaid tänu sellele, et sõjamasinaid võis hoida pidevas liikumises. Paradoksaalne küll, aga nomaade kasutasid ära just riigi loojad, kes olid õppinud, kuidas rakendada metallurgilisi tehnikaid, nii et ajaloolaste arvates muutusid nomaadid koos oma sõjamasinatega vaid instrumentideks riigimeeste käes, nagu mongolid hiinlaste või tatarlased venelaste jaoks. Kirjeldatud käsitlust kasutatakse kui metodoloogilist baasi, et uurida, kuidas mõistet *nomaadid* võib mõista eri kontekstides: nii antropoloogilises tähenduses kui ka uue kontseptsioonina filosoofias ja kunstides. Antud artiklis rakendatakse seda mõistet uute kunstiliste praktikate uurimiseks nii otseses kui metafoorses tähenduses. Otseses tähenduses viidatakse nomaadide kunstile, metafoorselt aga nomadismile uuemas kunsti- ja teatriloomingus.

Nomaade iseloomustab peavoolujärgne (*post-mainstream* – vastand eurosentristlikule peavoolule, mida kontrollivad Lääne-Euroopa keskused) liikumine uute kunstiliste tegevuste leidmiseks. Nende tegevus kannab nii globaalset kui ka lokaalset või regionaalset värvingut ning nomadismi mõistet võib kasutada kirjeldamiseks seda, mis toimub, kui peavooluliikumised ammenduvad. Nomadism segab stiile ja traditsioone, mida peavoolu kontseptsioonis ei saaks esteetilise puhtuse või suundumuste kinnistumise tõttu kombineerida. Konkreetsemalt tuuakse näiteid Põhja-Skandinaavia etendus- ja visuaalkunstidest.

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Nihkuv vaatepunkt: teatritraditsiooni ümberkirjutamine postmodernistliku kultuuri äärealadel

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Viimastel aastakümnetel on leedu teatris toimunud palju muutusi, eriti seoses teatri baaselementidega: teksti, näitleja ja vaatajaga. Esilekerkinud postmodernistlikud arengud on kõige ilmsemad ja radikaalsemad teatristruktuuri neis osades, mis on olnud problemaatilised kogu leedu teatri ajaloo vältel – teatri identiteet ja sotsiaalne funktsioon, draamateksti roll lavastuses ning näitleja ja tegelase suhe. Selles artiklis

käsitlen uusi representatsiooniviise kaasaegses leedu teatris, keskendudes mõistetele *eneserefleksioon* ja *postrepresentatsiooniline keha*.

Uuendamise võimatuse ning teatri väljendusvahendite piiride tajumine on sundinud teatripraktikuid küsitlenu ja taasavastama lavakunsti kohta tänapäeva kultuuris. Lisaks sellele oli üleminekuaja Leedu ühiskonnas lavastuste postmodernistlik eneserefleksioon seotud muutuva sotsiaal-majandusliku situatsiooniga. Eneserefleksioon kaasaegses leedu teatris kujutab endast mitmeplaani ja -teemalist nähtust, mida võib liigitada kolme kategooriasse: a) ajalooliste ja rahvuslike arhetüüpide/sümbolite representatsioonide revideerimine, b) teatri representatsioonimehhanismide ennastpeegeldav uurimine ning nende kõrvutamine teiste meediumitega, c) autorefleksioon. Viimane on Leedu kontekstis seotud peamiselt lavastaja institutsiooniga.

Eneserefleksiooni ja teksti rolli ümbermõtestamisega lavastustes on kaasnenud ka näitleja keha kui kultuuriliselt kodeeritud märgi kasutamine. Logotsentristliku positsiooni vältimiseks on teatripraktikud pöördunud näitleja keha ja identiteedi kui eneserefleksiivse näitlemise alternatiivi poole. Seda on mõjutanud peamiselt poststrukuralistlikud ideed sotsiaalselt ja kultuuriliselt kodeeritud kehast, mis ei suuda ületada oma ideoloogilist kodeeritust. Kui modernism allutas näitleja keha draamatekstile või arhetüüpsetele psüühilistele impulssidele, surudes alla ja ignoreerides selle materiaalsust, siis postmodernistlik näitleja teadvustab neid ideoloogilisi ja kultuurilisi koode ning dekonstrueerib eneserefleksiooni või inimkeha diskursiivsete aspektide esiletoomise abil nende representatsioone. Kehalisuse ja mitte-näitlemise tehnikate eksponeerimist võib leida paljudest kaasaegsetest leedu lavastustest. Näitleja keha ning näitlemise (rolli taas-esitamise) ja mitte-näitlemise (laval olemise) kõrvutamine tõstatab küsimusi näitlemise olemuse ning üldisemalt kohaloleku kohta teatris. Postmodernistliku identiteediteooria valguses on ümber hinnatud rolli kategooria, teadlik enesepresentatsioon või -konstruktsioon, keha kui kultuuriliselt loodud objekt ning idee fragmenteeritud skisofreenilisest subjektist, kes kehastab paljusid vastuolulisi rolle. Kõik need modernistliku näitlemistraditsiooniga vastuollu sattuvad ideed õhutavad teatripraktikuid otsima alternatiivseid teid tähenduse esitamiseks. Tegevuse, koreograafia ja isegi kõne abil on etendajatest tihti saanud teksti/lavastuse kaasautorid. Näiteks Benas Šarka lavastustes on näitleja intertekstuaalne persoon, mis koosneb nii tema enda kui rolli fragmentidest, mis on pidevas konstrueerimises ja dekonstrueerimises. Need arengud ei tähenda mitte niivõrd mimeetilise traditsiooni (realistliku või poeetilise-metafoorse) hülgamist, vaid selle ümbertöötamist ning uute representatsioonistrateegiate otsimist.

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