

Blurring the Borders between Life and the Theatre in the Stage Directing of Vladislavs Nastavševs

Ieva Rodiņa

Abstract: Vladislavs Nastavševs is one of the leading contemporary Latvian theatre directors. Nastavševs' stage productions are constructed by combining elements of psychological theatre, performance art and postdramatic theatre, deliberately expanding the traditional boundaries between the stage and the audience, actors and spectators. Nastavševs' performances usually contain visually impressive stage metaphors that generate both emotional and psychophysical influence on the spectators, thus exploring new types of performance perception and blurring the boundaries between life (reality) and theatre (fiction).

DOI: 10.7592/methis.v17i21/22.14588

Keywords: theatre, semiotics, postdramatic theatre, physicality

Introduction

Vladislavs Nastavševs (born 1978) is one of the leading stage directors in contemporary Latvian theatre. Together with Elmārs Seņkovs, Laura Groza-Ķibere, Valters Sīlis and others, Nastavševs belongs to the over-thirty generation of stage directors who started their work in Latvian theatre around the second decade of the 2000s. However, in many ways, Nastavševs' position in Latvian theatre has been independent and different from his contemporaries from the very beginning. While almost all Latvian theatre directors of this generation received their education at the Latvian Academy of Culture, Nastavševs chose to acquire knowledge abroad—first, he studied acting at the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts in St. Petersburg (*Российский государственный институт сценических искусств*, 1999–2004), followed by two years of theatre directing studies at the St. Martin's College of Arts and Design, Drama Centre in London (2005–2007). These educational impulses have formed the artistic signature of Nastavševs, mixing two different theatre traditions—on the one hand, psychological theatre which emphasises the actor's work in the Russian theatre school and, on the other hand, aesthetic strategies typical of 21st century Western theatre, for example, the dominance of visual and physical elements in the structure of performance. In addition to theatre studies, Vladislavs Nastavševs also has a basic musical education, which has had a strong impact on the artistic language of his performances: Nastavševs mostly composes the original scores for his stage productions, and tends to use music as the prevailing ele-

ment to create ambience, thus almost making it a materialistic element of the performance space.

This article tackles the question of blurring the boundaries between the stage and spectators in Nastavševs' performances, exploring how the theme of dissolving the thin line between life (reality) and theatre (fiction) is embodied in the discourse of Nastavševs' stage productions. Therefore, the performances mentioned in this article will be analysed from a semiotic perspective¹, as a system of theatrical signs², mostly focusing on actor- or space-related theatrical codes and exploring the different strategies through which Nastavševs challenges traditional performance perception models.

Context. Blurring boundaries in the 21st century theatre

Theatre is an art form which is based upon direct, "live" communication between spectators (audience) and actors (stage). Traditional dramatic theatre forms are based upon the principle of representation and imitation, or, as the semiotician Keir Elam (2001, 102) writes, "[. . .] the fiction of the presence of a world known to be hypothetical: the spectator allows the *dramatis personae*, through the actors, to designate as the 'here and now' counterfactual construct [. . .]". In most theatre forms, it is vital that the spectator accepts the fictive reality represented by the actors as "actual", not fictional, believing in the reality constructed on the stage. On the other hand, since the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary Western theatre has been strongly influenced by the aesthetics of performance art, exploring the possibilities of performance as a live event "here and now". Accordingly, theatre has been shifting towards more active communication with spectators and making theatre a part of "real life" by disrupting the distinction between theatre as fiction and life as reality (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 139). Contemporary theatre is challenging both the institutional (theatre as an organization, institution, or building) and the artistic borders between real life and the world of art. Just like many others of his Latvian stage directing peers, Vladislavs Nastavševs seeks to explore different possibilities and

1 The semiotic approach, as stated by the distinguished theatre theoretician Patrice Pavis (1982, 20), is mostly concerned with the discourse of staging, with the way in which the performance is marked out by the sequence of events, by the dialogue and the visual and musical elements, investigating the organization of the performance text, that is, the way in which it is structured and divided.

2 In the semiotic paradigm, all the stage elements (set design, costumes, lighting techniques, the actor's body language, sounds, music, etc.) are identified as theatrical signs, which are both carrying an individual symbolic meaning, and also participating in a complex signifying process where the spectator is free to create his own associations for the theatrical signs presented in the performance according to the individual perception mechanisms (Elam 2001, 28).

aspects of the relationship between theatre as an illusion (fictional work of art) and real life in his performances.

Another contemporary theatre tendency, which can be observed in the creative work of Vladislavs Nastavševs is blurring the boundaries between different art forms and shifting to an interdisciplinary performance language. In her study *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009) Josephine Machon, Associate Professor of the Performing Arts Department of Middlesex University, London, writes:

The fusion of arts practice from high and low culture has become patently clear in both mainstream and experimental performance. Work that straddles disciplines such as theatre, dance, visual art, virtual realities, online gaming, closed-circuit surveillance, opera, pop-music and stand-up comedy is increasingly prevalent and defies categorization. (Machon 2009, 29)

Contemporary theatre uses elements of different art forms to create a synaesthetic work of art, which can influence the spectator at many levels of perception. German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 36) writes: "The audience's physical participation is set in motion through synaesthetic perception, shaped not only by sight and sound but by physical sensations of the entire body". Like many contemporary Latvian and European theatre artists, such as Alvis Hermanis (Latvia), Ivo van Hove (Belgium), Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier (Germany), Katie Mitchell (United Kingdom) and others, Vladislavs Nastavševs' performances combine strong visual, physical, and auditory theatrical signs³ to create a complex performance aesthetics.

As for many contemporary theatre artists, one of the inspirational sources of Vladislavs Nastavševs is Antonin Artaud and the concept of "Theatre of cruelty". In his theoretical work *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) Artaud suggests that by its emphasis on the spoken word and the intellectual, the psychological, 'traditional' theatre has lost connection with the metaphysical dimension of theatre as ritual. Artaud writes that instead, theatre should use such dynamic visual, auditory and physical stage elements as

[. . .] cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, theatricalities of all kinds, magic beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models; resplendent lighting, incantational beauty of voices, the charms of harmony, rare notes of music, colors of objects, physical rhythm of movements whose

³ French theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis defines the theatrical sign as the union of a signifier with a signified (see Pavis: 1998, 335).

crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, concrete appearances of new and surprising objects, [...] sudden changes of light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold, etc. (Artaud 1958, 93)

The theatrical elements Artaud enumerates belong to different (auditory and visual) sign systems, meaning that the structure of the performance allows the formation of dynamic interactions between various theatrical sign systems. Artaud also mentions the need to arouse physical sensations in the spectator during the performance, and this principle appears in the stage language of Vladislavs Nastavševs' performances.

The characteristics of Vladislavs Nastavševs' stage directing

Vladislavs Nastavševs has the reputation of an authoritative director who challenges actors and offers them tasks that seem almost impossible to execute. His productions are based on the aesthetics of physicality. Writing about the language of contemporary theatre, German theatre scholar Hans Thies-Lehmann uses the term *postdramatic theatre*. This theoretical concept, expanded in Lehmann's fundamental research study, *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999, Frankfurt am Main), suggests that contemporary theatre forms have shifted away from the tradition of drama and become more visual and physical, making the actor's body one of the main "stage tools" in 21st century theatre:

The body becomes the centre of attention, not as a carrier of meaning but in its physicality and gesticulation. The central theatrical sign, the actor's body, refuses to serve signification. Postdramatic theatre often presents itself as an *auto-sufficient physicality*, which is exhibited in its intensity, gestic potential, auratic 'presence' and internally, as well as externally, transmitted tensions. (Lehmann 2006, 95)

The aesthetics of physicality, meaning that the actor's body is placed on stage as a self-sufficient element of the performance, and not as a carrier of meaning (role), is one of the main characteristics of Vladislavs Nastavševs' stage directing. In his performances, Nastavševs often uses the actor's body as material to build complex stage metaphors. In one of his more critically acclaimed productions, *Travelers by Sea and Land* (*Peldošie-ceļojošie*, The New Riga Theatre, 2014), all the characters on the stage have their own *alter-egos*—grand pianos, which symbolize their souls. During the performance, these pianos are pushed around, deconstructed and even climbed on, into and out of, making the stage action a physical challenge for the actors who are dressed in fine evening gowns, representing the high society of the

Russian Silver Age. This corresponds to the tendency articulated by Lehmann (2006, 163) that, in comparison to dramatic theatre, where the dramatic process occurs “between the bodies”, the postdramatic process occurs “with/on/to the body”.

One of the most characteristic qualities of Nastavševs’ stage directing is the physical impact his performances have on spectators—the stage metaphors he uses are so tense and sometimes naturalistic that the spectators view the performance not only emotionally or rationally, but also psychophysically. In her research paper about the stage metaphors in Vladislavs Nastavševs’ stage directing, Latvian theatre scholar Silvija Radzobe states that the metaphors Nastavševs creates mostly impact the spectator’s senses and nerves, not the mind or feelings:

V. Nastavševs’ stage metaphors have a more universal effect; no one is protected from them, even if the viewer is unaware of this influence or doesn’t like it. When choosing objects and procedures for the metaphors, V. Nastavševs prefers those with strong authenticity. These are real things that are assigned a second, figurative meaning. Since the metaphors created by V. Nastavševs are multilayered and often spatial, it is important that he is the stage designer of his own performances. (Radzobe 2013)

In Nastavševs’ performances, the manipulation with the spectator’s perception is usually attained by provoking such strong psychophysical reactions as fear or disgust, for example, when seeing fluids that represent human blood, saliva, or sperm, or, as in the case of *Travelers by Sea and Land*, when the spectators actually fear that the actors will harm themselves in the process of the performance. As suggested by Silvija Radzobe, Nastavševs uses authentic objects to provoke authentic feelings based on the spectator’s senses—such as passionate spilling of cherry compote in the stage production of August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (*Jūlijas jaunkundze*, Valmiera Drama Theatre, 2012), squishing of tomatoes in *The Black Sperm* (*Melnā sperma*, a stage version of Sergey Uhanov’s stories, Ģertrūde’s Street Theatre, 2015). Nastavševs’ performances are always unique and absolutely unpredictable—they offer new theatrical techniques and artistic challenges, making the premieres of his stage productions much awaited in Latvian theatre.

The true and live reactions of the spectators usually become an important part of Nastavševs’ performances, creating a bond between the stage and auditorium, and therefore blurring the boundaries between theatre and life. As stressed by Lehmann,

The theatre performance turns the behavior onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a ‘text’ even if there is no spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience. [. . .] the thea-

the situation forms a whole made up of evident and hidden communicative processes. (Lehmann 2006, 17)

Since starting his career in Latvian theatre, Nastavševs has become the absolute author of his performances, being not only a talented and extraordinary stage director but also creating the stage design, costumes and music for most of his productions⁴. Nastavševs himself has stated: “I want to be the total author of my performances. It is the old association with visual art—a painter and his painting. I put so much of myself in my work, that right now I can’t imagine anyone who could do the same [. . .]” (Gulbe 2012). Since 2010, Nastavševs has also participated in some of his performances as an actor, by playing himself. For example, in his production of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (*Makbets*, Valmiera Drama Theatre, 2013) Nastavševs appeared on stage in the role of Director, alongside five other actors who all at some point played the role of Macbeth. The performance ended with a scene where the Director, portrayed by Nastavševs, killed all the actors on stage by strangling them with a microphone wire. The topic of the conflicting worlds of actors and the director was similarly interpreted in the production *The Truth I Have Been Longing For* by the Estonian theatre *NO99* (*NO49: Tõde, mida ma olen igatsenud*, 2014), where at a certain point the actors could not stand the orders from above (the director), and fired a gun pointed above the heads of the spectators, shooting or at least symbolically silencing the director.

Blurring boundaries

Lately, the theme of blurring the boundaries between theatre and life, actors and the director, the stage and the audience has become one of the leading motifs in the stage directing of Vladislavs Nastavševs. He explores this theme in three major aspects.

First aspect: life as theatre, or ‘theatre within theatre’. Vladislavs Nastavševs plays with the idea of life as theatre and theatre as life. All of his newest productions are based upon the principle “theatre within theatre”, where the actors play characters who are also behaving like actors in their lives. The French theatre scholar Patrice Pavis defines this process as ‘metatheatre’ or “theatre which is centred around theatre and therefore “speaks” about itself, “represents” itself”. The theatre

⁴ In some productions Vladislavs Nastavševs has worked in close and regular collaboration with several theatre artists, such as stage and costume designer Monika Pormale or the musical consultant and composer Toms Auniņš.

semiotician also stresses that the phenomenon of ‘theatre within the theatre’ “does not necessarily involve an autonomous play contained within another [. . .]. All that is required is that the represented reality appear to be one that is already theatrical, as in plays in which the main theme is life as theatre” (Pavis 1998, 210). Pavis also mentions William Shakespeare, Pedro Calderon, Luigi Pirandello and other authors whose plays might be considered already theatrical in this sense.

Yet, Nastavševs mostly chooses to stage the works of Russian Silver Age modernists. The Russian Silver Age can be described as one of the most artistic periods in Russian culture, when theatricality was not only a means of expression in the artist’s creative work, but also a mode of life; theatrical behaviour was a principle both on stage and in real life (Jestrovic 2002). Vladislavs Nastavševs has staged several literary works from the Russian Silver Age, most recently—two performances based upon the novel *Travelers by Sea and Land* by Mikhail Kuzmin; the first part at the New Riga Theatre (2014), followed by a second production two years later at the Daile Theatre. Both performances apply theatre or ‘theatre within the theatre’ as the principle of life.

The performance of *Travelers by Sea and Land. Part II (Peldošie-celjojošie. 2. daļa, 2016)* continues the same plot line and visual code as the first part, staged at the New Riga Theatre. Although the second part is played by a different cast and in another theatre, the costumes and set design, created by the artist Monika Pormale, are practically the same, giving the impression that the characters who were introduced at the first performance have travelled to another theatre with an even larger stage in order to continue their never-ending story. At the same time, this context is clear only to those spectators who have seen the first performance of *Travelers by Sea and Land* at the New Riga Theatre. Although the second part can be regarded as an autonomous performance, the director has intentionally attached the words “Part II” to the title, suggesting that the full message of this performance emerges from the diptych. In her review, Latvian theatre critic Maija Svarinska writes the following:

Travelers by Sea and Land. Part II is trying meritoriously to compete with the first part, which Nastavševs staged at the New Riga Theatre. In the directing and actor’s work one can feel the same painfully ironic message about the world of feelings that maddens and enslaves a man’s life. The smile’s power is even bigger. Especially in the characters. (Svarinska 2016)

The large stage of the Daile Theatre is the biggest stage in Latvian theatre, and in *Travelers by Sea and Land. Part II* Nastavševs and the stage designer Monika Pormale use this space to create the impression of a large float made of grand piano

covers. It is very significant that the subtitle of the performance is “The end of a wonderful era”: when the actors in fine evening gowns climb on these grand pianos, it creates an impression of a sinking island, or symbolically—a sinking Atlantis.

The characters of the performance are Russian aristocrats who are bored with their lives and seeking new relationships, forming various love triangles and quadrangles, and creating new scandals. Nastavševs shows these characters as actors who seek each other’s attention; they are never themselves, hiding their real faces under real or symbolic masks. For example, the women in this performance are coquettes and seductresses, who change their love objects like gloves, floating around the stage like leaves of water plants. The idea of life as theatre culminates in the character of Orest (played by the actor Ģirts Ķesteris), a clear prototype of Mikhail Kuzmin and perhaps Vladislavs Nastavševs himself. Orest tries to lead the stage action, sometimes even physically conducting other characters as an orchestra, thereby becoming a symbolic director of this society and the performance as a whole.

Second aspect: self-reflexivity as a theatrical strategy. Another stage work in which Nastavševs explores the relationship between life and the theatre is the performance *The Lake of Hope* (*Cerību ezers*, 2015), staged at the New Riga Theatre. The performance received the Latvian National Theatre Award as the *Best Large-Space Theatre Production* and was well received by Latvian and foreign theatre experts. In this case, Nastavševs develops the theme of borders between life and the theatre by making himself the main character of the production. On stage, the character of Nastavševs is played by Intars Rešetins, an actor from the Daile Theatre, who tries to replicate Nastavševs’ looks, body language and voice authentically, creating an autobiographical image.

The performance consists of three plot lines or levels. The first shows the psychological relationship between Nastavševs and his mother Nadežda (translating from Russian—*hope*), exposing a diversity of feelings from love to hate. Secondly, it is a story about the community of Russians in Latvia. The performance portrays the situation in Latvia’s society as a post-soviet space, where the Latvians and Russians live in socially, politically and symbolically separated worlds. This idea is developed not only by the character of the mother, but also in the plot line about Nastavševs as a Russian director who stages performances in Latvian theatre. The deliberate choice of Rešetins draws not only on the visual resemblance between the two artists, but also on the fact that Rešetins is an actor from the Daile Theatre giving a “guest performance” at the New Riga Theatre. Considering the fact that most actors at Latvian theatres are employed by the theatre as an institution rather than individually contracted for particular theatre productions, this choice represents the

theme of “the other”. Of course, this aspect can also be interpreted as a subtext about Nastavševs as a Russian working in Latvian theatre despite otherwise separated ethnic communities. The third plot line is dedicated to the similarities between real life and theatre, telling a story about a director who tries to stage a performance at the New Riga Theatre, while at the same time Nastavševs desperately tries to be the director of his private life, where the “actors” (people) are not as easily controllable as on stage. The culminating point of the performance is an episode where Nastavševs, played by Rešetins, tries to “direct” the repairmen who are renovating his flat. When trying to set the interior elements in his bathroom, he arranges the repairmen like actors on stage in a beautiful *mise-en-scène*, but they neither care for nor understand his artistic ideas. This episode becomes a self-reflexive metaphor for the relationship between the director and actors in theatre, likewise foregrounding the similarities between everyday situations and theatre.

The tendency for self-reflexivity and self-thematization in Vladislavs Nastavševs’ stage directing relates to several artistic ambitions. First, there is the attempt to be the total author of his performances. Theatre theorist Patrice Pavis states that the role of the director as the author of the performance is more complicated than it seems at first glance, because “the moment authority over the text or the performance is surrendered, the power of decision is transferred to the actor, and in the final analysis to the spectator’s gaze” (Pavis 2013, 45). Making himself present in his performances ensures that the spectators are at all times aware that the author of the performance is Vladislavs Nastavševs. Secondly, the self-reflexive tendency can be analysed as a broader phenomenon of the contemporary theatre process. Self-reflexivity, as described by Lehmann in his study *Postdramatic Theatre*, has been emerging as a strategy of the theatricalization process, and remains a permanent potential and necessity in contemporary theatre, “forced by the coexistence and competition (paragon) of the arts” (Lehmann 2006, 51). By staging ‘theatre within theatre’, theatre artists reflect upon their personal experience in the theatre and simultaneously try to define the specific nature of theatre as an independent, sufficient art form. On the other hand, the level of self-reflexivity in this particular production, Nastavševs’ *The Lake of Hope*, also raises the controversial question of art as self-healing therapy. For example, in her review of the production, Latvian theatre critic Zane Radzobe states: “Undoubtedly, *The Lake of Hope* leaves a strong emotional aftertaste. Although it seems to me that it would fit into a therapist’s office, rather than on stage [. . .]” (Radzobe 2015).

Third aspect: Blurring the spatial boundaries between the stage and audience. The third performance in which Nastavševs specifically explores the borders

between life and the theatre is *The Blood Wedding* (2016)—a stage production of the play by Federico García Lorca at the Latvian National Theatre. The performance triumphed at the Latvian National Theatre Awards ceremony, receiving 4 awards—for *Best Theatre Music*, *Best Large Space Performance*, *Best Director* and *Grand Prix*.

The performance takes place on the large stage of the Latvian National Theatre. While usually the spectators are seated in the great hall, Nastavševs completely changes the perspective and seats the audience on the stage, with a wide view of the spectators' hall, and using all the visible spatial levels—from the parterre to the second balcony. Thereby Nastavševs physically changes the spectators' point of view, reversing the usual spatial borders in theatre without making the audience physically move. During the performance there are no direct interactive elements, but the stage action is constructed so precisely that it affects the spectators on all possible levels—intellectually, emotionally and psychophysically.

The main stage action is concentrated on a small inclined platform in front of the audience which is made to look like a dry, dead square of land, as described in the play by Federico García Lorca. All the actors are dressed in black, emphasizing that Lorca closely connects the cheerfulness of life (the wedding) with blood and ultimately—death. During the performance, the spectators are watching the actors try to keep their balance on this steep platform, their feet touching the hard ground, which sounds, like a rock being scratched. The stage metaphor of rocky, hard ground is created using both the visual and auditory theatrical signs, thereby triggering the psychophysical reflexes of the spectators. For example, when the spectators see the actress Daiga Kažociņa (Mother) lying on the hard ground with bare legs, and hear the sound of rock scratching when stepping on the ground, this creates specific psychophysical associations based upon real-life experience. The spectator automatically acknowledges that the rock is hard, that stepping on it with bare feet is connected to pain; therefore this knowledge creates empathy for the actress, who has to walk barefoot on the hard ground. Once again, psychophysical reactions are used in order to challenge the perception process of the spectators and to blur the boundaries between life (as a place of “real senses” where people can get hurt) and theatre (as a world where all the actions are considered to be “fictional”, not real). In *The Blood Wedding*, as in most of Nastavševs' stage productions, the spectators cannot be sure that the actors will not harm themselves during the process of the stage action, and this links the aesthetics of Nastavševs' stage directing to the unpredictability of performance art.

As the action of the performance develops, Nastavševs deliberately expands the borders of space. At the culminating point of Lorca's play, the Bride runs away with

Leonardo, her lover, and the chasing of the runaway lovers in the performance takes place in the spectator's hall.

So far, the hall has mostly been darkened; only intermittently does the lighting artist Oskars Pauliņš draw attention to the golden furnishings of the balconies, or the grand chandeliers at the ceiling, symbolizing the richness of the family to which the Bride wants to belong. However, at the end of the performance, when the Groom and Leonardo have killed each other, and the runaway bride returns home alone, the lighting completely changes. The actors who portray the surviving stage characters stand on the platform looking out on the spectator's hall which is now fully lit—the performance has ended, and we the spectators are on stage, looking out at the empty spectator's hall, and therefore symbolically at our own lives, to which we now have to return from the exciting world of the theatre.

Another technique Nastavševs uses to bring the performance closer to the spectators in the production of *The Blood Wedding*, is connected to the symbolic character of the Moon. The actor portraying the Moon (Uldis Siliņš) just sits in front of the spectators with an accordion and watches over the actions of the stage characters. Even more than in Lorca's play, the Moon comments on the action, gives advice and warnings, thus functioning like the ancient Greek chorus. However, the stage director has created another level to this character—the actor playing the Moon does not speak in his own voice but sings in the voice of Nastavševs himself—the music has been pre-recorded, and the actor brilliantly imitates the facial expressions of the director, becoming a symbolic *alter-ego* of Vladislavs Nastavševs. This is not the first, nor presumably the last performance in which Nastavševs deliberately breaks down the borders between life and the theatre, making his voice and his personality an important part of his artistic work.

Conclusions

Vladislavs Nastavševs is a stage director whose performances are always very personal and intentionally life-like. The principle of blurring boundaries between life and the theatre can be observed in many levels of his stage directing:

1. Nastavševs usually chooses to stage dramatic works (plays, stage scripts and so on) which allow exploration of the subject of theatricality. The characters usually behave like being on the stage, playing different social roles. The principle of 'theatre within theatre', or 'metatheatre', is a substantial theme in Vladislavs Nastavševs' stage directing. Nastavševs uses the aesthetics of theatricality to highlight the theatrical nature of everyday life and thereby reminds us that the borders between life and the theatre are fragile *per se*.

2. The theatre of the 21st century has become self-reflective. Like many directors in Latvian and also European contemporary theatre, Vladislavs Nastavševs has turned the theatre and its artistic process into a research field, where the boundaries between life and the theatre are becoming more and more indefinite. By making himself (his personality, artistic or personal experience) a part of his performances, Nastavševs manifests as the total author of his stage works. This allows him to create a more direct communication with the spectators, blurring the boundaries between performance as a fictional work of art and the director's personality in real life.
3. Theatre semiology investigates contemporary theatre as a complex system of theatrical signs (Pavis 1998, 334). Just like many 20th and 21st century theatre innovators (such directors as Antonin Artaud, Jerzi Grotowski, Peter Brook, Ariadne Mnoushkine), Vladislavs Nastavševs organizes the visual and auditory discourse of his performances to expand the traditional relationship between the stage (actors) and audience (spectators). The stage metaphors Nastavševs uses are complex and based upon sensual objects (for example, such bodily liquids as blood, saliva), in order to provoke strong emotional and psychophysical reactions in the audience. Another strategy that Nastavševs employs is expanding the realms of theatre space, thereby transforming the traditional relationship between spectators and actors. Blurring the boundaries of the theatre and life is an essential part of the stage directing of Vladislavs Nastavševs and in the context of the 21st century, theatrical art justifies the classification of his creative work as author's theatre.

References

- Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press.
- Elam, Keir. 2002. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Gulbe, Elīna. 2012. "Jaunās režijas vilnis Latvijas teātros. Intervija ar Vladislavu Nastavševu," *Diena*, September 12, 2012. <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/kd/intervijas/jaunas-rezijas-vilnis-latvijas-teatros.-intervija-ar-vladislavu-nastavsevu-13967355>.
- Jestrovic, Silvija. 2002. "Theatricality as Estrangement of Art and Life in the Russian Avant-Garde." *SubStance* 31, no. 2/3 (issue 98/99), *Theatricality*: 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2002.0031>.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Machon, Josephine. 2009. *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pavis, Patrice. 1982. *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

———. 1998. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Radzobe, Silvija. 2013. "Vladislava Nastavševa režija. Divas izrādes vienā," *Diena*, April 10, 2013. <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/kd/teatris/vladislava-nastavseva-rezija.-divas-izrades-viena-14002553>.

Radzobe, Zane. 2015. "Kas notiek Kurzemes prospektā?" *IR*, June 11, 2015, 32–33.

Svarinska, Maija. 2016. "Ābolu ķocis. Ārējā forma un divi lieliski aktierdarbi," *Diena*, December 10, 2016. <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/kd/teatris/abolu-kocis.-areja-forma-un-divi-lieliski-aktierdarbi-14161532>.

Ieva Rodiņa—professional Latvian theatre critic and researcher; editor-in-chief of the only Latvian theatre webpage *Krodērs.lv*. She is currently working as a research assistant at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art (University of Latvia) and lectures on different theoretical angles of the contemporary theatre. At present, Ieva Rodiņa is a PhD Candidate at the University of Latvia, working on her doctoral thesis in the field of theatre history—specifically, about the legendary Latvian modernism theatre director Eduards Smiļģis, analysing his creative work in the time-frame of 1920–1945 and comparing it to the process of European and Russian modernist theatre.

e-mail: ieva.rodina@gmail.com

Elu ja teatri vahelise piiri hägustumine Vladislavs Nastavševsi lavastustes

Ieva Rodiņa

Märksõnad: teater, semiootika, postdramaatiline teater, füüsilisus

Vladislav Nastavševs (1978) on üks tänapäeva Läti teatri juhtivaid lavastajaid, kes alustas tegevust 21. sajandi teisel aastakümnel. Ta omandas teatrilase hariduse välismaal (Peterburis Vene Riiklikus Etenduskunste Instituudis ja Londonis St. Martin's College of Arts and Design, Drama Centre'is). Psühholoogilise teatri, *performance*'i ja postdramaatilise teatri elemente ühendades on ta välja töötanud väga erilise kunstnikukäekirja.

Artikkel vaatleb piiride hägustumist lava ja vaatajate vahel Nastavševsi lavastustes ja uurib, kuidas elu (tegelikkuse) ja teatri (fiktsiooni) vahelise eraldusjoone kadumine väljendub tema lavastuste diskursuses.

Nastavševsi lavastajategevust võib seostada tänapäeva teatri mitme tendentsiga. Esiteks, alates 1960. aastate lõpu performatiivsest pöördest on teater nihkunud aktiivsema vaatajatega suhtlemise poole, võttes teatrit osana „tegelikust elust“ ja muutes vahe teatri kui fiktsiooni ja elu kui tegelikkuse vahel segasemaks. Vladislav Nastavševs vaidlustab oma lavastustes pidevalt piire tegeliku elu ja kunstimaailma vahel, püüdes uurida eri võimalusi ja aspekte teatri kui illusiooni (fiktsionaalse kunstimaailma) ja tegeliku elu vahelistes suhetes.

Teiseks, nüüdisaegseid teatritendentse järgides sulatab Nastavševs oma lavastustes ühte eri kunstivorme (teater, tänapäeva tsirkus, visuaalne kunst, muusika, tants, *performance*, jne), kaldudes seega interdistsiplinaarse esituskeele poole.

Kolmandaks, nagu paljud tänapäeva Läti ja Euroopa teatritegelased, näiteks Alvis Hermanis (Läti), Ivo van Hove (Belgia), Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier (Saksamaa), Katie Mitchell (Ühendkuningriik) ja teised, seob ka Vladislav Nastavševs oma etendustes keeruka etendusesteeatika loomiseks ühte tugevad visuaalsed, füüsilised ja auditiivsed teatrimärgid. Antonin Artaud' „julmuse teatri“ idee mõjul kalduvad Nastavševsi lavastused tekitama vaatajas füüsilisi aistinguid – kasutatud lavametafoorid on niivõrd pingsad ja mõnikord naturalistlikud, et publik ei taju etendust mitte ainult emotsionaalselt või ratsionaalselt, vaid ka psühhofüüsiliselt (näiteks võib tekkida tugevaid reaktsioone nagu hirm või vastikustunne). Vaatajate tõeline elav reaktsioon muutub enamasti Nastavševi etenduste oluliseks osaks, luues lava ja publiku vahel sideme ja hägustades teatri ning elu vahelist piiri.

Neljandaks, vastavalt postdramaatilise teatri ideele, mille tõi sisse saksa teatriteadlane Hans Thies-Lehmann, kasutab Nastavševs keeruliste lavametafooride ülesehitamiseks tihti näitleja keha, luues sellega füüsilisuse esteetikat. See tähendab, et toimub nihe dramaatilistelt (tekstipõhistelt) teatrirvormidelt, kus tähendust (rolli) kannab näitleja postdramaatilise märgisüsteemi poole, kus näitleja keha pole lavale toodud etenduse iseseisva elemendina.

Elu ja teatri, näitlejate ja lavastaja, lava ja publiku vaheliste piiride hägustumise teema on muutunud üheks Nastavševsi lavastuste juhtmotiiviks, mida on võimalik näidata kolmest peamisest aspektist.

Esimene aspekt: oma lavastustes mängib Vladislav Nastavševs ettekatsetult ideega elust kui teatrit ja teatrist kui elust. Kõik tema uusimad lavastused põhinevad printsibiil „teater teatris“ ehk

„metateater“, kus näitlejad mängivad tegelasi, kes käituvad ka oma elus nagu näitlejad. Valides lavastamiseks vene nn hõbedase ajajärgu modernistide teoseid (näiteks Mihhail Kuzmini romaan „Rändurid merel ja maal“ – esimene osa Riia Uues Teatris (2014), teine osa Daile Teatris (2016)), kujutab lavastaja seda vene kultuuri üht kunstirohkeimat perioodi tegevuspaigana, kus teatraalsus polnud ainult kunstniku loominguline väljendusvahend, vaid ka tema elulaad.

Teine aspekt: oma lavastustes käsitleb Nastavševs teatristrateegiana enesepeegeldust ise oma lavastustes kohal olles. Suurema osa lavastuste puhul on ta totaalne autor (lavastaja, lava- ja kostüümikunstnik, helilooja, koreograaf, mõnikord ka näitleja) ning näiteks „Lootuse järve“ („Cērī bu ezers“ 2015, Riia Uus Teater) puhul ka lavastuse peategelane, luues sel viisil autobiograafilise lavateose.

Kolmas aspekt: ühes oma kõige silmapaistvamas lavastuses, Federico García Lorca „Verepulmas“ (2016, Läti Rahvusteater), uurib Nastavševs elu ja teatri vahelisi piire, muutes tavalist ruumilist tegevuspaika. Ta asetab vaatajad lavale, kust avaneb täisvaade kogu publikualale, ja kasutab kõiki nähtaval olevaid ruumipindu saalipõrandast kuni teise rõduni. Lavaline tegevus on üles ehitatud nii täpselt, et see mõjutab vaatajaid kõikvõimalikel tasanditel nii intellektuaalselt, emotsionaalselt kui psühhofüüsiliselt, võimaldades nii hägustada lava ja publiku vahelisi piire.

Artiklis mainitud suundumused lubavad asetada Vladislavs Nastavševsi lavastajatöö nüüdisaegse Euroopa teatri raamistikku.

Ieva Rodiņa – professionaalne teatrikriitik ja -teadlane; Läti ainukese teatrile pühendatud võrgulehekülje Kroders.lv peatoimetaja; ta töötab Läti Ülikooli Kirjanduse, Rahvaluule ja Kunsti Instituudis teadurina ja peab loenguid nüüdisaegse teatri teoreetilistest aspektidest. Praegu on ta Läti Ülikooli doktorant ja kirjutab doktoritööd teatriajaloost, legendaarsest läti modernistlikust teatridirektorist Eduards Smiļģisest, analüüsides tema loomingut aastatel 1920–1945 ja võrreldes seda Euroopa ning Venemaa modernistlike teatriprotsessidega.

e-post: ieva.rodina@gmail.com