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METHIS CONTENTS

METHIS. STUDIA HUMANIORA ESTONICA 2021, NO. 27/28

INTRODUCTION

Raili Marling, Anneli Saro Performativity, Performance and Perception 5

ESSAY

Mieke Bal How the Concept of Performativity Travels: Between People and Media 18

ARTICLES

Raili Marling Authenticity and Depthiness in the Representation of Affects: Perception and Performativity in Contemporary (Auto)Fiction 33

Tanel Lepsoo Passion Performative: Reading Cocteau with Proust and Derrida 53

Richard Pettifer The Artist is Absent: Non-Human Agency in the Situation of the Theatre 73

Madli Pesti Space as an Active Agent. On Performative Space in Estonian Contemporary Performing Arts 96

Jurgita Staniškytė The Condition of Instability: Performative Turn and Contemporary Lithuanian Theatre 115

Anneli Saro Poetics and Perception of Interartistic Performance 134

Marie-Luise Meier Perceiving the Default: Navigating Choice Architecture in Video Games 155

Taavet Jansen, Aleksander Väljamäe Exploring Physiology-Based Interactions in Performing Arts Using Artistic Interventions 178

Katiliina Gielen, Maria-Kristiina Lotman On Performativity and Perception in Early Estonian-Language Theatre Translation 198

Anne-Liis Maripuu Performativity of Gender by Early Modern Dancers on and off Stage. The Case of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo 223

NON-THEMATIC ARTICLE

Jakob Ossmann, Kasra Seirafi, Carina Doppler Four Ways to Experience Augmented Reality at Museums 244

REVIEWS

Ian Gwin Under Review: *Nordic Literature of Decadence*. Edited by Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková, and Mirjam Hinrikus (London and New York: Routledge, 2020) 260

Sara Bédard-Goulet Under Review: Timo Maran. *Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 267

Performativity, Performance and Perception

Raili Marling, Anneli Saro

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This special issue grows out of the 2019 conference “Perception and Performativity in Arts and Culture in the Age of Technological Change,” supported by the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, TK 145) and Prof. Marina Grishakova’s Estonian Research Council grant “The Role of Imaginary Narrative Scenarios in Cultural Dynamics” (PUT 1481). The discussions on how digitation has affected performativity, performance, and perception in arts and culture that started at the conference developed into articles. Other colleagues joined the discussion, adding theoretical frameworks and textual sources. The results have been collected in this issue.

It seems that the heyday of interest in “performativity” is past. While in the 1990s, spurred by the work of Judith Butler, the term was ubiquitous in academic texts in disciplines ranging from gender studies to archaeology, it has lost some of its prominence today, when poststructuralist theories have been replaced by ontological ones. However, in many ways we live in a hyper-performative age, in societies of the spectacle, in a way that could not have been imagined by Guy Debord in the 1960s. Politics and the whole public sphere have become theatrical, and we live our private lives in social media that are constructed around performances of the self. This compels us to return to the concept of performativity in the present special issue and in this introduction specifically.

In the 1990s, performativity seemed to preoccupy primarily language philosophers and poststructuralist theorists. In the excitement it was often forgotten that performativity has been a central term in theatre and performance studies for a long time. The two strands of intellectual inquiry, however, hardly ever met in the 1990s. There were a few examples that bridged this gap, for example Andrew Parker’s and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s edited collection *Performativity and Performance* (1995), which brings together Judith Butler and performance scholars, or Mieke Bal in her interrogation of the term in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002). These examples, however, are rare. In this introduction we want to develop a dialogue between these two strands of approaches to performativity to show how it continues to play a productive role across the humanities, from theatre to fiction and video games.

What are we talking about: performativity and performance

Performativity as a concept emerged in different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences at the end of 1950s. The authors most frequently associated with the concept are British linguist J. L. Austin, French philosopher Jacques Derrida and American gender theorist Judith Butler. Despite major differences in their perspectives, they are all rooted in, on the one hand, the concept in language, and, on the other hand, in performance and action. Yet performance, not as a linguistic act, but as a physical fact, is also the core research object of theatre and performance studies. The performativity of different acts and genres is also actively discussed in relation to artistic, social and religious performances. James Loxley (2007, 140) has argued that the term “performative” is not always necessarily borrowed from Austin or the tradition of thinking connected to him, or even if it is, the term and the concept have acquired a broader meaning when, for example, transplanted into the field of performance studies. He has also pointed out that while “for Austin ‘performative’ could be both a noun and an adjective, and its meaning was specialised and technical, in performance theory it has been used adjectivally and quite generally to denote the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration” (Loxley 2007, 140). This should not be conflated with the very specific meaning given to this term by philosophers of language or gender. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995, 3), in their introduction to the topic, already warn that “while philosophy and theater now share ‘performative’ as a common lexical item, the term has hardly come to mean ‘the same thing’ for each.”

At this juncture, we can also see the emergence of two terms, performance and performativity. Mieke Bal distinguishes them as follows:

Performance – the unique execution of a work – is of a different order from performativity, an aspect of a word that *does* what it says. Hence, performance is *not* to performativity what matter is to materiality, the concrete to the abstract, or the object term to the theoretical term. Although derived from the same verb, ‘to perform,’ as soon as they become concepts the two words are no longer connected. [Bal 2002, 92]

This distinction is perhaps behind some of the divergences in the use of the term. Despite the often post-structuralist criticism of Austin’s ideas, the nature of the mutual affinity between the performative and performativity has been underappreciated. Austin believed that the irregularity embodied by the performative “needs to be expelled as it threatens to blur the difference between theatre and world” (Parker, Sedgwick 1995, 4). Parker and Sedgwick astutely note that Austin seems to equate the theatrical and the artificial with the perverse. Instead of suppressing this

association, however, they believe that we should relish the fact that the performative has been “from its inception already infected with queerness” in the broad sense of the term (Parker, Sedgwick 1995, 5). It is this connection with theatre, broadly conceived, that creates the space for transformation and for expanding our understanding of the relations between subjects. Thus we embrace Parker and Sedgwick’s belief that a productive dialogue can be established between speech act theories and theatre.

Different authors in different disciplines also develop different genealogies of the term. For example, French theatre scholar Patrice Pavis has pointed out three origins of the term: linguistics (J. L. Austin, John Searle), sociology and anthropology (Erving Goffman, Milton Singer, Victor Turner), and cultural studies of performance (Pavis 2016, 163–64). Based on a wide array of empirical material, all connected to performativity, he proposes the following definition: “[. . .] all that a culture can produce as a manifestation, an externalization, in short as ‘performativity’. This ‘performativity’ is always a production (also in the English sense of *mise-en-scène*), a productivity: the production of an experience, a situation of enunciation here and now, a meaning” (Pavis 2016, 164).

This set of references does not necessarily appear in other explications of the term. For example, although Butler’s first take on performativity, which tellingly appeared in *Theatre Journal* in 1988, referred to the work of Turner and Goffman, these references move to the background in the most famous presentation of the argument in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Goffman overall makes regrettably few appearances in articles on performativity, although his approach to social interaction is “dramaturgical,” as Goffman himself calls it, and he explicitly uses the term “performance” long before the term became trendy in cultural theory (Goffman 1959). Literary theorist Jonathan Culler (2000) traces a different path: from language philosophy to literature in the 1980s, then to gender studies in the 1990s and again back to philosophy. His key names are, predictably, Austin, Derrida, De Man and Butler. The names and the paths vary greatly across these texts. Mieke Bal (2002) tellingly calls performativity a travelling concept and in the following we will outline some of the key stops in its travel.

Different theorists in search of performativity

In order to understand what has been lost and found in the travels of this concept, we have to look at different approaches to performativity, following a more or less chronological order of significant publications and interpretations.

J. L. Austin in his posthumously published lectures titled *How to Do Things with Words* (1955/1962) distinguishes constatives as descriptive utterances that can be

RAILI MARLING, ANNELI SARO

true or false from performatives, speech acts that accomplish actions and generate some kind of effect, such as wedding vows, baptisms, last wills and testaments, etc. But Austin stresses (1962, 6, 8, 13–18) that performatives are effective only in the appropriate circumstances, in the right context; verbal performative utterances never work alone, but require the appropriate physical conditions. Austin labels performatives that fail unhappy utterances, or infelicities. Among other examples of infelicities, he points out that

a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. [. . .] Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use-ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. (Austin 1962, 22)

This quotation has been extensively cited in later research and perhaps also misunderstood. As Loxley (2007, 87) points out, it is not just fictional utterances that are parasitic for Austin, but also communicating with oneself, in contrast with public speech acts. Still, Austin seems to be treating the constative utterances as the model for language use, with performatives as an irregularity. However, as Culler (2000, 506) argues, the distinction between these two kinds of speech acts is rather porous, as constatives can also be interpreted as accomplishing things. Thus, perhaps, it is not the constatives that are the norm, but performatives.

This is why Sybille Krämer and Marco Stahlhut (2001) have distinguished between a weak, a strong and a radical concept of the term “performative.” While the first one refers to the general pragmatic dimension of language and actions, the strong concept is related to the performative utterances that accomplish actions. The radical concept destabilises Austin’s dichotomous terminological scheme of a distinction between performative and constative acts and draws attention to the performative act itself (Krämer and Stahlhut 2001, 56).

This understanding of language is particularly attractive for literary scholars who look for “what literary language *does* as much as what it *says*” (Culler 2000, 506). It is thus not surprising that although Austin wrote only few sentences about fictional performatives, they have stirred a lot of discussion among philosophers and art theorists. Art in general is assumed to strive to have an effect on the public, and it uses the most effective tools of expression at hand to achieve this aim.

This, however, creates a clash between philosophers of language and philosophers of literature, most famously embodied in the acrimonious debate between John Searle and Jacques Derrida (for the debate itself see, e.g. Moati 2014).

American philosopher John Searle's (1979, 1989) project is rooted in his interest in developing a deeper understanding of the nature of language. In order to achieve this aim, he remodels Austin's work. The philosophical nuances of this project are not relevant for this special issue and hence we will focus on the aspect that has created the most controversy, Searle's understanding of literature. Austin calls literary speech acts non-serious, as we saw above. Searle uses this idea to develop a theory of literature. His starting point is the serious, or literal, speech act and hence he sees literary speech acts as derivative or "parasitic." For him, in fiction language is used for pretending, and this intention is the most crucial quality that distinguishes a work of fiction from non-fiction (Searle 1979, 65–66).

Searle's confidence about his ability to explain fictional language is quickly challenged by literary theorists like Stanley Fish (1980) and, most famously, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida's thinking on this topic is collected in *Limited, Inc.* (1988), which contains his early response to Austin in "Signature Event Context" and his later responses to criticism by Searle. Derrida, too, believes that Austin's work is promising. However, he questions the possibility of distinguishing between serious and non-serious speech acts. Instead, he focuses on two issues: iterability and the possibility of creating something authentically new. Any speech act, as Austin had already admitted, is citing some previous speech act (marriage vows, naming a boat, etc.) and its felicity is based on this formulaic nature. Thus natural language speech acts are as parasitic as those of fiction (Derrida 1988, 17–18). The greater challenge is that fiction must cite the existing, to be understood, while at the same time being expected to

give space for singular events, to invent something new in the form of acts of writing which no longer consist in theoretical knowledge, in new constative statements, to give oneself to a poetico-literary performativity at least analogous to that of promises, orders, or acts of constitution or legislation which do not only change language or which, in changing language, change more than language. (Derrida 1992, 55)

It is this tension between iterability and novelty that plays a key role in Derrida's understanding of literature but he also extends his discussion to law and politics (for example, he analyses the American Declaration of Independence to show that the signatories of the declaration did not exist as sovereign people before signing the declaration (Derrida 2002, 49)). In other words, despite his overall deconstruction of Searle's approach to speech acts, he finds performativity to be an important notion not only philosophically but also politically.

J. Hillis Miller continues Derrida's project on the nature of speech acts in the context of fiction in *Speech Acts in Literature* (2002). Specifically, Miller highlights Derrida's work on a uniquely performative aspect of literature: its ability to create emotions in the reader. Expressions of emotion are, in general, always performative for Miller, because of their unavailability to traditional processes of verification (Miller 2002, 159–60). We respond performatively, in an act of trust, and this trust is relevant to the smooth running of social life. Acts of reading also create communities on these notions of trust. Miller returns to speech acts in his later works as well, as they help to connect linguistic acts and social relationships and human interaction, thereby mobilising the notion for a deeper interrogation of ethics and intersubjectivity than in Derrida's work (see e.g. Miller 2005).

Judith Butler's influential intervention in the debate shifts the attention away from the theoretical discussion of language and speech acts to subject formation and bodily acts. Butler's *Gender Trouble* is most famous for stating that one does not have an essential gender identity, but that this identity is the result of performing different gendered acts, from modes of speech to bodily comportments. This, however, does not mean that gender is a mere theatrical performance that one can take on at will. Instead, as Butler writes,

gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is the matter of repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, one which cannot be thrown off at will but which work, animate and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are forged. (Butler 1993, 23)

In other words, our compulsory performances of gender rely on repeating and citing the gender norms in place. It is this performativity that gives us a gender identity that is perceived to be stable. This is why Butler stresses that she is not speaking about performances, but about a process of performativity. For Butler the foundational speech act that brings gender identity into being is the sentence "It's a girl!", uttered when a girl is born: this "initiates the process by which certain 'girling' is compelled" (Butler 1993, 232). However, in the gaps and slippages of this repeated citational performance there is also space for subversion, as every repetition also carries the potential of altering what is being performed, even if slightly.

Culler (2000, 516) highlights that Austin and Butler both write about acts, but have very different acts in mind. Austin's speech acts are singular, while Butler, like Derrida, stresses the iterability of acts of gendering. This makes Culler (2000, 516) conclude that "the iterability that is the condition of possibility of performatives

introduces a gap that puts in question a rigorous distinction between singular events and repetitions.” This is why Culler returns to Derrida’s discussion of literature. For Derrida (1992, 73), literature is “an institution that consists in transgressing and transforming” of “discursive forms, ‘works,’ and ‘events’ in which the very possibility of fundamental constitution is at least ‘fictionally’ contested, threatened, deconstructed, and presented in its very precariousness.” This sense of precarity of the performed self brings together, in a way, speech acts and bodily acts.

The connotations of performativity have also changed in theatre and performance studies. The notion of performativity used in performance studies cannot be equated with the debate between language philosophers and literary theorists. Austin (1962, 22), for example, argued that stage performatives lacked performative force. He and some of the other thinkers cited above (e.g., Miller) have been against too casual equation of the work done in performance studies and in cultural theory. Loxley (2007, 140) proposes that the relationship between the two could be considered “asymptotic,” meaning “an ever-closer proximity without a final, resolving convergence.” The two fields share concerns and, increasingly, terminological foci, especially owing to the influence of the work of Judith Butler. This is not surprising, as Butler’s thinking has been influenced by performance theorists like Victor Turner, as mentioned above, although this connection has found less discussion than Butler’s dialogue with Austin or Derrida. Butler, however, relies on notions borrowed from theatre in her interpretation of drag, revealing the performativity that underlies all acts of gender while being attentive to the specificity of the stage (Butler 1990, 278).

Loxley (2007, 145) argues that today’s performances and also performance theory have challenged the traditional notions of the separation of the real and the make-believe and thus have made the broader philosophical questions about performativity raised by Butler relevant for performance studies and leading to the creation of new ontologies of performance (Phelan 1993). Participatory and relational art have also helped to erode former distinctions between authenticity and performativity (Bourriaud 2002; Bishop 2012). In parallel, owing to the work of sociologists like Goffman, we have also become increasingly aware of the theatricality of everyday life. Thus the two worlds have come closer to each other over the past few decades, despite the initial terminological tensions.

One of the possibilities within performance theory and studies is to understand performativity as a synonym of theatricality or, more precisely, as an efficiency with the tools of theatrical expression. There is also a cultural distinction here: the term “theatricality” seems to be more popular among continental and “performativity” among Anglo-American theorists (Reinelt 2002, 207). Due to different anti-theatri-

RAILI MARLING, ANNELI SARO

cal prejudices, theatricality as a term has also been ostracised during the last decades in Europe. Theatre scholar Teemu Paavolainen has highlighted intriguing ontological tensions between the notions of theatricality and performativity:

[. . .] the core distinction that their etymologies suggest between seeing and doing [. . .] is casually extended to those of form and function, theory and practice, fixity and change: rigid semiosis as opposed to effective action, inner meaning versus outer effect, the what of representation and the how of reiteration. (Paavolainen 2017, 174)

As can be seen from the quote, Paavolainen understands theatricality narrowly, as it is often understood outside of the circle of theatre scholars where theatre is related to more traditional forms of representation. Nevertheless, Paavolainen believes that “the conceptual positioning of the two terms is radically contextual and utterly flexible (cf. Jackson 2004, 6, 12)” (Paavolainen 2017, 175). Thus, he uses their meaning-making potential as a metaphor of human actions (performativity) and human perception (theatricality) in general.

Influential German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann opposes the view that theatrical means by themselves are performative, at least not in theatre, though perhaps more in politics. According to him, theatre is deceptive as an action, even when illusion is openly disturbed or destroyed. It is impossible to ever fully know whether an action does or means anything. This is why he calls theatre a doubtful performative or *afformance* art (Lehmann 2006, 179–80). Karen Jürs-Munby, in her introduction to Lehmann’s book, interprets “*afformance*” as follows:

While performance can address, show, destabilize and interrupt the ‘performativity’ of nationalism, racism, sexism or ageism, it does so not through a direct efficacy or real doing, not primarily by producing political meaning, but through something Lehmann calls ‘*afformance* art’. With this term Lehmann locates the political in perception [the emphasis of the authors] itself, in art as a poetic *interruption* of the law and therefore of politics. (Jürs-Munby 2006: 6)

A similar idea is expressed in the works of Jacques Rancière (2008, 2010) where he dismantles the opposition between viewing and acting, stressing that viewing is an action that confirms or transforms the distribution of positions. This perspective enables him to talk about emancipated spectators, who conduct performative acts in the process of reception of art works. In this process performativity and perception are interwoven and this explains the juxtaposition of the two terms in the present special issue of the journal.

The concept of performativity has also been highlighted and developed in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (2008), by German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte. She named the new aesthetic an “aesthetic of the performative,” based on the self-generating and ever-changing autopoietic feedback loop between actors, i.e. performance and spectator. Of course, not all performances and especially not all theatre performances belong to the category of an aesthetic of the performative, only those where spectators can take a more or less active role in co-creating the performance. Fischer-Lichte (2008, 164) even proposes that these performances have not only articulated a new image of the artist but also propagated a new image of humans and society. The performances where several traditional dichotomies (performing and perceiving, reality and art, etc.) have been torn down create a liminal experience with several possibilities of transition. “The feedback loop thus identifies transformation as a fundamental category of an aesthetic of the performative” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 50). Through numerous examples Fischer-Lichte demonstrates how a performance, either as an art form or a social event, can become a site and a vehicle of the performative.

Conclusion

Performativity as a term has proliferated in so many disciplines that some scholars even write about a “performative turn” (about other turns, see Bachmann-Medick 2016). This development, however, is in itself not that new. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 31) goes back to the turn of the last century to state that the first performative turn in European culture occurred with the establishment of ritual and theatre studies, since the first shifted the focus from myth to ritual and the latter from the literary text to the theatre performance. More commonly, the performative turn is associated with the popularity of the notions connected to theatre and performance in anthropology and sociology (Kenneth Burke, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Jean Duvignaud) in the 1940s and 1950s, in which the performative nature of society and human behaviour was highlighted. The performative turn in Western art took place in the early 1960s, making, on the one hand, different art forms more performative and eventful but, on the other hand, it also led to the (re-)creation of a new genre – performance art (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 18, 22). The new wave of popularity of performance and performativity is why we now perceive there to be a paradigmatic shift – a performative turn. In the 2010s, Patrice Pavis has listed areas of the humanities and social life that were, in his opinion, dominated by the theory of performativity as follows: a) the identity of gender, b) the actor’s performance and *mise-en-scène*, c) the anthropology of the body and corporeality, d) the ritual, e) the art of storytelling, f) the rhetoric of discourse and the control of spectators and lis-

teners, g) economy, h) the university, i) everyday and professional life (Pavis 2016, 164–67). We believe that performativity has continued to play a central role in all of these areas.

As the above discussion has shown, the notions of performance and performativity have had different complex genealogies. One dominant path comes through language philosophy, deconstruction and gender theory, the other through performance studies. The paths have mostly been independent of each other, but we believe that they can and should be brought together to generative cross-roads. This is especially important now when the intellectual field is reassessing its relationship with language and with anthropocentrism generally. Poststructuralist literary theory predominantly worked on language and discourse, to the extent that Butler herself cites a widespread criticism of her work in *Bodies that Matter*: “What about the materiality of the body, Judy?” (Butler 1993, viii). Today’s cultural theory has indeed taken a decisive turn away from language and discourse towards materiality and affect. Performance studies, too, is coming under increasing criticism for its perceived anthropocentrism, which necessitates a new range of questions about the human body and about the relationships between the human and the non-human (Salter 2020). Thus, although performativity may be perceived to be an old notion, it needs fresh attention in the 21st century.

In this special issue we address performativity in different disciplines and in different theoretical registers. Mieke Bal adds her theoretical meditation on the continued relevance of the distinction between performance and performativity for contemporary artistic practice. Raili Marling applies critical affect theories to the question of performance of emotions in contemporary fiction and autofiction. Tanel Lepsoo traces the use of passion performatives in the work of Marcel Proust and Jean Cocteau, relying on the work of Jacques Derrida and J. Hillis Miller. Richard Pettifer undertakes an ambitious theoretical project of developing an approach to non-human agency that can be adapted to the situation of theatre. Madli Pesti discusses space as an active agent. Jurgita Staniškytė’s theoretical overview of the notion of performativity is illustrated with examples from contemporary Lithuanian theatre. Performativity, however, also creates the need for new modes of reading, viewing or interacting. Thus Anneli Saro returns to the work of Erving Goffman and his frame analysis to propose a novel model of aesthetic reception. Marie-Luise Meier shows the presence of defaults in the seemingly free world of playing computer games. Technology and new genres require new interpretations of theories of performativity. Taavet Jansen and Aleksander Väljamäe engage in a creative dialogue on audience-performer relations created by the use of different experiments with physiological computing

in performative practice. Several articles return to the archives to trace the historical roots of performative practices: Katiliina Gielen and Maria-Kristiina Lotman look for the creation of self and other in early Estonian theatre translation, while Anne-Liis Maripuu investigates the performance of gender in Estonian modern dance in early 20th century.

We hope that this diverse range of texts will not only invite readers to reassess the relevance of performativity for analysing today's society of the spectacle, but also to consider its applicability to a wide range of texts, from novels and theatre performances to films and video games. Performativity, when lifted out of the narrow confines of linguistic speech acts and enriched with the understanding of bodily acts and the dialogic nature of perception in the context of arts, can help us understand the centrality of performativity in our interaction with arts and also in our existence as social subjects.

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How the Concept of Performativity Travels: Between People and Media

Mieke Bal

Abstract: This article examines how the concepts of performance and performativity can neither be merged nor firmly distinguished. The author calls on her own practice as a video-maker and academic thinker, establishing a dialogue between the two activities. She borrows extensively from the work of a colleague, with examples from photography, considering collegiality also a form of performativity. The conceptualisation helps argue for a shift from activist to activating art.

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This paper concerns the concept of performativity, which is inseparable from its “other half,” performance. I am submitting it for an international audience without proposing its universal validity. I have always been very interested in concepts. That interest concerns the usefulness of the following succinct bits of thought. In 2002, I began to also make video art. The initial occasion for it was simply social – standing up for a neighbour, an “undocumented migrant,” who had been treated profoundly unfairly by the police and, by proxy, in my name as an EU citizen. I wanted to make a testimonial film. It ended up in artistic circuits, which turned me willy-nilly into an artist. What makes that second line of my work relevant for this essay is the change in forms of perception.¹

Concepts are mini-theories that help us do our work of cultural analysis to the best of our abilities. I consider concepts useful principally for three reasons and in three respects:

- First: for *precision* and *explicitness* and for the sake of communication in intersubjectivity (discussions) and teachability (empowering students on the basis of equality);
- Second: for the mode by which they are brought to bear on *cultural objects* for the sake of analytical effectiveness and to *do justice* to the object, allowing the object

¹ See my book on concepts and the way they transform according to contexts (Bal 2002).

to “speak back,” to resist projections and misguided appropriations in our interpretations. An object considered with enough care and precision (as with what we used to call “close reading”) becomes in fact a *subject*, and the analysis a dialogue between analysing and analysed subjects, with concepts acting as mediators;

- Third: for their “travels” from geographical, temporal, and medial backgrounds to others of their kind. They also travel from disciplinary fields to others and, as I will address below, also between authors, including colleagues.

Only when we have taken these three considerations on board can concepts be truly useful for our work as cultural analysts, without the rigidity that stultifies and thus paralyzes a concept as well as without overextension and sloppiness, which leads to vagueness. This was the primary point of my book on the subject. And, although that book is now quite old already, I have been able to uphold this point.²

Performativity is an utterly meaningful instance of a concept that needs to be taken seriously in view of those three aspects and requirements. Only then can it do the work in our dialogue between the analyst and the object-turned-subject that we need in order to acquire new knowledge and insight. It is prone to misuse by overuse, resulting in the vagueness I mentioned as a primary risk. Thus, with precision in mind, the concept of *performativity* needs to be clearly distinguished from *performance*; however, the connections between those two must also remain openly in sight. To grasp the ways in which that concept has travelled and still travels, it also needs to be positioned *historically* so that changes in its conceptualisation and use can be mapped out. This requires revisiting, for example, John Langshaw Austin, John Rogers Searle, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Pamela Butler, to mention just the most influential theorists of performativity. And not only theorists should be revisited but also historically specific practices. In view of the concept of performativity’s *geographical* travel, I was excited to be invited to give an earlier version of this paper in a seminar that was part of a collaboration between Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden and Nanjing University, China, guaranteeing, I imagine, that the changes which occurred when the concept *travelled* to other continents and to different cultural contexts were held up against the light, allowing new case studies to be achieved. In the framework of the Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies,

² “Cultural analysis” is what I have done throughout my career as a scholar as well as later as a video artist. In 1994, twenty-five years ago, I co-founded the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis to develop this field as an interdisciplinary, theory-based engagement with cultural artefacts.

M I E K E B A L

which was the hosting context there, the travel between media remains an important question.³

This felt like a lucky topic, not only because I have been involved in intermedial travel ever since, but in 2002, I began to make films as an intermedial practice between cultural analysis in discursive writing and filmmaking as an audio-visual one. When I wrote *Travelling Concepts*, I did not yet have any experience with complex travel from a singular medium such as, say, written language, to a complex one such as cinema, which integrates media traits and modalities from language, sound, music, image, theatre, and that primary element of travel: *movement*. Media and modes are intertwined. That complexity assists us in achieving more profound analyses.

I will briefly sum up my own intermediality experience. At first, I made films to do justice to the people who constitute and make the culture the aspects of which I was interested in studying. For this, I made documentaries *with* rather than *about* people. Thus, the people who were to be the “objects” of study became true participants: not as “natives” supposed to know best (who in fact don’t because they take their cultural properties non-reflectively for granted), nor as “subjects” of representations “subjected” to the camera. Instead, they participated both in their personal choices of what to present and what to keep discreet and in their own and our cinematic choices, especially in the editing. A few of these were, in fact, recordings of performances within which moments of performativity occurred.⁴

Then, a bit later, I began to practice what is usually termed “transmediation” between literature or philosophy and film and video installation. Making films based on novels is not, in my opinion, a practice of adaptation, with the erroneous requirement of “fidelity.” Rather, I consider films based on novels *responses* to or analyses of the novels in a dialogue that includes the media themselves. To audio-visualise philosophical ideas seemed a pretty daunting challenge, but challenges push us to move forward. Such responding works demonstrate keenly how intermediality is *not*, or not only, or not always, an issue of showing the same plot, characters, and other elements known from an earlier source in what Elleström (2021) calls media transformation or transmediation. There is nothing “the same” between the two works. Instead, the responding work offers a specific interpretation of the earlier work and thereby reverses the chronology, showing us a different novel (if a novel is

3 See Elleström (2021) for an extensive (two-volume) anthology on intermediality.

4 See this page from my website <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/> for information and photographs. For reasons of discretion, I do not post entire films online. A book on this mixed practice is currently in press (2022).

the source work) than we assumed it to be. Therein lies the performativity of such responding artworks. The later work changes, transforms, the earlier one, which is no longer what it was before the response refracted it.⁵

Making films in response to philosophical ideas, to give another example, requires something like audio-visualising the *process* of thinking, as well as demonstrating how the ideas work in social practice, rather than declaiming the resulting ideas in the abstract mode in which the philosopher had supposedly written them. Performativity comes in when this brings an actualised, reframed, and more concrete understanding to the older work. This can no longer be considered a *constative* knowledge-producing addition to information, but something that partly replaces information with something that is *affectively active*. And that is where the performative partly overrules the constative.⁶

Without going into the issues these films raise, I draw on the insights my dual, spiraling practice of going back and forth between the object to be analysed and the audio-visual interpretative response to it, reflecting on transmediation as a process of a never-ending mobilisation of affect, has yielded. This is why I prefer the term *intermediality*, with the preposition *inter-* denoting relationality, which is by definition mutual and temporally “hovering,” rather than *trans-* which seems to assume the passage through is one-sided and leaves the original or source unaffected.

Making installations complicates intermediality even more. For, a third medium is brought into the picture: installation or exhibition. That is, curating in space and curating space respectively. Space participates in video performativity effects quite strongly. I am not referring to the profilmic space or the “set” where the footage is recorded, although the specific features of the set may enhance or inflect the affective performativity of the work. Rather, I consider the space of the installation itself also to be a medium. The effects and meanings produced by the installed video pieces change according to how they are disposed, the kind of space they are in, and their configuration. This makes installing, or curating, also a medium. I have recently been involved in co-curating exhibitions based on my 16-channel video installation *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances*, which has driven this point on the participation of space home with acute specificity.

5 See Elleström 2021. For a somewhat different take on the subject, see my article on adaptation (2017). On the problematic standard of “fidelity,” the leading scholar of adaptation studies has published a definitive critique (Leitch 2003).

6 On this issue, see my article “Thinking in Film” (2020) regarding a film I made on René Descartes. On the film and the installation pieces, see <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/reasonable-doubt/>.

M I E K E B A L

In this project, I have specifically explored how theatricality can help turn the museum into a theatre with something as simple as providing seating so that visitors are encouraged to take or, rather, give time to the works. But this raises a prior question: what is, or how can we consider, theatricality? Which in turn, as an epistemological doubt, raises the question as to whether a definition is what is primarily needed to grasp what theatricality is and does. Theatre scholar Kati Röttger (2010, 381) considers theatricality “a specific mode of perception, a central figure of representation, and an analytic model of crises of representation that can be traced back to changes in the material basis of linguistic behaviour, cultures of perception, and modes of thinking.” This multi-tentacled description cannot be considered a definition. It gives theatricality many functions and foregrounds its participation in thinking as well as in its inherent *intermediality*. That intermediality is of primary interest to me and in the humanities today. And theatre and performance scholar Maaïke Bleeker gives theatricality the critical edge that my video work seeks to achieve when she calls it “a critical vision machine” with a thorough exploration of how that would work.⁷

In my attempt to grasp additional nuances of the concept of performativity, I will give a brief comment on the issue of precision, my motivation to remain keen on conceptual work. The main problem as well as opportunity of this particular concept may well be the quite banal issue of the adjective or qualifier derived from it. I have often witnessed analytical thinking going awry simply because the researcher failed to take into consideration that the qualifier “performative” applies to both performance and performativity. This leads to confusion. However, in the historical, intertemporal travel, separating the two rigorously is not so easy either. This ambiguity of the in-between of these two concepts is its unique intellectual challenge and treasure. In a nutshell: whereas its inventor J. L. Austin ([1962] 1975) initially considered only a special category of words as performative, he also implied that certain moods, such as the imperative, are performative. But Austin was rightly criticised for that categorisation, as well as for excluding literature and fiction in general from his theory because it was “not serious.” John Searle pointed out that all utterances do something and are thus performative. Therefore, the later specification of the illocutive and perlocutive aspects of all utterances, distinguishing between intention and effect, took hold. Jacques Derrida (1988) insisted on the iterability of all speech acts. This makes sense if we consider the means of communication that language is. Derrida’s insistence made it possible for Judith Butler (1993) to theo-

⁷ See Bleeker 2008, 64. Through detailed analyses, Bleeker demonstrates in her publications (2008, 2009) how productive such a concept of theatricality can be for a political art that is not bound to a political thematic.

rise sexual identity by means of these concepts. It allowed her to propose that gender and sex emerge through the repeated (iterated) conformance to the cultural concepts of both, a repetition that allows slow change from within. This leaves us with the need to place performance in relation to performativity. For, according to Butler's theory, it is through repeated performances that sex and gender are established, which is the result of the performativity of the performance itself.

Another aspect that contributes to the difficulty of disentangling and connecting the two concepts is their respective theoretical context. Both concepts come from a different area of thought and scholarship. The word *performance* does not come from philosophy of language, as does performativity, but from art practice and studies. Most commonly, a performance is the execution of a range of "artistic making and doing." In his very useful, characteristically lucid, and highly recommended discussion of performativity, Jonathan Culler (2007) mentions performance in connection to the misunderstanding of the *reception* of Butler's performative theory of gender in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), which mistook the theory as implying a theatrical performance and the free choice of doing such performances. This misunderstanding was caused by erroneously confusing the two and considering only one of the concepts, performance, as autonomous from the other.

Butler addressed that misconception in her next book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) and explained gender difference in terms of performance and performativity in the entanglement I have just outlined. To come up with another of my academic slogans: in order to achieve *performativity*, you must repeatedly *perform*. The difference significantly hinges on the crux Culler so effectively identified in Derrida's shift from intention and singularity to convention and iterability. And given my life-long battle against intentionalist interpretation – basically because it disempowers the critic or reader and encourages unwarranted projection – I was quite happy about that distinction. The rigid separation of the two concepts of *performance* and *performativity* "performs," so to speak, a reconfirmation of individual intention as generative of meaning and effect, and that to me seems utterly wrong. Meaning-making happens in the dialogue between sender and receiver, and that dialogue is not the delivery of a ready-made package from a sender to a passive receiver.⁸

I have learned from my current intense involvement in making a work of video art based on or, rather, responding to that monument of cultural heritage, Miguel de Cervantes's world-famous masterpiece *Don Quijote*, a response which has already

8 I have developed this critique of intentionalism in the relevant chapter of *Travelling Concepts*.

M I E K E B A L

been exhibited in four different contexts in one year, frequently in a context where art making and academic research go hand in hand. In light of this experience, I propose considering *intermediality* itself as performative in both senses of the word. To simplify, there is inevitably a performance by actors who speak the lines from and enact the gestures described in the historic novel – selected on the basis of a specific interpretation. This performance is already intermedial. Those performances achieve performativity in that, as such, whenever the pieces have been made, they cease to function as distinct communicative “media products.” This is Lars Elleström’s term, which opens the linguistic source terms ‘text’ and ‘utterance’ to a media-unspecific wider use. As performative in the performativity sense, this occurs by definition *in the present*. The visitor’s participation, different in each act of perception, cannot avoid connecting what is seen – the performances, recorded at another time and borrowed from a novel from yet another time – to the present within which they are doing the viewing, hearing, or other forms of perception. The resulting interpretation each visitor is free to come up with is triggered by performativity.

I am using the experience of *making* as a source for theorising and conceptually understanding what is at stake in performativity as a concept that travels between media and deploys its “other,” performance, to conduct that travel. Now, what is to be gained by bringing these concepts to bear on this kind of artwork that aims to revitalise works from what is now called “cultural heritage”? I am only talking about responding works that avoid falling into the trap of the genre of the historical costume drama. This is a historiographic trap: most media products place the new work safely at a distance in the past so that contemporary perceivers need not feel worried about what they see. This is the wrong attitude, an abuse of historicity for escapism. I seek to move out of the narrowly defined realm of adaptation, yet take on board the obvious fact that a monument of world literature such as *Don Quijote* cannot be *addressed*, as I prefer to call it (rather than adapted), without considering the relationship (as in the preposition *inter-*) between the older text and what we can do with it *in and for the present*. Bracketing the issues of adaptation that have usefully led the prominent adaptation studies scholar Thomas Leitch (2003) to his classical enumeration of no less than twelve fallacies in that field, I am interested in looking how media can *exchange* modalities in order to achieve a performativity that, instead of neglecting the interlocutor text, makes elements or, rather, aspects of it stand out, come to life again, in a new performance that emanates performativity; hence, an act in the present.

For this purpose, I take what I have called the “pre-posterous” historical view, that is, the anachronistic back-and-forth travel between the present and past, as my

starting point, as a canvas on which to paint the theory of performativity (Bal 1999). On that basis I aim to connect to Lars Elleström's four modalities of media. He lists these four as material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic (2021). I endorse the list but not quite Elleström's qualification of the first three as "pre-semiotic" and only the final one as semiotic. To offer a small amendment, I would suggest that the first three, each in their own way, participate fully in the semiotic, which is the meaning-giving activity to which the recipient is – performatively! – compelled. They are not pre-semiotic. Material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal modalities together facilitate an ongoing process of *affective* meaning-making that impacts the kind of performativity at work, which, in turn, qualifies the moods and modes of meaning-making that can occur. This qualifies the social-cultural effect of the public domain in which art happens. Understanding the socio-political impact of performativity is, in the end, the grounding of the concept and the point of its use.⁹

The primary goal of the video work *Don Quijote* is to modify museum practice, endorsing theatricality and, through the presence of the visitor, not in front of but outside, the "play." The goal is to implicate the visitors, an implication compelled materially and sensorially, in order to make them offer *empathy*. Needless to say, this is a goal of performativity, and the display itself must achieve it as much as the content of the pieces. For the discussion of performativity, I will include a form of conceptual travel that matters enormously: that which occurs between colleagues coming from different areas of expertise.

In this respect, I am calling in Ernst van Alphen, with whom I have exchanged ideas for a very long time. Since he is my usual accomplice in crime, I gladly acknowledge that most of my work always passes through his very critical hands first. For this paper, I selected three examples of performativity in different media from his work, along with the impossibility to distinguish media as such from the intermediality that keeps roaring its head when performativity occurs. All three instances Alphen alleges as performativity-generating, are both medium-specific and emerged from medial innovation, and in all three, the distinction between performance and performativity matters, while, at the same time, the merging of the two remains difficult to disentangle. Historically, they have travelled and must be positioned. Most importantly, all three show the social-political impact of performativity. I had expected to write this paper together with him, but he could not make it to the conference for which this was initially written. Please consider it as co-authored with him.

9 For a recent anthology on affect, see Alphen and Jirsa (2019), especially the article by Alphen himself, which uses paintings by Francis Bacon as his case.

M I E K E B A L

The first example is the photography of Fredrick Douglass. This happened at a time when photography was a new medium. Sitting for the daguerreotypes took much time and demanded performance skills from the sitter. Thanks to social media and especially the webcam, the second example is the use of images that would formerly be seen as pornographic. The third example is the use of video in public exhibitions, which brings out a key form of performativity, perhaps the strongest one: *provocation*.

About Douglass's performative performances, Alphen wrote:

The long posing for daguerreotype images also requires presence of mind and composure. One should be in control of one's emotions and actions. American abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) understands this required composure as a form of self-possession, symbolically announcing freedom and the end of slavery. There is for him a vital link between art in general and reform, and more specifically between photography and freedom. Photography is important for achieving freedom and uprooting racism. There is also no other figure who has been photographed so much in American history of the 19th century, especially daguerreotype images [. . .] (van Alphen 2019a, 5)

I find this important because it demonstrates the social-political relevance of performativity as a concept. It helps us understand why and how performativity matters.¹⁰ Quoting from Douglass, Alphen writes:

Photographic portraits provide dignity to the sitters for these portraits. When someone's picture is taken "there is even something statue-like about such men": "See them when or where you will, and unless they are totally off guard, they are serenely sitting or rigidly standing in what they fancy their best attitude for a picture" (Douglass 128). Douglass suggests that posing for a portrait *performatively produces dignity*. The image is not seen in terms of its *likeness* to the sitter, but as actively producing a *truth* about the sitter that results from his posing and other aesthetic elements in the image. The sitter discovers this truth of having dignity when he sees the image taken of him. [. . .] He considers this production, or revelation of truth, the social force of pictures. This makes it understandable that he gave a long lecture on daguerreotypes and other photographic portraits in a speech which was supposed to be about the abolition of slavery. (van Alphen 2019a, 5)

¹⁰ The three examples are derived from Alphen's books on photography (2018) and on the archive as an artistic medium (2014).

The importance of performativity, connected to the reiteration of or the long duration inherent in the then-new medium and to the way illocution and perlocution collaborate, is stated a bit later in the analysis when he broaches a topic important in cultural analysis: "Although he was not the photographer, he is the author of his own portraits. That is why his portraits are indirectly self-portraits. Having these portraits made of him is 'a process of soul-awakening self-revelation' (Douglass 169). As a former slave, Douglass needed this self-confirmation through portraiture repetitively." (van Alphen 2019a, 6) This statement binds the medium, the genre of portraiture, and the political relevance together in a performativity-generating performance.

The example demonstrates the intermediality between, say, individual as well as group psychology and its social performance, and photography, which Douglass preferred strongly to painting, also for political reasons. What the "media product" of the former is, other than Douglass's own autobiographical statements and the discourses around it, remains unspecific, yet, of course, very relevant. But it is no less crucial to understand the performativity that merges out of his media-specific practice.

The second example is almost the opposite. Alphen analysed what German artist Hito Steyerl has termed "poor images," the non-professional, low-production-quality images that circulate on the internet. He wrote (and this is a patchwork of quotes from his 2017 essay):

The explosion of information since the 1990s through digital media has had as its effect the implosion of meaning with the release of affects as a result. This happened and happens most of all through the dissemination of images. [. . .] The intimate relation between the implosion of meaning and the release of affects is demonstrated by the recent "post-truth" regime in populist politics, especially, but not exclusively, in the US. This regime accommodates flagrant lies and contradictions in order to produce its own truth as affect. (van Alphen 2017, 82)

In an analysis of Thomas Ruff's nude photographs, blown-up stills from webcam porn, Alphen (2017, 88) writes: "The stakes of this generic exploration demonstrate a paradigmatic revolution in visual culture, namely the transformation of visuality defined by voyeuristic positions into one determined by exhibitionist positions." This is crucial. He explains:

Conventional pornography in photography and film always relies on two crucial components. First of all, its *reality effect*. This explains why pornography is always realistic; sexual stimulation by means of modernist or postmodernist texts or images seems to be unconceivable. The other crucial element is the *voyeuristic gaze* it enables. The viewer is outside of the scene that he looks at, belonging to another world. This voyeuristic positioning provides power and pleasure to the

M I E K E B A L

viewer. Both defining elements of pornography seem to be missing in the poor images of Internet pornography, and even more so in the enhanced poor images of Thomas Ruff. The poor images do not function like windows through which the viewer voyeuristically gazes at sexual action. They are rather opaque screens onto which the viewer can project his fantasy in order to be part of the scene he is watching. (van Alphen 2017, 90–92)

Needless to say, the reversal of voyeurism into exhibitionism has enormous cultural consequences. This is where the concept of performativity becomes a tool for critical cultural analysis. Alphen explains:

This use of the webcam is so extraordinary because voyeurism, a crucial aspect of more traditional visual technologies, is now overshadowed by its complementary other: exhibitionism. This exhibitionism is not only exploited in the sex industry. Most webcam images shown on the Internet are utterly boring. Showing these images seems to be more important than seeing them. The transformation caused by the webcam is that for the first time there are now more people who want to be looked at than people who want to watch. (van Alphen 2017, 96)

With regards to my interest in intermediality and the concept's "travel," when the performativity is so massive that we can almost despairingly wonder if this can still be analysed, what matters most is the explanation of what it is, exactly, that *changes* as a result of performativity. The issue is not moralistic, as in conceptions of what is proper. Alphen's conclusion lays out the more general cultural-political relevance of this discussion when he foregrounds the affective consequence:

It is precisely in this displacement from voyeurism to exhibitionism that the intensities of affective mechanisms are released. When using the terms voyeurism and exhibitionism, I am no longer applying them in the more limited erotic sense. [...] I use them in a more general sense, indicating a distinction between a *passive consumerist* attitude and a more *active* attitude of self-positioning of those distributing the information. (van Alphen 2017, 107)

This reversal, then, can also be seen in a very positive light: from passive to active, and from consumerism to production. This connects to what I advocate as *activating* art, rather than activist art.

This reversal is also at stake in the last example I draw from Alphen's work, his analysis of the provocative and much-contested video works by Polish artist Artur Żmijewski: *Game of Tag* (1999) and *80064* (2005) (van Alphen 2019b). Żmijewski makes videos related to the Holocaust and gets systematically in trouble because the films are considered an insult to victims and survivors. But what he is really doing is

provoking Polish people to reconsider their own attitude during the war and now, later, their affective investment in their innocence and victimhood. What matters in this example is that the performativity of the “speech act,” or audio-visual utterance, “overshoots its target” because it is not recognised as performative; it is misunderstood as a constative speech act. Alphen adds:

But even acknowledged as performative, it is often not clear in what kind of situation or event the provocative speech-act should result. [...] In the case of the Holocaust a rather limited number of performatives is considered as acceptable. Acceptable, because of a strong post-Holocaust morality, which stipulates what we should and what we shouldn't do in relation to the Holocaust's past and victims. The two performatives that are pre-scribed as morally responsible and necessary are those of teaching and commemoration. (van Alphen 2019b, 82)

This qualification brings in something not systematically considered when we discuss performativity: the social-political values attached to these concepts, which come from their earlier contexts. Alphen (2019b, 83) foregrounds this on terms that helps us grasp the connection between performativity and affect: “Instead of the right attitude, we, later generations, need affective investments in the Holocaust and an understanding of our affective investments because it is due to this understanding that we can be ethical instead of moral in our thinking. According to Jill Bennett it is precisely such an understanding that distinguishes ethical from moral art.” And he quotes from Jill Bennett (2005), another colleague with whom I am closely in permanent discussion: “An ethics is enabled and invigorated by the capacity for transformation; that is precisely by not assuming that there is a given outside to thinking. A morality on the other hand, operates within the bounds of a given set of conventions, within which social and political problems must be solved (15).” (Quoted in Alphen 2019b, 83)

Alphen pursues this:

The given set of conventions of how to adopt the right attitude towards the Holocaust stifles a sincere ethics; it results in a Holocaust morality, or in the words of Walter Benn Michaels, “ethical kitsch”. For the ultimate goal of a sincere, effective ethics concerns our social behaviour, behaviour which might substantiate the conventional slogan “never again”. (van Alphen 2019b, 83–84)

The qualifier “sincere” is derived from a book we edited together in which Bennett also participated (see Alphen, Bal, and Smith 2009).

M I E K E B A L

“Never again?” Well... what I wanted to foreground in this sampling from colleagues is not only the need to discuss and listen to one another, but to consider and accept that concepts can be most helpful when brought in with the precision necessary for intersubjective understanding. Collegiality stands for that intersubjectivity. But it is just as important, I submit, to connect concepts to their political relevance and, in that quest, to their “cousins,” their context, their histories, their frames, and their travels. Because culture, the artefacts we study, is vitally important for the social fabric in which and thanks to which we live.

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S U M M A R Y

Kuidas performatiivsuse mõiste rändab: inimeste ja meedia vahel

Mieke Bal

Märksõnad: adaptatsioon, mõisted, visuaalne-kujundlik mõtlemine, interdistsiplinaarvus, etendus, performatiivsus, teatraalsus

Resüme: Artikkel uurib, kuidas etenduse ja performatiivsuse mõisteid ei saa ühitada ega selgelt eristada. Autor tugineb oma kogemusele videorežissööri ja akadeemilise mõtlejana, luues dialoogi nende kahe tegevuse vahel. Kolleegi fotograafia-alastest töödest lähtudes arutleb ta kolleegiaalsuse kui performatiivsuse ühe vormi üle. See kontseptsioon viib tõdemuseni, et kunsti kui aktivismi juurest tuleks liikuda aktiivse kunsti juurde.

Mieke Bal – 45 raamatu autor ja 81 kaitstud doktoritöö juhendaja, kultuuriteoreetik, kriitik, videokunstnik ja kuraator. Bal kirjutab interdistsiplinaarsest perspektiivist kultuurialalüüsi, kirjandusest ja kunstist, keskendudes sugupoolele, rändavale kultuurile, kapitalismi kriitikale ja poliitilisele kunstile. Aastal 2002 hakkas ta tegema ka filme, mida peab kultuurialalüüsi spetsiifiliseks (sügavamaks ja nüüdisaegsemaks) viisiks. Sellest alates on kirjutamine, filmide tegemine ja näituste kureerimine käinud käsikäes. Raamatus „Visuaalne-kujundlik mõtlemine“ (2022, UP Edinburgh) arendas ta edasi oma ideed, kuidas ühendada akadeemilist ja kunstilist mõtlemist. Režissöörina on ta teinud mitmeid eksperimentaalseid dokumentaalfilme, peamiselt rännuolukordadest, ja „teoreetilisi fiktsioone“ – filme ja installatsioone, kus väljamõeldis aitas arendada keerulisi ideid. Filmi „Proua B“ („Madame B“, 2014) näidati Munchi muuseumis Oslos koos Edvard Munchi töödega. Dokumentaaldraamat „Mõistlik kahtlus“ („Reasonable Doubt“, 2016) René Descartes’ist ja Rootsi kuninganna Kristiinast näidati samuti mitmel pool. Lisaks sellele on Bal teinud 16-osalise videoinstallatsiooni „Don Quijote: kurvad ilmed“ („Don Quijote: Sad Countenances“, 2019) ja lühikese esseefilmi „Aeg on käes! Mõtted/peegeldused pakilisusest“ („It’s About Time! Reflections on Urgency“, 2020).

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Authenticity and Depthiness in the Representation of Affects: Perception and Performativity in Contemporary (Auto)Fiction

Raili Marling

Abstract: This article analyses the tension between the perception and performance of affect in two contemporary texts: Heather Christle's *The Crying Book* (2019) and Christine Smallwood's *The Life of the Mind* (2021). Both subvert the expectation of feminine sentiment and pose questions about the authenticity of affect. Although affects are always mediated in fiction, experimental fictional texts have the potential for greater authenticity than the performative affective displays of the emotional public sphere.

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Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean

Alfred Tennyson

Today's hyper-mediatised age seems to be characterised by extreme emotions and a "surfeit of affect" (Hoogland 2014, 11; Massumi 2002a, 27). We find ourselves bombarded by affect in our lived experience and increasingly in academic references. We live in the age of autobiography and confession. Our newsfeeds and reading lists are awash in trauma, anger, and indignation. Affect seems to have triumphed over critique even in academic discussion. Critical reading has been pathologised as paranoid and sent to the dusty library stacks. We are reading with the grain, reparatively, in enchantment, to mention but a few alternatives proposed to overcome the perceived negativity of academic reading practices.¹ Less attention is paid to theory and methods and more to "new ways to feel about ourselves" when we read, interpret, and write (Kurnick 2020, 351). Affect seems to promise us the immediacy and authenticity from which our media-saturated reality has cut us off. Indeed, in the age of Instagram perfection, Photoshop, and deepfakes, it is increasingly hard to

1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) proposed reparative reading as an alternative to the traditionally suspicious academic reading that she calls "paranoid." Timothy Bewes (2015), in a similar mode, proposes "reading with the grain," instead of the deconstructive reading against the grain. Rita Felski (2008, 2020) explores reading in enchantment. I engage more fully with the debates on the nature of academic reading in Marling and Marling (2021).

distinguish what is manufactured and what is real. But we know what we feel. Thus, in our “reality hunger” (Shields 2010), we have made an assertive turn to affect.²

Even if the radicalness of this “affective turn” has been exaggerated, as Ruth Leys (2017)³ maintains in her important critique, affect has become one of the key words of 21st-century humanities and not only because of fickle academic fashion. Affect seems to explain many of today’s central issues, from increased socio-political polarisation in a time of hermetic filter bubbles to diverging public reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. Postmodernism, characterised by the waning of affect, as Fredrick Jameson (1991, 16) famously argued, grew out of service-oriented late capitalism. Today we are living in what Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (1999) have called the experience economy, which, among other things, prizes and commodifies affects. Social media are one affect-producing apparatus, but we have many other examples, such as extreme sports and atrocity tourism. Thus, Brian Massumi (2002b, 233) believes that “affect is now much more important for understanding power [. . .] than concepts like ideology.” Indeed, we are becoming increasingly aware of the ideological force of affect. As Sara Ahmed (2010, 216) has evocatively stated, “feelings might be how structures get under our skin.” Therefore, for this article, affects are not just bodily intensities but also “feelings of existence” that are tied to cultural formations and deeply embedded in cultural, economic, social, and spatial contexts (Anderson 2016, 735).

This is why we need to interrogate the tension between the perception and performance of affect. Much of the intense affect that we encounter in the emotional public sphere is performed and deeply performative.⁴ This situational performed affect is not exactly fake, but synthetic. The performances are enacted in relation to the social norms that determine what is to elicit joy (weddings, Olympic victories) or

2 We have also made a turn to realism, but this does not necessarily imply friction with the present-day political status quo (Nealon 2017, 72, 83). This turn to realism emphasises ontology which “necessarily commits it to weak or non-existent political positions” (Nealon 2017, 73). The fact that these debates do not provide us with viable tools for discussing the present political moment has been pointed out by many (e.g., Baumbach, Young and Yue 2016). These discussions are directly linked to affect, one of the most popular ontological theories today; therefore, this article employs critical affect theories.

3 Delving into this critique is not necessary here, but it should be included in any conversation on the politics of affect theory itself. There are several feminist criticisms (e.g., Hemmings 2005), but I would especially like to highlight the work of Ruth Leys as well as the summary of the debate by Clive Barnett (2020, 124) who insightfully analyses how the ontological emphasis of much of affect theory is “so saturated in feeling that it is devoid of meaning.”

4 Indeed, perhaps provocatively, I would argue that affects can also be treated as citational performatives, following Derrida (1977) and Butler (1993), but this theoretical argument will have to be made elsewhere because of space limitations.

grief (death, social strife). This performative effect is achieved by citing previous affective performances that have congealed into an instantly recognisable impression of realness. Citationality is logical in view of the limited time people scrolling through social media feeds or clicking through channels spend on each individual story. Quick and easy recognition of a tragedy or triumph matters in our attention economy; misrecognition comes with many risks, as the emotional public sphere is quick to shame and cancel. The performatives might be citational, but they address others, are perceived by others, and make things happen, even if they are merely performative.

The notion of performativity is even more pronounced in the case of fiction where affects are represented and evoked in the audiences reading them. The perception of performativity does not, however, cancel out authentic response. I will investigate the performance and perception of affect in one work of autofiction/autotheory, Heather Christle's *The Crying Book* (2019), and in one novel, Christine Smallwood's *The Life of the Mind* (2021). Both can be seen as examples of new sincerity in fiction, but both also subvert the expectation of feminine sentiment and pose questions about the authenticity of affect. Like Renée C. Hoogland (2014, 3), I am interested in aesthetic encounters that can be a "potentially disruptive, if not violent, force field with material, political and practical consequences." In this mode, reading is a set of affective relations (Boldt and Leander 2020), not only of disruption but also of recognition and resignation.

Authenticity and affect

It is not accidental that the notion of "authenticity" has reappeared in critical conversation in parallel with the rise of affect.⁵ Maiken Umbach and Mathew Humphrey provided us with a cultural history of affect in 2018, almost fifty years after Lionel Trilling's lectures on authenticity at Harvard in 1970 (Trilling 1972). Trilling's lectures contrast sincerity and authenticity. For him, the latter is particularly characteristic of the 20th century and modernity that celebrates being true to oneself rather than adhering to social norms. As a result, we see the elevation of "disorder, violence, unreason," due to their perceived authenticity as sources of art and our inner being (Trilling 1972, 11). In Trilling's opinion, authenticity to oneself was valorised in the 20th century to the detriment of public discourse. Today, too, we assume that unreason – where we do not think – is where we can find authenticity. If Trilling's generation looked towards psychoanalysis for answers, we turn to affect the-

⁵ A thorough list of references is provided by Julia Straub (2012, 13).

ory. We are still searching for that authentic self, which we believe can be revealed by affects that, for many people, cannot be faked because they are pre-cognitive. Writers looking for new sincerity are not necessarily following Trilling's juxtaposition but rather arguing against the detached ironies of postmodernism. This article, however, questions the widely accepted conflation of affect with authenticity, arguing that affect can be performative and authentic at the same time.

Anna Gibbs (2001, 1) believes that affects, as feelings of existence, travel, leaping from body to body. They can also travel by leaping from theatre stages, works in an art gallery, or from the pages of a book. This means that we need to take affects and their representability seriously. Affects promise authenticity and depth in a world of surfaces; however, defining that depth is remains a complex issue. As Timotheus Vermeulen (2017) noted, today's life is characterised not so much by depth as by performative "depthiness" that is, among other things, affectively loaded. Affect, as pre-cognitive intensity, has been hailed for being unadulterated by discursive interventions. Research in different fields, however, has shown that affects can be generated by marketing, political campaigns, and memory sites. Affect can be viewed as an almost-tangible commodity bought and sold.

Yet, affect is still linked to its perceived experientiality and its promise to fill our craving for its reality-affirming authenticity. This might explain the hunger for autobiographies, testimonies, and trauma narratives. These could be called contemporary versions of the confession meant to make a person transparent to God as well as to reading audiences (de Villiers 2012, 5). I agree with Wolfgang Funk (2015, 79) in his assessment that people seek not just authenticity but, one could argue, a broader realism in a time when we must rethink the relationship between experience and representations of experience. This is certainly the case now as we begin to appreciate how impossible it is to grasp what is real and what is a simulacrum. What we feel seems to be one of the few things we are certain about, so it is unsurprising that we are interested in reading and writing about this last stronghold of authenticity in the world of fakeness.

The question of what constitutes authenticity in today's social reality is a complex one. For example, Alison Gibbons (2017, 130) argues that metamodern⁶ affect is

6 This article does not use metamodernism as a periodising device for texts written after and in response to postmodernism. Rather, I am using the work of Vermeulen and his collaborators to reflect on the "structures of feeling" of the 2000s (cf. van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017, 4). They provide an accessible condensation of Raymond Williams' notion of the structure of feeling as "a sentiment, or rather still, a sensibility that everyone shares, that everyone is aware of, but which cannot easily, if at all, be pinned down. Its tenor, however, can be traced in art, which has the capability to express a common experience of a time and place" (van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017, 7).

rooted in an intersubjective encounter: "It is ironic yet sincere,⁷ sceptical yet heartfelt, solipsistic yet desiring of connection. Most of all, it is experiential." Gibbons believes the fragility created by a contemporary, fragmented reality makes us yearn for grounding in experientiality and a potential encounter with others.

By contrast, Lee Konstantinou (2017, 98), believes that the trend of new sincerity and postirony "gives us postmodern reality by means of non-postmodern form" through devices like "flatness of tone, rambling plots, autobiographical content and notable lack of interiority" as well as the creation of "the gap between the reader and the writer." In other words, while culture at large craves easily consumable affects, literary fiction has refused this easy legibility and has sought instead to dig into the more opaque affects created by our present moment.

It is the latter point that I find specifically fascinating in the context of contemporary reality hunger. Readers crave the authenticity of affect that is promised by autobiography, true crime fiction, and reality TV. However, that reality is doctored to the extent that its disturbing recognisability is reduced to safe stereotypes. This is why we need to look for authenticity in experimental arts that are not afraid to seek out less legible and therefore more authentic realities. Instead of easily accessible affect, the autobiographical content of literary fiction helps stress what Konstantinou (2017, 100) has called "failures of intersubjectivity," the illegibility of affects and their appropriate interpretation. In this article, I situate my intervention in the gap between the hunger for (vicarious) experience and the failures of intersubjectivity represented by contemporary literary fiction and autofiction/autotheory. Specifically, I focus on the legibility of tears, a frequent marker of affect.

Reading tears, reading affects

Tears are a phenomenon endowed with an aura of authenticity, loss of control, and authority of experience.⁸ Eugenie Brinkema (2014, 2) usefully emphasises the origins of the belief in tears as true indicators of our interior states, citing the Gospel according to St. John: "Jesus wept (John 11: 35), *and no more needed to be said*" (italics in Brinkema). For Brinkema, modern tears have become opaque, if not outright suspect. She cites Roland Barthes: "If I have so many ways of crying, it may be because, when I cry, I always address myself to someone [. . .] I adapt my ways of

7 Trilling contrasts authenticity and sincerity. The latter word for him denotes public-oriented self-representation. This performative version of sincerity has also been taken up by some scholars interested in the so-called New Sincerity in fiction, for example Adam Kelly (2010).

8 A pithy intellectual history of tears can be found in Brinkema. A more historical narrative is provided by Tom Lutz (1999).

weeping to the kind of blackmail which, by my tears, I mean to exercise around me” (Barthes 2002, 181).⁹ Barthes, however, continues by directing the critical gaze inward, wondering whether tears could be auto-affective: “I make myself cry, in order to prove to myself that my grief is not an illusion: tears are signs, not expressions. By my tears, I tell a story, I produce a myth of grief, and henceforth I adjust myself to it” (Barthes 2002, 182). Barthes uncovers the central tension that this article also seeks to tease out: Where is the boundary of authentic and performative affect in situations where we expect sincerity? Does performativity necessarily suggest inauthenticity?

Tears are dangerously ambiguous: we cry in sadness, anger, prayer, in political performance.¹⁰ We also cry while watching movies or listening to songs of sentimental significance. What about those tears that are not interpersonal in the sense that Barthes describes them: not targeted at another human being? It is not surprising that there are actual scientific experiments about the differences between kinds of tears, for example in Rose-Lynn Fisher’s album *The Topography of Tears* (2017) where, using an optical microscope, she seeks to answer whether or not we can distinguish tears of hope and catharsis, laughter and loss. Her scientific equipment does not give her any definitive answers. “Instead of conclusions,” she concedes, “my exploration of tears has led me deeper into the intangible poetry of life” (Fisher 2017, 8). It is this opaque poetry of life that is also explored in contemporary fiction, as will be shown below.

Tears remain just as elusive in academic literary and cultural criticism. As Jennifer Doyle (2013, 84) observes: “Tears are suspect, whether they are represented within a work of art or produced in the spectator. Tears seem to embody both the height of unquestioned emotionality and the depths of emotional manipulation.” That tension animates this article as well. Doyle writes about performance art, where the visceral presence of the artist and the experiencing audience intensifies the affective effect. Audience members who encountered Marina Abramović during “The Artist Is Present” performance at MoMA in 2010 had authentic affective experiences, often ending in tears despite the obviously staged nature of the encounter. Doyle describes other instances of endurance art that, by using the “effect of intimacy,” seek and do physically move the audience (Doyle 2005, 46, 47–48).

9 Unlike Brinkema, I am using the full quotation from Barthes to show the extent to which manipulation but also self-awareness is built into Barthes’ fragment.

10 There is fascinating research on male politicians crying as a performance of masculinity (Gesualdi 2013).

However, even in this context, Doyle (2013, 85) warns that “once emotion is absorbed into the sphere of representation, once a feeling becomes an image of feeling, its claim to authenticity (to being a real feeling) is thrown into question.” We can debate the boundary of the performed and the real in Marina Abramović’s performances, such as “The Onion” (1996), one of the works that Doyle analyses in which Abramović complains about her life while eating a large raw onion, increasingly flooded by tears. However, this ambivalence vanishes when we take up a work of fiction. The emotional intensities conveyed in fiction are always representations of experiences that, nevertheless, have the potential to create the perception of authentic affect and perhaps even an authentic affective response. While Doyle believes that we do not cry in art galleries, we do in the intimate spaces of our home while we read books. Hoogland (2014, 2) calls us to look into “the actual ‘work’ that a work of art, intentionally or not, voluntarily or not, does in the world in which I encounter it.” In analysing fictional affects, we also need to be attentive to the work fictionally induced affects do.

Brinkema (2014, 4) argues for finding a way to read affects and their “exteriority in textual form as something that commands a reading.” Without attention to this exteriority, any analysis of literature or any other art form becomes merely a sharing of subjective experiences that can be neither argued with nor critically challenged. Instead, all we get is the story of “the successful consumption of affect and theoretical accounts of each private feeling experience complicit with the explicit marketing of feeling” (Brinkema 2014, 32). Brinkema (2014, 37) is also the main methodological guide here in “reading affects as having form,” as this “enables the specificity, complexity, and sensitivity to textuality that has gone missing in affect studies and is sorely needed.” While I will not be performing as close a reading as Brinkema does, I follow her guidance in looking closely at a set of textual representations of tears to show the contradictory effect of fictional surfaces on the affective experience.

Autofiction as a genre of authentic affects?

The search for intensity, “the lure and blur of the real,” has led to the proliferation of new genres of self-writing: “criticism as autobiography; self-reflexivity, self-ethnography, anthropological autobiography: a blurring (to the point of invisibility) of any distinction between fiction and nonfiction” (Shields 2010, 5). These cross-genre texts create the expectation that the textual self is that of the author. As Jessica Winter (2021) accounts in a *New York Times Book Review* essay, the necessary building of any work of fiction on the author’s subjectivity leads to many rushed misidentifications and raises complex challenges for the author:

R A I L I M A R L I N G

If she is forced to confirm that her material is autobiographical, then she risks forfeiting both the privacy and the power of transfiguration that fiction promises. If she denies it, then she surrenders a badge of authenticity that she may never have wished to claim in the first place, and lays herself open to accusations that she is appropriating the pain of others. (Winter 2021)

The blending of the fictional and the autobiographical is more heightened in texts explicitly labelled as autofiction.

French-born autofiction and its younger sibling autotheory seem to be excellent examples of texts that seek to satiate our reality hunger. The term “autofiction” was coined by Serge Doubrovsky (1977, 10) for whom “fiction, of events and facts strictly real” surrenders to “the adventure of language.” The self is not merely fictionalised, but the very act of fictionalisation opens the possibility of a multi-dimensional exploration of the self.

Autofiction offers itself as an alternative to autobiography. Autobiography prefers clarity, closure, redemption, subjecting life to the normative frames of intelligibility and significance (Smith and Watson 2010, 16). As Lauren Berlant has warned:

The sad part is that if we see ourselves as the inflated subjects of suffering who are only really living in relation to the transformative event of gesture, and if our genres of the transformative event are the only media through which we think that other people will be interested in us, we construct our lives and our encounters with destructive disregard for the ordinary forms of care, inattention, passivity, and aggression that don't organize the world at the heroic scale. (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 186)

We should attend to these ordinary affects and forms of care if we want to capture the world around us today, but they are not touched upon in conventionalised trauma and regeneration narratives. Berlant argues that “the genre of ‘life’ is a most destructive conventionalized form of normativity” that limits “people’s capacity to invent ways to attach to the world” (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 182). This raises the question as to what kind of intelligibility we yearn for, or what kind of unintelligibility we are willing to bear. Opacity generates speculation but also potentially indifference.

While autofiction uses one’s life for fictional experimentation, autotheory also seeks to weave theoretical reflection into the narrative.¹¹ Most of the relatively lim-

11 The best-known examples of autotheory are perhaps Paul Preciado’s *Testo Junkie* (2008, in English in 2013) and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015). Preciado’s experiences of taking testosterone without medical supervision are interspersed with a reflection on how the pharmaceutical industry has changed gender identity. Nelson’s

ited work on autotheory done thus far in English explores its relationship to post-modernism, post-postmodernism, and critical theory. Theory in the autotheoretical practice becomes a tool for literary creation and self-reflection. In fact, as Émile Lévesque-Jalbert (2020, 82) aptly puts it, “it is through the interval between fiction and non-fiction that the critical combines with the biographical, and the personal with the political.” In such texts, the author becomes a sort of text that writes the world. This type of textual creation also opens itself to writing that accepts the self as “a porous and disorganized thing that is constantly impelled (compelled and desiring) to take up positions of clarity in relation of objects, world, situations” (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 187).

Ralph Clare (2020, 86) argues that “autotheory’s sincerity lies in the exposure of a vulnerable self that recognizes its contingency and social/linguistic constructedness while nevertheless insisting upon the ‘reality’ and value of lived experience.” I find this tension between confession and critique particularly attractive for diagnosing the present, with its pervasive sense of invisible but inevitable crises filling us with unease and other amorphous minor affects that are intimately ours but also impersonal, part of the affective atmospheres of the present moment that, to use Sianne Ngai’s (2005, 14) words, is characterised by “a feeling of confusion about what one is feeling.” This unease, however, is not easily representable. This is precisely the sort of non-dramatic opaque affect that Konstantinou, cited earlier, was seeking in contemporary texts that almost violently resist affective connection (like the blank works of Chris Kraus and Tao Lin, to cite two extensively researched examples). This confusion, I believe, also creates the most intriguing autotheoretical writing, particularly from an affective perspective.

(Auto)theoretical and fictional tears

In the following section, I want to illustrate the abovementioned theoretical discussion by comparing the representation of tears, a conventional affective marker, in two books: Heather Christle’s autotheoretical *The Crying Book* (2019) (henceforth marked as C in in-text references) and Christine Smallwood’s novel *The Life of the Mind* (2021) (henceforth S in in-text references). Christle sets out on a nonfictional project of exploring the biological and social nature of tears, but this investigation is heavily interlaced with the tears of the narrating “I”. Smallwood’s acerbic novel indeed is about the mind of a contemporary young academic stuck in precarious

book, seemingly a memoir of pregnancy and childbirth, explicitly refers to a number of theorists in the margins of her text, making the implicit theoretical dialogues explicit on the textual level as well.

RAILI MARLING

adjunct jobs with no prospects or even desire for anything better. As the protagonist ponders, “want itself was a thing of the past” (S, 13). Her life is surrounded by the sense of an inevitable but slow and invisible ending. She reflects on climate change, refugees, the end of steady academic jobs. Although the stance of the protagonist is detached and cynical, Smallwood’s text evokes sharply recorded flat affects.

In a way, both texts appear grounded in the stereotypical narrative of feminine sentiment, as both protagonists obsess about reproduction: in Christle’s case, the struggle to conceive and to nurture a baby; in Smallwood’s case, the novel begins with the protagonist having a medically induced miscarriage and ends with her supporting one of her friends having an abortion. Yet, neither text easily fits the sentimental model and can instead be seen as an abrasive example of the mode of “female complaint,” a genre that foregrounds “witnessing and explaining women’s disappointment in the tenuous relation of romantic fantasy to lived intimacy” (Berlant 2008, 1–2). This ambivalent mode combines a critical and sentimental stance and produces “a space of disappointment, but not disenchantment” (Berlant 2008, 2). This ambivalence is evoked in the two texts’ use of affect and specifically tears. While Christle claims that tears are unknowable, she still resorts to their authority throughout the text. Smallwood resists the temptation of this legible formal marker but employs it in a stealthy manner. In her text, tears are accompanied by other bodily fluids, from blood to drool, from shedding hair and snot to the remains of a fetus. The abject, it seems, is at times used to stand in for more conventional tears as a signifier of loss.

The scenes of crying in Christle’s book are occasionally predictable (in response to pregnancy, childbirth, grief) in the tradition of feminine sentimentality. This can be seen in the following quote: “Motherhood gets me. I cry whenever I watch a representation – whether fictional or not – of birth. I have also cried at the gym, on the elliptical, watching a trailer for some dumb and heartbreaking movie” (C, 4). Contrary to what Doyle claims, the narrator even cries in museums or planes (C, 5, 28). In weaving together her research and her experience, she seems to be giving more weight to experience than science. By her own admission, “it is exhausting sometimes to conduct these imaginary arguments with scientists who seem determined to misunderstand the bodies of others” (C, 118). The body is more relevant than the objective critical gaze. The text ends with an affectively evocative poem by Aram Saroyan, consisting of one word, “light,” and the observation of how the audience realises “we all flicker” (C, 171). After a blank page, we get a somewhat jarring reminder that if readers should be having “thoughts of self-harm or suicide”, they should call a helpline, the phone number of which is given for both the USA and Canada (C, 173). This would suggest an affective, confessional reading, making use

of today's fashionable fragmentary style to do grief work and to arrive at a realisation that "I know I need to stop crying for long enough that I regain my capacity to imagine possibilities again" (C, 170). The books seem to say that art, like the text you are holding, having remembered your own tears and perhaps having shed some on the pages, allows us to imagine different possibilities of living.

Yet, this is not a fully satisfying reading of the tears that well up throughout the pages of the text. It is not just confession or meditation but also a critical reflection informed by science (even if at times it is taken down a notch for its arrogance and privilege blindness, especially when it comes to race), theory, and different art works. The theory does not crowd out the teary author but stays in the background, offering at times oblique commentary. For example, we get an excerpt from Roland Barthes' *Mourning Diary* from the day his beloved mother died, in which the philosopher remarks on frivolously buying tea cake and coming to the conclusion that this was "the most painful point at the most abstract moment" (C, 124–125). Even the confessional sections are interspersed with scenes in which the narrator maintains a certain unsentimental detachment:

The length of the cry matters. I especially value an extended session, which gives me time to become curious, to look in the mirror, to observe my physical sadness. A truly powerful cry can withstand even this scientific activity. (C, 2)

This method, as a matter of fact, is used from the very beginning of the text. Christle smuggles in a detached discussion of crying in church crying rooms, often now the scenes of the sacrament of reconciliation (C, 66), in which a person's anguish can be met with the rote ministrations of a priest. She often returns to the medieval mystic Margery Kempe, the first woman autobiographer in English, famous for her effusive crying. This creates droll scenes, such as the one of Kempe crying so intensely when approaching Jerusalem on her pilgrimage that she almost fell off her donkey. Christle comments that "I wish she could laugh at herself, but she refuses" (C, 49).

Similar distance is displayed throughout the text, often through the evocation of our bodily presence in crying: "It is fortunate to have a nose. Hard to feel you are too tragic a figure when the tears mix with snot. There is no glamour in honking" (C, 3). Yet, Christle intersperses the scenes of distance with confessional ones. For example, the above quotation is followed by the first-person scene describing the effects of a break-up: "I put all my crying into my mouth, felt it shake while I stalked to the car, inside which I let the crying move north to my eyes and south to my heaving gut" (C, 3).

RAILI MARLING

Smallwood, by contrast, presents us with a snarkier fictional voice whose affect is more ambiguous. The difference is partly due to the first versus third-person narrative. The latter gives the author more latitude to evoke disagreeable or controversial emotions than the first-person narrative, as many authors have found out in the panoptic social media scrutiny of today. We see this already from the opening page in which Dorothy, the protagonist, does not take a call from her therapist:

It wasn't that the miscarriage was such a big deal or that she was broken up in grief about it; it was that she hadn't told her therapist she was pregnant, and didn't want to have a whole session about her tendency to withhold. In the asymmetrical warfare of therapy, secrets were a guerilla tactic. (S, 3)

Readerly sympathy is displaced here: in a more conventional text, the focus of the scene would be on the miscarriage, and the parsing of the emotions of the event would be more central. We know that the miscarriage is important, as Dorothy dwells in detail on its physical effects, especially the bleeding, yet her mind wanders to the many minor affects that surround the traumatic event in an example of emotional realism that sacrifices the legibility of sentiment to authenticity in representing experience.

Tears do make a striking appearance when Dorothy meets her PhD supervisor, Judith, at a conference in Las Vegas. Judith's long-time editor has died in a freak accident, and Judith is seeking a confidante but perhaps also an audience for her grief:

The physiological collapse, the lachrymal overflow, that, in a weaker person, would appear as weakness, in Judith only enhanced her strength. The watery sheen cascading down her face did not make her seem quivering and helpless but strong and passionate. She had the strength to cry; she had the force to withstand it. Tears were no match for her spirit. (S, 142)

The scene is written with the same ironic detachment as the previous scenes of private feeling. Judith's tears are described as being "punctuated by little hiccups and wheezing breaths" (S, 142), and, instead of a mediation on grief, we read about the awkwardness of the protagonist in deciding what part of Judith would be appropriate to touch in an attempt at consolation. Dorothy is aware of the performativity that both women are involved in but also of the presence of authentic feeling behind the façade. Even the scene of grief becomes a scene of power as Judith commands Dorothy to cry with her, and Dorothy, indeed compliantly,

[. . .] took a breath and exhaled and buried her face in her hands and did her best to channel the whimpering mewls of an infant. [. . .] Privately, Dorothy felt proud of her effort. She had done a few school plays in her youth. She did not believe she entirely lacked talent for performance. (S, 145–46)

This scene, even more than the preceding one, invites attention to the performativity of tears and the attendant conventional affect. Dorothy's crying is inauthentic, but at the same time, it conveys authentic, even if ambivalent, interpersonal connection, one that leads Judith to recover her poise and leave. Dorothy, however, then finds herself experiencing a toothache with "an absence behind the pain" (S, 147) and succumbs to tears once more. But these tears, too, are followed by a critical comment: "There was something fortifying about crying in public, about letting the snot flow; what felt degrading in private, in public announced one's sensitivity and the great passions that ruled a life" (S, 148). So, this realisation does not rule out authentic affect. At the end of this scene, Dorothy "cried again, animally, whimpering" (S, 148). This juxtaposition of knowing irony and a physical description of crying creates a sense of authentic affect.

Since Dorothy holds a doctorate from a prestigious university, it is not surprising that theoretical musings end up on the page, about gender, feminism, academic precarity, and climate change, to name but a few topics. Intriguingly, among other thinkers, Lauren Berlant, who is extensively quoted in this article, also appears:

"Cruel optimism" was Berlant's way of theorizing why and how people remained attached to fantasies and aspirations of "the good life," how those aspirations injured them, and the resulting affect – something she called "stuckness." (S, 119)

The novel seems to be a demonstration of Berlant's theorisation of stuckness. In fact, one of Dorothy's friends fails to invite her to submit to a special issue on the topic because "'Cruel optimism' was Dorothy's entire life. [. . .] In other words, Dorothy knew too much about cruel optimism to write about it" (S, 119). The stuckness appears at work and in intimate relations, yet the theorisation comes to life in Dorothy's mind because, despite all its intellectual detachment, her mind is attached to a physical, leaky body. While Konstantinou has analysed texts in which detachment and flatness of tone create a gap between the reader and the writer, Smallwood's text invites a more ambivalent reading: not exactly sympathy, but at least recognition. The protagonist's detachment from the world seems to create a gap between her and the reader, but the recognisability of her situation sutures it.

Indeed, the novel positions itself as a form of social commentary more than Christle's meditation on crying. Christle also situates her text in today's social realities, in her sustained critique of systematic racism for example, but the first-person narrative meditates more on interpersonal connections. Smallwood writes explicitly about the academic precariat:

No one of Dorothy's generation would ever accrue the kind of power Judith had, and this was a good thing even as it as an unjust and shitty thing. Judith was old and Dorothy was young, Judith had benefits and Dorothy had debts. The idols had been false but they had served a function, and now they were all smashed and no one knew what they were working for. The problem wasn't the fall of the old system, it was that the new system had not arisen. Dorothy was like a janitor in the temple who continued to sweep because she had nowhere else to be but who had lost her belief in the essential sanctity of the enterprise. (S, 143–44)

This is an apt comment on the pervasive sense of ending that permeates the pages of the novel, the slow violence of not just climate change, but also of the death of academia as we know it. These broader processes are too invisible to be experienced directly, and hence we can get access to them only through the oblique affects like the ones that Smallwood represents. The drama of being confused about what one is feeling is at the core of today's crisis ordinariness, and detached resignation might be a more appropriate response than upper-case affect.

Both authors use tears to suggest affective intelligibility but at the same time to undermine this reading. Tears are explicitly shown to be performative, but, paired with other, more abject bodily fluids that resist aestheticisation, they signal the misperception and unintelligibility of affects to others and to ourselves. The texts testify to the opacity of tears as well as other affective markers. The boundary of the authentic and the performative is probed and shown to be porous. The autotheoretical text, because of the presence of the narrating "I", is perhaps more constrained in its affective representations. With its low-key dramas, the novel form allows the author to create a less sympathetic and therefore more credible representation of contemporary affective atmosphere.

Conclusion

When we look at today's deluge of memoirs, trauma narratives, and confessions, texts in which memory is "rewritten in the direction of feeling" (Shields 2010, 56), we can see that the authority of experience can also become restrictive, especially if the feeling is subjected to very limited surface readings. The texts analysed above dare to resist the temptation of the easy legibility of "depth" feelings and

their reality effect. They invite us into the seemingly safe world of sentimental feelings, but then lead us to a more ambivalent perception of affects and their performativity. This seems to create a gap between the reader and the text, but to make the effort of bridging it leads to a nuanced and authentic understanding of contemporary, gendered, affective atmospheres.

Adrienne Rich (1986, 213–14) has reflected on a useful theory: “Theory – the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees – theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn’t smell of the earth, it isn’t good for the earth.” We should treat experience the same way. If experience does not smell of earth – or in this case perhaps of snot – it ceases to be a testimony of a complex life lived and becomes a commodified artefact that satiates reality hunger with cheap junk emotions. Most nourishing contemporary writing invites us to meditate on the affective “I” in the contemporary world, released from the demand of affective legibility and likeability.

Our actual bodies and affects are wild and resist simple and unambiguous representation. This messy affect is not what we see in the emotional public sphere where affects are predictable, stereotypical, and performative. Instead, we need to turn to fiction where the distance from the first-person experience gives writers the freedom to be unlikable and illegible. Thus, although the affects we see in fiction are always mediated, they have the potential for greater authenticity than the performative affective displays on “American Idol” or a momfluencer site. Fiction and other art forms have the capacity to surprise, to rub us the wrong way, and to create the sorts of messy affects that our lived experience generates. Today, it might be time to seek not confession and testimony but opacity and the uncertainties of writing. This tactic is by no means new, as de Villiers (2012) has shown, but it has become more vital than ever in our present political moment, in which confessions replete with the authority of experience have drowned out critical reflection. Lévesque-Jalbert (2020, 82) writes about a friend who wants to live in theory, “because in theory everything is perfect.” Examples from today’s experimental writing should tempt us to live in fiction, because it is imperfect like the world around us. This messiness of fiction might give us more authentic guidance for navigating the present than the performative affects of the emotional public sphere.

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Autentsus ja sügavuse illusioon afektide kujutamises: taju ja performatiivsus nüüdisaegses ilukirjanduses ja autofiktsioonis

Raili Marling

Võtmesõnad: afekt, performatiivsus, autofiktsioon, nüüdiskirjandus

Üks afektuuringute keskseid teoreetikuid Brian Massumi (2002b, 233) väidab, et tänapäeval on afekt olulisem mõiste kui ideoloogia, sest võim toimib üha enam afektide abil. Kuna üldiselt vaadeldakse afekte kehaliste intensiivsustena, mida ei saa teadlikult kontrollida, siis peetakse neid autentseiks, seda ka tänapäeval, mil autentse ja võltsi piir on üha ähmasem. Kuigi üksikisiku tasandil on afektid tõesti raskesti kontrollitavad, on eri valdkondade teadlased näidanud, et afekte on võimalik kunstlikult esile kutsuda, nt poliitiliste või turunduskampaaniate või ka kogemusturismi abil. Seega väärib afektide autentsus lähemat analüüsi.

Käesolev artikkel väidab, et afektid, mida me avalikus sfääris kohtame, on performatiivsed: nad lähtuvad sotsiaalsetest normidest ja tsiteerivad varasemaid afektiivseid esitusi, mis on korduste tõttu omandanud autentsuse aura. Afektide performatiivsus ei tähenda, et nad on võltsid; lihtsalt me ei tohiks nende siirust üle hinnata. Ka performatiivsed afektid kõnetavad teisi inimesi ning tekitavad autentseid afektiivseid reaktsioone. Afektid liiguvad kehalt kehale, nagu väidab Anna Gibbs (2001, 1), aga ka teatrilavalt, kinolinalt või raamatulehekülgedelt publikuni. Seega väärib afektide kujutamine ja selle performatiivsus lähemat tähelepanu kirjanduse ja teiste kunstivormide analüüsis. Jennifer Doyle (2013, 85) väidab, et kui emotsioonist saab emotsiooni representatsioon, siis kerkivad kohe küsimused selle emotsiooni autentsuse kohta. Kuigi tekstidesse kätketud emotsioon või afekt on alati mugandus ja ehk isegi manipulatsioon, ei kaota see oma väge publikut kõnetada ja selles afekte luua. Palju on uuritud etenduskunsti, mis ründab vaatajate meeli ja ootusi, ning ka lugejas tugevaid emotsioone tekitavaid traumanarratiive. Vähem on tähelepanu saanud raskesti loetavad ja näilised tundetud kirjandustekstid, mille afektiivne laeng on ambivalentsem. Aga ka sellistel tekstidel on potentsiaal pakkuda inimestele uudseid viise maailmaga suhestumiseks (Berlant ja Prosser 2011, 182).

Artikkel keskendub konkreetselt ühele autentseks peetavale afektiivsele fenomenile, pisaratele. Pisarad on üks ilmsemaid afektide ilminguid, mida me ei kontrolli ning mis seega näivad autentseina. Kuid juba Roland Barthes (2002) juhib tähelepanu pisarate dialoogilisusele ja suisa manipulatiivsele. Pisarad on seega huvitav näide afektide autentsuse ja performatiivsuse analüüsimiseks, seda enam, et pisaraid kasutatakse mitmesugustes kunstilistes ja kirjanduslikes tekstides afektide tähistajana.

Artikkel lähtub Eugenie Brinkema (2014, 4) soovitusest otsida tekstidest afektide tekstilisi kujutusi, et hoiduda afektuuringute tihti omasest subjektiivsusest ning liikuda pelgalt afektide tarbimiselt sügavama teoreetilise analüüsini. Brinkema (2014, 37) soovib otsida afektide vormi, mis võimaldab analüüsides olla tähelepanelikum kirjandusteksti stiililise keerukuse ja nüansirikkuse suhtes. Seega vaatleb artikkel kirjandusteksti keelelisi väljendusvahendeid kui afektide esitamise ja loomise vahendeid.

Artiklis analüüsitakse kaht nüüdiskirjanduse näidet, mis eksperimenteerivad pisarate kujutamise. Esimeseks tekstiks on Heather Christle'i autobiograafia sugemetega essee „The Crying Book“ („Nuturamat“, 2019) ja teine Christine Smallwoodi romaan „The Life of the Mind“ („Vaimuelu“, 2021). Neid tekste võiks vaadelda uussiiruse näitena, kuid artikkel väidab pigem, et mõlemad autorid küsimärgistavad naise-

S U M M A R Y

likkuse ja naiskogemusega seondatavat sentimentaalset siirust. Pisaraid kasutatakse ühtaegu lugeja kõnetamiseks ja samaaegselt lihtsa pinnalugemise õõnestamiseks. Pisarad on performatiivsed, kuid samas ka autentseid, signaaliseerides lugejale, et teiste afektide tähendus jääb meile alati kättesaamatuks. Pisarad ei allu ühesele tõlgendusele, näidates autentse ja performatiivse vahelise piiri poorsust.

Tänapäeva menukite hulgas on palju mälestusi, traumanarratiive ja pihtimisi, milles mälu on suunatud tunnete voolusängi (Shields 2010, 56). Sellised tihti kommertslikult pakendatud kogemused on muutunud piiravaiks, sest nad pakuvad liiga kergesti loetavaid ja tarbitavaid stereotüüpseid emotsioone. Artiklis analüüsitud tekstid julgevad sellele kergesti loetavuse ja tarbitavuse kiusatusele vastu hakata. Nad toovad meid näiliselt turvalisse sentimentaalse pihtimuse maailma, kuid siis eemaldavad selged teetähised ja jätavad meid omapäi autentse ja performatiivsuse piire kompama. Selline strateegia tekitab lõhe lugeja ja teksti vahel, kuid just selle lõhe ületamiseks tehtud jõupingutus aitab meil mõista näiliselt selgete afektide tegelikku mitmetähenduslikkust. Kuigi kirjanduslikud afektid on alati vahendatud, on eksperimentaalses kirjanduses vähemalt potentsiaal murda välja stereotüüpidele üles ehitatud emotsionaalse avaliku sfääri turvalisest tarbijasõbralikkusest ning meenutada meile elatud kogemuse vasturääkivust ja metsikust.

Raili Marling – Tartu Ülikooli anglistika professor. Tema peamised uurimisvaldkonnad on afektide poliitiline dimensioon ning soolisuse kujutamine nüüdiskirjanduses. Ta juhib Eesti Teadusagentuuri rühmagraanti, mis analüüsib kriiside kujutamist ja kujutatavust. Selle projekti raames jätkab ta uurimistööd nüüdiskirjanduse, afektide ja neoliberalismi teemal, võrreldes ameerika, prantsuse ja eesti kirjandust ja kultuuri. Ta on kirjutanud ka modernistlikest naiskirjanikest, mehelikkusest, feministliku teooria tõlgendamisest ning soolise võrdõiguslikkuse diskursustest.

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Passion Performative: Reading Cocteau with Proust and Derrida

Tanel Lepsoo

Abstract: The article demonstrates that the use of the telephone as a performative medium on stage or in literature introduces the non-existent to the existent, making absence explicit and making it possible to foretell death, especially of a person one loves. This may also be viewed as the author's attempt to use the text to communicate with the beyond and make the voices of the departed audible.

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The demon calls. Socrates picks up, wait here's Freud (what a difference, a very important time difference and the demon speaks to Freud, directly, from the beyond, like his ghost which says to him "wait," hold on, come back with your spool, don't hang up, here's Heidegger.)
Jacques Derrida, *Postcard* (1987, 31)

Introduction

In his 2001 book *Speech Acts in Literature* Joseph Hillis Miller introduces speech act theory, proceeding from John L. Austin, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, and develops the notion of "passion performative," on the basis of his reading of the work of Marcel Proust. As can be seen below, literary performativity is at first glance surprisingly closely linked to technology, specifically the telephone, one of the new inventions of the beginning of the 20th century. The desire of literary characters to use the telephone or, rather, the interest of writers in new inventions is understandable, in view of the fact that technology modifies language use, making dialogues remarkably more complicated than the more conventional face-to-face interaction or epistolary exchange.

The question of love, one of the favourite topics of literature, with the attendant issues of the loss of love or of the beloved, gets heightened attention in periods of social change that alter our modes of communication, thereby creating uncertainty about the success of speech acts. The notion of the passion performative is thus most important not when communication is running smoothly, but when it fails or when people fear its failure. The development of technology has enabled people to communicate increasingly across distances, something we have a heightened

awareness of at the time of this writing. However, in addition to the more successful constative information exchange, this has also created new sources of tension at the performative-emotional level, where the lack of the physical presence of the partner carries considerable significance. Miller writes about the novel, but theatre as a performative phenomenon deserves closer attention in this context as well. While a work of fiction as a whole may be a performative speech act, as Miller argues already at the beginning of his book, can a theatre performance, with its ability to reproduce the reality, achieve even more?

The article will first discuss how Derrida enriches the traditional conception of the performative, by moving the discussion away from felicity or infelicity to the question of promise which allows him to delve into the declaration of love as a speech act. This will also help to elucidate why several key scenes in Proust's work that are related to love involve the use of the telephone. The article innovatively compares the literary performative to the theatrical one.

Derrida

If we are interested in the failure of the performative speech acts, we should not focus on Austin or Searle alone, but also the late work of Jacques Derrida, since performativity appears in almost all of his main concepts: gift, testimony, secret, forgiveness, etc. Derrida develops his main criticism of the speech act theory of Austin and Searle in *Limited Inc*, his main text dedicated to linguistic performativity. Derrida proceeds from the fact that famous examples like "I declare this meeting open" or "I pronounce you husband and wife" can only act as performatives, that is, change something in the world, in felicitous conditions in authentic contexts. The meeting will only be opened if both the speaker and the audience believe this to be fitting. This would suggest that performative speech acts cannot exist without seriousness of intent, something that Derrida, of course, doubts. Derrida believes that in the case of speech acts we need to bear in mind that an ironic speech act can also be performative and that each performative speech act need not work. The unpredictability of the performativity of speech acts is caused by iterability. As Miller states,

Iterability is nothing more [. . .] than the possibility of every mark¹ to be repeated and still to function as a meaningful mark in new contexts that are cut off from the original context, "the intention to communicate" of the original marker of the mark. That originator may be absent or

¹ Derrida uses the word 'mark' (*marque*) which he believes to be wider and more appropriate than the concept of sign (*signe*).

dead, but the mark still functions, as it goes on functioning after the death of its intended recipient. (Miller 2001, 78)

The phrase “*je t’aime*,” Derrida argues, is in most cases not constative but performative “because the one to whom it is spoken has absolutely no way to verify that what I claim is a fact. You must take it on faith that I’m telling you the truth” (Miller 2001, 135). Thus, this phrase is either explicitly or implicitly accompanied by a promise that is performative without a doubt. This allows Miller to define passion as a phenomenon that seeks to own or change its object. A phone call, especially to a person one loves, potentially creates such a passion performative, which makes a really existing other of the addressee into somebody who is not a unity but an indeterminate and uncontrollable multiplicity.

Derrida’s *The Postcard* is, as the title suggests, mostly dedicated to short-form correspondence, but it also contains examples of how the first-person speaker talks to his beloved over the phone. The speech is described as follows:

this is what I say to myself, she² still loves me since she is speaking to me. She is not here but there, she is speaking to me, she brings me near to myself who am so far from everything. She touches me, she takes me in her voice, while accusing me she cradles me again, she makes me swim, she engulfs me, you becloud me like a fish, I let myself be loved in the water. (Derrida 1987, 56)

As can be imagined, Derrida is aware of the fact that the telephone creates intimate closeness while simultaneously stressing distance. The woman becomes the voice that embraces the writer, the voice gains a voice. If everything goes well (a drunk is circling the phone booth in London from which the author is calling and staring at him), the voice is filtered, parasitised, and becomes a revenant. Speaking on a phone is thus speaking “through parasites”³ and the result is symmetrical: it is not just the addressee that turns into a revenant or parasite but also the speaker. Only “I love you” (*je t’aime*) allows love to exist and the lovers not to dissolve into eternity:

When I told you yesterday from the station, on the telephone, that we will not be able to replace each other, I was very sincerely talking about forgetting. And about the eternity of my love. You substitute yourself for yourself all the time. I forget you in order to fall in love, with you, from the

2 In French *elle* may refer to the woman addressed – which is the case here – but also to voice (*la voix*).

3 Parasitism (*parasitage*) is one of Derrida’s central concepts, which is also manifest in the case of speech acts. In contrast to Austin, Derrida’s position is that the possible infelicity of speech acts, their being affected by different disturbances, is not random but can be viewed as a central feature of language use.

T A N E L L E P S O O

very next second. This is my condition, on the condition that one loves. I felt it right away, I was uplifted, a kind of levitation, and as soon as you called me, the first time, I forgot you, I lost consciousness. I am going to sleep now. You should not have left me. You should not have let me depart alone. One day, when one of us will no longer be able to say "I love you," it will suffice that the other still have wind of it, nothing will have changed. (Derrida 1987, 180)

Thus, it could be said that at this juncture that the telephone as a technological apparatus marks both absence and presence. The telephone blurs and distorts the speech act, but the speech act may be (and mostly also is) performative, despite this distortion.

Proust

At the beginning of the 20th century, the period into which Proust has placed his characters, the telephone had already become an everyday phenomenon. Thus, a friend of Madame de Verdurin in his *In Search of Lost Time*⁴ even uses the telephone to order food from the shop, while the horrible maid Françoise sees the phone as the means through which to acquire another vice:

Thus Dr. Bell's invention has enabled Françoise to acquire an additional defect, which was that of refusing, however important, however urgent that occasion to be, to make use of the telephone. She would manage to disappear whenever anybody was going to teach her how to use it, as people disappear when it is time for them to be vaccinated. (SG 120)⁵

Proust got a telephone quite early but, as its ringing bothered him when he was writing, he gave it up, using the phone in a nearby café when he needed it.

The telephone, however, does not just mark the period or technology, but three longer scenes are dedicated to it, focusing on three central characters who are all objects of the narrator's attachment and who die: the narrator's grandmother, Robert de Saint-Loup and Albertine. The death of the grandmother is one of the most significant scenes in the novel as a whole. Saint-Loup is the closest friend of the

4 This article refers to Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as *In Search of Lost Time*, although the first English translation used for the quotes was titled *A Remembrance of Things Past*. *In Search of Lost Time* is closer to the French original.

5 The English translations are from C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation first published by Chatto and Windus in 1929. This quotation comes from vol. IV, translated by Moncrieff as *Cities of the Plain*, but here referred to by its original, *Sodom and Gomorrah* (SG hereafter).

protagonist who dies in battle and Albertine is his great love, who abandons him and then dies.

The first of the three scenes is introduced by the author's meditation on the switchboard operators (*demoiselles de téléphone*), who are also defined as vigilant virgins, guardian angels, the all-powerful, the Danaids of the invisible and the priestesses of the invisible (*Vierges Vigilantes, Anges gardiens, Toutes-Puissantes, Danaïdes de l'Invisible, prêtresses de l'Invisible*). It is these mythological creatures who make the call possible, but they may also prove to be obstructions, and the more one deals with them, the greater the likelihood that the call, especially with a loved one, will be disrupted. Perhaps this is why the otherwise admiring list contains a reference to the Danaids, the fifty daughters of King Danaus, forty-nine of whom killed their husbands on their wedding nights.

Even more, as Miller⁶ points out:

One thing, as Marcel indicates, what disappears with the telephone is the sense of privacy we used to associate with being safe within the home. The telephone brings the outside in, breaks down the inside/outside dichotomy, and endangers the possibility of private communication. (Miller 2001, 190)

The supernatural power of the telephone and the help of the switchboard operators bring a loved one to us, but the person's arrival is ambivalent. Thus the narrator muses: "It is she, it is her voice that is speaking, that is there. But how remote it is!" (GW 178).⁷ He remarks somewhat later, "A real presence⁸ indeed that voice so near – in actual separation. But a premonition also of an eternal separation!" (GW 178)

The person whom we hear through the telephone is thus something else. She or he is not the same person who we talk to in the salon. This makes Miller claim the following:

That the telephone, by dispensing with the bodily presence of the person and resurrecting him or her as a ghostly voice, presages the real death of the person is reinforced later in the passage, when the connection is suddenly broken. Marcel is left with a lifeless apparatus pressed against

6 Estonian writer Toomas Raudam's essay *Teie [You]* [2003, 29–82] also highlights the importance of the telephone in Proust's work and also looks into the same scenes.

7 C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation, first published by Chatto and Windus in 1925 as *The Guermantes Way* (hereafter GW).

8 Real presence is a theological concept that marks Christ's real presence in the Eucharistic bread and wine.

T A N E L L E P S O O

his hear, "vainly repeating 'Granny, Granny' as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife." (Miller 2001, 196)

The two scenes discussed below demonstrate that the disconnected calls, wrong connections and the helping but at the same time controlling actions of the switchboard operators are not just the technological characteristics of the era, but devices that metaphorically represent something more general that accompanies communication from a distance. In the first scene this is associated with Robert Saint-Loup, who is in Doncières, and has quarrelled with his mistress Rachel who is tired of the screeching of the parrot that lives in Robert's apartment (alongside canaries, dogs and a monkey). She has moved out. As a result, Robert has to make daily phone calls to the concierge to keep things under control. Rachel is a simple prostitute whom Robert has elevated to the status of a courtesan, and it is clear that the conventional option, reconciliation via a letter, is impossible for an aristocratic man. The modern means of communication is within reach, but its use displeases the narrator: "Besides, it hardly seemed to me quite proper to make my parents, or even a mechanical instrument installed in their house, play a pander between Saint-Loup and his mistress, ladylike and high-minded as the latter might be" (GW, 163). The telephone itself and entrusting it to somebody is significant and would assist the performative act, that is, bringing Rachel closer to Robert and thus facilitating reconciliation, which would transgress the rules of social politeness for the narrator.

The telephone permits people who have quarrelled to make up, but it also can easily sow discord. This happens to Albertine who, instead of coming to the narrator's place late in the evening when he has been impatiently waiting for hours, calls to ask him whether he is not too tired. If previously Albertine had two options – to keep her promise or not – the telephone now allows her to use obfuscation, to hide indifference under the guise of consideration (she had become more entranced with her relationship with Andrée). Albertine's calls place the narrator in a complex situation as the initial joy (she is coming) is replaced with suspicion (where is she) and then the understanding that she is lying. Burning with desire and longing, the narrator coolly answers that, since the woman had wasted one of his evenings already, he will not be able to see her for three weeks. It is the phone call that allows the narrator to understand the distance between the two of them: "About Albertine, I felt that I should never find out anything, that, out of that tangled mass of details of fact and falsehood, I should never unravel the truth." (SG 123) The phone makes it easier to lie, but also increases the other side's scepticism and jealousy. It makes the addressee indeterminate and uncontrollable but also leads to the understand-

ing of the overall impossibility of determining or controlling the addressee. The telephone allows Albertine to lie but it also allows the first-person narrator to catch her on a lie. Technology not only changes society, but also makes visible what already exists in a covert form.

The telephone and probably also other technological innovations reveal to our consciousness something that we do not want to admit in the context of emotional attachment: we are speaking to somebody who is present during the act of speaking and yet each moment of the conversation also stresses the fact of the beloved's physical absence and reminds us of his or her future physical absence, that is, death and with it the death of love. We are in an intimate dialogue, but this dialogue is controlled by the outside world and mediated: there can be interruption, the call can be disconnected at any moment and, perhaps most importantly, the telephone breaks the central illusion of love, that of owning another person. The telephone is an ideal means for creating jealousy as it makes the speaker deictic: unaware of the location of the partner, it reveals that love is not based on facts, but fantasies. In other words, love does not allow one to distinguish the fictional and the real.

Cocteau

One of the first plays that brings the telephone to the theatre stage is the two-act play *At the Telephone* (*Au téléphone*) by André de Lorde that is based on a short story by Charles Foleÿ and staged in 1901 by André Antoine who also played the lead. In the first act of the play we see the head of a family depart from his home, leaving his young wife and child with the servants. The audience hears different scary voices, barking dogs and then oppressive silence. In the second act we see the husband who has reached his friends who live 70 km away. He receives a phone call from his worried wife. He initially tries to calm her down, but becomes increasingly anxious as by the end of the play the house is invaded by bandits who execute the whole family, with the husband being forced to listen to the event, powerlessly, on the telephone. As can be seen, the telephone, called a "a wonderful invention" (II, 1) in the play that can be used to call "the master miles away – and yet he can talk to us as if he were quite close to us in this room" (Lorde 1901), plays a central dramatic role here.

The play was very popular when it came out and also in the subsequent decades, although the telephone, initially an exotic instrument the principles of whose use had to be explained at the beginning of the century, had become a common household item. Thus, critics complain about the technological naiveté of the text in the reviews of the staging at Théâtre d'Antoine in 1944 (Lauberaux 1944), but it can be seen that the play has lost none of its dramatic tension. The play is based on the

classical tragic model in which danger is removed from the stage and the disaster is suggested by the gradually approaching external threat. We see different signs of danger in the first act, the tension is maintained by sinister events and the second act brings the feared resolution. No violence is shown to us. The telephone as a medium is similar to the convention of the informants in classical French tragedy or the Greek chorus who tells us about the horrors that have taken place. It is not surprising that the telephone is described as being mysterious or supernatural in making it possible to make invisible violence accessible to our imagination. The impact of the violence is increased by the intensity of the premonition and the limited visual representation of the event.

More optimistic versions of the text have also been produced. For example, David W. Griffith's 1909 short film *Lonely Villa* reverses the French tragedy in an American manner by making the telephone into an instrument of rescue that allows the loving husband to give useful instructions to the household under siege and, when the bandits still get an upper hand, to arrive in time to save the victims. The culmination of the film, however, is in the moment when one of the villains cuts the cable and the call is disconnected. The popularity of the play can be seen in the fact that a parody was created in the 1920s in which, according to Marcel Lapierre (1944), it is not the beloved wife and child that are in danger but the mother-in-law of the protagonist who listens to her last breaths with pleasure.

The telephone is also a useful device in another play of the same period, Tristan Bernard's *Les Coteaux du Médoc* (1903)⁹, in which the protagonist, after a wrong connection, ends up talking to a lovely woman who he falls in love with and who fortunately is revealed to be his new neighbour. Additional flavour is given by the switchboard operator girls whose duty is to ensure smooth connections and who are called either "evil deities" or "elusive and malevolent demons" because they are both able to make miracles happen and end the call at any moment.

Thus, already starting from its first stage appearances, the telephone is not just a technical device but a full-fledged medium. It enables the creation of a specific stage reality of something completely absent with the help of a quasi-monologue. The audience sees a character talking on the telephone but does not hear the responses, which creates a credible conversational situation. The inaudible voice of the interlocutor is present on the stage, but this presence is, as we already know, at the same time proof of its absence. In addition to heightening absence, the telephone call also demonstrates the precarity of the speech act, as it may be interrupted or

⁹ For more detail on this, see Sakamoto (2006).

wrongly connected at any time, the other speaker may hang up, either by accident or on purpose, there might be an interruption by the switchboard operators, the call may be interrupted by other people and technical difficulties.

Jean Cocteau's play *La voix humaine* (*The Human Voice*) may have been influenced by *Au téléphone*, as suggested by Claude Jamet in his review in *Germinal* (1944). However, Cocteau's close relations with Proust are also well known and the scenes from *In Search of Lost Time* cited above were certainly familiar to Cocteau.

The play was first staged in 1930 and is probably one of the more popular texts of the author to this day: there are at least five stage versions from France in the past five years (excluding the stagings of Francis Poulenc's opera version). In Estonia, too, in addition to a recent staging at Tallinn City Theatre (March 2020, director Kristjan Suits), the play has appeared in radio theatre and on television in three performances with the genre designation of a *digital monodrama*. There are also several film versions, the most influential of which is probably Roberto Rossellini's from already 1948. Pedro Almodóvar's fondness for the play can be seen in his *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), a transfiction inspired by Cocteau's play, as well as *The Human Voice*, his free interpretation of the play from 2020.

The one-act one-woman play introduces us to a woman. The author says that she is not a specific woman who is either smart or stupid but an anonymous woman. We do not learn much about her beyond the fact that during the play that lasts about 45 minutes she talks to a man with whom she has had a five-year relationship and who has left her a few days earlier but whom she still loves. They do not appear to have (shared) children but do have a dog whose fate becomes a matter of discussion after their breakup. Nothing is said about the age of the woman but it is clear that the text works more dramatically if the role is played by a mature woman, not a teenager. Berthe Bovy, who played in the first stage version, was forty-three, Ingrid Bergman, who played in one of the more evocative versions in the late 1960s, was fifty-one, Evelin Võigemast was forty in the Tallinn City Theatre version and Tilda Swinton sixty in Almodóvar's recent film. Cocteau was also almost forty when he wrote the play.

In the introduction of the play the author writes that the protagonist is an "average victim, head over heels in love; she tries to achieve only one thing, to offer a straw to the man to make him confess his lie, to not leave behind a dishonourable memory. The actress has to leave the impression that she is bleeding, that she is losing blood like a wounded animal and that she ends the act in a room covered in blood" (VH 16).¹⁰

¹⁰ The direct translation of the French original is provided in the text to retain the emphases of the text.

T A N E L L E P S O O

The remark above states that the act opens with a crime scene. A woman in a long night gown lies on the floor next to the bed, as if she had been killed. There are other references to death: the phone call at times becomes almost the call of a dead person: “This is unpleasant. It is as if I was dead. I can hear but not make myself audible” (VH 31), “if you had not called me, I would have died” (VH 43), “when you talk to me, I get air, [...] when you hang up, you sever the tube” (VH 45). This is what happens at the end of the play: “she falls on the bed, face down, head limp and lets the receiver fall like a stone” (VH 14). Thus, the text is circular: the already dead character rises for a moment to talk to somebody who has abandoned her.

In order to stay alive, the protagonist has to avoid hanging up and thus has to maintain the conversation at any cost. In addition to the practical questions (like what to do with the man’s things), descriptions of states of mind, thoughts and memories of the protagonist are also motivated – as the author suggests in the quote above – by the desire to catch the man at a lie. The play’s culmination can be found in the moment when the call breaks off and the woman calls him back only to find out that he is not at home, as it had seemed earlier, but somewhere else. Without daring to ask explicitly and probably because there is no way of verifying the truth (because the woman is also lying, confessing some lies but not all), she makes a complex linguistic move: “if you lied to me out of kindness and I would find out, I would care about you even more” (VH 56). This speech act does not yield a result, but reveals the paradoxical tragedy of the conversation: the discovery of cheating is relevant only while people are in a relationship. When the relationship has ended, cheating and its discovery have no weight. The woman has accepted the loss of love but she at least hopes for a lie.

The text indeed works because of the tension that reflects, on the one hand, the acknowledgement of the fact of breakup by the protagonist and, on the other hand, her inability to fully accept it. This inability is situated somewhere on the outer limits of consciousness, creating occasional rays of hope, similar to tropisms¹¹ of Nathalie Sarraute, that are immediately extinguished by consciousness. The audience understands that the woman is pleading and hoping, but does not hear it as consciousness interferes before the words are uttered. The tragedy does not lie in abandonment, about which the protagonist says that she has known that this day would come even-

11 This concept that was created at the beginning of the 20th century has been interpreted in different ways, for example, by André Gide. In her *L'ère du soupçon* (1956), Nathalie Sarraute (1987, 3) defines it as “Mouvements indéfinissables qui glissent très rapidement aux limites de la conscience ; ils sont à l’origine de nos gestes, de nos paroles, des sentiments que nous manifestons, que nous croyons éprouver et qu’il est possible de définir.” (In direct translation: the indeterminate moments that occur at the limits of our consciousness and initiate our gestures, words and feelings that we express and believe to be experiencing.)

tually, but the fact that some obscure corner of consciousness has failed to accept this knowledge. At some micro-level, forgetfulness appears at times, making the body and the brain work on some earlier default regime, leading to the forgetting of the breakup in dreams and wakefulness and thus heartbreak is not created by the act of abandonment but by the remembering that follows the moment of forgetfulness. The audience is not just looking at a woman in the throes of love but a person who has lost her love for good and who is re-living the loss again and again. This is why the text mentions crying and tears repeatedly in the text, although Cocteau ruled them out in his stage remarks:

Cocteau directed Bovy to play it impassively, in order to emphasize her suffering by contrast. Having no stage partner but a Bakelite telephone receiver, the actress got to borrowing his intonations, as if internalizing the everyday heroism he had developed in his daily life. The tears he had rigorously forbidden her seemed to flow from inside her body, through the cord, to dampen the receiver – the only thing allowed to suffer. (Arnaud 2016, 501)

Almodóvar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* can be viewed as an analepsis of Cocteau's play or a prequel that shows the colourful events preceding the events described in the play: seeing the rival in a magazine, smoking, burning letters, suicide attempt. The events in the film end in the evening of the third day, the moment when the phone rings in the play. The emotional turmoil, as a result of which even the dog does not recognise its mistress, has ended by the time the curtain rises. "You cannot kill yourself twice," the protagonist says (VH 54). Hence Cocteau's instructions to the actress as the character has been reduced to a husk of a human, a person who has let everything out, accepted everything, surrendered, become jaded, except that something in her has not been able to do this. This something is love that does not yield to will, however steely, and that consciousness cannot fully control. Thus, at the end of the play, when there is nothing left to say, she seems to emit the busy signal (an anachronistic but accurate analogy) repeating *je t'aime* five times in a row.

It is the telephone that both symbolises the finality and irreversibility of the breakup and makes the protagonist conscious of it. "It felt that we were facing each other but all of a sudden there were basements and sewage system, all of the city, between us" (VH 57). But this separation is not only spatial: "At that time we saw each other. We could lose our minds, forget our promises, risk with the impossible, persuade our beloved by kissing him, by clinging to him. One glance could change everything. But this apparatus is finished" (VH 54). The designation of time – *dans le temps* ("at the time") – is interesting as it marks both spatial and temporal distance.

The telephone does not separate the characters only because they are in different places but because they are also in different times.

The theme of death is thus symmetrical. On the one hand, the character herself is symbolically dead, murdered by the man, rising for the brief period in which she is nourished by the call. On the other hand, her companion is dead (for her), his voice emanates from the past, constantly reminding her of the time before the breakup, while the phone itself incessantly reminds her of physical absence. Communication with the netherworld plays a central part in all of Cocteau's oeuvre, for example in *Orpheus*, written in 1926 and in the 1930 film *The Blood of a Poet*, to mention examples from his later work. Morbidity is stressed by the "basements and the sewage system" (*ibid*) that lie between the characters, as if the conversation took place underground.

The popularity of the play up to today is understandable. The text has a contemporary feel as it shows the relationship between the human (humanity) and technology that is topical to this day; it speaks about love and the pain of separation which, in its universality, permits easy identification with the protagonist; it enables great (female) role interpretations. Thus it is not surprising that this role has been played by stars like Ingrid Bergman or Simone Signoret. The text has often been interpreted in a psychological and realistic key. This is not impossible and we can find examples that try to recreate the other, missing part of the dialogue, in a realist mode (see Lorgnet 1983). Theatre history traditionally stresses the reserved intimacy of the text (Deshouilières 1989, 43) or generally regrets the under-appreciation of Cocteau's plays and stage versions in general, the reduction of his work to "dressing the characters of Sophocles into Chanel outfits" ("*habillait en Chanel les personnages de Sophocle*") (Jomaron 1992, 797). However, there are also more innovative recent productions that differ from this model. For example, the young Montréal director Stéphane Saint-Jean (Théâtre de la Névrose) brings the play on stage with nine actors, eight female voices and one male, consciously choosing an anti-psychological perspective (Le Devoir 2003).

Divergence from psychological theatre seems productive within this article for two reasons. The first is the biography of the author before the writing of the play and the second the use of the telephone as a magical element.

Already at the premiere of the play some of the audience realised that the protagonist is inspired by Cocteau himself, as Paul Éluard shouted "This is obscene, this is obscene. You are calling Desbordes" from the balcony ten minutes into the play.¹² After Éluard had been asked to leave, losing his hat and getting a cigarette

12 Both the description of this episode as well as other factual material about Cocteau's life is derived from Claude Arnaud thorough biography, *Jean Cocteau. A Life* (2016).

burn in the process, the play continued and ended with ovations. However, the scandal was not completely over as somebody (Robert Desnos) called to Cocteau's friends and acquaintances (including André Gide and Pablo Picasso) and told them that Cocteau had just killed himself in a bar. Projecting their desires from fantasy to reality does not leave the best impression of the surrealists, from Cocteau's perspective, but also testifies to their having understood the message of the play better than they wanted to admit.

Before explaining the identity of Desbordes, mentioned by Éluard, it is worth noting another possible addressee of the phone call, Raymond Radiguet. Cocteau met him in 1919, when Cocteau was 30 and Radiguet a 15-year-old precocious poet who lied that he was four years older, for his work to be taken more seriously. The extremely narcissistic and talented young man was admired by everybody but acted insolently in society. He was already an alcoholic and had many sexual liaisons, preferring older ladies, in addition to partners of his own age. Cocteau was especially chagrined by Radiguet's affair with man-eater Béatrice Hastings who was older than both Cocteau and Radiguet's mother¹³. Radiguet also consorted with older gentlemen but, it appears, out of vanity or because of his intellectual interests. They had a complicated relationship with Cocteau, in which the older man ended up being the more vulnerable partner who developed a strong and admiring attachment to the younger man, mixing intellectual and physical admiration.

When it is finally clear that there will be no reciprocal love, the results are rather dire:

When he came to understand that a person so important to him didn't love him, Cocteau began not loving himself. Worse, he soon convinced himself that people in general didn't love him – a change that marked the beginning of the end for the former wunderkind, who feared being an anomaly after his transformation. (Arnaud 2016, 300)

It is unclear how close the two were sexually, but at the time when Radiguet wrote two of his published novels they were in a very intense relationship for a year. In December 1920 Radiguet contracted typhoid fever and died. The following years were very hard for Cocteau, characterised by periods of opium use and withdrawal, as well as creative anguish.

¹³ To be more precise, five years older than Radiguet's mother and ten years older than Cocteau. It would be possible to speculate that the play can also be viewed as an act of revenge against these older women who Cocteau often had to compete with. However, this is not a focus of this article.

T A N E L L E P S O O

Things changed in 1925 when he received an admiring letter from a 19-year-old young man of literary ambition named Jean Desbordes. This relationship developed into Cocteau's first great love that was also reciprocated. It had taken him more than five years to get over Radiguet's death:

Radiguet's ghost, which had been maintained by a constellation of photos on the walls of the rue d'Anjou, was dispelled. "Memories of my room no longer gnaw at me," he wrote to Maurice Sachs, the first to hear of the end of this possession – which had not after all been diabolical but angelic. The dead no longer had a hold on him; he could breathe again among the living. (Arnaud 2016, 458)

The first emotions had waned a few years later and by the autumn of 1928 Cocteau understood that the younger man had become attached to an older woman, with the symbolic name of Geneviève Mater, whom Desbordes himself at times called *la Mater*, and who, in addition to being married to a Mr Mater also had a lover, a girl named Blanche. There is no need to spell out the similarities between Desbordes and Radiguet. Although sexual desire had waned and, as has been said above, this did not dominate in his relationship with Radiguet either, Cocteau needed somebody to adore unconditionally and to devote himself to and without whom he could not create.

However, Desbordes was less talented and more superficial than Radiguet and could not provide comparable intellectual tension. He tired of Cocteau's crises, scenes and constant apocalyptic moods and preferred to spend time in the cosier and merrier company of the Maters. Cocteau understood that the affair had ended and he again and forever lost his lover, but not in the form of a romantic drama this time but in that of a mediocre melodrama.

The first draft of *The Human Voice* grew out of the depression and opium of the autumn of 1928. The first complete version was written during rehab treatment and in March Cocteau was allowed out of the hospital briefly to attend the read-through in front of the creative committee of the Comédie-Française. Five years of being together that the protagonist mentions in the play are close to the time that had elapsed between Desbordes's letter and the premiere but it is also possible to see the text as a declaration of love for Radiguet, as much as to his paler and less worthy successor. Desbordes not only betrayed Cocteau's love (it was not a betrayal in the strict meaning of the word), but also Cocteau's memory of Radiguet.

One of the difficulties with interpreting this text lies here. The focus on the psychological state of the female protagonist draws the attention away from the fact that the performance does not focus on what we are seeing or hearing at the moment

but what we do not hear or see. The telephone possesses a dual power. On the one hand, it can bring something into the stage reality through a performative act (in this case, the voice of a man that the audience does not hear but that is not imaginary; the female character is not deranged but sane). On the other hand, it helps to create deictic confusion about the identity of the speaker – we do not know where he is, who he really is, is he dead or alive, is he lying and when. The protagonist's speech is not primary, but secondary to, illustrative of and mirroring the male voice. It is his voice that is primary (how could it be otherwise?) but we cannot hear it.

The autobiographical plane is not just an illustration here that explains where the author got his inspiration. We can also see Cocteau's intuition as a dramatist who was able to capture the operating mechanisms of the theatrical stage design. As demonstrated by Arnaud Rykner (1996, 317–18), already at the end of the 19th century we can see developments that challenge classical theatre: we are no longer witnessing the story of a speaking character but the story of a character who remains silent (for the audience); the speaker only illustrates the silent person. The telephone is one part of stage magic here. It is not simply a technical device of exchanging information but, like the theatre stage on which an actor acquires a new being, the telephone also brings a departed or deceived love and beloved back to the real world. However, this world will disappear when the performance ends and the author-protagonist is naturally aware of this from the beginning but staying in this moment gives both parties the opportunity to exist.

All of *The Human Voice* is an "I love you," Cocteau's passion performative that is addressed to Radiguet, to Debordes or to both of them or to neither of them. However, as Derrida argues, a performative speech act may also work when the addressee, the addresser or even both are dead.

Staging *The Human Voice* at the beginning of the 21st century is a serious challenge. If the staging is to remain true to the author and the period, the result might not speak to today's audiences. Thus, it is understandable that directors wish to speak about love and separation from the perspective of today's society and today's women. It was impossible for Cocteau to represent love between men on stage without raising questions of gender (this is complex to this day) and the woman character is thus a conventional figure, for the same reason that Proust represents Albertine as a woman, not a man. Today's audience is not paying attention to the fact that the text is dedicated to a rather emancipated woman (this would indeed be impossible if the staging is brought to today): she is unmarried (or a widow), has for five years lived with a man whom she had not married or had children and is well off. Even if it is not quite fair to accuse Cocteau of reproducing patriarchal stereotypes, as some critics have done (Pulver 2020), this does not mean that the text would not

TANEL LEPSOO

have this effect if it is mechanically transposed to today. Thus it is not surprising that Almodóvar has decided to replace the loving and submissive woman with a loving but resisting woman who hangs up first, saying “I have to learn to hang up on you, darling. Good bye.”

However, the film has an even more interesting element than making the protagonist believable in today’s world: its avoidance of psychological realism. Already the opening shots of the film show not just a luxurious (and rather tasteless) apartment but also reveal the film shoot behind the decorations between which the character walks from time to time. The audience also understands from the text that the protagonist is a successful actress. This can be seen in the acting of Tilda Swinton whose gestures and facial expressions are at times theatrical. We do not know whether she is actually experiencing these feelings or is rehearsing for a role. Almodóvar thus moves the focus from Cocteau’s theme of love and death to the theme of love and theatre (play, pretence, lies). Depending on the camera angle, the audience is at times immersed in the illusion of reality but is regularly yanked out of it. Similarly to Cocteau’s character who at times forgets that the man has left her, the audience discovers that they, too, have temporarily lost the sense of reality.

At the end of the film the protagonist pours lighter fluid all over everything and sets fire to it. This gesture seems final in its destructiveness, but this, too, is putative. The writer burns her manuscript, the director sets fire to the set, the person in love burns letters and photos. The work of art, however, has been created and love does not vanish. Probably because of this we see the arrival of fire-fighters, as similarly to the difficulty of letting go of love, Almodóvar leaves the artistic suicide incomplete. (“I knew the number of pills to not die,” the protagonist says.) This, too, is theatre: the actress cannot kill theatricality inside her and truth cannot be separated from lies in love, as Proust demonstrated.

Conclusion

In *The Postcard* Derrida carefully reads the analysis of the future by a Mr Bréguou, principal investigator of the postal services, that predicts the disappearance of paper-based communications (with the exception of private correspondence), until “the day will come that, thanks to the ‘telepost,’ the fundamentals will be transmitted by wire starting from the user’s computer going to the receiving organs of the computer of the post office nearest the residence of the addressee” (Derrida 1987, 105), Derrida sighs, watching with increasing curiosity how the high-ranking official carelessly and in self-satisfaction rejoices at the end of private postal service (embodied by the delivery of a sealed envelope) and the mingling of private and official communications in a unified and omni-present system or a collective envelope,

as Derrida calls it. This situation where a message addressed to someone will be accessible to third parties, including psychoanalysts and the police (that is, institutions of analysis and discipline), fills Derrida with “terror” as it means the end of literature. He muses: “I don’t know what terrifies me the most, the monstrosity of the perspective or on the contrary its ancestral antiquity, the very normality of the thing.” (Derrida 1987, 107)

The end of literature is not, of course, the end of fiction, writing, novels, drama or poetry, even less the end of the art of writing. It is the end of the kind of literature that developed in Western Europe after Gutenberg and found its symbolic absolute at the end of the 19th century. This literature is based on a clear distinction between the self and the other, the intimate and the public, to the extent that this distinction can be manipulated with, like in Choderlos de Laclos’ *Dangerous Liaisons*. Derrida, together with Mr Brégou, is witnessing the arrival of the Internet. He is not terrified by the fact that paper letters will move into an electronic format (today we know that an e-mail is no less secure than a paper letter) but that telecommunications will deconstruct the sender and the receiver. What was true about the postcard has become a norm now when we post something into that collective envelope, for example Facebook or Twitter and address our post to everybody and become the addressees for everybody. This changes the relationship between the external and internal, public and private. This marks for Derrida the end of literature and other grand institutions like the nation state or psychoanalysis or, in softer terms, the need to re-conceptualise them.

As the past decades have shown, messages circulating on social media do not just move around in vain but may be addressed to those not addressed initially. They act as passion performatives, creating all kinds of negative affects like anger and fear, among other things because it is easy to offend when there is no addressee, but it is impossible to declare love without an addressee. But let us hope that when Socrates calls Freud, he will say something nice (and that the person overhearing the conversation will not be offended).

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TANEL LEPSOO

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Performatiiv ja kirk: lugedes Cocteau'd Prousti ja Derridaga

Tanel Lepsoo

Võtmesõnad: kireperformatiiv, telefon, armastus, surm, Jacques Derrida, Jean Cocteau

Lähtudes viisist, kuidas Jacques Derrida mõtestab performatiivsust, on J. Hillis Miller analüüsinud Marcel Prousti teose „Kaotatud aja otsing“ mõningaid võtmestseene, kus on olulisel kohal värske tehnoloogiline leiutus – telefon. Huvitaval kombel on see aparaat, mis möödunud sajandi 20. aastatel enam ei ole lihtsalt kurioosum, vaid juba leidnud oma koha igapäevases eluolus, seotud uuritavates episoodides kolme tegelasega, kes on jutustaja jaoks väga lähedased: vanaema, armastatud tütarlaps Albertine ning sõber Robert de Saint-Loup. Kõik kolm tegelast lahkuvad minategelase elust traagilisel moel, mistõttu näib telefonil olevat võime otseselt seostada ühelt poolt armastust ja teiselt poolt surma. Tuginedes kõneaktide teooriale, võib mõista, et telefon, mis toob kuuldavale kalli inimese hääle ja koos sellega ka tema enda isiku peaaegu füüsilisel kujul, annab ühtlasi teravalt märku selle isiku puudumisest. Vanaemaga vestlemisel, kus olulisel kohal on lisaks veel kõne võimaliku katkemise oht, tajub jutustaja väga selgelt tema kohalolu, kuid samas ka eemalolekut, mida tõlgendab läheneva surma ettekuulutusena. Vanaema surm ongi Prousti teoses üks olulisemaid sündmusi.

Uurides lähemalt telefoni kui rekvisiidi kasutamist möödunud sajandi alguse teatrilaval, võib märkata, et nii mitmedki autorid on soovinnud ära kasutada selle performatiivset loomust. Ehkki vaataja ei kuule seda, mida teiselt poolt räägitakse, toob telefon sellegipoolest lavale veel ühe tegelase, kes on ühelt poolt küll nähtamatu, kuid teiselt poolt reaalselt olemas. Selline ambivalentne roll on loomulikult hästi mõjuv traagilise armastuse kontekstis, kus telefon toob igatsetud inimese küll kohale, kuid see kohalolu märgib ühtlasi tema eemalolekut.

Jean Cocteau on üks nendest autoritest, kes on telefoni, armastuse ja mahajäetuse teemat kajastanud oma tuntud mononäidendis „Inimese hääl“. Näidend kujutab ligi kolmveerandtunnist telefonikõnet, mida tegelane peab oma kallimaga, kes ta just äsja on hüljanud. Vaataja mõistab üsna pea, et olulisel kohal ei ole mitte see, mida täpsemini räägitakse, vaid asjaolu, et naise jaoks, kes on küll mõistnud suhte lõplikku ja pöördumatut läbisaamist, on see kõne viimane niit, mis teda armastatud mehega seob, ning et selle katkemist püüab ta iga hinna eest vältida. Teost on valdavalt tõlgendatud just naistegelase traagikana, mistõttu kerkib sageli küsimus naise eneseallutamises mehele ja see näib taastootvat tänapäevasele maailmale kohatuid stereotüüpe. Sellest tulenevalt püüavad mitmed lavastused teksti oletatavat patriarhaalset loomust kõigutada, andes naistegelasele jõulisema iseloomu.

Käesolevas artiklis kõrvutatakse seda näidendit episoodidega Prousti suurteosest, mis pärineb samast ajastust ja mida Cocteau ka hästi tundis. Nihutades fookuse mahajäetud naise teemalt telefoni performatiivsele funktsioonile, võib märkata, et ka selles tekstis avaldub jõuliselt surma-motiiv. Kõne katkemine põhjustab otseselt tegelase surma ning ka kujundlikus plaanis on kõne aadressaat teispoosuses, pärit eelmisest elust ja olles vaid viivuks üles äratatud tehnoloogia imelise väe abil. Ehkki peategelasena on siin kujutatud naist, siis vaadeldes lähemalt perioodi, mil autor teose lõi, võib mõista, et teosel on tugevad autobiograafilised jooned. Cocteau oli just äsja läbinud eluperioodi, mille depressiivsus ja enesehävituslikkus oli põhjustatud armastatud partneri surmast ning sellele järgnenud suhte purunemisest ja selles pettumisest. Kui mõelda laiemalt autori loomingule nii teatris kui ka filmikun-

S U M M A R Y

tis ning sellele, millist rolli mängib suhtlemine teistsugusega tema loomingus, siis võib väita, et nais-tegelases võib kahtlemata ära tunda autorit ennast, seda enam, et see asjaolu ei jäänud paljudele juba esietenduse ajal märkamatuks.

Teksti autobiograafilise loomuse ja telefoni performatiivsusega arvestamine avardab teksti tõlgendusvõimalusi ning toob selle välja naistegelase kitsast traagilisest probleemistikust. Mõistame, et lisaks armastusele ja selle purunemisele räägib Cocteau meile veel tehnoloogiast, mis loob inimeste vahele teistsuguseid suhteid ja mis on kahetise loomuga. Ühelt poolt võimaldab telefon – või näiteks internet, kui tuua arutlus tänapäeva – luua kontakti nendega, kes on kaugel eemal, kuid eriti juhul, kui tegu on armastatud inimesega, kaasneb sellega alati teadmine läheduse tegelikust puudumisest. Kuna armastus vajab füüsilist kontakti, siis on tehnoloogia põhjustatud afektiivne performatiivsus eriliselt tunnetatav ajutise, katkeva, ebatäiusliku ning peatselt lõppevana. Ehkki me teame, et armastus on ka väljaspool tehnoloogiat kaduv ning inimesed surelikud, toob tehnoloogia selle efemeersuse meile silme ette ning näitlikustab, et me elame maailmas, kus tihtilugu ei tea, kas meie vestluspartner reaalselt eksisteerib, kas ta asub, kas ta meid kuulab, kas ta meid usub ja kas meie võime teda uskuda. Nii Proust kui ka Cocteau näitavad meile, kuidas tehnoloogia muutumise tõttu maailm muutub, kuid ka seda, et tehnoloogia toob nähtavale inimloomuses midagi, mis on seal kogu aeg olnud, kuid mida seni pole osatud märgata.

Tanel Lepsoo on Tartu Ülikooli prantsuse kirjanduse kaasprofessor. Ta on omandanud magistrikraadi Pariisi III ülikoolis teatriteaduse ja etendus kunstide alal ning kaitsnud doktoriväitekirja Tartu Ülikoolis. Doktoritöös käsitles ta 1990. aastate prantsuse teatrit Bernard-Marie Koltèsi, Jean-Luc Lagarce'i jt loomingu kaudu. Oma teadustöös keskendub Lepsoo peamiselt kunstilise representatsiooni küsimustele, uurides, kuidas avalduvad teksti ja pildi vahelised suhted või kuidas autor kujutab iseend. Lisaks teatriteadusele on tema huviorbiidis 20. sajandi proosakirjandus, ennekõike prantsuse kirjandus kahe maailmasõja vahelisel perioodil. Ta on tegutsev ka tõlkijana ning vahendanud nii ilukirjandust (Kundera, Sartre) kui ka teoreetilisi tekste (Barthes).

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The Artist is Absent: Non-Human Agency in the Situation of the Theatre

Richard Pettifer

Abstract: The application of non-human agency in theatre is approached through the tendency for anti-humanist works to reproduce misanthropic outcomes within posthumanist, ecofeminist, and transhumanist thought. Alternatives to human supremacy suggest a role for theatre in reconciling questions of agency. This paper proposes theatrical *presence* as an answer, and extends this into social and political spheres, leading to what is called *superhumanism* in this article as a new situation of theatrical spectatorship – in close reference to fandom in superhuman films.

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Keywords: posthumanism, ecology, agency, superhumanism, humanism, digital theatre

Surely there is no better way to feel human again than to stare into the all-knowing eyes of performance artist Marina Abramović? Continuing trends in contemporary theatre towards site-specificity, immersion, co-presence, embodiment, and an advanced version of what Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) called “postdramatic” find mirrors in the world of contemporary art, where the “social turn” (Bishop 2006) has sought to build new forms of collective engagement between artists and audiences. One culmination of the social turn is the often-discussed 2010 work from Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, which saw the performance artist sit across from individual attendees, and interact with them for an undefined length of time. On one level, the work simply undertakes a re-negotiation of the “complex relationship between artist and audience,”¹ and offers a platform for a heightened social situation. The entry of “The Artist,” however, marks a re-insertion of human intervention into the process of art creation and reception – as a singular, exceptional being. The title of the work, supplied by MoMa curator Klaus Biesenbach, announces this re-inscription of the artist into the work of art as specifically a “presence,” implying that the figure of the Artist has generally become otherwise absent from the system of art-making. The title’s proclamatory form – as though triumphantly heralding the entrance of a person of significance² – puts human beings and their authorship centre-stage.

1 See MoMa website for *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) – https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/.

2 An equally flamboyant announcement was used for activist, philanthropist, and boxing champion, Muhammad Ali: “The champ is here!”

What might this gesture say about the human today? Both artwork and title perform radically human-centred gestures, and in this, *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) is in contradiction with much recent writing criticising the Anthropocene. Such writing seeks to push back against human supremacy by looking to antihumanist theories or groupings – such as Actor-Network Theory, posthumanism, transhumanism, and non-human agency – as mechanisms to radically decentre the human from a position of supreme authorship of environment, narrative, and epistemology. (See Morgan 2016, 2) Of these, it is non-human agency – descended from Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law’s Actor-Network Theory (see for example Latour 1996) – that contains fundamental challenges to theatre’s explicitly humanist origins.³ Many contemporary works use the moment of Anthropocene to generate new feminisms, post-colonial positions, and ecological activisms, which strike directly at the heart of the patriarchal, Eurocentric practice of theatre. (Pettifer 2017) Nevertheless, these critiques contain their own pitfalls, specifically, a tendency to be appropriated by misanthropic causes which seek to accelerate the removal of a shared vision of humanity, and to ignore inevitable implication with – and re-creation of – the targeted humanism.⁴ Theatre practices reliant on these antihumanist critiques, such as those conceiving a digital or hybrid space, may be embroiled in similar misanthropies, as they attempt to assert agency for non-human subjects without ever zooming out to examine the potential consequences of this relatively specific frame.⁵

From the staged conflict between humanisms and anti-humanisms, and the meeting of non-human agency with theatrical presence, a new orientation may arise – one specific to theatre, and strategically positioned “over” an antihumanist-humanist binary. Rather than the radical humanist gesture re-asserting the human as a “source of authorship, identity, and experience” (Morgan 2016, 2), or Friedrich

3 There are many different theatres. Here theatre is an architectural space descended from Greek and other European sources, and hence intertwined with the Eurocentric historical development of humanism, also acting as a historical source of cultural hegemony.

4 This is what Morgan refers to as the “inescapability of Humanism,” for example, in relation to Derrida. See Morgan 2016, 36–38.

5 One example is performance leaving behind material realities of human struggle, and over-relying on digital technology as a tool to destabilise the human subject. Martin Luther King, quoted in Gilroy 2000 vividly describes this ethical distances with a metaphor of “zooming out” into space: “when we set a man on the moon, with an adequate telescope he will be able to see the slums on earth with their intensified congestion, decay, and turbulence. On what scale of values is this a program of progress?” (Gilroy 2000, 346). Ironically this sentiment is mirrored in *Also sprach Zarathustra*: “I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth (bleibt der Erde treu)* and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!” (Nietzsche [1883] 1883, 6).

Nietzsche's "overcoming of human limits," *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) might be read as transformational in that it elevates a situation of human relations itself, and emphasises the infinite possibilities within that situation. It is not the only place we might find such interactions. However, while theatre may actualise critiques of a humanist/antihumanist binary into physical, temporal, and architectural form, particular transcendent power may also be located in the recent explosion of contemporary audiences' interest in superhuman narratives (fandom). Contained in both the work of Abramović and these superhuman narratives is not a fantasy of becoming some super-being with special powers, but of (finally) becoming *ourselves*, as a super-application of humanist terms, via a specific type of togetherness; a simple, pragmatic fantasy of actual human-hood through social relations. *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) can be read therefore not as an endpoint, but an origin story: the first work of an elevation "up, up, and into" a new state of collective being: a *Superhumanism*, with ramifications for collective spectatorship and reception in the theatre.

This paper will act as unwieldy introduction to this *Superhumanism*. Beginning with an examination of the threat of misanthropy in contemporary anti-humanisms such as in Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013), these concerns will be extended into analyses of contemporary thinking around ecological crisis and non-human agency, finishing with an analysis of its implications for the theatre, and in particular considered alongside theatrical *presence*. Finally, the invented category of *Superhumanism* will be proposed as an answer to this predicament, drawing collective power from observations of fandom in various comic book and cinematic universes, and their potential as sites of reception where transcendent theatre situations can arise.

The Posthuman: from anti-humanism to inhumane

Among the eye-catching examples in Rosi Braidotti's extensive study *The Posthuman* is the atrocious Finnish school mass-murderer Pekka-Eric Auvinen⁶ and his T-shirt which reads "Humanity is Overrated." Braidotti's inclusion of this misanthropic example raises a provocative question that is never directly answered in *The Posthuman*⁷: to what extent does her own anti-humanism align with the mass-mur-

6 A white supremacist terrorist is reluctantly named here – discussion would otherwise not be possible. It is worth noting that among the mass-murderer's contrarian self-descriptors, he identifies as an "antihuman humanist," anti-social social Darwinist," and cites Nietzsche as an influence.

7 Braidotti (2013) mentions the mass-murderer's "hatred for humanity" (15) as a caveat to the critique of humanism, and also asks "how does the posthuman engender its own forms of inhumanity" (3) but generally avoids this entanglement, instead simply asserting that "philosophical anti-humanism must not be confused with cynical and nihilistic misanthropy" (6).

der's misanthropy? Is the speciesist self-hate and misanthropic reaction present in Auvinen's dogma,⁸ and cited as his motivation for murder, aligned in some way with the anti-humanisms of the poststructuralists, transhumanists, or posthumanists – not in any explicit objectives, but rather as a type of collateral damage from challenging the structures of power which locate the (white, male) human as the “individual source of authorship, identity, and experience” (Morgan 2016, 2)?

Clear rebuttal to this provocation exists in old conflicts between humanisms and anti-humanisms (see Morgan 2016, 7). To summarise: equating an opposition to humanism with misanthropy can only be done under an assumption that humanity is itself defined by, and inexorably shackled to, humanisms and their associated fallacies of white supremacy, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. An accusation of “anti-humanist misanthropy” is therefore tacitly reliant on what, for many anti-humanists, is precisely the target. The whole point is that humanism is itself misanthropic in its horrific double-standards: the outcome for Sartre is an “ideology of lies” (Sartre in Fanon 1963, 21), in the sense that, for Tony Davies, “it is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity” (Davies 1997, 141).⁹ Braidotti, in her “affirmative politics” (Braidotti 2013, 54), sees anti-humanism as not itself constitutive of an ideology, but rather a vehicle to some other “more relational,” inclusive, conception of the human subject (26). Her deconstruction of the Vitruvian Man – Braidotti's symbol of the (tainted) universal sovereign subject – is the dismantling of what some view as the Human, specific in its representation of the ideal form (male, presumably white, and located at the geometric apex of the mathematically-defined reality). Opposition to this definition of humanity, even if it is opposing a “straw man humanism”¹⁰ is not equivalent to the atrocity of the aforementioned mass-murderer. Martin Heidegger specifies in his *Letter on Humanism* that his own anti-humanism is strategic, and merely a response to an inadequacy in humanism: “this opposition (to humanism in *Being in Time*) does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of man (sic). Humanism is opposed because it does not set the humanitas of man high enough” (Heidegger [1946] 1977, 210). An accusation that anti-humanisms are implicitly misanthropic may therefore

8 Dogma which is nevertheless relatively common among hipster culture, which (ironically) asserts a type of giving up as a response to overwhelming social, political, and environmental crises.

9 See also, for example, Janicaud 2005, 7. “Even Stalinists and Nazis could be seen declaring themselves as humanists!”

10 This is a concern that Morgan (2016) sees in a lot of antihumanist argument (see 46).

fall into what Marcus Morgan (2016), citing Rose (1984), describes as, “the anti-humanist project [. . .] misunderstood as a destructive exercise in nihilism” (Morgan 2016, 7).

Nevertheless, we might speculate on an observable phenomenon: a specific burst of misanthropic arguments occurring simultaneously in both far-right ideologies and ecological struggle. The latter more and more frequently casts humanity as a “nuisance to nature”¹¹ which should be erased or curtailed in some way, and the former capitalises on those discourses to advance projects that are directly or indirectly genocidal, in anti-globalist rhetoric covering everything from hatred of immigrants, to advantageous negotiations that will reinforce dominance in trade relationships.¹² Whilst anti-humanists almost never specifically promote a devaluation of the human subject, it is easy to see how it can be appropriated as such, and deployed to the benefit of these “soft” atrocities.¹³

At stake in these discourses are opposition to those for whom the enlightenment humanist project defines humanity itself – those mass murderers, fascisms, and increasingly visible white supremacies, determination that lands are being swamped by immigrants, that the “white race” is evaporating, and so on. In targeting the illegitimacy of this propagandic universe, it is also necessary to view these interests as themselves very real, emerging threats, capable of latching on to convenient arguments and integrating them into an incoherent and circular reasoning, that can be influential without the need for evidence. In this, certain anti-humanisms can be seen to be inadequate in defending against their appropriation to an atrocious end. Anti-humanisms may not even further an agenda in dismantling humanisms: as Morgan (2016) states in the ultimate backhanded compliment, challenges to humanism (transhumanism, posthumanism, other anti-humanisms) may function “not as providing a successive sequence of nails in humanism’s coffin, but rather as useful, critical and provocative conversation partners that have in fact helped determine humanism’s evolving forms” (Morgan 2016, 12). Humanism has a built-in reflexivity and agility that not only incorporates opposition into its own hegemony, but actively

11 This is especially prevalent in arguments over population control, but also in shareable misanthropic social media content – of dolphins reclaiming Venice during the COVID-19 pandemic, or various forms of “ecocide revenge porn” designed to create a certain pleasure in the erasure of humans through a celebration of nature.

12 Possibly the best example of this is Nazi Germany’s environmentalism under the “Blood and Soil” slogan – see Gilroy (2000). However, more contemporary examples include the “Green Wing” of the Greek neo-fascist Golden Dawn party.

13 It is notable that, despite an absence of detectable misanthropy, Gilroy nevertheless pays attention to the potential proximity of Planetary Humanism to misanthropy. See Morgan 2016, 114–15.

RICHARD PETTIFER

thrives and even depends on it. More radical positions that do not drift into misanthropy may be called for to advance the project of overthrowing historical conceptions of the human subject.

Within these contexts it is worth considering in what ways positions against humanism may manifest in ideologies that appear to constitute their polar opposites, and vice versa. One might read a post-colonial humanist like Frantz Fanon or Steve Biko and sense an awareness of precisely this contradiction, and a conclusion that concrete revolutionary resistance to the atrocious historical outcomes of humanisms may be best formed, not by absolute opposition to it, but by a strategic entanglement with the tools harnessed in the name of that violence – or an insistence on the (super-)application of humanism's stated principles. Where Kenan Malik cites that historically "Western radicals" – poststructuralist anti-humanists – "were often shocked by the extent to which anti-colonial struggles adopted what the radicals conceived of as tainted (humanist) ideas" (Malik 1996, 240), we might equally critique contemporary performance studies' fixation on embodiment, co-presence, and non-human performance as actually removing itself from the entanglements of certain struggles, for which humanism is actually synonymous with certain types of resistance. Fanon is often quoted pointing out that humanist principles were seldom actually applied in colonially-invaded lands: "The action of European men has not carried out the mission that fell to them, and which consisted on bringing their whole weight violently to bear upon these elements, of modifying their arrangement and their nature, of changing them and finally of bringing the problem of mankind (sic) to an infinitely higher plane" (Fanon 1963, 314). Although the outcome of these double standards was – and continues to be – atrocious, today these double standards are also identifiable in particular manifestations and extensions of antihumanist arguments, in as much as their stated aim differs from the outcomes of their pragmatic application. We might ask what a productive entanglement here – one that critiques anthropocentric hegemonies while equally concerning itself with atrocity and material conditions of human life – might look like.

Ecological crisis, non-human agency, and ecofascist outcomes

Although *The Posthuman's* only substantial mention of Actor-Network Theory ('ANT') – a precursor to non-human agency – relates to autonomous machines (Braidotti 2013, 45), ANT is also commonly applied in discussions of coming ecological crises. Specifically, ecofeminist arguments such as those offered by Jane Bennett, and (late) Donna Haraway adopt ANT's direction towards and "agency in things" – or what Braidotti describes as an "assemblage of human and non-human actors" (Braidotti 2013, 45) – to "level the playing field" and encourage what Bennett

describes as “encounters between ontologically diverse actants, some human, some not, though all thoroughly material” (Bennett 2010, xiv). This development of non-human agency extends ANT’s proposals, applying it as part of a diagnosis of humanity’s inability to conceive of, and respond to, present and emerging phenomena such as climate change, ecocide, and the entrance into this period of extreme human influence on the world, dubbed Anthropocene.

In writing on ecological crisis, an adoption of ANT often takes the form of critiques of anthropocentric outcomes, whereby non-human agents threaten the central position of human agents, giving rise to alternative conceptions of environment in which the barriers between human and non-human are dissolved. To the extent that ANT involves a reduction of human subject and non-human object onto the same plane of existence, its application within ecological crisis allows, as Haraway puts it, speculation on a kind of “making kin” (Haraway 2016) between the human and non-human. Relatedly, ANT’s re-conception of action as moving beyond being “limited a priori to what ‘intentional’, ‘meaningful’ humans do” (Latour 2005, 71) is extended and accelerated into the realm of ecological crisis by Timothy Morton in his conception of the “hyperobject” – objects that exist not on an equal plane as humans, but instead are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton 2013, 1). Morton’s hyperobjects aren’t mere equals, but “directly responsible for [. . .] the end of the world” (2) in the sense that, for Morton, they threaten the human conception of time and space, acting outside these boundaries. As a result, the “world” no longer functions as a meaningful signifier: “We have no world because the objects that functioned as invisible scenery have dissolved” (104). Hyperobjects are super-massive ideological constructs that are “rendering both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete” (2), as well as, arguably, humans themselves. ANT’s original investment in object agency is here accelerated into a vast scale, so that the hyperobject serves to define an entire metaphysics, and functions as a metaphor for human self-erasure through the over-intervention in nature.¹⁴

A related but distinct co-option of ANT has been enacted by a certain strand of ecofeminism, looking to build an ecologically-grounded assault on the (white, male) anthropocentric subject of patriarchal capitalism. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway describes a state of human and non-human agents definitionally “becom[ing] with each other” (4) via transdisciplinary exchange, denoting “an emerging “New New Synthesis” – an extended synthesis – in transdisciplinary

14 Other conceptions of time and space to the one Morton uses may not be as threatened by his concept of hyper-objects.

R I C H A R D P E T T I F E R

biologies and arts” that “proposes string figures tying together human and nonhuman ecologies, evolution, development, history, affects, performances, technologies, and more” (63). Here the theorist follows Jane Bennett, who in her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter* elaborates on a horizontal relationship between the human and non-human, stating that “to experience the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility” (10). Braidotti (not explicitly ecofeminist) expresses this same sentiment in her explanation of the possible new perspectives that posthumanism may open in academia:

In the age of anthropocene, the phenomenon known as ‘geo-morphism’ is usually expressed in negative terms, as environmental crisis, climate change and ecological sustainability. Yet, there is also a more positive dimension to it in the sense of reconfiguring the relationship to our complex habitat, which we used to call ‘nature’. The earth or planetary dimension of the environmental issue is indeed not a concern like any other. It is rather the issue that is immanent to all others, in so far as the earth is our middle and common ground. [Braidotti 2013, 81]

For all three theorists, the focus is a dismantling of human supremacy, a power structure explicitly or implicitly containing white supremacies, patriarchies, and colonial geopolitical systems of state power. Science for these theorists plays the role of authorising the assault on the human subject from the outside, offering evidence of dehumanisation and de-universalisation,¹⁵ and leading logically to its replacement with something like a global commons. This double-movement blurs the concept of human before offering a preferred, reconfigured (inclusive) and fact-based model.

While supporting the project of generating alternatives to oppressive epistemologies, we might ask concrete questions of this process and its outcomes – particularly in their willingness to reconceive the human. Is it possible, for example, to ask the same questions regarding potential misanthropies – levelled earlier at anti-humanisms – of this de-centring described above? Returning to the example of the Finnish mass-murderer, what role does atrocity play in the arena of ecological studies that addresses non-human agency, and fashions from it an argument against “human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption?”

15 The ends of Nazism and ecofeminism are undoubtedly different. However, as ecological crisis advances, the time is approaching where ecofascist proposals may well begin to hold a certain attraction, as the choices become increasingly taken between bad options. These questions may be generalised outside of the authors selected here, who are chosen because of their proximity to ANT and adoption of non-human agency.

[Bennett 2010, ix]. Can certain iterations of non-human agency not ironically serve the opposite to its stated function – facilitating eco-fascism in its severe under-rating of human presence in the world, with the effect of (deeply ironically) dismissing the ethical burden of human intervention in nature? Dehumanisation being the first step to fascism¹⁶ – isn't Bennett's reconsideration of our selves as a "vibrant matter" (xix) articulating a well-trodden slope to atrocity, invoking a dehumanisation with a sunnier appearance?¹⁷ Is the power in Morton's hyperobjects not contained in its manifestation as an all-powerful superstructure, one that renders all human life subservient to its metaphysical demands? Maybe not – but what, then, is the difference, and what if the endpoint would anyway be the same? How might we act to re-insert the human onto the stage of objects in some way, while also acknowledging the premise of de-centralising the impulse towards dominance and supremacy as a necessary step towards respecting that which exists outside the control of humans?

Jaeger's theatrical presence and its technological extensions

The developments of non-human agency in ecofeminism and hyperobjects outlined above have many mirrors in performance studies today, via the use of the stage to destabilise human supremacy, and to strive for human-object equivalence as a means to re-think anthropocentrism through performance. In part, this is a logical consequence of cross-disciplinary fertilisation between ecological studies, sociology, and the arts – which results in a type of de-centred strand of theatre, one that can be seen as a counter to theatre's humanist foundation. These discussions centre on the contested term *presence*, and its capacity to be shaped by the use of technology in the stage. This is further complicated in works more directly deploying non-human agents, where artists might, for example, perform Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* with real seagulls, seek to use robot actors, or incorporate digital technologies to question the authenticity of the stage image, thereby re-distributing "presence" to non-human subjects. Such examples may constitute what Suzanne M.

16 For example, Hannah Arendt describes Eichmann's disqualification of himself as human as occurring alongside his stated need to eradicate humanity. See Arendt (1963) 2006.

17 Although I posit this as new, we might also return here, for example, to ecological protectionist strands of Nazism, and its apparent compatibility with genocide, *Lebensraum*, and totalitarianism (Gilroy 2000, 39), and ask at what point the struggle to protect environment becomes an ecofascist one, and even if, at some point, despite its obvious misgivings, this might be the only justifiable pathway. Rather than fear such questions, I propose them as a critical necessary for discourses around environmental activism, not only to avoid trading one atrocity for another, but to develop comprehensive responses to deepening ecological crises that are capable of concretely addressing real-world scenarios.

RICHARD PETTIFER

Jaeger proposes are a “rejection of theatrical presence by postmodern performance artists who integrate contemporary technologies of mass communication within live performances” (Jaeger 2008, 124), while also, in their own way, questioning the human role in shaping reality. Presence in the theatre, then, contributes to conversations around non-human agency as something of an intruder.

Jaeger’s discussion of presence in performance (124), frames it in phenomenological terms; i.e., through the perception of both actor and audience. Jaeger’s interpretation incorporates poststructuralist linguistic authors to argue in favour of performance-as-text, where “the subjectivity of the performer becomes a zero point in the production of meaning through gestured and other physical signifiers” (128). The drive to textuality renders elements of the stage equivalent to each other and interacting on the same plane (in surface resemblance to non-human agency) so that presence is “the appearance of something real, here and now; the appearance of a self, an acting, physical body in the world, engaged reciprocally with other real bodies or other real features of the world” (128). Like non-human agency, presence might therefore create a textual equivalency that blunts potential intervention outside the stage: “all of these ideas that relate to notions of stage presence and openness to the real world seem, from a semiotic perspective, impossible to philosophically defend” (128). Jaeger cites Philip Auslander in claiming that this linguistic breaking-down of performance elements into *text* is inexorably linked to their commodification, a process she refers to as a “commodification of presence” (130), and it is easy to see how, slightly extending this argument, technology can act as a primary vehicle of this movement towards textuality on the stage.

Yet presence in the theatre, Jaeger notes, is also something quite other than the sum of its parts, with the main interrupting factor being the “importance of the body” (132) – and it is here that the challenge to non-human agency is most stark. Jaeger cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenology of bodily being-in-the-world” and the “bodily powers of perception” (131) as the key site of differentiation between the theatre and other text. Within non-human agency’s “flattening out” (Morgan 2016, 40) effect, however, the body becomes yet another object in space, potentially invested with agency, although no more so than other actants. Furthermore, phenomenological perception will only ever situate the viewing experience as reproducing human authorship of the world, on account of its inherent primacy of human perspective. In the face of this kind of evidence, Jaeger’s assertion that “artificial environments require new ways of using the body, and a reconfiguration of the unity of a bodily schema that ties the person to the environment” (Jaeger 2008, 137) seems inadequate: what would be required is an entirely different format of perception which attempts a holistic (bodily) one-ness with the other – something like a

stage version of Haraway's "becom(ing) with." The dividing boundary between self and the world would become erased, and the human basis for perception fragmented, and only exceptional to the extent that it exists in harmony and dialogue with the perspectives of co-spectators – in other words, a type of collective spectatorship.

From Jaeger's analysis of theatrical presence, it is easy to understand why non-human agency is attractive to theatre artists – it offers some reconciliation of the dissonance which arises from attempting to simultaneously de-centre and re-centre the human experience through performance. This apparent problem is resolved for Jaeger in theatre's key differentiating feature – the body – not co-incidentally, the same conclusion reached by many activists and artists looking to destabilise hegemonic structures using the stage. Such works participate in a selective investment of bodies with agency and visibility, whilst denying it to others, usually as an act of resistance against dominant cultural tendency.¹⁸ What are the ethical implications of this selective investment? In the theatre, the result can easily become an affirmation and negation of the human in accordance with certain strategic political ends – the accusation of misanthropy is neatly avoided by the selective investment in humanity where it is politically expedient, and as a counter-measure to violence (i.e. precisely against misanthropy, which is seen here as the targeting of people based on class, race, gender, or other category). Although Jaeger (2008, 126) briefly touches on ramifications of the centralisation of presence outside phenomenology when mentioning in passing the "death of the subject," the ethical implications of undertaking simultaneously a de- and re-centralisation of the human subject on stage are in sociological terms largely avoided. Who gets to be present? On what criteria are subjects to be permitted or refused visibility, agency, and stage power? What happens when these assertions, perhaps equally deserving, conflict with each other? These uncomfortable questions are where choices must be made, understanding that the breaking of categories always creates new categories – and that interacting with such a system of spectatorship to both refute and re-create it contains inherent contradictions.

Similar contradictions persist when the collective political dimensions of theatre spectatorship, such as those explored by Hans-Thies Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre*, are examined in relation to non-human agency. For Latour, the social "re-assemblage" is a final project of ANT, whereas Lehmann's postdramatic theatre has "the trivial and banal, the simplicity of an encounter, a look or a shared situation"

18 Such a position is, for example, present in Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, which is itself reliant on Foucault's proposal of the body as a key site of discipline and punishment. See Mbembe 2019.

RICHARD PETTIFER

(Latour 2006, 181) as its social endpoint. Where ANT's deconstructive approach to ontology necessitates its (healing) re-assembly (see Latour 2005, 247–50), Lehmann's approach is deeply involved in the ambiguities of shared presence and the effect of this on the dramatisation (and commodification) of everyday life: "what is at stake is also the fate of the errors of the dramatic imagination" (Latour 2006, 181). Lehmann specifically targets an observed de-investment in meaningful drama: "drama is increasingly becoming the core of a more or less banal mass entertainment where it is flattened into mere 'action', while it is simultaneously disappearing from the more complex forms of innovative theatre" (Lehmann 2006, 182). In Lehmann's terms, the outcome of non-human agency in the theatre would be a type of hollow performative totality of the (immersive) spectacle, and, as Lehmann puts it in relation to the world outside the theatre, "the 'theatricalisation' of all areas of social life" (183), in other words: a world full of theatre, and without drama. A liberating negation of the human is unleashed by non-human agency on stage, offering a re-inscription of human subjectivity through an erasure of its dramatic (human) elements, and simultaneously, the comforting emptiness of non-human equivalence. What is left to re-affirm the human subject? Presumably, the undeniable presence of the supreme authorial being – the artist themselves. So, surrounded by non-human actors on an otherwise empty stage, bereft of drama, the Artist asserts their power as the last – and only remaining – affirmation of the human subject: the *present* being, through which the world is to be read.

Returning to Abramović, is *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) not an attempt to re-insert, then, the *dramatic* into this situation – without reverting to human authorship of the environment, and instead through a heightened situation of social negotiation? Though non-human agency and its eco-critical and ecofeminist appropriations of Actor-Network Theory both find friends in contemporary theatre, the assertion/denial of human and other agencies – in audience, performer, or some hybrid *other* figure – is, just as in ecological crisis, not necessarily a clear pathway to any kind of resolution of the complications of human supremacy. The varying applications of non-human agency in the theatre gives rise to a question: to what end? If the *levelling out* of human and non-human on the stage results in a spectator's re-affirmation as a centre of meaning-making, then this is nothing particularly new. If, on the other hand, the human is placed in both supreme positions as primary intervener with nature *and* fundamentally at the mercy of limitations over which the only means of intervention is collective – a negotiation takes place which may supersede the humanist/antihumanist binary and the misanthropic traps of both projects. No longer equipped with the tools to reshape our environment, nor predisposed to (give up) supreme control to the elements, the ethical foundation and scope of our

interventions themselves are placed under consideration as part of an act of transcendence, performed together with the actor, within the elevated, fantastic architecture of the theatre. This, I claim, is the *superhumanist happening* – a type of spectatorship deeply involved in the collective overcoming of human limits, where the fallacious trap of human supremacy and its cleansing outcomes (both human (genocide) and a type of non-human (ecocide)) are circumvented or leapt over. In theatre, the flattening out of drama is traded for a high-risk investment in a shared idea of human inside a temporary aesthetic situation, in which spectatorship pins its entire existence on the negotiated presence of each other. The final section will propose that circumvention, in the form of what I will refer to as *Superhumanism* – a floating vehicle for re-conceiving the human, embedded in new human-led modes of spectatorship that gestures towards a collective struggle embodied in everyday mass-culture symbolism of the superhuman.

Superhumanism: an over-view

First let me state clearly what this mock term *Superhumanism* is not. This is not the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche and its positioning of the human being as “something that must be overcome” (Nietzsche [1883] 2006, 5), nor the project of Dominique Janicaud’s “superhuman overcoming” (Jacineau 2005, 56). Instead, Superhumanism follows Paul Gilroy (2000) in the development of his “Planetary Humanism”: a transcendent collective response to the atrocious deployment and outcomes of certain historical humanisms (and, as I have argued, anti-humanisms). Superhumanism’s central accusation, one that comes directly from the popularity of superhuman narratives, particularly in cinema, is that humanisms and anti-humanisms are not fantastic enough.¹⁹ This accusation stems from observations of Fanon that the humanist project was never actually applied – that its entire purpose was to be ideal in theory and atrocious in application – together with the perceived drift of certain anti-humanisms (especially within ecological crisis) toward an alternative misanthropy. The aspirations of humanism, shackled by the *übermenschlich* objective of overcoming human limits, are not nearly high enough, their modest principles applied only in a context of individual aspiration – what the transhumanist Nick Bostrom, in his reading of the *Übermensch*, calls “soaring personal growth and cultural

19 One possible exception to this is the Afrofuturism described in chapter 4 of *Necropolitics* (Mbembe 2019). For example, his assertion that “the Afrofuturist current declares that the category of humanism is now obsolete” (164) is not incompatible with Gilroy’s “planetary entanglement.” Another possibility is the xenofeminism of the *Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Laboria Cuboniks 2015) which adopts an attitude of transcending the humanist-antihumanist binary while retaining humanist undertones.

refinement in exceptional individuals” (Bostrom 2005, 361). The aspirations of the specific anti-humanisms mentioned here are too easily read, in their project of decentring human perspectives and challenging human supremacy, as devaluing the human in their challenge to this fundamental humanist project.

Superhumanism is grounded in our collective reception of and attraction to superhumans, as manifested in culture. The inadequacies and inherent inconsistencies of humanisms are recognised as under-valuing of the human, and in this sense, the “super” in superhuman does not denote a depiction of what the human could be, but rather what it actually *is* – as fantasy. Superhumanism therefore posits, in contradiction with the mass-murderer from Finland, that *humans are fantastic*.²⁰ Contemporary humanisms, in as much as they are deployed in defence of rights anywhere from incel groups’ asserted right to sex, to the border control corporation Frontex, are inadequate to encapsulate the aspirations of today, defending a set of rights that are themselves supremacist delusions. The appropriation of humanisms by various post-colonial and feminist perspectives are acknowledged, as are the goals of anti-humanisms in undermining human will for dominance over the environment. From these critiques and appropriations, we may spring into a futuristic set of engagements that have *the theatre situation* as their primary site for negotiating and articulating new togethernesses.

Superhumanist Anti-Hollywood

What is our fatal attraction to the so-called Marvel Cinematic and DC Comics Universes? Why this unstoppable gravitational pull toward what is surely just a morbid commercial recycling of the same content? Isn’t it that, as the film director Martin Scorsese spat out recently, superhuman films “aren’t cinema” where “nothing is at risk” (Scorsese 2020)? On one level, the superhumans of Hollywood draw out age-old criticisms of a Hollywood conveyor belt, devoid of new ideas, simply regurgitating profit-based content. Yet on the level of reception, as Will Brooker (2002) suggests, it would be a stupid act to rob these films of affording access to a special type of agency, one which floods through a variety of cultural production. Although remaining significantly under-researched, fandom – as well as being now an explicitly commodified practice – is simultaneously a site of fluidity in identifica-

20 This is close to what Bennett (2010) refers to this in a pejorative manner as an “aporetic and quixotic endeavour” that she warns is “too often bound up with fantasies of uniqueness in the eyes of God, or of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature.” Nevertheless, the claim is not occupied specifically with “the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends” (ix), and rather with a state of being together that resists human self-hate, a type of exceptionalism irremovable from collectivity.

tion, wish-fulfilment, and hope for overcoming bleak circumstances through the innate power of the (super-) subject.²¹ Not only do these films turn a profit out of wish-fulfilment, even if they are narratively banal variations (or perhaps because of this), they also point to an existing lack, which is filled by the films “transcendental power” (Brooker 2002, 4). As Jacques Rancière states: “what human beings contemplate in the spectacle is the activity they have been robbed of; it is their own essence become alien, turned against them, organising a collective world whose reality is that dispossession” (Rancière 2009, 7).

The work of Will Brooker on Star Wars fandom *Using the Force* (2002) documents a fan spectatorship that is inherently theatrical, and contains a separation of the commodity of the superhuman film from its *Superhumanist* reception. Chapter 2, titled *Viewing Star Wars Together*, documents the researcher’s visit and participation in a collective viewing of *The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner et al. 1981), and in particular, the interactions of the “participatory community commenting on and interacting with the film” (Brooker 2002, 29). Brooker documents the spectators’ relentless flow of exchange with the film, offering “sarcastic commentary,” “quoting lines,” performing “rituals of dressing up or drinking,” and “acting out scenes” (35). As Brooker notes, there is a kind of playful seriousness about these interactions, which are characterised by their competitiveness and precision – he quotes Jeff, a grocery manager from Ohio, as enjoying to perform the choking sound Jabba the Hut makes as he dies in *Return of the Jedi* (Marquand et al. 1983), and his brother’s preference for quoting Stormtrooper dialogue such as “look sir, droids!”, or mimicking the swoosh of the lightsabre. It is easy to dismiss these performances as naïve interactions with text (51–54). Yet, at the end of the chapter, Brooker remarks on a specific bond formed with one viewer/participant: “once it was established that I had a similar [. . .] level of expertise and enthusiasm for the saga, we immediately had a vast bank of shrewd references to draw upon” (61–62). Furthermore, Brooker notes the transgressive potential of the shared viewing experience, and that “for one hundred and twenty minutes (of viewing), the hierarchies were so fully dissolved and replaced with new ones” (62).²² Is it not possible that these exchanges, especially when undertaken in relation to superhuman texts, become not only a collapse of

21 Although this type of wish-fulfilment is notably different today than that described by Umberto Eco in relation to Superman, who “embody(ies) to an unthinkable degree the power demands that the average citizen nurtures but cannot satisfy,” it nevertheless retains the feature of emerging out of an identifiable need (Eco 1979, 107).

22 One example of the link between fandom spectatorship and theatre is the similarity between a concept such as this from Brooker and Augusto Boal’s conception of the “spect-actor,” where theatre is a space for the spectator’s intervention, and in which the structures of power can be renegotiated through spectatorship (Boal 1974).

RICHARD PETTIFER

hierarchies, but the creation of a referential universe that attempts to escape a cataclysmic ecological condition on earth – i.e. the same gesture as Haraway’s “becoming-with”? Can re-authorship from fans be seen as an attempt to re-inscribe the human into the experience of spectatorship – through the creation of a kind of pop-up theatre of “active participants in a shared world” (Rancière 2009, 11)? Can this not be a collective overcoming of human limits, *up, up, and into* a fantasy space, where we might finally meet the ethical demands of being human, and at the same time imagine these not as limitations, but overcomings unto themselves?

Up, up, and into!

From the collision of reception studies, phenomenology, fandom, sociology, and ecofeminism, a new performative philosophical gesture arises. This gesture comes from an identified need for a new conception of spectatorship that identifies a state of being “beyond” the human, a collective transcendence *into* a field of human exchange, material interaction, and interconnectedness. The “over-under” of the *Übermensch* is reloaded as an “up, up, and into” a set of conditions similar to those identified by Gilroy’s Planetary Humanism, and Heidegger’s being-in-the-world or *Dasein*. To this extent, the superhuman is not exceptional individuals achieving what for us mere mortals is impossible. To fans, it is a concrete and repeating reminder of their locked-outness from conceiving the world, from the perpetual movement of philosophy up, up and out of reach. Trapped within an increasingly apocalyptic scenario of material living, the fan plays with a particular contradiction: an inability to re-author their circumstances, and a fantasy of meaningful (collective) intervention in them. The superhumans of Marvel and DC universes are manifestations of a concrete and bodily fantasy: to intervene, at the level of governance, on those conditions that create circumstances of this inhumanity without end. Superhumanism is thus not a suspension of disbelief, but a suspension of spectators themselves into beings beyond belief.

The first Superman could not fly. He was earth-bound, with the exception of his powerful leap. Superhumanism, both in a conceptual and pragmatic sense, lives as a collective aspiration that unleashes its deep, fantastic intervention with material circumstance and the limit of earthly existence. Figures like former Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton, or Kanye West re-naming himself “Ye” become only agents of a collective elevation of the human above the realms of struggle and suffering. While on the level of enlightenment humanism, an article like *Everything Black Folks do is Excellent* (Smith 2016) is impossible to argue, within a superhumanist frame it is the only possible logic, as it concerns humans subject and their collective overcoming – not of themselves (as in Nietzsche), but of the circumstances that ground and control everyday human relations. The superhuman is not an individual

exception, but a fantasy of exceptional collectivity, and an immunisation against prevailing cynicism – a place where our dreams are kept safe from the relentless pillaging and deception of contemporary media, ironically within plain sight of its most advanced systems of cultural mass production.

And yet, cinema itself – with its commodification of text and intertext, and control of consumption obscured behind the emotion of storytelling (Meehan 1991, 61) – is far from the ideal site for collective transcendence. This phenomenon of media interaction, re-authorship, and participation is inherently contradictory within the platform of blockbuster cinema, as it involves giant mechanisms of media commodification, which have become professional at pretending to be on the same level as the fans. When Janicaud observes in sports that “the sole horizon of ‘overcoming’ is the fanatical gain of some tenths of a second in a race, where young sportsmen and women are ready to undergo dangerous (and illegal) courses of treatment in order to dominate in competitions and where, despite this, a champion will be all but worshipped as a superman?” (Janicaud 2005, 49), he overlooks here the potential function of sport as a mass entertainment and participatory spectacle unto itself, where viewers engage in a universe of fantastic narratives and reclaim them from their systems of production. Cam Newton is here as superhuman as Marshawn Lynch: one dancing in the end zone, the other answering an entire pre-super bowl press conference of questions with “I’m just here so I don’t get fined (by the NFL)”.²³ These gestures point to the creation of a resistant, transcendent collective state, away from the proposed escapes of consumerism that serves to define the frame in which the humans-turned-phenomena exist. Agents themselves can know their role in this constellation, and occasionally point to the subversion of their own deployment as “soaring” and “exceptional” within it: is Usain Bolt’s famous “To di world” pose – where he gently leans back and points to the sky with two fingers – not a gentle mockery of Buzz Lightyear’s delusional “To infinity and beyond!” from *Toy Story* (Lasseter et al. 1995)? One points to the world and its conditions, the other gestures at the limitless possibilities of precisely its evacuation.²⁴

It is not my intention to participate naively here in what Gilroy, citing the example of Michael Jordan in *Space Jam* (Pytko et al. 1993), calls “the celebrated sequence of superhuman black physicality,” which has its own white supremacist overtones in commercialisation and promotion of “precisely those forms of solidarity that Nazi

23 This occurred during a press conference prior to Super Bowl XLIX, in which Lynch, one of the NFL’s star running backs at the time, answered in this way to excessive questions from reporters.

24 This is probably not intentional. Bolt’s pose reportedly comes from the Jamaican Dancehall dance culture.

RICHARD PETTIFER

emblems first sought to impose on a disorderly world” (Gilroy 2000, 348). Superhumanism is not located in any superior physical body, nor any other superiority. Instead there is a discernible pattern around collective spectatorship, in particular those examples attempting to refuse or supersede Eurocentric and inherently racist and/or patriarchal lines of thought, and which offer the most active and potentially transformative situations. Such discourses may strike directly – more directly than the cited anti-humanisms – at the earlier identified Eurocentrism and patriarchy inherent to the theatre itself: its forms deeply embedded in lines of thought and performance that are intertwined with the humanist project. Performance existing elsewhere, and the creation of pop-up theatres around certain situations of spectatorship – particularly in relation to fan performance and interaction around superhuman texts – offer glimpses into what is possible in terms of collective transcendence through spectatorship. Far from marginalised, then, these are the theatres that should be central to any radical transformational discourse – creating, almost incidentally, the chance to free the stage from some specific legacies: of the historical development of humanism, and the under-rating of the human in certain anti-humanist discourses.

Conclusion: towards superhumanist theatre situations

Whilst Abramović can be seen to create a space for the re-negotiation of the human through presence, Brooker’s *Star Wars* spectatorship is the creation of a meta-theatre outside of the permitted spectator experience: it rejects the inherent inaccessibility of theatre by creating its own accessible one – complete with its own textual language built out of the given fan universe, and its own defined *presence* of an audience augmented by their intervention. Fandom points to an absence in theatre, which is re-cast as an improvised architecture, a forum theatre that can spring up anywhere – including, but not only, in the cinema. This theatre is the arena in which the *Super* can be performed and negotiated through the interaction of various present actors (performer and spectator), and their elevation “up, up, and into” a state of radical exchange and togetherness. Yet Superhumanism enacts what the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) achieves only in simulation: where participation in the MCU will always (for profit reasons) be a not-quite fulfilling invitation – the space between involvement and exclusion being where profit is made – the theatre created outside the immersive *universe* is authentically superhumanistic, in the sense that the act of transcendence is achieved necessarily together, as the collected group of individual beings that constitute an audience.

This mobile, flexible *theatre situation* identifies and facilitates a specific kind of community-formation. Whilst Lehmann (2006, 186) cites Bertolt Brecht as picturing

a role for theatre as “elevating feelings to a higher level,” this is not an elevation of emotion per se, but a collective sense of imagined being outside of the limitations of material conditions. Likewise, where for Lehmann the goal may be to connect the spectator with the spectacle by “mak(ing) visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception” (186), the superhumanist theatre situation observes the resistant components of fan response to superhuman texts, and proposes them as a potential site of communal negotiation and collective imagining. In this sense, it is not a case of the “words and images, stories and performance, can change something of the world we live in” (Rancière 2009, 23), but examining the formation of this sense of collectivity, and the nature of the fantasy that fosters it. Constructing that fantasy of change happens through the malleable and intangible bonds of shared human experience – what for Rancière is “the third thing that is owned by no one, but which subsists between them” (15).

What is the artist’s role in the facilitation of this *super*? Taking the lead from Abramović, the first step appears on the surface to be a kind of stripping back of the artwork, a minimalist focus on social relations. And yet, Abramović’s work – a highly visible work among a sea of less visible examples – is loaded with content that becomes visible when all else is removed: the nature, site, and platform of negotiation, herself as an identity and history, the specific spectator and their own experience, mood, feeling, atmosphere, and so on. This elevation, then, is partly a zooming in on the details of human relations and collective authorship – though it is the Artist who is announced in *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010), the work is equally contingent on the unstated presence of another person – as a partner to its formation as a site of discourse, and the co-sculptor of a fantastic reality. In announcing this super-inscription of the human into its aesthetic universe, *The Artist is Present* (Abramović 2010) is a beginning – a suggestion, rather than an endpoint. As new digital forms of togetherness are explored by theatre artists, these new formations of being together lend themselves to potential new fantastic states of collective being, constituting a significant new mode of perception that collaboratively discover new agencies, over and into mutual experience, co-reliance, and collective elevation. Superhumanism is not grounded in hope for escape from the crises of the Anthropocene, but instead in our mutual obligation, that facilitates this collective movement “up, up, and into” a situation of active imagining together: of just what it would be like to be human again.

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S U M M A R Y

Puuduv kunstnik: mitte-inimese agentsus teatri kontekstis

Richard Pettifer

Võttesõnad: posthumanism, ökoloogia, agentsus, superhumanism, humanism, digitaalne teater

Mitte-inimese agentsus on teoreetiline suund, mida rakendatakse nii tänapäevastes ökoloogilist kriisi käsitlevates kirjutistes kui ka posthumanistlikes tehnoloogilistes spekulatsioonides, uurides „mitte-inimeste“ võimalikku agentsust. Üha enam kasutatakse seda ka mehhanismina, leidmaks võimalusi „eemaldada“ inimene ajaloolise narratiivi keskmest, et vabaneda kalduvusest pidada inimest ülimuslikuks (eelistades inimese subjektsust teiste olendite omale) kujunevas antropotseenis, ajastul, mil inimesi peetakse planeedi peamisteks mõjutajateks. Viimasel ajal on mitte-inimese agentsus jõudnud teatrisse selliste kontseptsioonide kaudu nagu kaaskohalolu ja sotsiaalse kaasamise praktika. Kuid millised on selle anti-humanistliku positsiooni tagajärjed, kui see aktiveerub püsivalt humanistlikus teatris?

Misantroopne korrapäratus Rosi Braidotti raamatus „Inimjärgne“ („Posthuman“) toimib hüppelauana uueks aruteluks igivanal teemal, kas humanismi kriitikud vihkavad inimesi. Selliseid misantroopseid tendentse analüüsivad oma uutes ökoloogilist kriisi käsitlevates kirjutistes näiteks Jane Bennett, Donna Haraway ja Timothy Morton, kes võivad alternatiivseid reaalsuse kujutlemise mudeleid otsides eirata potentsiaalselt kohutavaid tulemusi. Nendest pingetest Inimese selektiivse ülistamise ja eitamise vahel kerkib esile oluline küsimus: kuidas seda inimlikku perspektiivi uuesti kaaluda, säilitades samal ajal need väärtuslikud inimlikud sidemed – mida Paul Gilroy (2000) nimetab „seltsivuseks“ – ühiskondlikus ja poliitilises elus?

Teatri uut rolli inimsubjekti ümbermõtestamisel puudutavad arutelud kohalolu üle teatris. Suzanne M. Jaegeri esinejakeskset artiklit „Kehastus ja kohalolu“ („Embodiment and Presence“ 2008) kasutatakse käesolevas artiklis lavale omase kehalise kohalolu tutvustamiseks ning seda fenomenoloogilist lähene-mist vaadeldakse koos Hans-Thies Lehmanni postdramaatilise teatriga („Postdramatisches Theater“) kui vahendit, mis võimaldab laienemist sotsiaalsetesse ja poliitilistesse sfääridesse, võttes arvesse ka publiku kohalolekut. Küsimärgistatakse kunstniku enesepresentatsiooni ülima autorikujuna läbi jaatamise ja eitamise protsessi.

Kohalolu ümbermõtestamine sünnitab uue teatriolukorra vormi, nn superhumanismi, mis tähistab koosvaatamist, mis väldib humanismi ajalooliselt koloniaalseid pretensioone ja antihumanismi võimalikku misantroopiat. Arutletakse uue „koosvaatamise“ viisi üle, analüüsides Hollywoodi superkangelastele pühendatud filmide fännidest vaatajaskonda. Neis filmides võib tekst toetada teatud kollektiivse vaatamise viise ning olla mõttevahetuse ja vaatajatepoolse tegevuse aluseks. Selline vaatenurk pakub uusi võimalusi ka teatritele. Superhumanism, mille juured on mustanahalisust ja Paul Gilroy „planetaarset humanismi“ puudutavates diskursustes, pakub välja uued vaatamisviisid, mis soovivad koostöös publikuga korraga nii kahtluse alla seada kui ka taaskehtestada inimagentsuse, kuid seda muudetud kujul. Nietzsche kuulus „inimlike piiride ületamine“ teoses „Nõnda kõneles Zarathustra“ on uuesti sõnastatud kui inimlike piiride kollektiivse ületamise akt ühise vaatamise kaudu.

Üks tuntud kohalolu lahkav kunstiteos on Marina Abramovići „Kunstnik on kohal“ („The Artist is Present“). Selle kunstiteose juurde naastakse (taas), kuna see on esimene näide praegu tekkivast koosole-mise vormist teatris, mis loob uue „super-kollektiivse“ olemise seisundi. Kunstiteos juhib sellele olukor-

S U M M A R Y

rale tähelepanu, kirjutades humanistlikud põhimõtted ümber etendussündmuseks, täites nii Frantz Fanoni optimistlikke soove, et humanism peab oma lubadustest kinni pidama pragmaatiliselt ja silmakirjatsemata. See kunstiteos pakub selget fantaasiat kollektiivsest sekkumisest situatsioonis, kus etendaja ja vaataja kohalolu on teineteisest sõltuvad, ning on seega eelkäija uuele kollektiivsele vaatamisviisile, mida nimetatakse superhumanismiks.

Richard Pettifer – Berliinis elav Austraalia lavastaja, teatrikriitik ja kirjanik. Alates 2013. aastast on ta hallanud kriitilist platvormi *Theaterstuck*, mis sisaldab tema kriitilisi kirjutisi Berliini ja Euroopa teatri kohta. Tema töö puudutab ökoloogilist kriisi ja teatritehnoloogiat, meie kriitikavaba suhtumist globaalsestesse rühmussüsteemidesse ning sotsiaalsete muutuste võimalusi teatris ja kunstis.

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

Madli Pesti

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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Keywords: performing arts, performative space, audience interactivity, installation space in theatre, social space

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

M A D L I P E S T I

– 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.

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).

M A D L I P E S T I

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

M A D L I P E S T I

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”

M A D L I P E S T I

(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/>

M A D L I P E S T I

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 etenduskunstis

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-geomeetrilisest 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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The Condition of Instability: Performative Turn and Contemporary Lithuanian Theatre

Jurgita Staniškytė

Abstract: The article discusses the new strategies of representation that emerged in contemporary Lithuanian theatre under the influence of socio-cultural transformations that can be attributed to the umbrella notion of “performative turn.” With the help of three case studies, the article investigates how certain codes of “aesthetics of performativity” as described by Erika Fischer-Lichte are circulating in contemporary Lithuanian theatre, what processes and agencies facilitate their emergence, and what possibilities as well as challenges for performative practices they entail.

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Keywords: disability in theatre, documentary theatre, experience-based theatre, embodied life-stories, Lithuanian theatre, performative turn, performativity, participatory performance

A major issue that the analysis of the aesthetic development of Lithuanian theatre of recent decades needs to address is the definition of the transforming principles of representation and their relation to the developments in contemporary socio-cultural landscapes as well as theatre cultures in Europe. The futuristic narratives of the impact of “digital turn” on the ontological, aesthetic and institutional character of theatre art dominate the most recent debates about the condition of (post-)pandemic Lithuanian theatre. Having that in mind, the question whether contemporary Lithuanian theatre is radically transforming, or on the contrary reproducing and continuing the established forms of artistic language and entrenched models of interpretations of reality, is becoming even more pressing.

Undoubtedly, the transformations of Lithuanian theatre of the last decades – whether named performative, post-postmodern, post-dramatic or participatory – are most visible in the reconfiguration of the main structural elements of scenic practice: image, text, body and space. This shift, in turn, is connected to and can be best articulated with the shifting notions of representation and perception in contemporary cultural and critical theory. The article discusses the new strategies of representation that emerged in contemporary Lithuanian theatre under the influence of socio-cultural transformations that can be attributed to the umbrella notion of “performative turn.” With the help of three case studies (the immersive performance *Republic* by Polish theatre director Lukasz Twarkowsky, the documentary production by Jonas Tertelis *The Green Meadow* and the performance *Superpowers*

by theatre director Karolina Žernytė (Theatre of Senses) the article investigates how certain codes of “aesthetics of performativity” as described by Erika Fischer-Lichte are circulating in contemporary Lithuanian theatre, what processes and agencies facilitate their emergence and what possibilities as well as challenges for performative practices they entail.

From anti-theatrical sentiment to performative turn

“Performative turn” can be generally described as paradigmatic transdisciplinary shift where performance as a form of knowledge making is confronted with representational forms of knowledge. Tantamount to a tectonic shift in the humanities and social sciences, performative turn encompasses various theoretical aspects and is developed, argued or critiqued by many scholars. In her seminal article “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity meets Theatricality” Janelle Reinelt (2001) summarises the usage of three terms – performance, performative and performativity – at the same time highlighting their interconnectivity as well as delineating their cumulative effect on the rise of performative turn.

The first term, “performance,” according to Reinelt (2002, 2021), is linked with what came to be known as “anti-theatrical sentiment” embedded in practices of modern avant-garde theatre as well as performance art. Emphasizing “singularity of live performance, its immediacy and its non-repeatability” (Reinelt 2002, 201) avant-garde theatre and performance artists revolted against referentiality, logocentrism, inauthenticity and the authoritarian nature of traditional theatre practices. According to Reinelt, “This understanding of performance leads to valuing the processes of signification in performance, and to radical scepticism about the presence or truth of any metaphysical claim within performance” (Reinelt 2002, 202).

The meaning of another notion – “performative” – is related to the field of performance studies that initially emerged as a cross-disciplinary approach towards various performative aspects of culture. Firstly, this approach encompasses anthropological objects of analyses – cultural performances, such as rituals, carnivals, sports, games, etc. that together with theatre and performance art form a plateau of performative cultural forms. Secondly, various aspects of the post-industrial society of spectacle, such as social roles, political stagings, theatres of history, communication dramas, the theatricalization of everyday life, position performance as a model for various forms of social interaction. The famous distinction proposed by Richard Schechner between what “is” performance and looking at something “as” performance, means that “any behaviour, event, action, or thing can be studied “as” performance and can be analyzed in terms of doing, behaving and showing” (Schechner 2002, 32). This all-encompassing notion of “as performance”

expands the field of “performative” almost infinitely. As Philip Auslander pointedly remarks, performance in the context of performance studies functions as a “paradigmatic starting point,” which “can function as a lens through which to examine almost anything” (Auslander 2008, 2–3).

The third important influence, or, so to say, the third elephant on the back of which the universe of performative turn is foregrounded, is the poststructuralist notion of “performativity.” The works of J. L. Austin, John R. Searle and their critique by Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler together with poststructuralist and postmodern critique of the notion of representation (sign, meaning, object/subject) developed further the idea of “performativity” as a constant deferral of meaning, the constructed nature of all kinds of knowledge, and radical autonomy of representation. The notions of performativity of gender, race, identity, law, knowledge had an unquestionable impact on performance theory and practice. According to Reinelt, the response was isolation of “performative processes in order to subject them to a de-representation and a close scrutiny for lingering traces of the theological stage – the text-dominated, logocentric stage of European theatre and culture” (Reinelt 2002, 205). In this sense, performativity is connected to postmodern theory and postmodern theatre aesthetics.

While pointing towards intrinsic similarities between performance and the postmodern, Nick Kaye observes that “perhaps performance may be thought of as a primarily postmodern mode,” for “the condition of ‘performance’ may be read, in itself, as tending to foster or look forward to postmodern contingencies and instabilities” (Kaye 1994, 22–23). Indeed, postmodernism in theatre can be defined as a shift from hierarchic relationships to heterogeneity of textual, visual, aural elements. Postmodern performance is self-reflective, it deconstructs its own foundations and acknowledges the discursive nature of the actor’s body, perceiving subject and representation, thus disclosing their embedded performativity as “a constant state of flux or transformation that is unstable and difficult to repeat” (Salter 2010, 27).

In conclusion, the performative turn initiated by modernist impulses of historical avant-garde performances and performance art practices transferred into postmodern territory via cultural studies and post-structuralist theories and at present occupies the discursive area of post-postmodern realities. Present academic debates about “performative” encompass science and technology studies (STS), arguing for an antirepresentational stance in various areas of scientific or even non-human activities. According to Chris Salter, “what performance as method/worldview suggests is that there is not a reality pregiven before one’s experience but rather that the world is enacted or actively performed anew” (Salter 2010, 26). As authors of *Performing the Digital: Performance Studies and Performances in*

Digital Cultures argue “human bodies and technological apparatuses enter into a relation of performativity, therefore ‘performative turn’ in digital cultures urgently needs to be analysed and conceptualised” (Leeker, Schipper and Beyes 2017, 11).

It is obvious that in the situation, then, “performative turn not only highlights performance as artistic practice, but theatre as a model for various social, scientific, human and non-human acts of post-industrial society,” the question about its impact on contemporary theatre practice and aesthetic transformation becomes extremely important (Salter 2010, 21). In other words, when every aspect of human and non-human behaviour can be understood as performance, how does theatre art react and respond to this condition of heightened performativity.

In her seminal book *Transformative Power of Performance: a New Aesthetics*, Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that it is of the utmost importance to bring the debates about “performative” back into the realm of arts, particularly theatre and performance art practice (Fischer-Lichte 2008). She observes that the key aspect of performative turn in art, music, literature, or theatre can be described as “the transformation from a work of art into an event” (23). According to Fischer-Lichte, “Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus, the conditions for art production and reception changed in a crucial aspect” (22). In a recent contribution to the debate about performative theatre, Annamaria Cascetta similarly defines a list of major characteristics of performative theatre – non-hierarchical systems of representation, collective engagement of artist and community, author-actors, audience involvement, etc. – that can be summed up as a major shift in the modes of production and reception in theatre (Cascetta 2021).

Indeed, the question about transformation of production and perception processes in contemporary theatre as well as various forms of recalibration of its main elements (text, image, body, sound) and spectatorial practises lies at the heart of the most important debates in theatre studies, be it post-dramatic, postmodern or performative theatre. In the Lithuanian context these debates first came into the focus of theatre research and criticism almost two decades ago, when postmodern strategies of constructing meaning and perception became increasingly visible on the Lithuanian theatre stage.

At the end of the 20th century the performative in Lithuanian theatre discourse was understood as a binary part of the performative / logocentric dichotomy. The constancy of the text and the homogeneity of the audience that interprets were two central assumptions on which traditional literary theatre was based. The specific character of relations between the dramatic text and stage imagery, usually described as re-writing of drama text by performative tools, where literary text still

remains the primary source of meaning, became the trademark of Lithuanian stage directing.

There were several attempts at building a performative theatre in Lithuania even before the 21st century: Benas Šarka's Gliukai theatre and the Miracle theatre of Vega Vaičiūnaitė. In the context of Lithuanian theatre practice, the productions by Šarka and Miracle have opened up new possibilities for the existence of body and place independent of the dramatic text. Body and space (place) are two important elements of theatrical structure and fundamental factors that form a subjective identity. The creative activities of Šarka maintained performative and changing corporeality and the body as performance, while the projects by Vaičiūnaitė sustained the understanding of the place as a mobile and dynamic text, revived and made sensible through performative action (Staniškytė 2019, 99).

During the first decades of the 21st century, the changing relationship between text and image, word and action, meaning and effect, repetition and event-ness, acting and non-acting became more and more visible on the Lithuanian stage. These relations have gradually been turning non-hierarchical, their dominant patterns have often been shifting even within the framework of one performance towards a more image-centric or action-centric position. It is possible to state that the turn from logocentric to performative theatre had been gradually taking place on the Lithuanian theatre stage, particularly in productions of the young generation of theatre artists as well as within the framework of international collaborations.

Techo feedback loop: the (im)possible theatre of *Republic*

Republic – the first immersive and durational performance in Lithuania created by Polish theatre artist Łukasz Twarkowski and his team in 2020 for the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre – was described by its creators as a new performative experience of space and time. In the Lithuanian theatre milieu Twarkowski was already known for his production of *Lokis* (playwright Anka Herbut, 2017, LNDDT). In the Lithuanian theatre context, *Lokis* was exceptional due to its autonomous, self-contained, and detached visuality, fragmented narrative, choreographic ambience, non-acting techniques, heterogeneous structuring of theatrical elements and decentered modeling of the stage space.

De-hierarchisation of theatrical means in *Lokis* reduced the authority of logos, producing multidimensional narratives that proved to be quite difficult to grasp even for a Lithuanian audience that had been for a long time treated with allusiveness of metaphorical representations. Nevertheless, one of the many enthusiastic interpreters of this performance, playwright and theatre critic Dovilė Statkevičienė proclaimed in her review: "The main driver of this performance is not dramaturgy but rather

JURGITA STANIŠKYTĖ

aural and visual constructs, which constitute a flawless audiovisual architecture [. . .]. Finally, we can talk about theatre as ambience, as dynamics of stage structure, as scenic landscape” (Statkevičienė 2017). Even though in Lithuanian theatre criticism *Lokis* was interpreted mainly as a form of post-dramatic performance, many of its features come quite close to the definition of performative theatre.

The second production of Łukasz Twarkowski – *Republic* – came even closer to performative aesthetics. Twarkowski described his performance as a composition of shifting multidimensional narratives, which should be experienced sensually and subjectively by every audience member. To rephrase Fischer-Lichte, Twarkowski constructed open-structured environments as “conditions for the experiment” in order to explore the specific function, condition, and course of interaction between actors and audiences. Precisely “the feedback loop as a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process,” described by Fischer-Lichte as the main characteristics of performative aesthetics became the defining principle of Twarkowski’s *Republic* (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 39).

The initial thematic idea of *Republic* – the building of an alternative community that would exist beyond conventional social and economic structures, becomes the cornerstone for its infrastructural and formal model. In the hangar of Vilnius Film Cluster the production team erected multi-spatial constructions, modeled after the



Figure 1. *Republic* (2020, director Łukasz Twarkowski, LNNT). Photo by Andrej Vasilenko / LNNT.

house in the woods that the creative team inhabited during the initial stages of experiment while devising *Republic*. This installation became the situated mechanism, an engineered environment for community building rituals of performance. Audience members were able to freely roam the space with two view platforms, a small kitchen, solar lab-room, lounge, confession room, dance floor – stage, chill zone, small stage, sauna, shower, small waterfall, two bars. Each audience member received instructions and was warned several times not to try “running around trying to see everything.” Confronted with the notification that it is impossible to see everything that is happening in *Republic*, audience members could freely choose what they wanted to see, what stories to connect or disconnect from, and at what points in the six-hour performance they wish to remain spectators or to engage as participants – members of the emerging Republic.

Construction of a particular community in *Republic* is enabled not only by a specific space configuration that provokes multidirectional nomadism of the spectators; the creation of communality requires mutual acts and joint performances. According to Fischer-Lichte, “the creation of a community out of actors and spectators based on their bodily co-presence plays a key role in generating the feedback loop” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 51). In *Republic* the common cultural performance that integrates audiences and performers within theatre production is rave. In the beginning of *Republic* Twarkowsky addresses the audience with promise: “I hope we will dance together at some point.” The creators of performance offer synesthetic experience on the dancefloor to the audience members as a means of being together and sharing experience.

Indeed, the main trope of *Republic* is reconstruction, sharing or rather engineering of the experience. A group of actors, together with other creators of the performance, have spent several months living in the house in the woods while discussing various topical issues: climate change, basic income, political and social tensions in society and utopian visions of alternative communities for the future. They also organised rave parties and played DJ sets. In *Republic* they want to reconstruct that “primary” reality, at the same time self-reflectively raising questions about the (im)possibility of generating common experience in theatre.

One of the actors utters this question during the performance: if you want to reconstruct the situation of the “original group experiment,” how can you share the experience by the means of performance? Particularly if that experience is subjective and difficult to articulate. Can you build a model for generating experience, a machine that would re-construct situations and mediate stories, ideas, and feelings? And if theatre can be interpreted as such a machine, why it is not always working? *Republic* self-reflexively questions and tests the very basis at the heart of per-

formative aesthetics, it feeds on the tension between impossibility and urgency to reproduce and share the experience in theatre or, on the broader scale, the (im)possibility of representing reality.

Utopias are fragile and unstable, especially in the fragmented world of permanent crisis. Therefore *Republic* seems to suggest that utopias can be imagined and felt rather than narrated and rationalised – it is an event rather than a thing in itself, process, performance rather than fixed definition. This stance embedded in *Republic* confirms the notion expressed by Karen Barad, that “agency is a matter of intra-acting: it is an enactment, and not something that someone has” (Barad 2007, 235). Indeed, the agency in *Republic* is embedded in movement, in performance. *Republic* exhibits this anti-representational stance very boldly: actors and spectators move through space, fragmented narratives overlap, recorded and live images alternate on screens, selected fragments of reality are being reconstructed, techno loops overflow the space – there is no narrative to follow but rather the ambience of the event to immerse oneself in.

By subverting, fragmenting and (re)constructing the structural elements (bodies, spaces, text, image, sound) of performance, Twarkowski strives for active communication and aims to challenge traditional modes of perception by forcing the spectator to co-create the meaning of *Republic*. According to Fischer-Lichte, in performative aesthetics “what applies to the feedback loop’s autopoiesis in general also applies to the generation of meaning: everyone contributes to it and is influenced by it but no one controls it” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 154). The distinction between performance and reality in *Republic* is blurred, and any hierarchies of difference between original and copy, spatial and temporal co-ordinates, live presence and recorded versions, acting and non-acting are disrupted. The linearity of a given system of signification is disturbed, thus creating new dissonant patterns of meaning. “It thus becomes difficult to speak of producers and recipients. [. . .] Through their actions and behavior, the actors and spectators constitute elements of the feedback loop, which in turn generates the performance itself” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 50).

Indeed, the performative multiplicity of *Republic* offers spectators one of the major roles in the theatrical production. He or she no longer needs to decipher the visual subtext of the *mise-en-scène*, to synchronise it with the imaginary or real dramatic text or emphatically follow the psychological line of the character. Audience members can try to thrust a tangled body of the performance into a more or less comprehensible story or use the elements offered on stage to produce an experience of event, an agency of movement. You can repeat the structure of the situation and architectonics of space in *Republic*, but you will not be able to repeat the experience of its flow – it will be different every time for each spectator. *Republic*

is a performance-event, not so much concerned with authenticity as modern performance art events but rather with inter-active agency of performative. This liberation of multiplicity may consequently be interpreted as both a constructive process revealing positive aspects of cultural otherness and a destructive disruption of the totalitarian structures, including the totality of the artistic production itself.

Performing authenticity or taking control: embodied life stories and aesthetic mediation

Another important area of impact of performative aesthetics is acting, or relations between performer and role in theatre as well as in any performative situation. If performative turn can be defined as a shift from representational forms of knowledge to performative ones, questions of embodiment and presence come into focus in theatre arts, forcing us to rethink anew the relations between representation and presence, repetition and authenticity. If everything that we do can be interpreted as "restored behaviour" what should acting in theatre look like? If performative acts construct our bodies and identities, what constitutes the self onstage? Subsequently, do we really need a mediating presence of professional actors to tell someone's story, or can maybe only first-person narratives secure authentic experience in theatre? These questions connected to the notions of performativity come into focus in an emerging number of productions of contemporary Lithuanian theatre.

„Tired of acting? Come to theatre“ – that was the slogan of the Sirenos international theatre festival in 2014. Ironic as it is, this message indicated that contemporary theatre exists (or at least strives to become) an exceptional place of authenticity, where one can indeed experience reality or encounter the real, no longer available for us in the "society of spectacle," where an abundance of social roles, political staging, TV spectacles and language games disguises or even cancels reality as such. Sirenos' marketing message seems to suggest that in performative reality the only place of authentic experience can be found in theatre. At the same time, it perfectly embodied the notion of acting as something artificial, repetitive, hypocritical and indeed theatrical – the ideas embedded in modern performance art. The implications of this slogan point directly to the sphere of post-acting, when the reality effect becomes the central attraction of contemporary theatre and this passion for the real multiplies in various forms of participatory or engaging performance, documentary or site-specific theatre, experience-based or confessional performance. Furthermore, it unavoidably raises questions about the nature of relations between reality (person) and acting (character) in the context of contemporary theatre.

The fracturing of the links between character and actor were becoming increasingly visible already in modern Lithuanian theatre. The leaders of Lithuanian stage

directing (Eimuntas Nekrošius, Oskaras Koršunovas) all created their own individual methods of working with actors, departing one way or another from realistic psychological understanding of character. After the shift in the socio-political situation, the urge to transform the ways the actor exists onstage and communicates with a “new” audience increased. Theatre creators acknowledged the need for authentic communication: the fall of the Soviet regime was perceived as an end to hypocrisy and simulation; audiences in post-Soviet Lithuania were looking for the “real thing.” Furthermore, the young generation of actors who graduated from theatre schools in post-Soviet Lithuania was more eager to play with distances between their identity and role, more flexible and able to employ various acting techniques and styles, and more suited for “open texts,” fragmentary characters, post-dramatic theatre practices or non-acting techniques.

Furthermore, performative turn not only brought back the idea about acting as giving voice to a real and authentic self but also complicated the general notions of “real” and “authentic” in theatre. Performance of social roles such as conscious presentation or construction of self, the concept of a culturally conditioned body and identity as negotiation of subject positions contradicts the Stanislavskian acting tradition based on binary subject/object, urging Lithuanian theatre creators to look for different ways of embodying and communicating meanings.

One of the best examples of the new approach towards the relations between performance and reality are the examples of the so-called experience-based drama and embodied life-stories. A number of performances focusing on first-person narratives represented by non-actors emerged on Lithuanian theatre stage during the last five years. One of the first was production *The Green Meadow* (stage directors Jonas Tertelis and Kristina Werner (2017, LNDR) – a devised performance based on interview sessions and workshops conducted with present and former workers of Ignalina nuclear power plant as well as people connected with negotiations about its closure.

Mixing personal experiences, family stories with historical, political, and popular discourses, the narrative focuses on the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power plant and the consequences of this decision on the lives and identities of the residents of this mono-industrial community. These stories are retold and embodied onstage by the “real people” – local residents of Visaginas and Helene Ryding, an independent energy consultant from the UK, who was involved in the negotiation process between the EC and Lithuanian government (Staniškytė 2020, 69). *Green Meadow* is performed in three languages: Lithuanian, Russian, English, as each person speaks his/her native tongue. According to director Jonas Tertelis, the important task was to introduce the spectator to utterly real, non-acted persons

(Ribačiauskas 2018, 11). Indeed, embodied life stories and first-person narratives onstage invite spectators to experience a specific effect of reality, since appearance onstage of the very subjects of narrated life stories redoubles the urge for authentic presence embedded in the very nature of documentary theatre.

However, in the case of *The Green Meadow* stage authenticity, and the promise of an unmediated presence is treated uncritically and therefore encounters challenges similar to many attempts at “theatre of the real.” Firstly, even if theatre takes on confessional performance with its subjects addressing the audience directly, according to Carole-Ann Upton (2011), the very claim to authenticity on the basis of non-performer status in theatre is paradoxical. “By virtue of repeating a rehearsed series of actions onstage before different audiences, real people become real actors” (Upton 2011, 213). Indeed, the first-person narratives in *The Green Meadow* become something of a marketing strategy similar to that of *Sirenos*, implying the promise of “the real reality” at the same time as if declaring the replacement of “the creative interplay between the real and imagined with the evidentiary force of the empirical” (Upton 2011, 213). It seems that performance is based on the phantasy of transparent medium or rather a possibility to avoid mediatisation in order to overcome artificiality in the theatre.

However, even though collected during group sessions with local residents and based on their firsthand experience, the script of *The Green Meadow* went through the process of dramatisation, and the manner of theatrical framing influenced the effect of performance. The initial life stories of Visaginas residents were selected, edited and molded into linear script, following the romanticised model of the eternal human quest for progress and happiness, rather than disclosing the conflicts, power struggles and ideological complexities of the socio-political story behind the rise and fall of this Soviet industrial utopia.

The model of narrative construction as well as the presence of “real” people onstage in *The Green Meadow* requires affective rather than critical or dialogical engagement from the audience. According to the report by Mary Moynihan, it is much easier for spectators to challenge or critically engage with narratives uttered by characters rather than “real” people re-presenting their subjective experience onstage. A character “provides an opportunity for the audience or participants to challenge the words or actions of a character that they simply would or could not do with a ‘real’ person. In short, the character provides a safe space to challenge” (Moynihan 2008, 22).

Secondly, the very idea about unmediated presence falls right into the paradox at the heart of performance theory, which itself is based on the exploration of the limits of representability. If meaning is continuously fluid and demarcation lines

between former binaries (subject/object; re-presentation/presence) are constantly shifting, it is possible to think about authenticity in performance as a moment of conflict or tension between mediation and reality. According to Carol Martin, “Performance of the real can collapse the boundaries between the real and the fictional in ways that create confusion and disruption or lead to splendid unplanned harmonies in the service of the creation of meaning” (Martin 2013, 10). However, *The Green Meadow* fell right into the trap of the “myth of authenticity,” while choosing to dismiss self-reflexivity towards the processes of its creation. One way to avoid that “trap” would be “to openly treat autobiography as a process in which personal stories are ‘dressed’ in the specific *mise-en-scène*’s in order to retain ‘credibility,’ to demonstrate the process of construction of the conceptual self” or in other words to disclose the tensions between fiction and reality embedded in a performative situation (Staniškytė 2020, 70–71).

Undoubtedly, *The Green Meadow* did expand understanding of the possibilities of acting in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. However, an uncritical attitude towards first-person narratives onstage that portrays representations as neutral and devoid of any conflict dismissed the possibility of critical or political perception in theatre.

One of the possible positive outcomes of public re-enactment of one’s own personal stories can be described as specific social impact. In performance theory performance is often celebrated as a tool for socio-political activism that provides a possibility to narrate and embody stories of individuals and communities that were denied the voice or were misrepresented. In these instances, the right to speak for themselves without the mediating presence of professional actors can indeed be significant as a practice of taking control of one’s own narrative.

An example of first-person performance as a form of agency can be found in the production *Superpowers* (stage director Karolina Žernytė, Kaunas Chamber Theatre, Theatre of Senses, 2019). Three “women with superpowers” Aistė, Irma and Ernesta, with the help of various performative genres – storytelling, dance, pantomime, stand-up, film – tell the stories of their lives with disabilities. Deeply personal, infused with humour, addressing the audience directly, *Superpowers* talks about the social realities of being invisible in a society that denies certain groups opportunities for representation. At one point in the performance, Irma tells how she was denied admission to the professional acting programme because “the stage is not the place to see the invisibles.” Indeed, according to Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, in daily life “disability becomes one of the most radical forms of performance art, ‘invisible theatre’ at its extreme,” which attracts heightened attention in everyday life situations but lacks representations that would challenge not only



Figure 2. *Superpowers* (2019, director Karolina Žernytė, KCCT / Theatre of Senses).
Photo by Viktorija Lankauskaitė / KCCT.

stereotypical cultural scripts about disability but also aesthetic conventions in professional art (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 2).

According to Sandahl and Auslander, “the notion that disability is a kind of performance is to people with disabilities not a theoretical abstraction, but lived experience” (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 2). *Superpowers* self-reflectively touches upon the subject of always being on display but at the same time being invisible in a double coded manner: as a story line brought forward by Irma about always being watched as if metaphorically being onstage and as a formal *mise-en-scène* of being in the limelight. Similarly, artist Petra Kupperts notes that “the physically impaired performer has [. . .] to negotiate two areas of cultural meaning: invisibility as an active member in the public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorisation” (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 4). Being aware of the complexities of disability representation, *Superpowers* balances the thin lines between empathy and voyeurism, humour and seriousness, interactivity and distance, narrative and physicality, body and identity, always trying to embrace both and not treating them as binaries.

According to disability scholars, traditionally disability is understood as difference, as “something out of place” (Mitchell and Snyder 2000). Therefore, to locate one’s place onstage, to claim it as a space of conscious performance on your own terms signifies the reclaiming and realisation of agency. The need to take control of the forms of representation of disability and “to become an active maker of meaning rather than a passive specimen on display” is at the heart of the formal and narrative structure of *Superpowers* (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 3). Aistė, Irma and Ernesta are in very close proximity to the audience, they tell and embody their own stories that are not polished or thrust into closed narrative structures. Stories are fragmented and non-linear, there is no climax or stereotypically modelled ending, the stage directing is sensitive yet feels almost non-existent. At each point of the story performers ask the audience if they have any questions, they are eager to interact, constantly approaching audiences with the performative agency. The performance takes place in a climbing club, Sleeping Elephants, a place of physical activities and sporting enthusiasts, not stereotypically associated with disability. At the end of the performance, instead of narrative conclusions, three girls climb the climbing wall clearly enjoying themselves, while being cheered by audience members. Indeed, rejecting stereotypical scripts in order to share one’s own experience of disability enables “transformation of potentially stigmatizing experience into an act of empowerment” (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 3).

Superpowers was received quite moderately in Lithuanian theatre discourse. One of the few reviews, written by disability scholar Jonas Ruškus, underlines the importance of this performance as a conceptual shift in audience perception of peo-

ple with disability (Ruškus 2019). Indeed, *Superpowers* productively contributes to the transformation of the representations of disability, demonstrating its unstable and shifting meanings in different cultural contexts. It displays performative understanding of disability as a matter of transforming agencies as well as a matter of performative relations between identity and context. This shift in perspective indeed activates performative modes of knowledge rather than representational ones. According to Sandahl and Auslander, “to think of disability not as a physical condition but as a way of interacting with a world that is frequently inhospitable is to think of disability in performative terms – as something one *does* rather than something one *is*” (Sandahl and Auslander 2005, 10). In this sense, the embodied first-person narratives in *Superpowers* effectively activate the transformative power of performance.

Conclusions

New formations of meaning and *mise-en-scène* (visual dramaturgy; disassociation/deconstruction of theatrical elements; intertextuality) that emerged in contemporary Lithuanian theatre destabilised modern categories of production and perception. Although they can be interpreted as a characteristic of postmodern or post-dramatic aesthetics, they clearly fall under the definition of the performative turn. Their main features – open structure, fluid and multilayered circulation of meaning and perception as negotiation, exchange and co-creation – can be best understood in the framework of performative aesthetics.

Similarly, performative understanding of subjectivity and identity as an effect created within intersubjective exchange influenced the processes of acting and particularly the relation between actor and character in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. However, the resulting willingness to renounce the mediating presence of professional actors to tell someone’s story does not necessarily entail the post-representational understanding of the role and more often comes quite close to the practices of modern performing arts. Nevertheless, in some instances, as exemplified by the performance *Superpowers*, re-presenting one’s own life story onstage not only allows taking control of narrative and challenging stereotypical portrayals but also displays performative understanding of disability as a matter of transforming agencies.

At least two strategies can be observed in contemporary Lithuanian theatre as a response to the proliferation of performative acts and metaphors underlying the performative turn. First, the return to mimetic representation, or such artistic forms as documentary or verbatim theatre, can be interpreted as a desire to simply mirror onstage the theatricality of contemporary social realities at the same time

avoiding the artificiality and referentiality of traditional forms of theatre. As demonstrated by the example of the documentary performance *The Green Meadow*, by simply re-creating “authentic” reality theatre becomes its double, repeating and re-enacting performative aspects of human behaviour. However, such repetition rarely assumes a critical posture and quite often merely multiplies stereotypes and images of the “society of spectacle.”

Self-reflexive theatrical practices, in which performance as a model of contemporary reality construction is analysed on stage, turning performative metaphors into artistic realities, can be described as another way of analysing the effects of performative turn. In its best examples, such theatre can become the meeting ground between theatre and society, where by perceiving one (theatre), we understand the other (society). By deconstructing and de-mystifying the apparatuses of performance representation, by disclosing the (im)possibility of re-constructing experience, by giving power to perceptive multiplicity, such artistic strategies as seen in *Republic* strive to disrupt social conventions that govern everyday perceptions and behaviour.

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S U M M A R Y

Ebastabiilsuse seisund: performatiivne pööre ja Leedu nüüdisteater

Jurgita Staniškytė

Võttesõnad: puue teatris, dokumentaalteater, kogemuspõhine teater, kehastatud elulood, Leedu teater, performatiivne pööre, performatiivsus, osavõtuteater

Viimastel aastakümnetel Leedu teatris toimunud muutused – olgu need siis performatiivsed, post-post-modernsed, postdramaatilised või kaasavad – on kõige nähtavamad lavastuspraktika peamiste struktuuri-elementide: kujundi, teksti, keha ja ruumi kasutuses. See nihe on omakorda seotud ja kõige paremini põhjendatav representatsiooni ja taju tähendusvälja muutumise ja nüüdisaegses kultuuri- ja kriitilises teoorias. Artiklis käsitletakse uusi representatsioonistrateegiaid, mis tekkisid Leedu nüüdisteatris sotsiaalkultuuriliste muutuste mõjul ning mille võib koondada katsumõiste „performatiivne pööre“ alla. Võttes aluseks kolm juhtumiuuringut (Poola lavastaja Łukasz Twarkowsky immerstiivne lavastus „Vabariik“, Jonas Tertelise dokumentaallavastus „Roheline niit“ ja Karolina Žernytė lavastus „Supervõimed“), uuritakse artiklis, kuidas Erika Fischer-Lichte kirjeldatud „performatiivsuse esteetika“ teatud koodid levivad nüüdisteatris, millised protsessid ja agentsused soodustavad nende tekkimist ning milliseid võimalusi need loovad performatiivsetele praktikatele ja milliseid väljakutseid esitavad.

Leedu nüüdisteatris esile kerkinud uued tähenduse loomise ja lavastamise vormid (visuaalne dramaturgia, teatrielementide eraldamine/dekonstrueerimine, intertekstuaalsus) destabiliseerivad nüüdisaegseid lavastus- ja tajumiskatgoriaid. Kuigi neid võib tõlgendada postmodernistliku või postdramaatilise esteetika tunnustena, kuuluvad need selgelt performatiivse pöörde määratluse alla. Nende põhijooni – avatud struktuur, voolav ja mitmekihiline tähenduse ringlus ning taju kui läbirääkimine, vahetus ja ühislooming – saab kõige paremini mõista performatiivse esteetika raames.

Leedu nüüdisteatris võib täheldada vähemalt kahte strateegiat, mis on tekkinud vastusena performatiivse pöörde aluseks olevate performatiivsete tegevuste ja metafooride levikule. Esiteks, tagasipöördumist mimeetilise representatsiooni või selliste kunstivormide juurde nagu dokumentaal- või *verbatim*-teater võib tõlgendada soovina peegeldada laval tänapäeva ühiskondlike reaalsuste teatraalsust, vältides samal ajal traditsiooniliste teatrivormide kunstlikkust ja referentsiaalsust. Nagu näitas dokumentaallavastuse „Roheline niit“ analüüs, lihtsalt taastootes „autentset“ reaalsust, muutub teater enda teisikuks, korrates ja taasesitades inimkäitumise performatiivseid aspekte. Selline kordamine võtab aga harva kriitilise hoiaku ning sageli lihtsalt taastoodab „vaatemänguühiskonna“ stereotüüpe ja kujutlusi.

Eneserefleksiivseid teatripraktikaid, kus laval analüüsitakse etendust kui nüüdisaegse reaalsuskonstruksiooni mudelit ja muudetakse performatiivsed metafoorid kunstilisteks reaalsusteks, võib kirjeldada kui teist viisi performatiivse pöörde mõjude analüüsimiseks. Parimatel juhtudel võib selline teater saada teatri ja ühiskonna kohtumispaigaks, kus tajudes ühte (teatrit), mõistame teist (ühiskonda). Dekonstrueerides ja demüstifitseerides etenduse representatsiooni aparate, paljastades kogemuste taasloomise võimalikkuse (või võimatuse), andes võimu tajutava paljususele, püüavad sellised kunstilised strateegiad, nagu on näha „Vabariigis“, häirida sotsiaalseid konventsioone, mis reguleerivad igapäevaseid arusaamu ja käitumist.

Samamoodi on performatiivne arusaam subjektiivsusest ja identiteedist kui intersubjektiivse suhtluse käigus loodud efektist mõjutanud näitlemise protsesse ning eriti näitleja ja tegelase vahelisi suhteid.

Sellest tulenev valmisolek loobuda professionaalsete näitlejate vahendavast rollist kellegi loo jutustamisel ei tähenda aga tingimata postrepresentatsioonilist arusaama rollist. Üsna sageli sarnaneb see hoopis modernistliku etenduskunsti tavadega. Kuid mõnel juhul, näiteks lavastuses „Supervõimed“, võimaldab laval oma eluloo taasesitus lisaks narratiivi kontrollimisele ja stereotüüpsete kujutuste vaidlustamisele ka näidata performatiivset arusaama puudest kui ümberkujundavast agentsusest.

Jurgita Staniškytė – Vytautas Magnuse ülikooli (Kaunas, Leedu) kunstiteaduskonna dekaan ja teatriteaduse osakonna professor. Ta on avaldanud arvukalt teaduslikke ja kriitilisi artikleid Leedu nüüdisteatrist Balti etenduskunstides toimunud protsesside kontekstis, Leedu nõukogude-järgse kultuuri performatiivsetest aspektidest ning publiku uurimisest ja arendamisest. Staniškytė osaleb aktiivselt mitmetes teadus- ja kunstiorganisatsioonides ning rahvusvahelistes ja riiklikes uurimisprojektides. Ta on HERA (Humanitaarteadused Euroopa teadusruumis) ning Euroopa Liidu kultuuripärandi ja globaalsete muutuste ühisprogrammi algatuse (JPI) juhatuse liige, samuti Kaunase kui Euroopa kultuuripealinna 2022 juhatuse esinaine.

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Poetics and Perception of Interartistic Performance

Anneli Saro

Abstract: The article investigates the poetics and perception of interartistic performances, using two theatre productions – *NO47 A Girl That Was Looking for Her Brothers* (2014) and *NO33 Hysteria* (2017) – by Estonian performance artist and scenographer Ene-Liis Semper at the Theatre NO99 as case studies. A theoretical and methodological framework will be developed for the purpose of the analysis, based on Erving Goffman's notion of the frame and on transformative aesthetics elaborated in art research and psychology.

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Keywords: interartistic performance, transformative aesthetics, poetics, perception, Estonian theatre, Ene-Liis Semper

The idea of interplay and interaction of different art forms goes back at least as far as the end of the 18th century when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe argued – as Richard Wagner ([1849] 1993) would do later – that opera, a genre that combines all other arts, can be considered the apex of arts. Since the beginning of the 20th century and as a result of (post)modern explorations, diverse examples of interdisciplinary and interartistic exchange in arts abound. For example, Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists in their performative events of the 1910s and 1920s brought together art forms such as literature, theatre, dance, music and visual arts. In Futurist *serate*'s, Dadaist *soirée*'s and Surrealist performances traditional barriers between different art forms were dismantled, artists crossed these boundaries and created events that united old and new heterogeneous tools of expression, stressing intuitive synesthetic reception. As Meltzer (1994, 196) claims, "all of the techniques of one art seemed to stand ready to serve all the others." In the early 1960s, what could almost be called a performative turn took place in Western art, since performance penetrated all art forms and a new genre – performance art – was (re-)created (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 18, 22). Performance art as a predominantly interdisciplinary field was born as an initiative of mainly visual artists when exploring theatrical tools of expression at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s (Goldberg 2011, 7–9).

As these historically influential examples show, interdisciplinary art (the term *combinatory art* is also sometimes used) usually takes place between the disciplines and tends "to displace boundaries out of the field of genre determination rather than merely crossing them" (Soussloff and Franko 2002, 35). Nevertheless, the notion of interdisciplinarity does not cover all types of relations between fine arts and this is

the reason why I prefer a less widely used term *interartistic* (or *interart*) for the purpose of this research. This term is not widely known in English but has been used by some theatre scholars. For example, French researcher Patrice Pavis has pointed out in *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre* that the notion of the interartistic sphere, which has been used increasingly more widely since the 1960s, covers very different realities: 1) the gathering of arts, 2) the system of arts, 3) the synthesis of the arts (like Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*), 4) the fraying of the arts, 5) application of one art to another (Pavis 2016, 103).

While the first definitions of the interartistic overlap with interdisciplinarity to a considerable extent, the latter ones suggest a more specific approach where "the principles of an art are projected onto one or more different arts" (Pavis 2016, 103). Pavis's example of the approach is performance art and installation, which enjoy the privilege of quoting and adopting techniques and aspects of other arts. Yet what could interartistic performance mean in this context, considering the long history and interdisciplinary nature of performance? I argue that since the wide and vague notion 'performance' has been used for different art, cultural and social events, certain conventions have been either maintained or established for the inner sphere of performance that create particular expectations. Both sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) and theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) have described a wide array of performances throughout history that have been falling between different frames of expectation and, as a result, caused confusion, anger, excitement, but also transformation of frames and social and aesthetic experiences. Interartistic performance is topical also for this special issue of *Methis*, since the concept of performativity has been of utmost importance in the development of interart studies (Fischer-Lichte 2016, 17) by helping to show the dynamics between arts, but also between art and life.

There has been a long tradition of interartistic performances, and the discussion surrounding them is still relevant even in the 21st century when blending and merging of different arts is rather common, as can be seen also in the switch that has occurred from using the term 'theatre' to preferring the term 'performing arts', and in the development of interart studies (Fischer-Lichte 2016). In Estonia, an exceptionally heated debate on the topic took place in 2014, initiated by Alvar Loog's review of the Rakvere Theatre's production *Inner Tourism. Star Ship* that was entitled "The Degradation of Theatre into Performance." Loog expressed his disappointment with the developing trend in which innovative local theatre makers' extreme forms of expression had come dangerously close to the point where theatre started to vanish alongside with drama. "That is acceptable, if the outcome is not marketed as theatre." (Loog 2014) Loog makes an important point in his article, since the blur-

ring of the boundaries between different arts and genres and the vanishing of the tradition of familiar genre terminology (see for example Karja 2020, 69–77) have made it extremely difficult to find one's bearings on the terrain of performing arts, especially when one is not an art connoisseur.

Another intriguing aspect of the review is Loog's distinction between theatre and performance art, and noting how the production, typically for interartistic work, has fallen into the gap between them. Loog accuses *Inner Tourism* of being too long for a performance, and too open and abstract for a theatre production. In addition, the stage as a theatrical frame is, in his opinion, too broad for a performance and generates false (elevated) expectations. "People, who came to theatre for a thrill (*elamus*), got an experience (*kogemus*)."¹ (Loog 2014) Theatre and performance art, indeed, no more differ from each other by any clear formal qualities, but mostly by the institutional frame in which a work is presented and by the type of reception strategy suggested for the spectator.

This article investigates two interartistic works where performance art and installation are projected onto theatre performance. These works are *NO47 A Girl That Was Looking for Her Brothers* (2014) and *NO33 Hysteria* (2017), both directed by Estonian performance artist and scenographer Ene-Liis Semper at the Theatre NO99. The two productions did not cause any metacommunicative discussion in the media comparable to that sparked by Loog's review. However, as rather radical examples of interartistic poetics, the confusion and cognitive dissonance they inflicted on the audiences (incl. the author of the article) help to elaborate the discussion further. The productions were chosen for the analysis primarily because they exemplify the implementation of different artistic strategies in a condensed form, but also because research on works of Semper is quite scarce (the most noteworthy being Allas 2007; Epner and Epner 2020).

Thus, the main foci of the article are interartistic poetics (i.e. the material from which the interartistic performances are composed and the ways in which this is done) and perception (i.e. the effect the interartistic performances have on spectators). First, a special theoretical and methodological framework is developed for the analysis based on the notions of the frame by American sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) and transformative aesthetic experience as sketched out in philosophy (Dewey 1958), psychology (Pelowski and Akiba 2011) and theatre studies (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz 2018). Relying on the interdisciplinary framework developed in the first part of the article and the empirical case studies introduced in the second part of the article, I intend to elaborate the reception model of transformative artistic experiences further and substantiate it by the collapse of

habitual frames and collision of different frames, often initiated by interartistic works.

Methodologically, the article combines performance analysis and reception research when tackling the case studies. Considering the traditional limits on space, only the beginnings of the two productions are analysed and the rest of the performances will be introduced only when a change of frame takes place. For the reception research, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (auto-IPA) method, registering all physical sensations and cognitive associations I had during the live performances and afterwards when watching video recordings. I did not take notes during the performances, but registered my sensations and associations immediately after them. Video recordings were used as a memory aid, mostly for accurate stage descriptions and to a lesser extent for refining the reception. The description of stage activities is combined with my own reactions to them and synthesised with the analysis of cause and reactions. (See, for example, Smith et al. 2009)

Frame and transformative aesthetic experience

Since Erving Goffman's sociological works to a greater or lesser extent rely on the model of theatre, the use of his frame theory in the context of the article on interartistic performance need not come as a surprise. Also, Chapter 5 in his book *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974), "The Theatrical Frame," is entirely dedicated to theatre, highlighting the parallel between theatrical and social frames, while a wide variety of examples are drawn from the theatre throughout the book.

Goffman borrowed the notion of the frame from Gregory Bateson (1955), who, together with his colleagues, also developed the double bind theory of schizophrenia that rests on contradictory or ambivalent communication dilemmas. In principle, Goffman defines the frame along the lines similar to Bateson's:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social one – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. [. . .] My phrase "frame analysis" is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience. (Goffman 1974, 10–11)

Consequently, frame analysis is used for the investigation of social life, but also for structures of social experience that might be highly individual and subjective but are usually governed by certain social frames.

A N N E L I S A R O

In general, frames help people make sense of different social scenes and be involved in them in an expected manner. Goffman understands involvement in a scene as a social, cognitive and emotional process, stressing that the subject might even become unaware of the direction of his feelings and cognitive attention. (Goffman 1974, 346) Still, even when some frameworks are “presentable as a system of entities, postulates, and rules; others – indeed, most others – appear to have no apparent articulated shape, providing only a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective.” (21) Nevertheless, a person who is familiar with the existing cultural and social conventions tends to know which frame organises which scene. Some occurrences do not fit the habitual frame, however, i.e., a break can occur in the applicability of the frame, resulting in bewilderment and chagrin on the part of the participants. (347)

In the chapter titled “The Manufacture of Negative Experience” Goffman states:

When an individual is lodged in a stream of framed activity, he sustains some check upon his immediate, spontaneous involvement in it. This will vary in degree with boredom at one end [. . .], nearly full engrossment at the other. Along with affective reserve [. . .], there is likely to be a measure of cognitive reserve also, a wisp of doubt concerning framework and transformations, a slight readiness to accept the possible need to reframe what is occurring; and this reserve, as well as the emotional kind, varies. (Goffman 1974, 378)

Thus, Goffman’s frame analysis also involves a shift of frames that depends first of all on the cognitive and affective reserve of a person, as indicated above, but also on the availability of competing frames. Frame breaks as a strategy can have different functions: sometimes they are used for entertainment only but sometimes they carry the effort to destabilise a social occasion or even cause a change in the social order (Goffman draws the majority of his examples from theatre, sport and criminal records). In general, frame breaks tend to require extra energy and mental work, and are often found to be disturbing. Goffman stresses the vulnerability of both frames and framed experiences and this vulnerability also affects our perception of the world despite the real physical circumstances.

Frame, as it is understood by Goffman and the author of the article, is based on a person’s earlier experience and knowledge, often shared with a group or a society, and forms a rather coherent conceptual entity. Because of that, the concepts of frame and frame analysis provide a useful framework for investigating the poetics of interartistic works in which two or more artistic frames of two or more art forms with their specific materials, media, aesthetics, etc. are used either simultaneously or consecutively. Theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 47–48) has used the

term 'frame' sporadically in her seminal book *The Transformative Power of Performance* where she tackles the destabilisation, collision, blurring and eventually invalidating of habitual conceptual frames, which might lead to the establishment of a new frame. When a subject is suspended between two frames ("orders of perception"), s/he experiences perceptual multistability, which Fischer-Lichte (2008, 148–49) compares to a ritual liminal state of being at the threshold ("betwixt and between"), in the transition from one order to another. It is exactly this processual nature of liminality and not so much the transformativity that intrigues me in inter-artistic performances because, according to Goffman's (1974, 378) theory, one needs an affective and cognitive reserve for reframing and transformation. Thus, an artistic experience only rarely culminates with a transformation.

I have developed the idea earlier under the notion of the poetics of ambivalence (Saro 2021). When contradictory flows of information, expressions or moods cross or intertwine, intentionally or accidentally, ambivalent nodes are created that are supposed to activate different reception and interpretation strategies in the perceiver. When ambivalence is the main poetic means or idea of a work, we are dealing with an example of the poetics of ambivalence. The main strategies of the poetics of ambivalence in theatre are 1) playing at the thresholds of different genres and types of theatre, or 2) different art forms, or 3) at the threshold of art and non-art. (Saro 2021) Yet what actually happens with the organisation of art experience and with the recipient when two artistic frames overlap and the spectator's previous perceptual and expectation frames fail?

American philosopher John Dewey, in his "Art as Experience" [1934] 1958, has tackled disruption in the viewer's interaction with art and the viewer's response to that. He distinguished two strategies in the reception of arts: facile recognition and meta-cognitive perception. While the former strategy represents successful matching of pre-expectations to perception and reducing discrepancies, the latter stands for a re-organisation of a viewer's expectations and frames, also inducing meta-cognitive mode of self-reflection.

Psychologists Matthew Pelowski and Fuminori Akiba (2011) have further elaborated the idea, substantiating the theory by psychological evidence. They identify five stages in meta-cognitive perception of transformative aesthetic experiences: 1) pre-expectations and the self-image, 2) cognitive mastery and introduction of discrepancy, 3) secondary control and escape, 4) meta-cognitive re-assessment, 5) aesthetic outcome and new mastery.

Pelowski and Akiba (2011, 87) stress not only the importance of pre-expectations (comparable to the horizon of expectations in Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory), but also the self-image of a receiver in the reception process and the urge to be

ANNE LI SARO

masterful in meaning-making. Due to that, receivers tend to decrease the amount and importance of discrepant information because it threatens their self-image (stage 2). Discrepant or ambiguous information also disturbs the process of identification and classification of a work of art that aims to form one coherent meaning. When neglecting information is impossible, it is assimilated into the classification. When discrepancy can be neither ignored nor assimilated, a switch from a lower, often unconscious order of perception to a higher order, involving conscious assessment and greater cognitive involvement, takes place (stage 3), but it causes tension and anxiety. (Pelowski and Akiba 2011, 88) When re-classification of a work fails, there are two options: receivers might attempt to escape, either physically or mentally, or they move to stage 4, meta-cognitive reassessment where they revise their expectations and perceptual schema, but also reframe their own involvement with the situation and achieve a relative self-transformation. When this re-assessment is successful, a new aesthetic outcome of perception and new mastery is reached (stage 5). This successful completion of schema change is often described as causing an epiphany or cathartic feelings. (Pelowski and Akiba 2011, 89)

In the following, I will use the model of transformative aesthetic experience by Pelowski and Akiba and auto-IPA as a method to analyse my own reception process of two interartistic productions by Semper. When frame as a notion and collapse of habitual frames/expectations are familiar concepts in theatre studies, a detailed and systematic analysis of the process of a collapse of a frame, or transformation from one frame of perception to another has not been carried out earlier.

Poetics and perception of interartistic works of Ene-Liis Semper

Ene-Liis Semper (b 1969) is Estonian scenographer, performance artist and director. She graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts as a scenographer in 1995 but had gained fame as a video and performance artist already during her studies. Since 1993 she has exhibited videos that explore corporeality, often through her own body and using a theatrical lens (Epner and Epner 2020, 9). Semper quickly gained recognition as a set and costume designer, working mostly with postmodern Estonian directors like Mati Unt, Hendrik Toompere and others. She has been awarded with the annual prize for the best scenography by the Estonian Theatre Union in 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2014. From the beginning of the 21st century, Semper's ambitions of authorship in theatre grew and she started to stage performances in collaboration with other beginners, but mostly together with director Tiit Ojasoo. In 2004, they established a new state-supported experimental theatre NO99, which hosted different directors, artists and forms of performing arts, including one-off performative events. Individually, Semper has staged three productions:

NO47 A Girl That Was Looking for Her Brothers (2014), *NO42 El Dorado: The Clowns' Raid of Destruction* (2015) and *NO33 Hysteria* (2017). While *NO42 El Dorado* was an example of physical theatre and was relatively easily accepted by spectators as theatre,¹ the other two caused inconsistencies in reception and thus deserve special attention in this article.

In the following, I focus on the beginnings of the two productions and the rest of the performances will be given closer attention only when a change of frame takes place. The frames of perception and expectations are created partly before a performance but predominantly during the first scene(s). (In Estonia, 57 percent of spectators admit that they attend performances accompanying somebody else and do not participate in the decision-making process (Kivirähk 2016, 8). Based on my own observation, spectators often have no previous knowledge of the forthcoming performance.) Semper herself has pointed out in an interview to the art critic Anders Härm that she is interested in what happens among audiences when there is "a change of code," in either style or design, several times during a performance. She thinks that during the first ten minutes the audience obtains a code that explains the performance and becomes very confused or upset when it is changed. Nevertheless, for Semper it is most important that these code changes should fit together and not leave audience in peace. (Härm 2003, 26) What follows is that, according to her intentions, performances should keep the spectators alert during the whole event and should make them conscious about the meta-cognitive dimension of reception, i.e. changes of codes.

Since *NO47 A Girl...* was Semper's first individual theatre production, I had no clear advance expectations, but was aware of her former works as a video and performance artist and scenographer. The beginning of the work tackled many ontological questions of theatre and arts in general – first, when the work started, and second, the type of the work. The production was performed in the big hall of the Theatre NO99 on a slightly raised stage, which spectators could observe from their fixed seats and from one side – all that spatially created an obviously theatrical frame of perception. The stage space created an impression of an installation of a white cube (white walls and floor of the stage area) in a black box (the hall). It looked empty, even sterile and strongly lit, resembling a studio or a gallery. On the left side as seen from the audience were a table, two chairs and a sofa on its back, the right-hand side was empty at first (later it was equipped with a carpet and a microphone)

¹ *NO42 El Dorado* was nominated for the annual theatre award of performing arts as an experimental production that combines different forms of performing arts; together with *NO43 Filth* (in collaboration with Tiit Ojasoo), it represented Semper as a leading European female director in the theatre programme of the Venice Biennale in 2017.

and a black piano stood next to the stage. The stage had ambivalent identities, since the right side could refer to an installative space of a gallery, and the left one to a representational space of a theatre performance. The sofa that was first lying on its back manifested first its materiality and non-functionality, but later, when turned onto its legs, started to represent a functional living room together with the table and chairs.

When the spectators arrived in the hall, “a technician” (actor Jõrgen Liik) was fixing wires with a tape, but it seemed to be more a make-believe work than a serious need. At a certain moment, a naked woman (Rea Lest) joined him on the stage and stood or sat there in graceful poses with a disinterested gaze. Liik rolled out a carpet and set up a microphone for her but without paying any attention to the woman. While the quotidian work of “the technician” signalled the preparation phase of the performance, the performative appearance and stance of the woman suggested the beginning of the performance. Since nothing more than what has been described above happened on the stage for the first fifteen minutes, this raised questions about the beginning and type of the work. Thus, according to the model of Pelowski and Akiba, in stage 2 of the reception process, receivers could not demonstrate their cognitive mastery because of the lack of sufficient information and because the given information was discrepant and ambiguous. The limited flow of information caused boredom, but also suggested that the audience should concentrate on the micro details of the performance and combine phenomenological perception with cognitive analysis (stage 3). The described scene activated the following discrepant perceptual and interpretational frames:

- *Theatre*. The institutional frame of the Theatre NO99, the frontal frame of performance and the representational frame of performing all suggested a theatrical frame for reception.
- *A sculpture, or figurative art more broadly*. The body of the actress Rea Lest was predominantly motionless during the performance and her disinterested look suggested that her inner world also seemed to be motionless. Her minimal movement could be described as successive striking of different poses, where the refinement of body parts and relaxation of muscles recalled classical sculpture and the beauty standards of the antiquity. The skin of Lest’s body was faultless, its colour pale, even and unvaried. Later during the performance, when confronted with other characters, the static sculptural body became a representation and a symbol of beauty and arts in general.
- *Performance art*. Some qualities of Lest’s body stressed the biological nature of “the represented object” described. Thus, the perception of the body became one source of cognitive dissonance in the production. When the visual image of

the body referred to a sculpture, the auditive information, breathing (though mediated through microphone and speakers) referred to a living organism. Since Lest is a relatively well-known actress in Estonia, her social body was here exposed as an installation material. One could even say that the materiality and figurativity of the body was put under observation, since first of all the body/nakedness/beauty was performed. The duration of the scene was extended consciously to focus the attention of the spectators and magnify the influence of the body. A naked body in public space always acts as a provocation, irrespective of the context. When the first uneasiness due to the potential provocation was overcome, the spectator was encouraged to use her/his glance as an instrument for critical observation of the body and the communicative context.

Performance art, in contrast to theatre, tends to expose the process of making a performance. Jörgen Liik, who used a microphone and random objects on the stage to create a looping sound design, presented this aspect throughout the performance.

- *Fashion, advertising, commerce.* Lest's body also implied a sexual, desiring and desired body that is often used in fashion, advertising and commerce. Lest's instrumental body could be interpreted as a tool for the presentation of the high-heeled shoes she was wearing. In theatre reviews similar kinds of observations were made: for example, one critic referred to the "empty enigmatic eye of a model" (Herkül 2014).

I reached stage 4, meta-cognitive reassessment of the performance, and my own initial reception process gradually changed during the rest of the performance. After the first fifteen ambiguous minutes, the theatrical performance started. Marika Vaarik (Mother), Raivo E. Tamm (Father) and Eva Klemets (Aunt) came on stage and started acting grotesquely, also infecting their Son (Jörgen Liik) with their strange behaviour. The acting strategy stressed the difference between an actor and a role, between natural and theatricalised behaviour, implicitly mocking the traditional theatrical code of re-embodiment. Rea Lest also acquired a role – she was called Bride by the other characters – although she retained her former "role," that is, was emotionless and speechless. Lest was ontologically at the same time a representation (either Bride, beauty, or art) for others and a presentation of herself. The production investigated the influence of beauty/art on people, stressing from the beginning the discursive incongruousness of beauty/art (Lest) with everyday life and its logic (represented by the other characters) and people's eternal admiration of, even craving for, beauty. The two distinctive spheres were represented in different styles: Lest used the tools of expression of performance art and the other performers the traditional tools of acting where embodiment of a character is the main principle.



Figure 1. *N047 A Girl That Was Looking for Her Brothers* (2014, Theatre N099). Eva Klemets, Rea Lest, Marika Vaarik and Jörgen Liik. Photo by Tiit Ojasoo.

Spectators who decided to escape the performance, either mentally or physically, because their cognitive reserve was insufficient for the reception of the inter-artistic performance, could look for the first aid of meaning-making on the theatre's web page. "Even kids know that beauty is absolute. [. . .] What happens with people, who find themselves too close to this absolute? The production of Ene-Liis Semper tells about a family, who burst into bloom at the unexpected vicinity of beauty for the last time." (N099) The guideline leads spectators to follow a theatrical and, more specifically a representation, reception frame, i.e. to ask implicitly what the stage activity stands for, what it depicts. However, this frame (alone) is invalid and the sense of failure forces the spectator to look for other frames of perception available to her/him.

In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance* Erika Fischer-Lichte describes two types of perception and meaning-making that might take place when habitual theatrical elements are isolated from each other. She does not use the term 'interartistic' but the types are characteristic also of the reception of interartistic performances:

In the first case, the phenomenon is perceived as what it appears, i.e. in its phenomenal being, so that materiality, signifier, and signified coincide. In the second case, they markedly diverge from each other. The phenomenon is perceived as a signifier that can be linked to a diverse range of signifieds. The meanings ascribed to the phenomenon are not dependent on the subject's will but appear in consciousness spontaneously – even if, retrospectively, they can oftentimes be explained rationally. (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 144)

The beginning of *NO47 A Girl...* was semantically ambivalent, since it opened up different interpretational frames, which led to different associations and meanings, which all together created a void of meanings characteristic of abstract or non-representational art. In this case, Fischer-Lichte's two types of perception and meaning-making were attached to each other: type two led to type one, and after that type two again as will be shown below.

Of course, other spectators could perceive other types of ambivalences in this performance. Kadi Herkül, for example, admitted that the production brought on stage a hundred minutes of sexual fantasies but left the audience as cold as a fish – "It is a clinically sterile stage picture lacking eroticism." (Herkül 2014) The quote demonstrates the overall estrangement that an interartistic performance might cause.

Altogether, both the reassessment (stage 4) and the whole reception process was successful for me, providing a new challenging aesthetic experience, strengthening my self-confidence and leading to a relative self-transformation. The blending of different aesthetic discourses in the production sharpened and dislocated my perception but estranged grotesque acting and some features of the bourgeois mentality being criticised caused also strong psycho-physical reactions like abomination and a suppressed urge to escape from the performance. In a broader context, the director made the spectators recognise their biological, psychological and social determination, since the body is the site where all these aspects overlap.

The audience may have been better prepared for Semper's third production – *NO33 Hysteria* (2017) – but not entirely. The performance started as performers of the NO99 theatre Rasmus Kaljujärvi, Eva Koldits, Rea Lest, Jörgen Liik and Marika Vaarik, all dressed in pink, exaggerated, even vulgar costumes came on stage that was equipped with two sofas and panel room dividers, a screen and a couple of spotlights and cameras. The visual context was clearly theatrical, associating partly also with a film studio. The performers sat on the sofas and started to laugh one after another, seemingly without any particular reason. This collective hysterical laugh lasted without interruption for the next forty minutes. At the same time, nothing significantly representational happened: performers fooled around on the sofas, drank water, unexpectedly changed costumes and used cameras as mirrors for

A N N E L I S A R O

self-inspection and self-presentation. The cameras and the screen were used to accentuate and exaggerate the corporeality of the performers and their attempts to change their appearance, rejuvenate themselves, try out different identities or amuse others. The hysterical laughter, a physiological reaction with accompanying sound, and the visual amplification of that on the screen dominated the whole situation. No verbal interaction took place between the performers.



Figure 2. *NO33 Hysteria* (2017, Theatre NO99). Rasmus Kaljujärv, Jörgen Liik and Eva Koldits. Photo by Ene-Liis Semper.

During the hysterical laughing scene, the spectators did not laugh because the stage activity and the hysteria that was definitely performative slowly became more and more appalling. On the 28th minute of the performance, I myself experienced so strong physical queasiness and disgust that I seriously considered escaping from the theatre (stage 3 in Pelowski's and Akiba's model). I checked my watch at that moment because I predicted intuitively that the performance had lasted at least forty minutes already and probably would continue in this way until the end. Nevertheless, I decided to stay because it is not customary to leave in the middle of an act in Estonia and I did not want to attract any attention. When the opening scene of *NO47 A Girl...* left the receiver enough mental freedom to invent and test different reception strategies and cultural contexts, then *NO33 Hysteria* created an overflow

of discrepant visual and auditive information and had a psychophysically aggressive effect on spectators, almost paralysing their cognitive capabilities. According to the home page of the theatre, the psychophysical condition created during the performance is characteristic of the current society at large: "The cornucopia of information has the same effect as every other cornucopia: it inebriates. [. . .] The cornucopia and void, baroque and hysteria." (NO99)

Here, Semper had used a strategy that is well known in performance art – *endurance art* or *durational performance*, the most famous representative of which is Marina Abramović. Endurance art usually puts to the test the physical endurance of a performer but definitely also the mental and psychological, sometimes also physical, endurance of the receiver, not to mention their cognitive capability. Luule and Eero Epner have mentioned that the first parts of *NO47 A Girl...* and *NO33 Hysteria* are "purely performative scenes that focus on the physical capability and durability" (Epner and Epner 2020, 16). They do not explain how they understand the performativity in this context, but presumably the physical capability of performers is intended to have primary psychophysical effect on the spectators.

To develop the notion of performativity further, I believe that the first forty minutes of the performance when the spectators were faced with abiding hysterical laughter and their own psychophysical reactions, represent non-representative theatre that is aesthetically close to performance art, since the performative function dominates here over the representative one. Nevertheless, the stage actions are not natural physical reactions, i.e. the performers are not caught up in the uncontrollable hysteria but they represent it, copying physical reactions typical of hysteria. In addition, even if they are caught up in the hysteria, the theatre stage as a medium and a perceptual frame makes everything presented there a representation. Thus, at the beginning of the performance, a spectator / I fell in the breach of two opposing reception frames, switching constantly between the representational or theatrical and the action-based or ritualistic frame of performance art, and finding neither of them entirely effective. According to Pelowski's and Akiba's model, I was circulating between stages 2 to 4. When I thought I had achieved a certain cognitive mastery (found an appropriate reception frame), some new discrepancy was introduced (stage 2) that made me move to the level of secondary control, revise all the available information again (stage 3) and invent new perception frame (stage 4, meta-cognitive re-assessment).

Erika Fischer-Lichte has also stressed the perceptual multistability in reception, i.e. shifting between such perception orders [frames – A. S.] as presence and representation [or performativity and referentiality – A. S.]. The transitional moment from one order of perception to another is accompanied by a sense of destabilisa-

ANNELI SARO

tion, a feeling of liminality. The threshold is highly ambivalent because it enables transformation of the perceiver and causes physiological, affective, energetic and motoric changes in the body. But the fluctuating state of instability might finally end up by the establishment of a new stability. (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 147–48, 174, 205)



Figure 3. *NO33 Hysteria* (2017, Theatre NO99). Rasmus Kaljujärv. Photo by Ene-Liis Semper.

Little by little I reached some kind of a new mastery and new aesthetic experience (stage 5) in *NO33 Hysteria*. Despite the first impression that performers were just improvising some random actions and trying to create fluid unfixable identities, some visual details, performing principles, relations and sensations recurred and converged into bigger clusters and figures. Thus a spectator learns the implicit rules of the new game. The performers did not act as actors do, but just performed different playful activities; nevertheless, their theatrical actions led to psychologisation and character-building in perception. *NO33 Hysteria* highlighted the difference between stage and off-stage behaviour in social life, as was pointed out also by Goffman, but did it in a reverse mode: performers were alone (off-stage) in front of the cameras where they tried out new physical identities, and on stage when being with others. Their stage behaviour was exaggerated, hysterical, and off-stage behaviour mechanical or emotionally and existentially vulnerable.

Conclusion

The article analysed the poetics and perception of interartistic performances using two productions of Ene-Liis Semper as case studies. According to Patrice Pavis (2016, 103), interartistic work is a merger of different art forms, a case when the principles of an art are projected onto another. In her works, Semper has projected some principles of performance art onto theatre performances and the other way around. The productions analysed bear many similarities with Semper's videos: the human body serves as the centrepiece, the situations (activities, costumes, set design) and the communication frame are theatrical, in her own words, the visualization of "concentrated states of mind" (*kontsentreeritud meeelseisund* in Estonian, Härm 2003, 26) dominates over narrativity. The earlier quote about a change of code and the following quote vividly exemplify her aesthetic principles.

I have never been particularly interested in social critique, neither in theatre nor in art. What I am interested in is testing the concurrent influence of things. There are so many components in the world and when you put them next to each other, they have a different effect. (Epner 2014)

Considering the statement, and looking at Semper's artworks where she is constantly looking for new and surprising connections between different materials, media and artistic conventions, it can be stated that interartistic aesthetics is Semper's conscious poetics, i.e. a principle of creation, even when she does not use exactly the same words.

Luule and Eero Epner have labelled Semper's style hybrid aesthetics because she blends the tools of expression of theatre and performance art, which creates

ambivalence in perception, since some elements refer to the presence and some others to representation (Epner and Epner 2020, 29). Interartistic works that connect and blend techniques and contexts of different arts create hybrid artworks that highlight the discrepancy between produced perceptions and information, and lead to an ambivalent situation where the spectator is either confused, unable to find an appropriate reception frame, or caught between different reception frames. Semper's productions were performed in theatre buildings, on traditional frontal stage and used exaggerated, theatrical aesthetic language, which all suggest the theatrical perception frame. However, especially the beginnings of both productions relied on techniques commonly associated with performance art, highlighting the physicality of the performers, the materiality of the environment and the duration of the situation, avoiding or deferring representation and meaning-making.

Earlier I have analysed other works of Semper and Ojasoo through the lens of poetics of ambivalence, pointing out that the hybridity and ambivalence stem from encounters of different arts, but also of different genres and styles of expression (see Saro 2021). Thus, issues raised in the article can be extended to other hybrid artforms and are not confined only to interartistic performances.

The main aim of the article was to test the reception process of interartistic works and their potential for transformative/performative aesthetic experience. I used Pelowski's and Akiba's five-stage model and my own perception of two performances by Semper for the test. The model appeared to be useful for the analysis of an aesthetic experience but, as models often are, it seemed too simplified and rigid. First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between different stages of the reception process because some of them seem to progress in parallel. Second, the model seems to be inspired by the reception of visual objects that can be grasped in a glance. In art works where the temporal dimension is essential, the constant flow of new stimuli makes the receiver restart the modelled process over and over again, moving constantly between stages 1 to 4.

I would like to finish the article with a longer quote from Semper that exemplifies some aims and potentials of interartistic works.

Lately, society seems to be expecting more and more that art should offer ready-made responses. But I think that the true phenomenon of an image is its polysemy. We are living in a terribly descriptive world, words are devaluated and simplified and because of that everything becomes banal. [. . .] This is the reason why preservation of the ambiguity of artwork is important, connection between different layers, because the connection is not verbal and cannot be devaluated. A brilliant art work is able to create such a flow of associations that nobody is able to articulate them because so many human experiences have been deposited there. (Epner and Semper 2021, 8–9)

Interartistic and other hybrid artworks open up new possibilities for self-expression, enabling artists to cross borders between arts, and art and non-art. More importantly, interartistic works revitalise the perceiver's senses and sense-making apparatuses, break habitual perception frames, and through that highlight the logic of existing perception frames, leading to meta-cognitive analysis of art, society and self. Interartistic performances, which are able to accumulate in themselves the tools of expressions of almost all other arts, and even non-artistic spheres, are especially powerful performatives, since their wealth of stimuli, average duration of the performance and expected perception frame(s) have a strong transformative potential for the perceiver, and maybe even the potential for transgression of a whole community or society.

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Kunstidevahelise etenduse poeetika ja taju

Anneli Saro

Märksõnad: kunstidevaheline etendus, transformatiivne esteetika, poeetika, taju, Eesti teater, Ene-Liis Semper

Artiklis uuritakse kunstidevaheliste etenduste poeetikat ja taju, tuginedes kahele juhtumiuuringule – etenduskunstniku ja stsenograafina tuntud Ene-Liis Semperi lavastustele „NO47 Tüdruk, kes otsis oma vendi“ (2014) ja „NO33 Hüsteeria“ (2017) Teatris NO99. Selleks arendati välja spetsiaalne teoreetiline ja metodoloogiline raamistik, lähtudes Ameerika sotsioloogi Erving Goffmani terminist *raam* ning filosoofias (Dewey 1958), psühholoogias (Pelowski ja Akiba 2011) ja teatriteaduses (Fischer-Lichte 2008) tuntud transformatiivse esteetika käsitlustest.

Kunstidevahelise etenduse defineerimisel on tuginetud Patrice Pavisile, kes termini *kunstidevaheline* (*interartistic*) puhul on eristanud viit tähendusvälja, millest viimane ja kõige kitsam tähistab ühe kunstiliigi printsiipide projektsiooni ühele või mitmele teisele kunstiliigile. Ta on toonud kunstidevaheliste teoste näiteks etenduskunsti ja installatsiooni, mis tsiteerivad ja adapteerivad teiste kunstiliikide tehnikaid ja aspekte. (Pavis 2016, 103) Kuid kuidas mõista performatiivse pöörde järgses kultuurisituatsioonis, kus etenduslikkus on tunginud peaaegu kõikidesse kunstiliikidesse, kunstidevahelist etendust? Väidan, et etenduses kui heterogeenses ja laialivalguvas nähtuses on siiski säilinud või tekkinud teatud sisemised konventsioonid, mis loovad vastuvõtul kindlaid ootusi.

Artiklis vaadeldakse Semperi kunstidevahelisi teoseid, kus etendus- ja installatsioonikunst on projitseeritud teatrilavastustele. Analüüsitud lavastustel on palju sarnasusi Semperi videotega: fookuses on inimkeha, situatsioonid (tegevused, kostüümid ja lavakujundus) ning kommunikatsiooniraam on teatraalsed ning kontsentreeritud meeleseisundid (Härm 2003, 26) domineerivad narratiivsuse üle. Semper otsib oma teostes teadlikult eri materjalide, meediumite ja kunstikonventsioonide kombineerimisel tekkivaid uusi ja üllatavaid kokkupuutepindasid ning nendest tekkivaid mõjuallikaid. Tema loomemeetodid võib seega nimetada kunstidevahelise esteetika poeetikaks.

Metodoloogiliselt on etendusanalüüsi kombineeritud retseptisiooniuringutega, täpsemalt enesekohase interpretatiivse fenomenoloogilise analüüsiga. Uuris in kahe lavastuse näitel, kas ja kuidas töötab psühholoogide Matthew Pelowski ja Fuminori Akiba (2011) transformatiivse esteetilise kogemuse mudel, kus nad eristavad metakognitiivse taju viit faasi: 1) eelootused ja enesekuvand, 2) kognitiivsed oskused ja lahknevuse ilmumine, 3) sekundaarne kontroll ja põgenemine, 4) metakognitiivne ümberhindamine ning 5) esteetiline tulemus ja uued oskused.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et see mudel osutus küll kasulikuks analüüsivahendiks, kuid nagu mudelid ikka, on liiga lihtsustav ja jäik. Esiteks on keeruline, kui mitte võimatu eristada vastuvõtuprotsessis eri faase, sest mõned neist näivad toimuvat paralleelselt. Teiseks, kuna see mudel näib põhinevat selliste visuaalsete objektide vastuvõtul, mida saab haarata tervikuna ja ühe pilguga, siis ajalise kestusega teoste puhul on uue info pealevoog pidev ja see sunnib vastuvõtjat alustama mudeldatud protsessiga ühe uuesti ja uuesti, liikudes pidevalt faasist 1 faasini 4.

Kunstidevahelised ja teised hübriidsed teosed loovad uusi eneseväljenduse võimalusi, võimaldades kunstnikel ületada eri kunstiliikide ning kunsti ja mitte-kunsti vahelisi piire. Kuid olulisem on see,

S U M M A R Y

et kunstidevahelised teosed värskendavad vastuvõtja tajusid ja tähendusloome mehhanisme ning lõhuvad harjumuslikke tajuraame, valgustades nii läbi subjekti käsutuses olevate tajuraamide loogika, ning juhivad kunsti, ühiskonna ja vastuvõtja metakognitiivse analüüsi juurde. Kunstidevahelised etendused, mis suudavad endasse akumulierida peaaegu kõikide teiste kunstiiliikide väljendusvahendid ja isegi mitte-kunstilised valdkonnad, on eriti tugevad performatiivid, sest oma stiimulite rikkuse, etenduste keskmise kestvuse ja oodatava(te) tajuraami(de) tõttu on neil suur potentsiaal vastuvõtjat tugevasti mõjutada – transformeerida ning võibolla isegi häirida kogukonna või ühiskonna traditsioone ja norme.

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Perceiving the Default: Navigating Choice Architecture in Video Games

Marie-Luise Meier

Abstract: Using Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler's concept of *nudge* (2008), this article transforms Stuart Hall's notion of *preferred reading* (1973) into the concept of *preferred playing* to create a new approach to textual analysis appropriate for video games as interactive media. Markers for preferred playing as an alternative to more traditional *close reading* are discussed together with concepts and insights from contemporary game studios and game design regarding the medium's different layers.

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Keywords: methodology, textual analysis, video games, preferred playing, default choices, game studies

Introduction

Approaches informed by *close reading* often misleadingly frame gaming as a solely individual experience. This stems from the perspective that the player's performance is, in terms of research value, more important than the actual text based on which the player is performing. This approach, however, downplays the importance of the video game as a text, which is involved in a complex interplay with the player's performance. Depending on the game, the text serves as, for example, a stage, a script, and an actor in all important roles but the player's. Diane Carr (2009, 1) claims that textual analysis of video games is valuable for research on games, but papers that suggest specific approaches to textual analysis are still rare.

In this article, I argue that textual analysis can yield important information about race, class, and gender biases hardcoded into games; however, such discussions must be based more on affordances inherent to video games, not on personal experiences. I also show that spaces in which performance and performativity are frequent can be deduced from the text itself without sacrificing objectivity. My approach combines Clara Fernández-Vara's (2015) *space of possibility* with a method that determines the most default-centred path through a game, as suggested by the game itself. For that, I transform Stuart Hall's notion of preferred reading into a mode of *preferred playing*, while also relying on/referencing the related concepts/terms *negotiated* and *oppositional playing*. To achieve this, I apply the theory of *nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) to game design to establish a more objective method of textual analysis. After discussing both approaches and the benefits of combining

M A R I E - L U I S E M E I E R

them, I define markers of preferred playing which can be used for textual analysis of games. I focus on concepts such as default options, balancing, difficulty and challenges, level design, genre and narrative design, as well as objectives and goals that can be used for gender analysis or any other field which benefits from a qualitative approach. The versatility of this approach is demonstrated by showcasing a variety of different games. By integrating tools from other disciplines into the field of game studies, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how to analyse video games as a unique form of media without assimilating game studies into literature or film studies.

Approaches to textual analysis in video games

Compared to other fields in which textual analysis is used, game studies is a young discipline that is still very much concerned with creating medium-specific methods of analysis. The word “medium-specific” plays an important role in this context, because, as Mark Wolf (2006, 78) notes, this lack of tradition in game analysis makes scholars use methodologies from other media such as film studies or literary studies. While films and video games are both visual and auditive media, and often make use of the same elements, such as characters or tropes, Wolf (2006) stresses that interactivity, i.e., user participation, sits at the heart of video games. Henry Jenkins states the same in stronger language:

The application of film theory to games can seem heavy-handed and literal-minded, often failing to recognize the profound differences between the two media. [. . .] Not all games tell stories. Games may be an abstract, expressive, and experiential form, closer to music or modern dance than to cinema. (Jenkins 2004)

The main forms of analysis performed on games are either quantitative or forms of close reading. Quantitative studies have been conducted mainly in regard to gender or violence (e.g., Beasley and Standley 2002, Downs and Smith 2010). They have often been criticised for a binary coding of an otherwise interactive medium (Shaw 2014), for disregarding factors such as cultural framing or video-game-specific aspects like gaming platform, difficulty, branching narratives, and alternative gameplay paths. Close reading, which in its early forms was formulated by John Crowe Ransom and other ‘New Critics’ in the late 1930s and early 1940s, concerns itself with the “examination, deconstruction, and analysis of media text. It is the quintessential humanist methodology, born in the study of literature, and adapted to other media forms such as cinema studies” (Bizzochi and Tanenbaum 2011, 1). Mia Consalvo and Nathan Dutton’s (2006) approach is very similar to that of close read-

ing but is more tailored to the needs of games by introducing four areas of analysis: Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map, and Gameplay Log. Works on texts and language by Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva have been deemed relevant for textual analysis as well (Carr 2009, 1).

Previously suggested new forms of close reading tend to share the same limits. While Jim Bizzochi and Theresa Jean Tanenbaum (2011, 5) agree that the interplay of different aspects of video games is an important asset of games and has to be taken into consideration when analysing them, in their analysis, they focus on their own individual experiences of the games in question, arguing: “New media and games suffer from a certain degree of indeterminacy: one cannot guarantee that two readers will encounter the same media assets while interacting with a game, or that they will experience them in the same order” (Bizzochi and Tanenbaum 2011, 6–7).

While it is true that games, especially so-called *games of emergence* (Juul 2005, 75), in their varied replayability, seem to be perceivable only in individual instances of playing, transforming the individual playthrough into the basis for interpretation is not without its problems. For one, the personal playthrough often seems to be arbitrary and resembles a snapshot more than a holistic picture. It is always possible that the player remains oblivious to the aspects of a game that might be important for analysis but which did not emerge in the individual playthrough. When playing *Fallout 4* (2015), for example, the player is given the chance to choose between a male and a female avatar. A researcher who aims to analyse gender equality in games might think that *Fallout 4* indeed strives for equality in agency. When playing the male in an individual playthrough, however, one never notices that the companion Codsworth, who refers to the male protagonist as “Sir,” calls the female one “Mum” rather than “Ma’am.” This clearly shows that the preferred choice of the avatar’s gender is male, limiting the female one to motherly duties, unfit for a post-apocalyptic wasteland, which can easily be missed in an individual playthrough. This is also a problem I see in the notion of the *implied player* proposed by Espen Aarseth (2007), which is similar to Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the *implied reader*. However, this very much focuses on player types (Aarseth 2007, 131) and individual instances, not on the game’s rhetoric. When using Ian Bogost’s (2007) concept of *procedural rhetoric*, in which persuasion inside a game is achieved through rule-based representations and interactions, the game as a medium is approached in its entirety and not just through one individual’s lens to see which rules and processes are involved in conveying a certain ideology.

Some researchers try to solve this problem by proposing the use of multiple coders (Schmierbach, 2009) or additional document analysis (of reviews, fan discussions, or interviews with the creators) to elicit different potential readings (Malliet, 2007),

which leads to different results. However, analysing fan discussions primarily means analysing discourse, not the medium of the video game itself.

The circle and the line: From possibility spaces to preferred playing

To tackle the aforementioned challenges, I propose an approach to games that is twofold, combining the space of possibility with preferred playing. Both approaches are equally important and help draw a holistic picture of a specific game.

Fernández-Vara (2015, 252) defines the space of possibility as “[t]he potential actions and events in a game; what the player could do and the potential results of those actions, as opposed to actual specific actions that have already been carried out.” In terms of choice architecture, defining the space of possibilities usually means exploring all parts of a branching choice architecture, investigating different gameplay options, trying different approaches in different situations, and, finally, mapping these possibilities. I would add to the definition that a list of interactive items that can change and impact the game may be useful. Depending on the game, mapping the space of possibility is a time-consuming endeavour.

The space of possibility, however, says nothing about the likelihood of a player choosing a certain path. Returning to the example of gender, if there is a dominant male perspective, which unfolds because the game is narrated in a certain way, it often remains unseen. Mapping out possibilities creates a detailed yet static picture of a video game. In a way, this resembles the data from quantitative content analysis about proportional male and female representation, which, by failing to contextualise individual representations within a broader framework (Shaw 2014), does not grasp the complex interplay between genders and sexuality and risks contributing to processes of erasure (Erikson-Schroth and Mitchell 2009).

“Depending on the choices the player makes, the same game content can yield a variety of interpretations, messages and values” (Biscop et al. 2019, 25). Thus, decision-making should always be taken into account, rather than just mapping all possibilities as equally viable and likely options. The possibility of interactive gameplay strongly relies on when and where the game appeared, since “hardware, software, and cultural constraints [determine] what was possible, or at least typical, at the time when the game was made” (Wolf 2006, 79). For Wolf, interactivity consists of smaller units that he calls “choices” (80). Choices influence the replayability of a game, are often a key constituent for winning conditions, and might lead to different endings.

After mapping the space of possibility, my second approach concerns interactivity and its importance in games. Since choices are essential to video games and are often responsible for most of their entertainment value, they must be included in the

analysis. Wolf (2006, 84) concludes by asking: “What are the game’s objectives and how are they linked to the choice that the player is asked to make? And which options within choices are considered to be the correct ones, and why?” Kilian Biscop, Steven Malliet, and Alexander Dhoest also state:

In directed games, the player is usually encouraged to take an ideal path, by means of rules of reward or progression through a storyline or quest. Directed games offer varying degrees of performative freedom, such as the option to choose between multiple characters, weapons-of-choice or variable environmental paths. (Biscop, Malliet, and Dhoest 2019, 29; emphasis by me)

They contrast directed games with what they call “semi-directed games,” where players are given more freedom to find their own preferred styles and follow the narrative they desire, which results in a much stronger feeling of agency.

I agree that all games are more or less directed and, even if no ideal path exists, at least a suggested path can be deduced. For one, even in the most complex games, agency and choices are always limited. They are “constrained from below by material resources and from above by authorial formal causation from the level of plot” (Mateas 2004, 24). Players are not able to perform actions that the code did not anticipate, except when they themselves are changing the code (for example in the form of modding). Life itself, researchers like Daniel Homan and Sidney Homan (2014, 175) argue, is built upon a set of restricted choices. Likewise, many video games offer the illusion of a broad range of choices. In that regard, Aarseth’s (1997) criticism of the term “interactivity” for games is valid. Games follow prompts instead of offering real interactivity, which Aarseth (1997, 51) calls “ergodicity.” Just as in real life, however, I would argue that it is likely that a player chooses one option over another because that choice might be more rewarding or offer a better experience. This seems natural for video games as developers strive to design levels in meaningful ways that serve as narrative architecture (Jenkins 2004).

Pelle Guldborg Hansen and Andreas Maaløe Jespersen (2013, 6) state that “human decision-making and behaviour [. . .] is often influenced in systematic ways by subtle, seemingly insignificant changes in the decision-making context.” Those influences in games are embedded within the architecture of the game. Taken together, they form the basis of what I call *preferred playing*, which I coined from Stuart Hall’s *preferred reading*, a process of preferred meaning-making delimited by the position of a certain element in relation to other elements in a medium (Hall 1973, 9). While Hall clearly differentiates the dominant code and the meaning-making done by those decoding it, in video games, these practices partly coincide. In games, the act of playing is inevitably connected with meaning-making, or as Helen W. Kennedy

M A R I E - L U I S E M E I E R

and Jonathan Dovey (2006, 6) put it: “In order to study a computer game we cannot have recourse solely to its textual characteristics; we have to pay particular attention to the moment of its enactment as it is played.” A player generates a certain form of text by simultaneously reading the code presented and acting upon the framework they perceive.

Preferred playing is a hegemonic concept. Hall (1973, 17) states that the hegemonic viewpoint is that which “appear[s] coterminous with what is ‘natural’, ‘inevitable’,” therefore following the natural flow of the game. Similar to the preferred reading, which is the reading that the producer wants the audience to experience, the preferred playing is the experience the developer wants the player to experience. I would strongly argue, however, that the developer is of lesser importance than the medium, because the will of the developer and the actual message the medium conveys about the preferred playing might vastly differ. In *Fallout 4*, the introductory scene features the life of a male soldier, with male values, narrated by a male narrator. Later, those values are taken up again. I doubt, however, that a hegemonic male view was actively intended. It emerged from the sum of the parts that form the game. The fact that games are seldom developed by a single person and are more likely to be created by a team or even a whole studio only adds to the difficulty of determining authorial intent. Considering its referential value and inter-textual elements, a video game is an inherently postmodern work.

Of course, there is not only one way of playing. In accordance with Hall’s (1973) concepts of *oppositional* and *negotiated meaning*, I want to propose similar concepts for games. Someone who performs the *oppositional playing* is aware of the preferred playing and consciously chooses to play differently to arrive at a different outcome, thereby generating a text that also leads to a different meaning since those two acts inevitably fall together. This can happen, considering Hall’s (1973, 18) initial concept, when the game contains controversial themes with which the player disagrees. I see a possibility here for subversive play, for *queering* in games that in their preferred playing offer no room for that kind of play. Different forms of performance are part of oppositional playing, such as the exploration of a role or the development of a roleplay character, which do not follow directed play, but instead strive for “the expression achieved through their interactions” (Nitsche 2016, 391). Playing a game like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) without following the level progression and instead focusing on acting out a certain role, embodying the “dragonborn” instead of engaging in a goal-driven fight through the storyline, is part of oppositional play because there is little to support deeper, pen-and-paper-like roleplaying endeavours in the core game. That those endeavours exist can be proven by examining

fan-made content, so-called mods, that change the code of the game, adding content for such performance.

Modes of *transgressive play*, as proposed by Aarseth (2007) and Jenny Sundén (2009), also fall into the category of oppositional play. They are partly synonymous, as they are both non-hegemonic forms of play. I would, however, use the term transgressive play, especially in the sense that Sundén (2009, 2) applied it, stressing, on one hand, play that exploits loopholes and, on the other hand, play that consciously criticises the status quo. Aarseth (2007, 132) stresses that “[t]ransgressive play is a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game.” Transgressive play is often aimed at communicating with an audience or the developers, thereby favouring acts within online games or on *Twitch* streams to deliver visible symbolic gestures. Oppositional play, however, also includes weaker forms of non-preferred playing by using an underdeveloped spectrum within the game but does not necessarily dwell on bug abuse or attack the status quo.

Negotiated playing is a compromise between *oppositional* and *preferred playing*. A part of the *preferred playing* is accepted but is still changed to the player’s own liking. *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn* (2013) is an MMORPG that features a vast-but-goal-oriented world, which, via level progression, leads to a form of endgame featuring battles as the dominant form of interaction within the game world. While there are numerous ways to individualise one’s own character or its house, hinting at the possibility of roleplay, this is never explicitly stated as opposed to, for example, *World of Warcraft* (2004), where dedicated roleplay servers with separate rulesets exist. The game does not offer an eloquent concept for roleplay, but contains features that are open for use and interpretation and can therefore be used for roleplay.

Some games offer more in terms of free play and forms of *oppositional play* than others through characters and avatars. While all video game protagonists can in some way be controlled by their players (Aldred 2016, 355), avatars are “prosthetic, part-of-ourselves type of character(s)” who “embod[y] empathy, in which the player experiences a kind of physical or bodily connection to the character” (Tronstad 2008, 256), such as with the avatar of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. In contrast to avatars, “agents” are characters whose skillset and outer appearance cannot be altered (Waggoner 2009, 9). They are often recognisable icons of a franchise (Aldred 2016, 359) such as Cloud from *Final Fantasy VII* (1997). A spectrum exists ranging from agents to avatars, consisting of protagonists that are partly customisable and partly fixed in their appearance and behaviour. Avatars as predominantly empty vehicles invite the transfer of emotions, inviting players to fill them with a form of “self” and

encouraging them to act more as individuals than as the presented characters. This can lead to forms of oppositional playing in which individual freedom is exercised.

Wolf (2006, 82) argues that prior knowledge from multiple playthroughs can further alter the kind of playing a player tries to achieve. Paths that were hidden may now be more obvious, but it is also possible that the game offers paths to the player that were not there on the first playthrough, such as a new set of characters or a new difficulty setting.

Preferred playing as that which is nudged

Preferred playing can become a textual basis for analysis if it is first grasped. The game conveys the preferred playing through various means to the player, and markers can be found in all layers of the medium. To develop this theory further, I will rely on the concept of *nudge*. This concept is part of Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein's (2008) attempt to foster a different kind of economic thinking to help consumers make healthier or more thoughtful choices in life. It follows a mindset called "libertarian paternalism" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 5). While the idea is not without criticism (Arneson 2015, Hansen and Jespersen 2013), the actual economic implications are not relevant in this context. Nudge is a form of economic manipulation, as Yasher Saghai (2013, 487) clarifies, but I would argue that every kind of medium – interactive and non-interactive – manipulates us towards a certain reading, as previously argued by Hall.

Nudge can be seen as a type of interference with the decision-making process that is "relatively weak, soft, and nonintrusive [. . .] because choices are not blocked, fenced off, or significantly burdened" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 5). While, on the surface, a person may be presented with all options available to them, the presentation of subtle incentives portrays certain options as more rewarding than others. Game designers usually intend to design games to be entertaining. As previously discussed, options are an essential aspect of the entertainment which video games deliver, but not all choices lead to equally entertaining results. The risk of losing an allied character inside a game like *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014) might be part of the thrill, but the actual incident is connected to the loss of fighting strength, cutscenes, and story. Therefore, players concerned with the preferred playing try to navigate a kind of ideal gameplay path, and the game, likewise, tries to nudge them in that direction.

Decision-making is based on two systems, the automatic system, which can roughly be equated to the gut reaction, often seen in games when decisions need to be made within a limited time, and the reflective system, which is responsible for conscious thoughts (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 21). I would argue that this kind of

system is more prevalent in turn-based tactics and strategy games, such as *Sid Meier's Civilization V* (2010). The combination of both systems usually leads to a highly immersive experience, perpetuating the illusion of non-mediation between the player and the gaming context (Przybylski et al. 2010, 161–62).

Thaler and Sunstein list circumstances that alter the choice-making progress, of which a few are particularly relevant for games. Their first belief is that people make choices because of *anchoring*, which occurs when a prediction is anchored to previous knowledge, which can, depending on the similarities between the predicted occurrence and the previous knowledge, be closer to or further from the optimal prediction (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 23–25). Presentation is equally important in a situation where a person can choose. Framing an option as a loss makes it highly unattractive to customers (37). This goes hand in hand with what they call gains and losses, which essentially revolves around the fact that people hate losing (33), and which presents an inherent impetus that is consistently used in game design. For Thaler and Sunstein (72), nudges are especially important when the effects of a choice are not instantly visible, which is even more true for games with eloquent choice architectures and a lot of branching (for example, in the *Banner Saga* series (2014–2018), where early choices affect not only one individual event or even one game but carry over from the first game to the third game). They argue that feedback is one of the most important parts of nudging, as it shapes the way decisions are made in the future (77). This also holds true for video games.

I have already briefly talked about the aspect of manipulation. A nudge is a non-intrusive, soft form of manipulation, which preserves the unaltered choice set (Saghai 2013, 15). Other forms of manipulation are possible, such as that which Richard J. Arneson (2015) labels a *shove*, or a forceful intrusion. In gaming, nudges and shoves fall on a spectrum. If nudges are subtle influences in the choice-making process, building on aspects such as choice arrangement or the framing and balancing of games, then shoves are an intrusion. For example, in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, if an allied character is about to leave the group indefinitely, the game provides the player with an additional prompt asking them to confirm they actually want to make that choice. This is remarkably controlling. One example of an even more egregious shove is found in some side-scroller games where the screen scrolls forward by itself, resulting in a game over once the screen's border reaches the player's character. While it is possible to stand still, it is highly advisable to move, since standing still is penalised immediately by the character's death. Two phenomena that comprise no actual options at all would be *pseudo-choice*, which, to use Wolf's terminology, is no choice at all, where every choice made leads to the same result, and lastly *coercion*. Coercion describes the outright denial of any choice,

such as in *Evoland* (2013), where the player is asked if he or she wants to help the damsel in distress, but the option to say “No” is greyed out.

Perceiving the default: Default options and other markers of preferred play

In this section, I want to discuss a few of the markers that guide players to follow the preferred playing. Due to the multi-layered nature of video games, this list should not be seen as exhaustive but rather as a starting point for discussion about the guidance offered in certain parts of games throughout a playthrough.

Default options and visual defaults. So-called default choices form one category of markers for preferred playing, a part of nudging which manifests in a visibly different way in video games. Default choices are “an option that will obtain if the chooser does nothing” (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 83). Christina L. Brown and Aradhna Krishna (2004, 529) state that “default options affect choice by taking advantage of consumers’ processing limitations” and reduce the cognitive effort to make a choice (Brown and Krishna 2004, 530). There are numerous aspects in which default choices can nudge the player towards the preferred playing, but they are also often shaped differently than they are in economics because games mostly demand input of some kind to advance the story at all.

A phenomenon in games that semantically best matches the actual definition of “default options” is what I will call *standard actions*. Standard actions occur when a certain default action is triggered by the game if the player remains inactive. They are often accompanied by a timer that runs out and then triggers the game to choose the least-favourable option, which makes it a challenge and not a true default option. For example, in the final scene of *Half Life* (1998), the player is given the choice of stepping through a portal to receive a new mission from the employers of the mysterious G-Man. Failure to do so within 18 seconds results in the protagonist being teleported to his certain death instead.

An important form of default for the preferred reading is what I will call *visual defaults*. According to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996, 2), “like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction.” Some structures, they argue, are subordinated to others (79). In video games, this can occur in two forms: a subordination in time (one was there before the other) and in the game arrangement. By subordinating one option to the other, one option can be defined as the visual default, sparking the *default effect*. Framing a choice as the default option drastically increases the likelihood that this option is chosen above the others (Brown and Krishna 2004, 530). Furthermore, default options serve as what Thaler and Sunstein call the anchor, with the default option becoming the point of reference for the decision-maker

(Wernerfelt 1995). They also change the player's understanding of what is the desired, the recommended, or simply the best option.

Dishonored 2 (2016) is an example of a visual default where subordination is achieved via time structure. Emily Kaldwin is presented first on the screen when the player has to choose between her or Corvo. The player must actively move the cursor to move the camera over to Corvo to choose him instead. Emily is not only presented as the default choice on a technical level, but also via the preceding tutorial and cutscene, which are played and told from Emily's perspective. Choosing Emily as the protagonist leads to a relatively fresh story about female agency in which she sets out to avenge her murdered mother and save her father. Another visual default example is in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, in which the presented default character in the character editor is always a white, male Nord, which the player must actively change. The images provided by the character creation already establish certain views and favoured playstyles. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 87) state that an object or person in a picture, or the carrier, consists of possessive attributes or parts, both of which are put in relation to each other. An initial image of a character with a weapon drawn already sets the tone for a preferred playing of the game and provides an outlook to the supposedly most important mechanic, in this case combat.

Balancing. Balancing is another manifestation of the nudges that lead to the preferred playing. It describes how a game renders a certain option or playstyle more ludically rewarding due to the calibration of its mechanics. In *Far Cry 2* (2008), the protagonist dies so quickly under enemy fire that stealth becomes necessary to survive, although the player could theoretically opt for a more aggressive approach. Instead, the overall narrative requires the protagonist to sneak around at night and actively avoid any signs of human life, like a night-prowling animal, thus becoming less "human."

The opposite occurs in *Doom* (2016) and *Doom Eternal* (2020), where killing enemies through close-up melee finishers grants bonus health, armour, and ammunition, all of which are vital for survival, making players control the Doom Marine in accordance with his narrative: as an agent of aggression and rage that does not back down but pushes forward.

In strategy games, balancing is often used to differentiate a variety of playable factions in ways that correspond with the faction's narrative theme. In *Sid Meier's Civilization V*, the Egyptians are faster at building wonders, which makes building them an effective strategy and thus makes the player reenact the behaviour associated with the game's idea of "Egyptians." Balancing that contradicts the narrative results in ludo-narrative dissonance. If a narrative goal grants unsatisfactory ludic rewards compared to alternative paths, the player is less likely to pursue it. This is

the case in *Fallout 4* where the Lone Survivor is supposed to follow the main quest to save her son, but the player is rewarded more for exploring the landscape and building settlements and thus more likely to avoid the very goal that supposedly drives the character.

Difficulty and Challenges. The notion of difficulty is closely connected to balancing. The right difficulty in games is essential to the fun it offers. “In its ideal state, then, challenge – characterized by the obstacle that attempts to impede player progress – is directly proportional to the pleasure gained through playing” (Furze 2016, 146). This ideal proportion perpetuates the so-called “flow” state, coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in which someone becomes lost in his or her current activity. Challenge is an integral factor in motivating the player to continue playing (Furze 2016, 147). Jesper Juul (2008, 247) notes that challenge does not rise in a straight line, but that it should be “sometimes [. . .] a little easy, sometimes a little hard” to be less predictable. Games can have an emergent difficulty, such as in chess (Holland 1998, 14), or they can have a progressive difficulty curve (Furze 2016, 138). As they progress through a game, players expect challenges to become more difficult, as by that point, ideally, the player has become more proficient at the game as well. While emergent difficulty is a form of difficulty that relies on the players themselves or the game unfolding, even relatively open games still feature forms of progressive difficulty that shape the way in which someone following the preferred playing would play the game.

Conan Exiles (2018), for example, allows the player to visit every part of the map right from the onset. Every player starts in the beginners’ area in the very south of the world map. The player has the option to travel to the most challenging areas of the map right away, but those lie in the far north, which, without a mount, requires an hour to walk on foot. On this path, several challenges in the form of enemies and potential death from thirst, hunger, or sandstorms await the player, making it highly unattractive to stray from the path of preferred playing. The difficulty in *Conan Exiles* spreads in concentric circles around the area in which the player starts, and the player learns by interacting with the world to travel certain distances that lie within the strength of the character. Another example in which difficulty shapes the preferred playing is *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017). This open-world game offers the player the option to face the final boss at the very beginning. The so-called “speed run” community competes to finish the game in the shortest amount of time and thus skips the majority of content to head straight to the final encounter. These 30 minutes of intensive play are widely seen as a spectacle and are part of the oppositional play, as the added time condition for winning is not part of the original game’s ruleset.

Difficulty shapes a game and the way the game is played on several levels, such as dungeons, which are structured in an equally climatic way. In games of emergence, such as *Crypt of the NecroDancer* (2015), levels of certain types are randomised, but the difficulty increases with every new stage. Challenges shape the kind of individual progression. Even in relatively open games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, where the player can choose from a variety of skills ranging from a proficiency in axe-wielding to a knack for alchemy, the player is confronted with certain challenges that will shape the way in which the player wants to progress. Enemies can only be defeated through combat and therefore some kind of violent approach has to be part of the individual progression of the player's character. In even more emergent games, the challenges shape the variety of approaches that emerge as most effective. In digital card games like *Hearthstone* (2014), for example, the game's limited options at the start of a match and the plethora of options towards the end establish certain decisions as openers or standard moves. The same phenomenon can be observed in chess where some moves have become so standardised that they are called "book moves," those most adept at dealing with situations that arise from the game's ruleset.

Another form in which difficulty makes the preferred playing visible is closely connected to the notion of default options. Nowadays, many games offer options to change the overall difficulty. In some games, players are stripped of certain options when they change the difficulty, or changing difficulties creates a ludo-narrative dissonance. *Dead in Vinland* (2018), for example, gives characters a well-balanced set of skills on normal difficulty ("story mode") that fit their personality, while higher difficulties randomise attributes, which makes for a vastly different experience. In Story Mode, Kari, the tomboyish daughter of the family, prevails in agility, stealth, and courage. This goes hand in hand with her narrative representation as a daredevil who refuses traditional feminine values. Heodening Mode, the higher difficulty, however, can lead to a ludo-narrative dissonance, picturing Kari as thriving in skills like cooking while still bemoaning them in cutscenes. Therefore, the default difficulty is the one that fits the overall design of the game, making it the preferred playing. *Dead in Vinland* and many other games, such as *Wargroove* (2019), outright tell the player which of the difficulties is the default setting, often adding that this is the way the game is meant to be played.

Level design. Game levels are often critiqued in terms of openness, for creating the illusion that the player is dropped into a vast world that offers unlimited paths. This, however, is not how games are designed. When discussing meaningful level design, Jenkins (2004) states: "Game designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces." The gameworld is not a natural space, but both a story-

telling device and a playground. Jenkins (2004) famously compares levels to amusement parks, claiming that those levels “can paint their worlds in fairly broad outlines and count on the visitor/player to do the rest.” Jenkins continues by calling them “spatial stories,” connected to spatial exploration. The amusement park, however, might be a place that can be explored freely, but it is still full of markers that guide the visitor in certain directions so he or she does not get lost and enjoys the individual attractions to their fullest capacity. Most levels are designed in ways that are meaningful and, while technically open, in parts linear in their potential for exploration and progression. Objectives are usually close by, even in open spaces, leading the player through the terrain, thereby allowing them to visit everything that is worth seeing, except for maybe a few places meant for in-depth exploration. Returning to *World of Warcraft* as an example, when the player visits Stranglethorn, the first quests with the hunter’s lodge start in the town in which the player arrives, Booty Bay, then progress to the entrance to the Stranglethorn jungle, and eventually go deeper and deeper until the player arrives on the opposite side, having visited all important locations on the way by virtue of following the questline.

Genre and narratives. Level design is one of the narrative devices that games use. In the aftermath of the debate between ludologists and narratologists, most have settled on the fact that “some video games include a story and expend great effort to make it the most important point of the experience they offer, while others feature a very limited story (or [. . .] no story at all)” (Arsenault 2016, 479). Jenkins (2004) notes that games tell stories differently, but they often rely on the player being familiar with genre conventions and stereotypes. Games that serve as a host medium for already-existing narratives make use of so-called extrinsic narrativity (Arsenault 2016, 479). This extrinsic narrativity, I would argue, is also a form of nudge. Through internalised genre conventions, players can predict what kind of an event might lead to what effect or ending, and developers can use this knowledge to nudge players in certain directions. In Thaler and Sunstein’s terminology, players anchor to their previous knowledge about genre and base their choices on that knowledge.

Gone Home (2013), for example, instantly reminds one of a horror game, featuring an old mansion as its setting. The player arrives at night, the mansion is dark, and no music plays. A letter states that the protagonist shall not look for answers where the protagonist’s sister Sam might be. The player then has to find clues inside the house as to what happened, while a thunderstorm is roaring outside, causing the lights to flicker. Floorboards creak, doors shut, and the narrow perspective, perpetuated through the first-person camera, evokes an atmosphere of danger. Knowing and reading those signs as belonging to the horror genre will make players

explore more carefully, influencing their behaviour in a more predictable way, which is part of the preferred playing, even when the player never faces a single foe throughout the entire game. One could argue that this preferred playing only occurs when the player is familiar with the conventions and tropes, but creaking floorboards and thunderstorms draw the genre in such broad strokes that no real literacy in the horror genre is needed. Exploring the house at a fast pace, willingly ignoring all these signs, can therefore be seen as a form of oppositional playing.

Video game genres are numerous, partly contradictory, and also mostly ruled by formal features (Fernández-Vara 2015, 68). A first-person horror shooter is defined by the perspective of the player, the prevalent mode of action inside the game, and traditional narrative conventions. Genre serves as an implicit contract between the film maker and the audience (Schatz 1977) – or, in this case, the developer and the player. In a shooter, shooting will be part of the preferred playing. Trying a pacifist approach to a game that is coded around gunfights is clearly an approach to oppositional playing. Actively avoiding combat in this context means one is familiar with the conventions and rejects them.

The story itself employs similar forms of anchoring to those described for genre. Players are implicitly or explicitly familiar with narrative conventions. Roleplaying games are known for featuring complex stories, sometimes told from multiple perspectives, and it is no coincidence that many fantasy novels like *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) and *The Witcher* (1993–2013) have been adapted into roleplaying games. Even vague knowledge of the narrative and lore can be used by developers to guide the player accordingly. Combined with gameplay elements, the aspects of the story itself provide the strongest nudges for the preferred playing. Especially in roleplaying games, where players are immersed not only in the game but also in the depicted world (called “imaginary immersion” by Ermi and Mäyrä 2005), players are more likely to follow clues given by other characters. In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, Cullen Rutherford, an ex-addict, will tell the protagonist that he does not want to consume drugs any longer. If the player ignores multiple clues from other characters to keep him clean, the game punishes the player by making Cullen unavailable for romance. In such cases, longstanding tools of narratological analysis would be useful to analyse the preferred playing towards which the story nudges the player.

Objectives and goals. Louis-Martin Guay (2016, 191) states, “Playing a game always involves achieving some objectives.” Game designers like Tracy Fullerton (2004) argue that establishing an objective is the first step in game design. Fullerton even claims that objectives are the very thing that structures games (Fullerton 2004, 29). While Guay (2016, 192–95) mainly differentiates between three kinds of objectives – Formal Objectives, Learning Objectives and Experimental Objectives –

M A R I E - L U I S E M E I E R

preferred playing is mostly concerned with formal objectives. For example, they come in forms of "Chase: Catch X and/or elude X" (Fullerton 2004). A game rarely provides the player with only one objective (Rollins and Adams 2003, 55). Roleplaying games, for example, provide players with a variety of objectives, such as slaying foes, avoiding damage, saving damsels, gathering herbs, fleeing from danger in a limited time, etc. Mandatory objectives, however, play the most important role in mapping the preferred playing. In a roleplaying game, progressing the character's capabilities is necessary to win. It can be argued that it is highly unlikely that a player will avoid all obstacles because otherwise their character will be unfit for the final confrontation. Here, the objective – defeating the final boss – shapes the preferred playing. Similarly, in dungeons of roleplaying games, players are incentivised to explore every room and corridor rather than rushing straight to the end, as they require the rewards this yields in the form of experience and loot to progress their character.

Outside of roleplaying games, games like *Dishonored* (2012) show how goals shape the preferred playing. The game repeatedly emphasises through cutscenes, dialogue, and loading screens that an overly violent approach will lead to a worse (so-called *High Chaos*) ending. Therefore, the goal of keeping characters alive and achieving a positive ending urges the player to attempt a stealthy, nonviolent approach. In a game of emergence like *Hearthstone*, the tutorial already teaches players that they have to put cards on the field that are able to attack the opponent, but they must first overcome the cards that the opponent has on the field. The objective to "reduce enemy hitpoints to zero with skills or units" leads to the emergence of strategies. Analysing the goals will inevitably lead to the preferred playing.

Rewards are a form of objective. In games, they can be used as a marker for preferred play. As Andrew Przybylski, C. Scott Rigby, and Richard M. Ryan (2010, 155) note, (non-educational) games are usually intrinsically motivating. Rewards are a strong driving force within games, be they in the form of additional gain within the game world such as objects or in-game currency (both usually considered *loot*), additional cutscenes, lengthy talks with a favourite character, developing skills, and so on. Players will usually opt for the path they deem rewarding, and the game will usually hint to the paths that are. In *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (2011) a certain amount of dark/light points is needed to wield certain items. They also influence the relation between the character and their follower. Options that are beneficial in dialogues and are rewarded with dark or light points are marked with respective symbols, making them the preferred option if they coincide with the path that the character pursues. While players pursue oppositional play for a variety of reasons, such as seeing a character die or mastering a special kind of challenge, such as with *The Sims 3* (2009), for

which entire websites for alternate game modes exist, those players are usually already aware of the typical and therefore preferable way to play the game.

Conclusion

This article started by discussing the limitations of past qualitative and quantitative approaches to video game analysis, which are especially prevalent when analysing games regarding race, class, and gender. While past approaches often fall short objectively or paint the content of the inherently interactive medium of video games in binary terms, I recommended a twofold approach to game analysis. To start, I proposed mapping out the potential actions and events inside games, following Fernández-Vara's (2015) concept of the space of possibilities.

While this ensures one perceives games in their entirety, it is still not enough to grasp perspectives and ideologies oftentimes encoded within the game's preferences. For this reason, I transformed Hall's longstanding concept of preferred reading (1973), together with the notions of negotiated and oppositional reading, into the concept of preferred playing. For this, I used Thaler and Sunstein's concept of nudge (2008), which suggests that the game itself advocates an ideal way of playing it. To grasp the nudges employed by games to form the preferred playing, different aspects and layers of games have been discussed. Analysing those nudges helps those working with games to perceive the preferred playing, which can be difficult to recognise within the space of possibilities. It offers a new way to perceive games. Nudges are particularly prevalent in so-called visual defaults but are also visible in many aspects of gameplay, especially in balancing, difficulty and challenges, as well as goals and rewards. Meaningful level design and aspects of genre and narrative further shape the game's vision of an ideal path, which both players and scholars can then identify as the preferred playing of the game. Performativity can thereby mostly be found in semi-directed games which offer an especially broad space of possibilities within the space of oppositional play.

This methodology can be used to create a textual groundwork to analyse games not only from the perspective of gender but also, for example, from race. As a versatile tool for game analysis, it can be combined with other approaches. Particularly in games that pursue openness and emergence, it allows putting additional emphasis on aspects of gameplay and user participation, while games that emphasise story and character development will benefit from longstanding approaches to those subjects found in the analysis of other forms of media. The extent to which the notion of preferred playing is universal has yet to be determined since games communicate via signs, which are culturally specific. To what degree this applies to video games as a global medium may incentivise future research.

While the focus of this article is on video game studies, which currently lacks a systematic method of default choices and preferred playing, the ideas of the type of perception that orient people toward preferred playing may potentially be extended to other fields of study. Interactive media belonging to genres such as interactive film or choose-your-own-adventure books could especially benefit from this approach.

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S U M M A R Y

Vaikesätte jälgedes: valikuarhitektuuri navigeerimine videomängudes

Marie-Luise Meier

Võttesõnad: metodoloogia, tekstianalüüs, videomängud, eelistatud mängimine, vaikevalikud, ludoloogia

Käesolev artikkel loob Stuart Halli (1973) eelistatud lugemise (*preferred reading*) käsitluse alusel eelistatud mängimise (*preferred playing*) kontseptsiooni, kasutades selleks Cass Sunsteini ja Richard Thaleri (2008) nügimise (*nudge*) mõistet, et luua uus lähenemine tekstianalüüsile, mis oleks sobiv videomängude kui interaktiivse meediumi analüüsiks. Koos mõistete ja uuendustega nüüdisaegsest ludoloogiast ja mängu-disainist arutatakse eelistatud mängimise markereid kui alternatiivi levinumale lähilugemisele videomängu meediumi eri kihistuste uurimiseks.

Artikli alguses on välja toodud varasemate kvalitatiivsete ja kvantitatiivsete lähenemiste probleemaa-tika videomänguanalüüsis, mis on eriti märgatav siis, kui käsitletakse rassi, klassi ja soo kujutamist video-mängudes. Kuna varasemates lähenemistes jääb tihti puudu objektiivsusest ning tihtipeale kujutatakse videomänge, vältimatult interaktiivset meediumit, ka liiga lihtsustatult, soovitan kaheosalist lähenemist videomänguanalüüsile. Alustuseks pakun ma potentsiaalsete tegevuste ja sündmuste kaardistamise videomängudes, võttes aluseks Fernández-Vara (2015) kontseptsiooni võimalusruumist (*space of possibilities*).

Kuigi see aitab videomänge mõista terviklikena, ei piisa sellest siiski mängusiseste vaatepunktide ja ideoloogiate analüüsiks, sest need on tihti kodeeritud eelistama üht või teist valikut. Seetõttu loon ma Halli (1973) mõiste „eelistatud lugemine“ (*preferred reading*) alusel, koos selle alla kuuluvate vastanduva (*oppositional*) ja sobitava (*negotiated*) lugemise mõistetega, kontseptsiooni eelistatud mängimisest (*preferred playing*). Sel eesmärgil kasutan ma Thaleri ja Sunsteini (2008) terminit „nügimine“ (*nudge*), pakkudes välja, et videomäng ise markeerib ideaalse viisi enda mängimiseks. Eelistatud mängimine on seega domineeriv mängustiil, mis on tuletatud neist nügimistest, mida mäng mängijale esitab; vastanduv mängimine on mängustiil, mis tunneb need nügimised küll ära, kuid vastandub neile tahtlikult, näiteks lõhestava või eten-dusliku mängimise eesmärgil. Sobitav mängimine seevastu aga kaasab tihti eelistatud mängimist, kuid muudab seda vastavalt mängija soovidele. Selleks, et mõista, millised nügimised videomängudes moodus-tavad eelistatud mängimise, on vaja analüüsida videomängude erinevaid aspekte ja kihistusi. Nügimine on eriti tavapärane nn visuaalsete vaikesätete puhul, kuid esineb ka paljudes mängumehhaanika detailides, näiteks tasakaalustamises, keerukuses ja väljakutsetes, aga ka eesmärkides ja auhindades. Täendus-rikas tasemedisain ja žanri- ning narratiivielementide kasutamine kujundavad täiendavalt kujutluspilti ideaalsest teekonnast läbi videomängu sündmuste, mille põhjal saavad seega tuletada videomängu eelis-tatud mängimise nii mängijad ise kui ka ludoloogid.

Kirjeldatud metodoloogia abil saab luua lähteteksti, analüüsivaks videomänge nii soo kui ka näiteks rassi kujutamises, kuna alaesindatuse probleem on mõlema aspekti puhul tavapärane (Williams jt 2009). Kuna tegemist on kohandatava töövahendiga videomängude analüüsiks, saab seda vastavalt vajadusele kasutada ka koos teiste teoreetiliste lähenemistega.

S U M M A R Y

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Exploring Physiology-Based Interactions in Performing Arts Using Artistic Interventions

Taavet Jansen, Aleksander Väljamäe

Abstract: Technological innovations like physiological computing offer new possibilities when exploring audience-performer interaction. To avoid technological solutionism that often accompanies biosensor applications in performing arts, an artistic interventions approach was used. This paper describes a recent art-science residency consisting of three artistic experiments: the audience's electrodermal, activity-driven soundscape in a dance improvisation, a "lie detector" applied to the actor just after the performance, and a heart-rate-driven personal discotheque installation. Both artist and scientist provide reflections on future development of this transdisciplinary field from the performing arts perspective.

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Keywords: performing arts, art residency, interaction design, physiological computing, neurotheatre

Introduction

Contemporary interactive theatre heavily relies on technological innovations, and its content is often generated on the fly. However, new technologies such as wearables that sense viewers' physiological reactions or stream online theatre are far less frequent. During an art-science residency at Tallinn University in 2019, the performing artist Taavet Jansen experimented with physiological computing concepts and technologies in relation to new ways of audience participation. The art-science collaboration residency took place over six months in Tallinn, Estonia where Mr. Jansen and Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI) scientist and art-science practitioner Dr. Aleksander Väljamäe worked together to explore the potential of physiological computing technologies in performing arts settings. This article uses a mixed methods writing approach (Zhou and Hall 2018, 1) in which the artist's and the art-science practitioner's first-person autoethnographic reflections (marked in italics) provide personal insights into the working process. The overall scientific discourse, however, is given in a traditional, non-personalised text. This mixed writing method allows one to highlight individual narratives within the context of the art-science collaboration and more fully represent its multifaceted nature. A detailed account of the transdisciplinary collaboration process and the time structure of the residency is detailed by Hanna-Liisa Pender and Taavet Jansen (2020).

The artist: *I am interested in people on stage in front of other people. It bugs me that I don't know what happens 'inside' of them. I realise we don't understand what the other person thinks or feels, but we can get small indications of these processes. If we can measure these and smartly visualise this data, it could become an instrument to measure the artistic project's success or become a part of the artwork itself. But what kind of data could we extract from people in this wild, uncontrolled environment? In this art-science residency, I had a chance to study the audience's reactions, analysing their electrodermal activity and heart rates. I was looking for the artistic stimuli triggering the reactions and for new ways to meaningfully visualise this data.*

The residency's art-science collaboration can be best described by the practice-based research model of Ernest Edmonds and Linda Candy (2010, 471), which distinguishes different trajectories between three main elements of practice (art works), theory (design strategies and frameworks), and evaluation (results). The residency's methodological approach was closest to "artistic intervention in research" as described by Baptiste Caramiaux and Marco Donnarumma (2020, 2). In this approach, the artistic process acts upon specific scientific frameworks and HCI design strategies. This allowed us to explore different artistic concepts during the residency without relying on a specific research topic. Instead, every artistic experiment focused on different ways of using the physiological computing technology. From the HCI perspective, artistic intervention helps to address a problem (or study a phenomenon) in radically new ways (Benford et al. 2012). Also, artistic intervention helps to avoid the problem of technological solutionism (Caramiaux and Donnarumma 2020, 5). Technological solutionism refers to the technological push and "solution-driven design" (Blythe et al. 2016, 4968) where social or cultural contexts are often ignored. A critical artistic intervention can question the role of technology and its meaning-making capacities, forcing artists and researchers to face the inner beliefs that ultimately motivated their choices (Caramiaux and Donnarumma 2020, 5).

The scientist: *Since 2008, I have been involved in the art-science productions that have been triggered by researchers, e.g., the Multimodal Brain Orchestra performance in 2009 in Prague (Le Groux et al. 2010) or the mixed-reality interactive installation 'The Synthetic Oracle' presented at the European Science Open Forum (ESOF'08 in Barcelona (i Badia et al. 2009)). One of the common shortcomings in these productions was a strong technological push where the possibilities of new technologies were demonstrated to the public, but the artistic concept was weak or not situated in a wider social context. Over the years, this convinced me that true art-science productions should start not from the technology side but from the artistic concept or artistic enquiry.*

TAAVET JANSEN, ALEKSANDER VÄLJAMÄE

In physiological computing, human-computer interaction relies on measuring human physiological signals, such as brain or heart activity, and then adapting the system to these signals, usually in real-time (see Fairclough 2009 and references therein). Changes in physiology reflect the cognitive, perceptual, and emotional processes of the user interacting with a digital system. Importantly, such physiology-based interaction can be both explicit, in that the user is aware of his or her control, or, more importantly, implicit, where interactions between human and computer happen on subconscious and symbiotic levels (Kosunen and Väljamäe 2020). Physiological-computing technologies that focus on the monitoring of a user's affective states are referred to as affective computing (Picard 2000). In recent years, the research on affective processes has demonstrated its importance for understanding and predicting how people think and behave, giving rise to "the era of affectivism" (Dukes et al. 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that affective computing technologies are becoming increasingly widespread in all domains of human life, including theatre and performing arts at large.

At the beginning of the residency, the fields of physiological and affective computing were new to the artist, generating several artistic questions regarding both hardware and software tools in terms of their simplicity, reliability, and, finally, their added value in the performing art context. Embracing the scientific agenda, the leading research question for both the artist and scientist became: "How can physiological computing tools extend and deepen the performing artist's practice beyond simple technological augmentation?" Three distinct artistic experiments focused on different aspects of using physiological computing tools in the performing arts context. The first experiment explored what sensory feedback can be given to the audience about the emotional arousal state of selected members and how this can complement the performance experience. The first experiment explored what sensory feedback can be given to the audience about the emotional arousal state of selected members and how this can complement the performance experience. The second experiment tapped into the actor's own emotional experiences immediately after the performance. The third experiment focused on how to create an interactive audio-visual space that adapts to the individual visitor's heart rate.

The artist: People don't understand the advantages that technology use can bring to art. People tend to integrate technology into an artistic event so that the performance would be more attractive, but technology could be used more delicately – using human micro-movements, physiological reactions, and brain processes. In other words, the use of technology can now give a voice to our organism that others can hear.

The scientist: *In my art-science practice, I am interested in how to shape viewers' or users' experiences over time, their 'affective waveform', its dynamics. I find the physiology-based interaction fascinating since it allows the artistic content to adapt to the individual or collective reactions, therefore maximising the potential emotional impact of a cinema or theatre piece. Bringing various sensors into the performing art context also allow us to unite the audience, the performers, and the stage into a complex, interconnected, bio-cybernetic system that may bring to life new experiences and new forms of art.*

This paper is organised as follows: Sections 2 to 4 describe each of the three artistic experiments, detailing their artistic, technical, and scientific aspects, followed by key observations. Section 5 provides a more general summary of the lessons learned from the residency. And, finally, Section 6 contains the general discussion and concluding remarks.

2. Artistic experiment 1: Neurochoreography experiment nr. 4

2.1. Physiology, theatre, and audience engagement

Wearable technologies and biomedical sensors are not an exception and are becoming increasingly integrated into the theatre domain (for a recent review, see Rostami et al. 2017). Particular attention has been given to the audience's cognitive and emotional reactions, which represent a dynamic "waveform" of unfolding theatrical experience. These can be detected using both behavioural, such as viewers' facial expressions or their movements (Theodorou et al. 2019), or physiological data (Latulipe et al. 2011; Vicary et al. 2017). Ideally, physiological computing technologies should allow, even in real time, redesigning of the structure or the content of the performance to have artistic impact on the audience, e.g., emotional impact and engagement or a new understanding of the theatre piece, as well as to open up new artistic possibilities.

2.2. The initial artistic idea

The first artistic experiment was a contemporary dance performance *Neurochoreography experiment nr. 4*. It stemmed from the previous neurotheatre works of Väljamäe and his colleagues in collaboration with the dance collective FINE5, where the audience's physiological reactions were an integral part of the show either as visualisations (*Demultiplexia*¹, 2017; Väljamäe 2017) or sonifications (*Trisolde*², 2019).

1 *Demultiplexia* (2017), directed by Yury Didevich and Aleksander Väljamäe. Bozar, Brussels.

2 *Trisolde* (2019), directed by Rene Nõmmik. Sakala 3 Teatrimaja, Tallinn.

TAAVET JANSEN, ALEKSANDER VÄLJAMÄE

Neurotheatre is an emerging type of interactive theatre, in which the audience – spectActors – and actors can communicate via brain-neural computer interaction using motion and physiological sensors and multisensory actuators, including touch, sound, and visuals (Väljamäe and Didevich, in preparation). The primary interest in this experiment was to convert the audience’s immediate affective reactions into a meaningful soundscape even if such sensory feedback would be very simple aesthetically. Sonification, or, in a more general terminology, the perceptualisation of data, is the process of converting a data stream into sound or another perceptual modality (Jovanov et al. 1999). One of the key issues in the sonification of physiological signals is finding the right strategy of feedback to strike a balance between aesthetic quality and public perception of the feedback (Väljamäe et al. 2013).

The artist: Sound design is an organic part of every mise-en-scène. From the music design to the organic sounds of the space – all sounds are artistic decisions. I am interested in how to use the implicit processes of the spectators in sound design. The majority of people don’t know how the sensor technologies work, and, therefore, too complicated of a relationship between the sensor’s data and the sound can confuse the spectator. I was curious about what could be the most straightforward data mapping. I decided that the audience’s reaction should modulate the volume of the sound design so that everybody could understand the relationship.

2.3. The performance

The performance took place on a 6m x 6m black box type of stage where both performers (Liis Vares and Liisbet Horn) were on stage for the entire time. The performance lasted precisely 20 minutes. When the audience entered the space, the performers were already performing a “warm-up” sequence. The performance began with the performers leaving the stage and coming back with intensive movement. Both performers were tasked with taking choreographic impulses from each other, accounting for the overall intensity, and not consciously reacting to the sound. Dramaturgically, they had a mission to meet three times during the performance and restart their improvisation with a new theme. Henri Hütt’s track “taeva altaril” was used for the soundtrack, which was manipulated by the artist.

To monitor the audience’s emotional response, four electrodermal activity (EDA) sensors were used. EDA is a common biometric signal that measures conductivity from sweat on the skin that is secreted in response to autonomic nervous system arousal (Andreassi 2010). So, the arousal of four members of the audience was registered when they saw something exciting on stage. A simple sonification approach was used, which reflected arousal changes via the loudness modulation of the accompanying soundtrack. The performance was designed in such a way that the

dancers avoided any interaction with the sound (the audiences' response) because the goal was to create the condition for the sound design and the dancers to be observed separately. In terms of the performance "space," separating the dancers and the soundtrack created an additional tension between the visual and auditory "spaces."



Figure 1. Left panel: two dancers in physical interaction. Right panel: two dancers performing a movement sequence separately. The video of the full performance is available online: <https://youtu.be/JuqL79vdOLY>.

2.4. Observations

The dancers (Liis Vares and Liisbet Horn) shared several observations after the performance. First, they claimed that it was not difficult to ignore the soundtrack since they both concentrated on the dance improvisation. However, long pauses or rapid changes were noticeable, and a lack of a single sound source (a sonification of a single user affective state) created a feeling of randomness. In other words, the composite feedback from four different people was more difficult to "associate" with. Second, it was not more complicated than a usual dance improvisation, but the presence of the audience added a new layer: "[. . .] we were moving through it together, no place to hide." The "active" presence of the audience felt as if the control over the choreography became distributed between the dancers and the audience. Both dancers agreed that having a software tool that allowed them to revisit both the video and the underlying affective reactions of the audience would be very interesting for similar future work. A member from the audience noted that the most intriguing element for them was following the physiological data mapping and witnessing the discrepancies between what was happening on the stage and its effects on the music level. There was a very intense moment when the two dancers were touching each other, but the sound went completely silent, creating an additional level of tension. The full analysis of the performance will be provided by Jansen and Våljamäe (in preparation).

T A A V E T J A N S E N , A L E K S A N D E R V Ä L J A M Ä E

The artist: *I mostly see the artistic potential in neurochoreography – sensor technologies making visible what is currently invisible – the internal processes of the performer and the audience are expressed in numerical values. It is not clear at all what these numbers represent, but I see the potential of these technologies for finetuning the audience to a state where they are the most responsive to my artistic challenge. These numbers represent something – we just have to figure out how to use them.*

The scientist: *This experiment revealed the great importance of a ‘performance space’ dimension when choosing the right sonification strategy. It was clear that the artistic setting, the atmosphere, the pretext, and the dramaturgy, influenced the audience’s perception of a rather simple, if not primitive, sonification based on the music loudness modulation. While the initial mapping between the viewers’ reaction and the sound was very clear, the moments of mismatch between the tension on the stage and the sound intensity added a completely new layer to the performance. Viewers were trying to follow ‘the logic’ of the mapping and this added to the overall tension created by the performance.*

3. Artistic experiment 2: The “Interrogation” of Macbeth

3.1. Acting and the use of physiological sensors

An actor’s profession is tightly linked to emotional dynamics and self-control of underlying physiological processes. Many studies show that strong emotional experiences that actors live out during a scene can lead to emotional burnout (Robb et al. 2018). While the debate about whether actors experience true emotions on stage can be traced back to the 18th century’s “Paradox of the Actor” by Diderot (Beck 2000, 264), there are various acting training methods stemming from Stanislavsky’s early ideas about “psychophysiological authenticity” and his interest in yoga practice in the 1910s (Tcherkasski 2012, 10). For example, in the Alba Emoting method (Bloch et al. 1987; Bloch 1993), actors train triadic, respiratory-postural-facial patterns to create and control real emotions. Another important training technique for actors is the use of emotional imagery (Gollnisch et al. 1993), which sometimes evokes stronger physiological reactions than real life events. Antonin Artaud compared the process of actor training to sports, calling it “affective athleticism” (Gardner 2003; Artaud 2018).

The scientist: *During my research stay in Saint Petersburg in 2013–2014, I learned about extensive experiments that the Institute of the Human Brain at the Russian Academy of Sciences conducted together with the State Academy of Theatre for a number of years in the joint neurophysiology lab led by the theatre director, Larisa Gracheva (Gracheva 2019). This interdisciplinary research extensively studied topics like non-verbal creativity and actors’ psychophysiological dynamics. Conversations with Larisa sparked my interest in actors’ physiology training and qualitative assessment of their emotional experience. Interestingly, the field still is very conservative when talking about the adoption of new physiological computing tools and mainly relies on exercises that do not involve sensor technologies.*

3.2. The initial artistic idea

The second artistic experiment was done in collaboration with actors from the Tallinn City Theatre and involved ideas using lie detection techniques based on recorded electrodermal activity.

The artist: The initial idea came from the Estonian actor Tambet Tuisk – he was interested in acting while connected to a “lie detector.” He was intrigued about whether he could lie without the lie detector identifying it using his skills of acting. The proposal was interesting for me for two reasons: a) figuring out how to build a technologically reliable equivalent to a lie detector, b) exploring the artistic potential of the situation where the actor’s skills can be actually measured.

Originally, the idea was to use sensor technology while the actor was on stage (a performance of *Macbeth* by the Tallinn City Theatre³). The visualisation of biological signals, or their processed output, to the audience would, in theory, allow viewers to believe the emotional authenticity of his acting. Even if the sensor did not work, this would still give room for the alternative interpretation that the actor was so good that he deceived the technology. However, due to time, organisational, and budget constraints, we decided not to interfere with the ongoing performance, since the introduction of sensor technology would break the scenography of the performance and creating a new performance was not an option. As an alternative, it was decided to “interrogate” the actor after the performance in front of the audience from the main show.

3.3. Technical realisation

A lie detector or a polygraph infers deception through the analysis of physiological reactions to a structured series of questions. This technique has become a popular cultural icon even though its effectiveness in detecting deception has been questioned (American Psychological Association 2004). While there are no specific physiological correlates of deception, the anxiety associated with a sensation of guilt can be picked up by peripheral physiology sensors. The typical polygraph instrument simultaneously measures several physiological indexes, such as blood pressure, pulse, respiratory patterns, and the electrodermal response, which are not under the direct voluntary control of the test subject (Steinbrook 1992, 122). A customised BITalino R-IoT microcontroller board with an EDA sensor was used to record physiological signals from the actor’s left and right palms. While such a simplified version of a polygraph was not enough to detect deception, it still allowed us

3 *Macbeth* (2017) by William Shakespeare, directed by Antti Mikkola. Tallinn City Theatre Põrgulava, Tallinn.

TAAVET JANSEN, ALEKSANDER VÄLJAMÄE

to see the peripheral arousal reactions of the actor. The final experiment setup included a prepared “interrogation” just after the performance (*Macbeth*, but without the audience to avoid putting additional pressure on the actor (Mr. Alo Kõrve, who plays the role of Macbeth)). The interview questions were created together with Steven Hristo Evestus – a professional prosecutor – and were based on the actor’s decisions on stage. The main research question was whether the actor was aware of the artistic decisions he made on stage and how much these affect his real life and work. The professional maturity of the actor and the complex role allowed for in-depth questions about how and why he made artistic decisions (e.g., “Were your stage partners today as focused as you were?”, “Were you mentally exhausted?”, “Were you satisfied with your work tonight?”). The “interrogation” took place on 25 May 2019 and took about 30 minutes, with recorded physiology and videos.



Figure 2. Snapshots from the *Macbeth* experiment process. Left panel: the prosecutor S. H. Evestus. Centre panel: the setup at the Tallinn City Theatre. Right panel: the actor Alo Kõrve connected to electrodermal activity sensors.

3.4. Observations

The media took great interest in this artistic experiment because the people in the team – Tambet Tuisk, Steven-Hristo Evestus, and Alo Kõrve – are well-known in Estonia. The lie detector topic and the use of sensors greatly contributed to this interest. The process of setting up the experiment at the theatre went very smoothly, and the idea of a specific show after the main performance attracted attention from both the administration and the creative team of the theatre. The main participants, Evestus and Kõrve, found strong artistic potential in this format for development into a post-performance event. However, such an event’s dramaturgy had to be carefully developed with the actor since it was an intimate experience that goes beyond the play’s character and tapped into the actor’s real life. The experiment also showed that the peripheral physiological responses alone were not enough to decipher the decision-making process happening on stage or the subjective feelings experienced by the actor. Perhaps a wearable EEG (Electroencephalography) or fNIRS

(functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy) device recording the actor's brain activity during the performance could complement this approach (see, for example, a recent brain-driven camera solution by Mann et al. 2021). Some of the questions resulted in stronger emotional arousal reactions than others, intruding the private space of the actor. From a conceptual perspective, it was interesting to see how the "theatre miracle" could be deconstructed, where instruments from reality questioned the imaginary world created by actors. Hence, such technology could be used to detect aspects of the performance that are personally important to the performer. The idea of the actor being aware of his decision making and emotions during the performance has great potential for both teaching acting and educating the audience.

The artist: I'm sure that I would believe the actor even if I saw from the polygraph that he is lying. The research process with Tabet and Steven uncovered more for me than I was initially expecting. I realised that sensors do not help me to 'decode' the art of acting. The use of sensors on the actor during the performance could be seen itself as entertainment – visualisation of the actor 'lying' can be entertaining and fun rather than adding extra artistic value to the performance.

The scientist: Working with a professional actor was rewarding. Observing an 'emotional athlete's' reactions confirmed my conviction that affective dynamics should be studied using professionals, as they exhibit a variety and strength of emotional reactions that are not similar to naïve participants. It was also clear to me that psychophysiological hardware and software tools can and will be integrated in the actor training process once they can be used without professional assistance.

4. Artistic experiment 3: Interactive installation "Heart-rate Party"

4.1. Scientific background

Heart rate and, especially, pulse, are physiological signals that are rather simple to measure. This has already led to many commercial uses of heart-activity monitoring in sports and well-being applications. Heart rate can be easily affected by external rhythmic stimulation where, for example, false heart-rate sounds can modulate the real heart activity and underlying emotional and cognitive states (Valins 1966; Tajadura-Jiménez et al. 2008). Interactive systems where a user gets heart-rate feedback can be seen as positive (training up) or negative (training down) feedback (Pope and Stephens 2012). One important aspect of heart-rate use in art and well-being applications is that, due to its simplicity, collective scenarios can be deployed monitoring a group's physiological synchronisation and social coherence (McCraty 2017). Such collective scenarios are specifically relevant for the theatre domain when monitoring a performance's impact on the audience.

4.2. The initial artistic idea

The third artistic experiment was realised as an interactive installation. Its idea originated from a collaboration with Sasha Mirson, DJ and media artist, who proposed a sound installation with a modulated musical tempo, where the rhythm of the dancer's heartbeat would enforce the dancing rhythm. While artistic instances of such physiology-based interactions are not new (for a recent review, see Dikker et al. 2019), the focus here was on the technical and physical realisation of such a system, its reliability, and its perception by visitors.

The artist: An interactive artwork is a complex concept. Artwork that adapts to the spectator decreases the possibilities of meeting something that would make you see the world differently. If the spectator becomes a narrator, the dialogue between the artwork, the spectator, and the environment becomes one-sided and narrow.

4.3. Technical realisation

The audio-visual installation "Heart-rate Party" was shown on June 6, 7, and 8 in Püha Vaimu SAAL, Tallinn. The installation was built and programmed by Taavet Jansen and Aleksander Mirson, a student at the Viljandi Culture Academy. The heart-rate sensor (R-IoT) was used to measure the pulse of the user. It synchronised the frequency of the pulse to the sound tempo or, in other words, its beats per minute (BPM), including the light design. The user's pulse was measured when she held her finger on the sensor for 10 seconds. The software then registered the visitor's heart rate, and the frequency of her heartbeat was used to modify the BPM in Ableton Live and Video and the light mapping software MadMapper. The graphic instructions for the user were generated and rendered in Max MSP software. The idea was that visitors would be engaged with the installation, trying to change their heartbeat by moving more, thus making the music play faster.



Figure 3. Left panel: a spectator interacting with the installation. Centre panel: the heart-rate sensor and the microcontroller BITalino R-IoT. Right panel: the light modulated by the user's heart rate.

4.4. Observations

Several technical questions arose from this work, including which software framework to use, the sensor's reliability, mappings of biosignals to light and sound, the physical arrangement of the space, and the artistic context of the installation (how to instruct the visitors). Over 20 people experienced the installation. Participants' experiences helped to understand the importance of the installation setting. Visitors were a bit intrigued by the complexity of the installation. Even when they understood how it worked, they found it technologically complex and were surprised when their heart rate was captured and the music actually started to change. Since most efforts were put mainly into getting the technology to work, the context and artistic "packaging" was very weak. The installation itself was not sufficiently "inviting" or "intriguing" and its "invitation to start moving" addressing the visitors did not work at all. Almost nobody started to move to control the BPM of the installation. However, almost all visitors agreed that if the concept would be developed further and designed properly, it could be an interesting (art)work. All visitors had many questions about the technical details and the process of creating the installation.

The artist: I couldn't enjoy the installation myself because of the stressful preparation period. Also, I felt more like a technician, explaining to the spectators what to do, what was going on and how it worked, and why it was such a great idea.

The scientist: The installation clearly showed that ideas that are valid in controlled laboratory conditions may not necessarily work in a public installation. The context and the "packaging" of the experience became as important as the technical realisation of the simple biocybernetic loop. Perhaps the idea would have been more effective in a real discotheque as not all visitors were prepared to dance in the exhibition room.

5. Lessons learned from the artistic experiments of the residency

The three artistic experiments concentrated on the specifics of what one could physically record from a performer-viewer relationship. Importantly, after these experiments, it was clear to the scientist and the artist that the captured spectator experiences expressed in physiological data did not necessarily represent a conscious, subjective reaction to the presented content. The work process was also different for the artist, since the artistic practice develops in a different way, independent of the science or technology involved. In other words, the artistic expression was almost side-lined. For the scientist, it was a very good example of research-in-the-wild, with every artistic experiment providing a seed for a more methodologically elaborate scientific experiment.

TAAVET JANSEN, ALEKSANDER VÄLJAMÄE

Physiological data is highly idiosyncratic, and generic classifiers that rely on a predefined set of signal features, even for such a simple signal as EDA, may fail, especially in the theatre and out of the lab context. Some of the experiences may be entirely new for spectators (e.g., complex mixed emotions, see Kreibig and Gross 2017), and the artistic concept of the performance could rely precisely on these new physiological patterns. Importantly, the physiological reactions of the audience could be a result of a complex and carefully directed interplay of both cognitive and emotional manipulations. Reliable classification of such mixed reactions is in opposition to the standard challenges of the affective computing domain, which currently gravitates towards using simple solutions with the few basic emotions at hand. Ideally, one should be able to build and adapt classifiers for a dedicated performance and the related cognitive and physical context (e.g., similarly to the co-adaptation of a prosthetic control algorithm and a user strategy in the rehabilitation domain, Couraud et al. 2018).

The artist: This residency gave me the basic understanding of affective computing paradigms and it also opened up a new sense of spectator-performer relationship analysis in the theatre environment. Developing and executing the concepts of interaction helped me to understand better what happens between a spectator and a theatre performer. I understood that there are more 'measurable' things going on during the performance than I had imagined. The whole focus on people's physiological and emotional reactions was new for me. Artists don't usually worry about how the spectators will physically and psychologically receive the artwork – I realised how affective computing tools and methodologies could bring an angle in understanding the performing art process.

The scientist: During my work with Taavet, I started to grasp how a performing artist works and the strength of a true art-science collaboration. Using the artistic interventions allowed us to explore, discuss, and play with many scientific concepts and technological solutions – almost like walking through a garden and picking the most exotic fruits. Each of these topics – neurochoreography, measuring collective audience engagement, evaluation of the actor's emotional state, or heart-rate-based interaction with audio-visual content – definitely forms a separate topic for in-depth research. However, the presented work allowed me to map the potential foci of these future studies.

The use of physiological sensors in the theatre may bring a new dimension into the creative process. For that, it is essential to:

- Experiment with sensor technology in the theatre from the beginning of the artistic creative process so that the sensor technology is an integrated part of the performance;

- Allow enough breathing room for the artists to get used to the new technologies, to fully grasp the new possibilities, and to experiment with these freely, having a strong technical and scientific support;
- Systematically study “implicit interaction aesthetics” similarly to the aesthetics of more common, explicit interactions, since the exploration of “uncomfortable” interactions is very important for bringing moments of discomfort into the overall experience leading, sometimes, to the climax of the performance (Benford et al. 2012);
- Create an opportunity for an ethical debate on the ways to use physiological sensing with the audience in the theatre so that it is both accepted by viewers and conforms to the ethical standards of human experiments (consent form, anonymisation of the data, etc.);
- Ensure the artist knows the technology in advance and has the possibility to experiment with it during the rehearsal periods, and preferably that the developers or technical support work together with the creative team to allow constant development and modification (e.g., testing sensory feedback mapping solutions);
- Provide the creative team with a stable link to an expert who can support them with the necessary scientific knowledge, examples, and references, and also facilitate the translation of this knowledge into a different domain.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

There is still a lot of exciting research to be done on how to interpret and make perceptible the data collected from viewers and performers. One may call this research area “quantified theatre,” in parallel with quantified self-movement. At the current moment, rather straightforward approaches are used to translate biosignal data into changes within audio-visual parameters, so called data mapping. This gives a perfect synchronicity and an instant effect for data perceptualisation. However, it misses the most important thing – what this data means, what it expresses, and what should be done with these results in an artistic context. Artists often lack the theoretical knowledge underlying the technologies that are used. The transfer of this knowledge to art and, specifically, to the world of theatre would open new directions and opportunities for interpreting art as well as science in richer ways.

Directors and stage artists are skilled at energising the space, composing the emotions of the audience with active dramaturgy, and igniting and directing the audience’s imagination. The viewer is made to forget reality and enter an imaginary world where different rules and laws apply. Such knowledge is appreciated in many

other fields where the user's / viewer's experience is at stake – in HCI, marketing, virtual reality journalism, to name a few.

The theatre experiments described above used sensors and software specifically tailored for artists and creators. However, new technological tools for theatre experimentation are yet to be designed and created. There is a clear need for a common scientific conceptual basis and language that can be used for collaboration in different formats, mentoring programs, multidisciplinary think-tanks, etc., to help create the necessary ecosystem for online theatre and neurotheatre experiments. Specific methodological innovations are emerging from art-science projects interested in experimental research outside the lab, research-in-the-wild, and particular tools for training performers and creative processes. And, finally, such technological innovations will inevitably speed up and intensify the public debate on technology-infused futures, since theatre can be used as a part of the fiction design practice that has become popular in the HCI community (Dunne and Raby 2013). Technology should not be seen as something external but rather as something that helps humans to know themselves better and to build deeper connections within one's consciousness.

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S U M M A R Y

Kunstiliste sekkumiste kasutamine füsioloogiapõhiste interaktsioonide uurimiseks etenduskunstides

Taavet Jansen, Aleksander Väljamäe

Võtmesõnad: etenduskunstid, kunstiresidentuur, interaktsioonidisain, neurofüsioloogia, neuroteater

Tallinna Ülikoolis toimus 2019. aasta veebruarist juunini kunstiteaduse residentuur, kus etenduskunstnik Taavet Jansen ja neuroteadlane Aleksander Väljamäe töötasid kunstilise sekkumise kontseptsiooniga, analüüsides võimalusi, kus publiku ja esinejate füsioloogilised reaktsioonid looksid uusi tähendusi etenduskunste kontekstis. Selles artiklis analüüsivad ja kirjeldavad autorid sooritatud eksperimente ja avaldavad omi isiklikke mõtteid toimunud sündmuste kohta.

Kunstilises eksperimendis „Neurokoreograafia nr 4” uuriti interaktiivset improvisatsioonilist tantsu-etendust, kus neljale vaatajale kinnitatud sensorid mõõtsid nende erutuse taset (*electrodermal activity*) ja saadud andmed manipuleerisid reaajas sama etenduse helikujundust. Sellise interaktiivse lahenduse tekitatud tagasiside-efekt lõi olukorra, kus vaatajate tahtmatud reaktsioonid mõjutasid omakorda nende saadavat kogemust, tekitades lavastuse mõju intensiivsuse spiraali, kus nähtu mõjutas järgmisel hetkel juba kogemust ennast.

Kunstilises eksperimendis „Macbeth” kasutati erutust mõõtvaid sensoreid, salvestamaks näitleja reaktsioone intervjuu vältel, kus esitati küsimusi tema rollilooma kohta vastlõppenud etenduses „Macbeth”. Näitlejaga läbi viidud intervjuu eesmärgiks oli mõista, milliseid tehnikaid kasutab näitleja oma rolli luues, ja tehnoloogiat kasutades tuvastada, mil määral on näitleja teadlik oma laval tehtud kunstilistest ja tehnilistest otsustest.

Interaktiivses heli- ja valgusinstallatsioonis „Heart-rate Party” kasutati külastaja südamerütmi, mõjutamaks installatsiooni heli- ja valguskujunduse tempot. Eksperiment tõi teravalt välja kriitilised küsimused piisava tehnilise võimekuse, kujunduse ja raamistuse olulisuse kohta, mis on vajalikud interaktiivse installatsiooni õnnestumiseks.

Kõik kolm eksperimenti otsisid kontseptsioone, kuidas oleks võimalik salvestada võimalikult täpselt esineja-vaataja omavahelisest suhtest loetavaid andmeid. Oluline on välja tuua, et kogemused salvestatult füsioloogiliste andmetena ei pruugi väljendada teadlikku, subjektiivset reaktsiooni nähtud kunstilisele sisule. Sellised „uurimistööd võsas” (*research-in-the-wild*) võivad luua uusi võimalusi, kuidas tõlgendada füsioloogilisi andmeid mitte ainult laboratoorses kontekstis. Läbi kunsti prisma vaadatuna võivad need andmed omandada mitmeid uusi tähendusi. Inimeste füsioloogilised andmed on isikupärased, teatriruumis võivad need aga olla keerulise kognitiivse ja emotsionaalse manipulatsiooni tulemus. Seetõttu üldised klassifikaatorid, mis töötavad laboris, võivad olla etenduskunste kontekstis kasutatud.

Füsioloogiliste sensorite kasutamine teatris võib tuua uusi dimensioone ka loomeprotsessidesse. Selleks tuleks aga luua võimalused, kus kunstnikud saaksid eksperimenteerida sensortehnoloogiatega juba loomeprotsessi algusest peale. See annaks kunstnikule piisavalt hingasmisruumi, et saada ülevaade tehnoloogia pakutavatest võimalustest ning eksperimenteerida sellega piiranguteta. Oluline on tagada kunstnikule ka tugev tehniline ja teaduslik tugi eksperimenteerimise vältel. Samuti oleks oluline algatada arutelu füsioloogiliste andmete eetilise kasutamise kohta etenduskunste kontekstis, nii et see oleks akt-

septeeritud nii kunstnike kui ka vaatajate poolt, aga oleks ka vastavuses inimestega tehtavate eksperimentide eetiliste standarditega.

Väga palju põnevat uurimistööd ootab ees: kuidas interpreteerida ja teha mõistetavaks esinejatelt ja vaatajatelt kogutud andmed. Praegusel juhul kasutatakse interaktsiooni visualiseerimiseks andmete otsest ülekandmist audiovisuaalseteks parameetriteks. See tagab küll perfektse sünkrooni audiovisuaalses efektsis, kuid selles puudub peamine – teadmine, mida need andmed tähendavad nii teaduslikult kui ka kunstilises kontekstis kasutatuna. Kunstis jääb tihti puudu teoreetilistest teadmistest, mis aitaksid intuitiivselt tehtud kunstilisi otsuseid raamistada. Selline teadmiste ülekandmine kunsti ja teaduse vahel avaks uusi võimalusi kunstiteoste interpreteerimisel ja looks uusi perspektiive mõlema valdkonna arenemiseks.

Taavet Jansen töötab etenduskunstide väljal üle kahekümne aasta – tantsija, koreograafi, lavastaja, helikunstniku ja videokujundaja, interaktiivsete lahenduste programmeerijana. Praegu õpib Eesti Kunstiakadeemia doktorantuuris, uurides kohalolutunde loomist vahendatud kunstisündmuse kontekstis. Samuti töötab ta TÜ Viljandi kultuuriakadeemias multimeedia lektorina. Jansen on ka üks pool-virtuaalse, pool-füüsilise platvormi e²lektron (<https://elektron.art>) algatajatest.

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On Performativity and Perception in Early Estonian-Language Theatre Translation

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Abstract: The present article will address the role of translation in the very first stage of Estonian language theatre history, during the so-called August Wiera period in the activities of the Vanemuine Society. We aim to map and define the early Estonian translational drama through the concepts of “self” and “other” considering its performative aspect. Four tentative categories emerge when looking at the mechanisms of theatre translation of the time that can be described as degrees from total domestication to foreignization.

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Keywords: theatre translation, drama translation, performative translation, self and other

1. Introduction

1.1. The performativity of translation and “self” and “other”

Translation and especially drama translation as a performative practice is not a new concept. Douglas Robinson, for example, has claimed that translation is a language act, a use of language, and in order to analyse it he has proposed an approach that emerges from performative linguistics¹ (for more on the concept see Robinson 2002, 6–10); what is more, borrowing from Bakhtin, Robinson looks at translation as an activity of double voicing (on translator’s voice in theatre see also Sofo 2016). According to Robinson’s approach, in the case of translation we are dealing with a performative practice that not only communicates the structures of the source text/culture, its topics and ideas, but that also conveys the attitudes and beliefs of the translator, all the aspects that influence the translator’s interpretation: what gets emphasised and what not. That means that the translator is a performative agent (on the translator as a performer see also Zanotti 2009, 81–83) whose voice adds a layer to the original. Stefano Muneroni (2012, 297) says that drama translation is “an operation that exists not only as interpretation and representation, but also as re-enactment and transformation of cultural material, within both the source culture and the target culture.” Thus, drama translation is associated with active agency as

¹ Robinson distinguishes between “constative” and “performative” linguistics. According to him, constative linguistics includes methodologies aimed at “freezing” language as an abstract sign system, while performative linguistics explores how language is used or “performed” in speech situations.

well as cultural change, whereas from page to stage performative practice must, to a certain extent, involve staging of cultural differences.

Apart from the main problem of researching translational texts for theatre, that is, the issue of dealing with complicated multilayered polycoded structures, an important aspect of theatre and drama translation is that it is a collective practice (for a more detailed discussion see Brodie 2018, 105–54), whereas the initial translated text may change during the staging but also during the ensuing stagings. This means that the changes and inconsistencies are already inscribed in the practices connected with theatre translation. When a translated text is staged, new agents are added, along with new performative levels. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2006, 2463) has even claimed that the tension between textuality and performativity that varies according to the situation is constitutive of theatre. When producing and performing a play, the agency of a director and that of a performer come into play, and what is more, also the agency of a viewer also enters the scene: due to the performative processes an encounter occurs between the actors/performers and the audience/viewers the result of which is that the audience becomes excited, affected and influenced by the processes on stage (Fischer-Lichte 2011, 98); that means that theatre is dialogic by its nature. However, translation is by its nature also a dialogic process, since the translators are not merely mediators, but operate on the borders of self and other, bringing new phenomena into the culture and, at the same time, increasing the dialogic capability both inside their culture as well as spurring a dialogue with other cultures (Torop 2008, 375–76). Moreover, borders do not only separate but unite, and the dialogue inside borders is to a large extent determined by the dialogues held on borders (Torop 2011, 87). In the case of theatre translation, the dialogicality is to an even larger extent multidimensional, since it involves complex levels and agents.

Theo Hermans (1996) has shown how translation is, among other things, also an index of cultural self-definition, offering an insight not only to what is transposed from the “other” culture, but also what is re-coded as (our) own, and what is not mediated since it is too unfamiliar and lies outside the boundaries of the local environment. Translators are always part of a system, that is, they always translate in a particular context with an aim to meet certain expectations. The choices they make and positions they take in this context makes translators active agents in the process of cultural transfer, and as the activities and contexts of people are socially determined, translators are active social agents. (Hermans 1996, 9–10) Thus, apart from being a mediator and a creator, a drama translator also has a performative function as a cultural and social agent.

Following from the above-described notion of the performativity of the translator, the present paper will address the concept of “other” and ask what such “other” entails, how it is enacted and what is its relation to the perception of “self” in the early Estonian drama translation context. We have devised four broad categories based on the degree of domestication to exemplify and map the mechanisms of translation used to communicate theatre texts to early Estonian theatre audiences.

The issue of “self” and “other” is one of the central questions here that surfaces on the most different levels. It can be seen in the repertoire politics, discussions on theatre, criticism and reviews, but also in translational choices. However, the opposition of “self” and “other” in Estonian context means the relationship and self-definition against other (European) cultures that are perceived to stand hierarchically on a higher position, but also more exotic and distant cultures as can be seen from several very popular performances in the Wiera theatre. Historically the Estonian and Baltic German cultures have been in a strained relationship, regarding each other in terms of “cultural other”: the Baltic Germans exercising a typical colonial attitude of enlightening and educating the lesser, but never regarding it as equal (for further discussion on the relationship of Estonians and Baltic Germans in view of postcolonial discourse see Plath 2008, 37–64; on the development of Estonian cultural identity see Jansen 2007), whereas the Estonians accepted mimicking the Baltic Germans’ cultural practices as a means for development, including the imitation of theatrical structures (Saro 2006, 59; Saro and Pappel 2008, 129), although it was often publicly denied (Saro 2020, 37).

We propose that in the early Estonian drama translation the double voice of the translator is especially pronounced. It is first motivated by the fact that drama translation is already historically a relatively free translational genre (see, for example, Aaltonen 2000: 38–46) in which manipulating with time, space and culture is widely accepted. What is more, it is accompanied by the translation norms of the period that allowed any text to be translated quite freely: omissions, additions, adaptations and rearrangements of different texts and parts of texts were accepted and even normative (Lange 2015, 21, 179; Mits 2012, 74). Being the first study on translation mechanisms in early Estonian theatre, our article suggests a classification and analysis of the different manipulations used in the drama translational practices of the time, that is, late 19th century Estonia.

The fact that new performances were promptly and amply introduced in periodicals shows that both the people involved in theatrical activity as well as the critics of the time were aware of the impact theatre had on the society and culture. Thus, when we look at the expectations for theatre expressed by the critics of the time and through that how theatre impacted the society, what it wanted to change,

we can distinguish between the aspirations regarding the audience and more generally the entire society: to educate, cultivate, shape, but alongside these we can also see cultural aims: to enrich, validate, empower, add value. What is of importance here is the creation of Estonian(-language) theatrical genres and languages that prepared the ground for their further development and diversification. Despite all this, we must not forget the entertainment function of theatre: the choices of repertoire and translation strategies are often justified by the need to offer the audience leisure activities and entertainment. Keeping the entertainment function of the theatre in mind, the translators may, for example, erase or add characters or plot lines they consider either boring or difficult to understand.

Although Lawrence Venuti (1995) distinguishes between foreignization and domestication in translation, with a higher degree of detailing, four different mechanisms can be brought out that are used to mediate a foreign culture (Carbonell i Cortés 2003, 155). Firstly, *total domestication* (the “other” is domesticated to represent the “self,” that is, the source text is assimilated to the target culture), secondly, *familiarization* or *partial domestication* (the “other” will remain, the “otherness” is preserved and recognised, but adapted and approximated to the target audience), thirdly, *foreignization* (the “other” is presented markedly as not the “self”), thirdly, and lastly, *conscious omission of the other* (the “other” as too unfamiliar is left unmediated; reasons for non-translation may be given in metatexts (on the corresponding semiotic processes see in more details Carbonell i Cortés 2003). Apart from theatre translation being an under researched subject, this paper is the first attempt to classify and map these phenomena in early theatre translation history in Estonia.

Such categorization, however, can only be tentative since most translations operate on the axes where total domestication inhabits one end and foreignization the other. Theatre text has a polycoded structure, where different verbal, visual and auditory sign systems are integrated into a complex construction, and as with other genres, most of the theatre translations exhibit both foreignized and domesticated elements. What is more, in early theatre translation domestication and foreignization practices can be observed on both verbal as well as structural level, i.e. adding, deleting or restructuring the presentation of information pertaining to both content and expression planes. The question is which of the codes of this complex system become/are chosen to be dominant. The fact is that even the most foreign can, at a certain point in time or in certain form, appear in Estonian or any other culture as own; for example, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was not staged in the Wiera period and as a matter of fact was properly translated into Estonian only in 1935, but Johann Kantswey’s *Mihkel and Liisa, or Have a look, what greed can do* that premiered

in the Vanemuine in 1876 and talked about the tragic fate of two young lovers, covered a similar ground and has been perceived as Estonian *Romeo and Juliet* (Põldmäe 1978, 166), although it was also criticised, since the suicide of a young lover was perceived as implausible and thus a strange event in local circumstances. Thus, “self” and “other” are not objective distinctions, but take form through an interaction between different agents, whereby not only performativity plays an important role in this equation, but also perception. These notions are not neutral and adopt certain attitudes: similarly to the practices that are considered our own, there is one type of “otherness” that is perceived as deplorable and another “otherness” that is welcomed, admired and aspired towards.

1.2. Subject, aims, material and methods used

Our study aims at viewing the concepts of “self” and “other” through the translated and staged drama texts and their reception in the early Estonian theatre, covering the period of August Wiera’s activities in the Vanemuine, that is, the Wiera theatre (1880s and 1890s). The present study draws heavily from a chronological corpus of translational theatre texts that we have been compiling, a corpus that extends from the earliest known translations until 1945. Relying on other archival materials (playlists, manuscripts, playbills, etc.) stored in the Estonian Cultural History Archives as well as the Vanemuine theatre archives, memoirs of the people concerned in theatrical activity of the time (Reinhold Sachker, Hugo Techner, August Wiera, etc.), reviews and criticism published in periodicals, but also a comparative analysis of translated drama texts, we will take a semiotic approach to the phenomenon, since the translation of theatre texts inevitably also incorporates the transposing and recoding of different auditory and visual elements.

We differentiate between theatre and drama translations as according to Aaltonen (2000, 33–38) the latter concerns translation of the written text and the former translation of the theatrical work. Aaltonen (2000) shows that drama and theatre are different phenomena: a drama might not reach the stage and that theatre performance does not have to use drama texts at all. What we mean by drama translation is the translation of verbal codes; in case of theatre translation, however, the mediation of the entire complex polycoded system, by which certain codes are transposed and others recoded. Whereas adaptation, a traditionally prominent translation strategy, is, like Aaltonen (2000, 75) also claims, likewise a theatre translation strategy, and as such concerns the non-verbal codes to an even greater extent than verbal codes. Although a comprehensive study of the translation of relevant visual and auditory codes might be complicated, it is still possible through the

descriptions and memoirs of the contemporaries as well as preserved photographs and drawings of scenic design.

For us the formation of the Estonian cultural self-definition and the development of national identity during the 19th century serves as a backdrop to the translational phenomena stemming from the representation of “self” and “other” as analysed in the article. The invigorated cultural sphere of the time, theatre included, has played a significant and under researched role in the identity development.

2. The Wiera period in Estonian theatre translation history: performances of the eighteen-eighties and nineties

1865 marks the year of the founding of the Vanemuine Cultural Society in Tartu, which was originally meant to coordinate and spur the activity of Estonian male choirs, but soon expanded its activity to stage Estonian-language plays (see also Põldmäe 1978, 12–16).

Estonian national theatre history proper starts with a translation – Lydia Koidula’s² adaptation of Theodor Körner’s *The Cousin from Bremen* (*Der Vetter aus Bremen*) that was staged by the Vanemuine Society in 1870 under the title *The Cousin from Saaremaa* (*Saaremaa onupoeg*; see Põldmäe 1978, 142–45; on the difficulties differentiating the original and translational in early Estonian theatre see also Saro and Pappel 2008, 126). The following decade was carried by national awakening and is frequently referred to as Koidula’s theatre.

Starting out during the national awakening, theatre functioned as a channel for cultural development; however, soon it found itself serving the increasing appetite for entertainment, became financially responsible for its production and despite the passionate organisers who wanted to explore different facets of theatrical activity, needed to keep serving the popular taste.

From 1872, August Daniel Wiera (1853–1919), a young energetic carpenter’s apprentice with a considerable musical ear (Sachker in Kirepe 1974, 11), became involved in the work of the budding theatre. August Wiera’s career quickly took off, and by 1878 he was appointed to lead the activities of the orchestra, choir, and drama performances in the Vanemuine Society. Thus, the last twenty years of the 19th century theatre in Tartu can tentatively be called the Wiera period. Although not solely responsible for the staging of the plays, he was definitely in charge of organising the work of the theatre including finding and designing the repertoire as well as arrang-

2 Lydia Koidula was an Estonian poetess, who had an active role in the national awakening of Estonia. In addition to her original writings she translated and adapted German poetry, translated and wrote plays and assisted her father, Johann Voldemar Jannsen, in editing the country’s first weekly newspaper.

ing the music, training the actors and singers. Musical interludes and songs were characteristic to the Wiera period and gave a jump start to a three-genre theatre that still exists in Tartu – the Vanemuine.

There is a diversity of people and practices through which drama as a genre was imported into the Estonian language. First of all, theatre itself was not new or unknown in Estonia since various German theatres, such as the Tartu German Craftsmen Society's Theatre, regularly staged plays in German and hosted travelling German theatre companies (see Põldmäe 1978, 142). Many Estonian craftsmen, members of such German societies, visited the performances and in the wind of national awakening, an audience for the Estonian theatre was formed and the demand for plays in Estonian grew quickly. The flood of theatre translations into Estonian that followed the 1870s showed various degrees of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation.

In the case of early Estonian-language theatre, the "self" is constructed and defined through oppositions with different degrees of "otherness" (see also Saro and Pappel 2008). On the surface, the self is built on local language, names, realia and circumstances, but a closer look reveals deeper moral and ethical implications: sometimes the encounter with the "other" can be detrimental and even dangerous, while the "self" is worth holding on to. At the same time, the cultural superiority of the "other" can widely be perceived. Periodicals of the time reflect constant comparisons with both local German theatres as well as theatres outside Estonia: "The artistic skills of neither the Estonian actors nor theatres can be compared with those of other, educated nations as yet" (anonymous 1888a, see also Vilde 1886). Thus, this otherness is connected to a certain inferiority, an aspiration to be comparable, similar or equal to the "other" that is perceived to be in a culturally higher position. Local German newspapers were closely monitored as well, and in his memoirs Heinrich Rosenthal (Estonian theatre activist) proudly mentions the praise of Koidula's *The Cousin from Saaremaa* in both *Dörptsche Zeitung* and *Neue Dörptsche Zeitung* after its premiere in 1870 (Rosenthal in Kirepe 1974, 17). Indeed, on the one hand, there was praise, but on the other hand, Estonian attempts at theatre were looked at with a certain ironic patronage. For example, although with approval, the aforementioned coverage also remarks that instead of female actresses, Estonian gentlemen in skirts populate the scene (see *Dörptsche Zeitung* 25.06.1870, No. 143).

2.1. Repertoire and translation choices in early Estonian language theatre

The repertoire of early Estonian language theatre heavily depended on several factors. Firstly, the taste of the paying audience, craftsmen and traders in the case of Tartu, who formed the majority of both the actors as well as the audience, needed

to be taken into account. The titles of the plays reflect the target audience and its preferences: tailors, shoemakers, milkmaids (August von Kotzebue's *Tailor Vips or Who knows what good this is* (*Rätsep Vips, ehk kes teab mis tarwis see hää on*, originally *Schneider Fips oder Die gefährliche Nachbarschaft*, 1873), Emanuel Schikaneder's *Shoemaker Tikko and his Wife or The living dead couple* (*Kingsepp Tikko ja tema naine ehk elavalt surnud abielupaar*, 1873), Wilhelm Mannstaedt's *Milkmaid from Ilumäe* (*Ilumäe piimatüdruk*, originally *Das Milchmädchen von Schöneberg* 1887)). The topics prevalently concerned either marital or monetary affairs, outsmarting and trickery in both domains. The Vanemuine Society started out in the 1870s with a repertoire centred around local Estonian circumstances. During the first decade, the work of local authors (Lydia Koidula, Carl Robert Jakobson, Juhan Kunder) was utilised to the maximum (see Kask 1970, 66) and translated plays were modified to reflect local circumstances. Genre wise, especially towards the end of 1880s, at the height of Wiera period, the repertoire consisted of melodramas (Ernst Raupach's *Jenowewa* (1886), Theodor Körner's *Tooni* (1887), Salomon Hermann von Mosenthal's *Debora* (1888), Friedrich Halm's *Griseldis* (1890)), simple comedies (by mostly German and mostly early 19th century playwrights such as August von Kotzebue, August Wilhelm Iffland, Emil Pohl), and occasional morality plays alternated with large-scale musical performances on exotic topics (Pius Alexander Wolf's / Carl Maria von Weber's *Preziosa* (1883), August von Kotzebue's *Fatiniza* (1884)). Wiera's dislike of Estonian language originals and his admiration of foreign settings is well documented: he "much preferred the pieces by other nations" (Techner in Kirepe 1974, 30) and "had no interest whatsoever in original pieces on serious topics" declining any offers by saying: "write a play with accordion and songs, and then we'll talk" (Kitzberg 1956, 481).

Secondly, the repertoire had to be chosen from the material that was not only suitable, but available. Reinhold Sachker (1843–1919), the director and organiser of the theatrical activity in the Vanemuine Society before Wiera, has documented writing one play in 1872 (*Tailor Zippet*, originally *Rätsep Zippet*) to enrich the repertoire, but realising that he "lacked fantasy to be a playwright" he purchased a German-language collection of plays by Kotzebue, possibly the only one available, translated it "with the help of a student called Leilov" and "adapted it to match the Estonian ways" (Sachker in Kirepe 1974, 9). Such adaptation to reflect the local situation or "the Estonian ways," with an aim to appeal and relate to the audiences, is also described by Põldmäe (1978, 143) in regard to Koidula's *The Cousin from Saaremaa*, where Koidula adds an entire page to the original text criticising the state of the public schools in Estonia.

Thirdly, there was a constant lack of actors, especially skilled female actors (see Kärner 1922, 6), for acting was generally associated with promiscuous behaviour, and actors were considered to be “dilettantes, comedians, night workers” (Konsa in Kirepe 1974, 6). Whereas in the beginning of the 1870s female roles were often taken up by male actors, and not without criticism (see Põldmäe 1978, 144–45), then later actresses did perform, but preferred to do so using pseudonyms. The shortage of actors had an impact on translation strategies as well. Thus, for example, the cast of 12 characters in Iffland’s original German language play *The Bachelors* (*Die Hagestoltzen*, 1793) has been reduced to 6 in its Estonian translation (*Linnas ja Maal*, 1875). Manipulating the text this way both the level of the performativity as well as the agency of the translator increases, since they became responsible for cutting lines of action that in its turn resulted in a changed narrative.

Fourthly, repertoire choices were also connected to and mirrored what was performed in the local German theatres. The latter often served as a model and point of reference to early Estonian-language theatre. Wiera describes how he kept an eye on the Tartu German Craftsmen Society’s Theatre, jotting down performances he wanted to stage with his company (Wiera in Kirepe 1974, 53). There have also been attempts to reconcile and unite the endeavours and audiences of these two different language theatres. For example, Eduard Vilde (1886) stresses the educational role of theatre and the fact that Germans are ahead of Estonians in this respect. Local Estonian and German theatres should cooperate, Estonians could learn from the Germans, but German theatres should also start staging Estonian plays: “the Estonian-speaking German public would love to see Estonian performances” (Vilde 1886).

What is more, censorship also tacitly plays a role in the choice of repertoire as well as establishing the dynamics between the translational “other” of the time. Techner describes the struggle to get permission to play *Fatinitza* in 1892: “I rewrote the piece to depict the conflict between the French and the Arabs in Africa instead of the Hungarians and Turks. Alas, we did not get the permission to play it then. We dropped it.” (Techner in Kirepe 1974, 27) This exemplifies that censorship influences both the choice of repertoire and translation strategies, serves as a motivating factor for omissions and conceptual changes, and in some cases results in the elimination of the work from repertoire.

2.2. The role of non-verbal codes in early Estonian translations for theatre

Musical theatre is by nature a more universal phenomenon, becoming localized or “own” mainly through the local performers (Saro and Pappel 2008, 136). Music and songs often accompanied the early Estonian-language German plays making

them more attractive for the audience. The practice itself originates from the (local) German theatres (Saro and Pappel 2008, 128) and the very first Estonian language play *The Cousin from Saaremaa* (1870) also had two songs in it that were not present in the original. It has been documented that popular solo or choir songs often travelled from one play to the other. A march from Richard Strauss' *The Gipsy Baron* (*Mustlasparun*, originally *Der Zigeunerbaron*) in 1889 reappeared in Raupach's *Jenowewa* (first staged in 1886) even though the historical time and circumstances in these plays were very different: "The choir sang "bullet from a gun flies like wind" (*püssi kuul, nagu tuul*) even though the soldiers on the scene were carrying spears (Techner in Kirepe 1974, 31). Johann Voldemar Jannsen's original play *King of Udumäe* (*Udumäe kuningas*, 1894) that was allegedly staged only because Wiera could incorporate some musical pieces into it, was criticised because of the songs that were perceived as not inherent to Estonian theatre nor in accordance with the plot: "New music and novel artistic duets do not suit an Estonian national dramatic work that, by the way, is set into the Middle Ages. We need more of Estonian music for choirs: Estonian tunes for Estonian plays! A foreign tune sounds cold and callous." (Anonymous 1894) This explicitly shows the aspiration of the critics to encourage the Estonian theatre to use Estonian original cultural heritage that at the time was still mostly folkloric.

Elements of scenic design can be used either to reduce and hide or stress the foreignness. Hugo Techner (in Kirepe 1974, 28) describes the ambition, ways and means of the creation of a markedly exoticized environment on stage for Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* (1891):

[...] we had an entire cave painted. A ship and palm trees, a train [...]. I made four big snakes and painted them. These could be moved by a thin string. [...] there were two men inside one elephant costume, they both had to crouch, one with his hand up inside the trunk, the other holding his hand inside the tail. [...] The turbans were large discs stuffed with seaweed.

Hence, visual stage codes, props and costumes among other things appear to be important means of constructing the "other" on stage. This way the non-verbal codes played a significant role in rendering and interpreting what was foreign in the process of building the "self."

3. Translating the "other" in the early Estonian-language theatre

3.1. "Self" and "other" in early Estonian theatre translations

A systematic analysis of the early translations, be it parallel text comparison or research into the sociology of translators, is not possible due to the gaps in the

material that are no longer possible to fill: a large number of texts has not come down to us and is known only through titles from coincidental archival finds or occasional ads in periodicals of the time; data on translators is absent or incorrect; often the names of the original authors and titles cannot be found, not to mention other circumstances associated with translation such as information concerning the choice of the translational repertoire or translation process, etc. Therefore, we have taken an approach based on sporadic snapshots into the history of theatre translation to show some of the translation related phenomena that we have been able to map.

The main concern of the present paper is the volatile and multi-faceted relationship between “self” and “other” in the early Estonian translational drama: in which way and how such a relationship materialises and is perceived, what are the means a theatre uses to meet the expectations of the audiences and how this relationship is reflected on the textual level in translations from a foreign language and context.

The tensions between “self” and “other” in early Estonian theatrical history emerge implicitly in the choices of the repertoire, translational decisions/solutions and matters regarding staging, and such tension can also be seen explicitly from the disputes inside theatrical circles as well as in criticism covered in periodicals.

The issue of repertoire is one of the most discussed and visible topics in the early Estonian theatre, Wiera’s Vanemuine included. A perpetually sounding accusation by the critics is: too many foreign plays, too little good original Estonian material (see, for example, Parv 1888, Treffner 1890, anonymous 1892 and others). The tendency towards translational material is reflected in the list of plays that were performed in Wiera’s period: a couple of new original plays as opposed to a dozen new translations a year.

An anonymous critic in the *Postimees* describes the lack of original plays also, and especially in the Vanemuine, stating that the actors’ skills do allow performing in the Estonian language and that sometimes one original play “can move the hearts of the audience more than several translations,” since originals portray the lives of the people, and the foreign plays have often “no importance whatsoever for the life in Estonia” (anonymous 1888b). A recurring criticism is that foreign plays might be too unfamiliar (anonymous 1897), corrupt the taste (Saal 1892) and morals (Järv 1886, anonymous 1890; disputes on the 1897 production of *Fatinitza* see Kärner 1992, 12): “not everything is good and commendable that comes from the ample source of the foreign play-writing reservoir” (anonymous 1889a). The critics also complain about the quality of translation (Rosenthal 1874, anonymous 1885, Vilde 1893, anonymous 1894), and, especially in the context of elaborate musical performances, that Estonians might be incapable of understanding the fancy foreign

material since Estonians lack the glorious past, grand nobility and ground-breaking politics (Liiv? 1888). The fear of Germanisation is also one of the issues taken up and criticised: “Why is the focus not on the Estonian authors [. . .] the Vanemuine could take up the works of Russian, Finnish, and Latvian authors” (Treffner 1890). It is true, except for a single Russian (Alexander Pushkin’s *The Miserly Knight*, originally Скупой рыцарь, in Estonian *Kitsi rüütel*, 1881) and French (Destouches’s (Philippe Néricault’s) *Triple Wedding*, originally *La Triple Marriage*, in Estonian *Kolmewõrdsed pulmad*, 1883) language translations, most of the early translations come from German authors or through the German language.

The reasons for such a translational surge of foreign material are twofold: emerging Estonian authors were few and far between and those few were cautious about writing for theatre, since in the case where the play was not published, there was little hope for remuneration, but also for the lack of skill and experience (see Techner in Kirepe 1974, 27). Translating, on the other hand, was a relatively easy and more affordable task and could be and was often done by members of theatre staff.

On some occasions the production of foreign translational dramas was justified by the scarcity of original material and that the originals were boring and did not draw the audiences to theatres (Parv 1888). What is more, some critics viewed original dramas to be both technically and aesthetically inept (anonymous 1892) or not capable of “educating the hearts of the audiences, refreshing their minds, elevating their spirits, and broadening their horizons” (Rosenthal 1897).

The Vanemuine Society even implemented regulations regarding the balance between original Estonian and foreign performances, apparently to ensure that at least a few original plays were performed yearly. The terms of the permit Wiera signed in 1891 that enabled him to stage performances in the Vanemuine Society, but left the financial responsibilities to him, stipulate: 30–35 productions a year from which at least 2–3 should be original Estonian plays (Kask 1970, 76; Palamets 2006, 51). Such steps give witnesses to the intention to foster and develop Estonian own original drama, but also hint at the importance of the issue of “self” and “other,” constructing an identity by comparison and contrast, in the context of theatre.

3.2. Total domestication

By total domestication we mean works that are presented as originals, that is, they have a translational basis, but have been reworked to an extent that the foreign element is erased or hidden or perceived as local, and it is possible to categorise them as original compositions. The voice of the original author is not audible, and the voice of the translator overpowers the entire work, becoming dominant on every level. Such works were either domesticated during their first translation, or they

gradually became domesticated through editing for different stagings. Such translations usually completely alter the play on multiple levels and become adapted to a degree that it is difficult to perceive them as translations.

It would not be surprising to find translational origin in many early originals, while it is difficult and sometimes impossible to find their source texts. These works are characteristically translocalized, renamed and referred to by the name of the translator: Lydia Koidula's (Theodor Körner's) *The Cousin from Saaremaa* (1870), Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's (Ernst von Houwald's) *Lighthouse (Tuletorn, originally Der Leuchtturm, 1871)*, Johann Voldemar Jannsen's (August von Kotzebue's) *The Dream of Pärmi Jaak (Pärmi Jaagu unenägu, 1873)*, to name just a few known Estonian cases. Such adaptation practice was common to the period in general, not only in Estonia, but elsewhere in Europe too (see for example Rossel 1994).

The origins, however, are difficult to establish also because the translation has travelled a long way and sometimes shifted the original genre. For example, while Theodor Körner as the author of the source text for *The Cousin from Saaremaa* is somewhat known, it is less recognised that the original of Lydia Koidula's second play *Maret and Miina or Betrothal birches (Maret ja Miina ehk kosjakased, 1870)* was based on a story by Johann Voldemar Jannsen, *Neighbour's Daughters (Naabri tütreid)* that in its turn was an adaptation of W. O. von Horn's story. (See also Põldmäe 1978, 146; Saro and Pappel 2008)

It is possible to observe a dramatic work gradually and through different editions becoming totally domesticated. *The Dream of Pärmi Jaak* is based on a play by August von Kotzebue (*Der Trunkenbold [The Drunkard]*), which in its turn is based on Ludvig Holberg's comedy *Jeppe on the Hill (Jeppe på Bjerget)*, staged in 1722 (for more details see Suits 1927). Kotzebue's play was first translated into Estonian as early as 1824 by Peter A. J. Steinsberg (the translation is lost). The translation was picked up again and edited by Johann Voldemar Jannsen in 1873 (republished in 1993). Jannsen emphasised comical elements in the play, neutralised it somewhat (a revolting peasant is substituted with a drunkard), intensified the marital conflict, added moral points and made the language more colloquial, inserted proverbs and sayings (Põldmäe 1978, 158). The structure of the play in Estonian translation has seen radical changes, the two-act comedy has become a three-act comedy. The domestication of character names is conducted on a very sophisticated level using total domestication for the names of simple country folk (Pärmi Jaak, Liisu, Mats), but bringing in German names (with slightly Estonianised spelling) for the manor-related characters (Anken, Marihken, Hans). Such a practice can also be observed elsewhere, for example in the translation of Destouches's *Triple Wedding (Kolmewõrdsed pulmad, 1883)*. Moreover, the activities of *The Dream of Pärmi Jaak* are

set into the Estonian context created with the help of domesticated realia: place names, food, currency, measurement units, Estonian verses and songs, but also the dynamics between the characters. This play has since been considered as Jannsen's original, at best presented as in Rudolf Põldmäe's study (1978, 14): "a play based on Kotzebue."

3.3. Familiarization or partial domestication

According to our estimation, familiarization is the most used approach in the translation of plays during the period of early Estonian-language theatre. This approach brings the dramatic text somewhat closer to the audience, but it is still performed by the theatre and received by the audience and critics as something foreign and translational. We can here distinguish between familiarization as a method that means a partial domestication of the whole text, and familiarization strategies that concern the familiarization of certain levels of text and/or the familiarization of certain individual elements. In both cases the extent of rewriting the text may vary greatly: sometimes the original is quite freely transferred to the Estonian context Estonianising the names of the characters, replacing the titles and realia, and simplifying the content and the expression plane of the source text to match the expectations of the Estonian audiences; however, sometimes the drama work still carries the elements of the source culture and the voice of the original author enters into a dialogue with that of the translator. These are not totally erased, and it is possible to perceive the piece as translational, not local.

Karl August Hermann's free familiarization and production of August Wilhelm Iffland's light comedy *The Bachelors* (*Die Hagestoltzen*, 1793; in Estonian translation *Linnas ja maal*), premiered first in 1873 in St. Petersburg and later also in the Vanemuine Society. In the foreword to the published play, Hermann (1875, 3) stresses the translation strategy, saying that he has "made the play into the Estonian language, not put it into Estonian," meaning that the play has not just been translated but also customised for the Estonian stage. The translator clearly stresses the fact of adaptation, taking into account the means and needs of local theatre. He further connects the extent of simplifications to the lack of skilled actors: "In German the play has 5 acts and 12 characters, from which 3 acts and 6 characters remain in my remake, for the way it originally was, is hard to play" (Hermann 1875, 3). Although in Hermann's case the reason is said to be the inadequacy of actors, this practice also enabled the translator/playwright to modify the plot of the play to match local circumstances, and thus, engage with the audience on a more personal level. Hermann claims: "The main principles of the play have remained the same, the face of the play has, however, been totally altered. My aspiration has been to fit it to match the

life of our people as much as possible, and this is the way I will pass it on to the audience" (Hermann 1875, 3).

Comparative analysis of texts by Iffland (1793) and Hermann (1875) shows conceptual changes in the plotline but the retention of formal elements. The plays both start with a scenic description of a room in a mansion with a sofa and a person stretched out on it, ready for a monologue. But here the differences on the conceptual plane start: Iffland's sofa is inhabited by the servant Valentin, in the Estonian translation the master of the house Reinhold starts speaking. Their monologues also have different foci. Iffland's Valentin regrets not having an education and thus a better outlook on life, Hermann's Reinhold ponders upon coming into means by hard work but having no friends. From the opening scene the plays continue in the same vein, Estonian following closely the setting and formal elements of the German original, but conveying, with the help of similar characters, a slightly different story. Thus, the technical framework such as settings and general character descriptions, the balance of monologues and dialogues is similar to the original, but the morals stress the local Estonian reality: Reinhold has worked hard and has become a free man with financial means, but he is lonely. Such comical dramas with an emphatic moral point apparently had a didactic function, but not only. In some sense the real "self" is being constructed here, the one that deviates firstly from the Germans in the original and secondly gives guidelines to the local "self."

However, there were works that were translated by our current contemporary standards, with no cuts made in characters or storyline, noticing and imitating stylistic markers such as metaphors, repetitions, parallel constructions, etc. August von Kotzebue's light farce *The Confusion or the Wag* (*Der Wirrwarr, oder Der Muthwilige*, 1803), translated by a later Estonian playwright August Kitzberg in 1878 (in Estonian by the name *Wirrwarr*), has a complicated plot line revolving around marriage and conning out an inheritance. The topic as well as the genre were deemed suitable for Estonians since "it had no lengthy and boring monologues" allowing "one joke be followed by another" (anonymous 1882). All the characters are present (some nameless extras are even added) and although the names of the characters are Estonianised, meaningful names get a translational counterpart. Kitzberg's translation follows the dialogues quite precisely, sometimes even rigidly in the 1878 version. The translator's voice does occasionally manifest itself carrying along the recognizably national mentality: in the opening scene of *Wirrwarr* in the original as well as the translation, three main male characters are seated in a living room of a manor, sleeping. These are the two suitors and the father (Herr von Langsalm/Jaak Tasantus) of the maiden (Doris/Dooris). As the name of the father suggests, he is slow and lazy, sleeping whenever he can. Kitzberg, however, has inserted a telling

remark explaining the constant leisure that must have been (and still is) an unfamiliar topic to Estonians: the German father sleeps earnestly “schläft nie anders als im Ernst” (Kotzebue 1836, 4), but in Estonian the father sleeps, also earnestly, but a clarification “whenever he finds a moment” (“Iisa magab ju, kui ta vähe mahti saab, ikka nõnda, et ta ei näe ega kuule”; Kotzebue 1878, 3).

Kotzebue’s *Wirrwarr* was well liked by contemporary audiences (Pöldmäe 1985, 126–27) and only four years after its first appearance in 1878, it was staged again under the title *Priidu Kuldnupp and his Half a Million* (*Priidu Kuldnupp ja tema pool miljonit*). The records state that we are dealing with a new translation by Ludvig Menning, the drama director in the Vanemuine at the time. However, the analysis revealed that this is an edition of Kitzberg’s translation, and most probably the original was not consulted at all. What is interesting is that the text is set in much more domesticated circumstances: the activities take place in an Estonian cottage, and the language has got a colourful local coating, made more speakable and more idiomatic. Such a tendency can often be noticed in case of dramatic works that by different stagings gradually lose their foreignness picking up local elements until they are interchangeable from the local original works.

In most of the familiarized plays we encounter similar principles: original structures are simplified, a versified original is translated into prose, proper names are familiarized, and through the translator’s voice local circumstances can be seen. Although plays translated using familiarization were generally well received, there are, however, also examples where the foreignness is perceived to an extent that critics feel the need to point it out separately. From Vilde’s review on Wilhelm Mannstaedt’s musical drama *Milkmaid from Ilumäe* (*Ilumäe piimatüdruk*) in 1896 we read: “There is no other such play like this *Milkmaid from Schöneberg* among the Sunday theatres of Berlin that is so hokey, such an oddity with stale jokes. Half-clad in an Estonian attire, fitted into by the translator, makes it ever more awkward” (Vilde 1896). Here the foreignness is perceived to an extent that the critic felt the need to point it out separately. However, the issue does not only concern the foreignness, but the ineptness in blending the foreign and the local culture.

3.4. Foreignization

Foreignization in the context of early Estonian theatre translations would include cases that exhibit a noticeable number of foreign elements in the title of the work (toponyms, proper names, etc.), character names, realia, setting, context and sometimes also language. In addition to that the foreignness may be supported by other non-verbal auditory and visual stage codes. In such a case we can still distinguish between the methodical and coherent manipulation of the entire text and a

text where only certain levels have been systematically foreignized, still with an aim to make a difference between the “self” and the “other.” It is important to note that even single borrowed codes or elements may perceivably foreignize the text.

The Wiera theatre was the first to make an attempt in 1885 to stage a classical drama play, *Muhamed*, Jaan Bergmann’s translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (unpublished) translation and rework of Voltaire’s play *Mahomet* (1736). Exotic themes proved to be very popular and the 1980s and 1890s saw productions such as Richard Genée’s comic operetta *Don Trabuco of Trabucillos or a groom from the land of moors* (*Don Trabuco di Trabucillos ehk Peigmees Mooramaalt*, 1887), Richard Strauss’ *The Gypsy Baron* (*Mustlasparun*, 1889), Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days* (*Reis ümber maailma 80 päevaga*, 1891), etc.

The first translations of William Shakespeare’s plays, *The Merchant of Venice* (*Wenedigu linna kaupmees*, 1888) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Kangekaelse taltsutus*, 1889), also found their way to the Estonian stage in the Wiera period. These plays may be perceived as an attempt to redeem Estonian theatre and its light repertoire choices and show its presence among the “cultured” peoples. Shakespeare was well known to the audiences through German translations and German theatres and the Estonian-language performances were received with certain expectations that also foreshadowed the translational decisions. The Shakespearean plays were welcomed by the audience (Kask 1970, 69) but while some critics praised and congratulated the Vanemuine for such an important step (anonymous 1888c, anonymous 1889b) others sided with the emerging Estonian cultural elite: Estonians are still not mature enough to handle such serious world classics with appropriate dignity (anonymous 1888a).

Both plays retained some of their foreignness: Antonio, Bassanio, Portia, Shylock, Katherina and Petruchio all operate on the stage and do it according to the Shakespearean plotline and in Italy. The cultural and historical realia are also there (that is, the use of ducats as monetary units). However, both plays were translated into prose and featured many cuts, deviations and shifts in emphasis (Pöldmäe 1985, 153–60). The director, Hugo Techner, found a way to highlight contemporary societal issues that would be of importance to the then audiences: Shylock’s tragedy was overthrown by the stress on class relationships such as arranged or inter-class marriage, thus, the courtship scenes became the centre of the play that in the original is more known for the absence of love rather than its presence. The audience is said to have enjoyed themselves by drawing parallels between Katherina and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* and the idle life of the Estonian nobility – the Baltic Barons, but lost a sense of humour when Petruchio treats the tailor rudely: Petruchio “is often harsh and unjust with servants and people who have not

deserved such fate, therefore the audience can no longer look kindly upon him, even though he reaches the much expected goal with his wife in the end" (Anonymous 1889c). It was thought that Shakespeare is misunderstood or mistranslated since surely he "has not taken the matter this far and treats especially the tailor in a friendly manner" (anonymous 1889c; see also Kask 1970, 70). Hereby the relationship between what is associated with and what is perceived as "other" can be seen working on different levels. The choice of a more serious repertoire and an attempt to present it in a consciously foreignized way would refer to breaching the gap between "self" and "other," creating a sense of belonging with the other, "cultured" people. However, the interaction that happens between the text, the stage and the audiences shows the dichotomy between intention and perception.

At the same time the idea as to what constitutes the "self" comes clearly through from the criticism regarding Karl August Hermann's original Estonian play *Auction or a tale about the life of the destitute* (*Oksjon, ehk lugu vaese rahva elust*) (Rosenthal 1874): not everyone is fit to write or translate plays, you need skills and a natural talent since "here each page shows that the writer lacks skills in Estonian and writes like a German in his manner and thought." Here the critic's deplorable attitude towards the use of Germanised Estonian can be seen: where the local material is presented by means that are perceived as foreign or borrowed, the foreignization is considered in negative terms.

3.5. Conscious omission

Conscious omission concerns both leaving some levels of a work untranslated, but also rendering entire works or even genres improper or unsuitable for the target audience. In this respect also the choice of repertoire may be quite telling, for example the fact that no great classical tragedies were staged in the Wiera period. In a review, allegedly by Juhan Liiv³ (1888), a number of texts are mentioned that would be pointless to present to the Estonians: *Hamlet*, *Faust*, *Don Juan*, *The Robbers*; instead "scenes of simple family life in a cottage would be suitable, maybe even translations that show the societal classes and their ways. That is it." Our analysis showed that as a strategy, omission is extremely widespread in early Estonian theatre translation. Under observation here are those cases where the omission can be seen to be performative: the aspirations, attitudes and opinions of the translator and theatre manifest itself through it. Such omissions may be motivated

3 This assumption, supported also by Põldmäe (1985, 48) seems plausible, since Juhan Liiv worked at the newspaper *Sakala* at the time.

by the lack of skills from the part of actors (see above anonymous 1888a), or else, the omissions can be justified by the expectations and estimated level of the target audience, in which case, typically, either entire parts of the play, characters and lines of activity are left out, or the more complicated levels of a play such as codes concerning versification, poetic structure, comical situations are consciously omitted (for the justifications for the prose translations of Shakespeare's plays see in anonymous 1888a, Õis 1888; on the translation of *Griseldis* into prose see Parv 1892). Sometimes, however, the criticism is directed towards the inability of the translator to use the omission strategy. For example, the translation of *A Hundred Roubles for the Trouble* (*Sada rubla vaevapalka*) was criticised because of the translator's inability to leave out a part or two or to redesign it in a more correct and truthful way (anonymous 1886).

4. Conclusion

Theatre translation can be seen as an interaction between texts and audiences with a historical socio-cultural moment in time and space, where context determines both the choice of genre as well as translation strategy. As translation is a cultural practice and culture in turn is translational, mapping and analysing early theatre translations also allows us to get an insight into the state of cultural affairs at that particular moment in time, late 19th century in the present case. Early theatre translation is performative by nature: it creates genres, generates stage language, brings Estonian theatre into a dialogue with other European theatres, and takes an active role in establishing Estonian cultural identity. Such performativity manifests itself especially on the level of drama translation: the agency of the translator emerges quite clearly through translational manipulations and choices. The focus of our article is performativity in the context of "self" and "other" in the emerging Estonian-language theatrical culture of the end of 19th century. We have studied the interaction between what is considered to be own and what is seen as the "other" through the theatre translations: what are the principles of the translators for transposing and recoding the foreign in a local culture, whether and in what ways does the voice of the translator manifest itself and, through criticism, how did the audience receive the translational "other."

The operations observed include total domestication, familiarization, foreignization and omission, keeping in mind that more than one of these may be seen at work on the different levels at the same time. The most common of the strategies can be said to be familiarization, a strategy that to a great deal shapes the appearance of the theatre of the time. Whereas familiarization seems to meet the expecta-

tions of the audiences, foreignization, even if it is a rare occasion and concerns only certain codes, gets noticed and creates the most discussion.

It can be seen from the analysis that certain levels of drama translation are generally more susceptible to manipulation: these are first and foremost levels connected to the expression plane, such as the composition, form, and versification techniques, but also the cultural and social codes (realia, names, circumstances). However, manipulations can occur also on the level of the content plane: ideological and conceptual messages can become altered, sometimes even the plot.

The analysis supported the hypothesis that the voice of the translator is even more prominent during the period when drama as a genre is imported into the local language. It can become rather explicit at times, for instance when the translator incorporates social criticism into the text (e. g., see above the case of Hermann's translation of Iffland's *The Bachelors*). In this respect, in addition to entertainment a theatrical translation functions as a moral compass, it educates and acculturates, and does that very often by examining the concepts of "self" and "other."

To conclude with, all of the four ways of interacting with the "other" that are brought out in this paper occupy a certain place in the development of the cultural identity of Estonians, helping to understand not only the dynamics of cultural change, but also to conceive of the ways a young and budding culture gives meaning to and perceives its own "self." This is when theatre translation starts playing a so far underestimated role through which many a phenomenon of the time can become visible. Even though the foreign ways are seen as culturally superior and more sophisticated, a warning against the indiscriminate import of it is often voiced by the critics. The cultural "other" is at the same time something that enables one to identify and understand the "self," grow and become stronger, but on the other hand it can be perceived as dangerous and unwanted, something to be hidden away, omitted or rejected in the translations. Operating on the borderlines of "self" and "other," accommodating their own concepts to the rules of the theatre and genres, taking into consideration translation norms, social context, expectations of the audience and critics, the drama translator not only creates new culture that would serve as a basis for the original drama tradition, but also actively participates in the creation of the emerging young cultural identity in Estonia.

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KATILIINA GIELEN, MARIA-KRISTIINA LOTMAN

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Performatiivsusest ja tajust varases eesti teatritõlkes

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Võtmesõnad: teatritõlge, draamatõlge, performatiivne tõlge, oma ja võõras

Artikkel on pühendatud Eesti teatritõlke loo varaseimale järgule 19. sajandi teisel poolel, kui eestikeelne professionaalne teater tegi siinmail oma esimesi samme. Tähelepanu all on eelkõige nn Wiera teater, millest kasvas hiljem välja üks Eesti mõjukamaid kultuurinähtusi, riigi ainus kolmeliigiteater Vanemuine. Uurimismaterjali moodustavad nii selle repertuaari kuulunud tõkelavastused kui ka nende retseptisioon. Artiklis kaardistatakse ja analüüsitakse selle aja teatritõlget „oma“ ja „võõra“ suhete kaudu, uurides nende vastassuhet performatiivsest aspektist lähtudes: kuidas tuleb teatritekstides esile tõlkija hääl ja milliste strateegiatega on võõrast omakultuuri transponeeritud ja rekodeeritud.

„Oma“ ja „võõra“ suhe on Eesti varase teatritõlkeloo üks kesksemaid küsimusi, mis tõuseb esile kõige erinevatel tasanditel. Seda võib näha repertuaaripoliitika vaidlustes, teatripoleemikas, arvustustes ja ülevaadetes, kuid ka tõlkevalikutes. Need mõisted ei ole neutraalsed ja seostuvad erinevate hoiakutega: nõnda nagu omaks peetavate struktuuride puhul, on ka võõrasust sellist, mida taunitakse ja soovitatakse vältida, ja ka sellist, mida tunnustatakse, kiidetakse ja imetletakse. Nii selle aja teatritegijad kui ka kriitikud teadvustasid endale teatri kultuurilist ja ühiskondlikku mõju ning teatrit oodati publiku õpetamist ja kasvatamist, kuid lisaks sellele ka laiemat panust kultuuri rikastamisse ja väärimdamisse. Selle kõrval oli tähtis ka teatri meelelahutuslik funktsioon: nii repertuaarivalikuid kui ka tekstimanipulatsioone põhjendati sageli vajadusega pakkuda publikule lõbusat ajaviidet. „Oma“ materjali ja selle loomise praktika puudumisel mängiski sellel varasel etapil tähtsat rolli just tõlkedraama.

Materjali täpsemaks analüüsiks on uurimuses eristatud nelja mehhanismi, mis kirjeldavad „võõra“ ülekandmist omakultuuri: 1) täielik kodustamine, mille puhul lähtetekst assimileeritakse sihtkultuuri; 2) osaline kodustamine, mille puhul jääb sihtteksti tajutat võõrasus, ent seda on siiski publikule lähemale toodud ja mugandatud; 3) võõrapärastamine, mis tähistab „võõra“ markeeritud eristamist „omast“ ning 4) „võõra“ sihilik väljajätt, kui võõrast peetakse liiga kaugeks, et seda kodupublikule esitada. Et aga teatritõlge on keeruline polükodeeritud struktuur, on analüüsis silmas peetud, et enamgi kui teistes kirjanduse põhiliikides opereerib tõlkija korraka eri mehhanismidega ning võib osa elemente ja koode üle kanda kodustades, teised aga võõrapärastades. Sealjuures on publik ja kriitikud vahel isegi kõige võõramaid struktuure ja elemente vastu võtnud algupärase ja omana, s.t „võõras“ ja „oma“ kujunevad eri agentide koosmõjul, kusjuures tähtsat rolli mängivad siin nii performatiivsus kui ka taju.

Artiklis näidatakse, et kõigil neljal analüüsitud mehhanismil on eesti varases teatritõlkepraktikas oma koht, kuid neist levinuim on osaline kodustamine, mis kujundab suurel määral selle aja teatri näo ja näib vastavat ka publiku ootustele. Teisalt jääb mõnikord just võõrapärastav kõige rohkem eristuma ja kõneainet pakkuma, isegi kui tegu on haruldase ja erandliku sündmusega. Tõlgete eri tasandite analüüsist tulevad esile küllaltki märkimisväärsed erinevused tõlkemanipulatsioonide määras: kõige vabamalt käsitletakse väljendusplaaniga seotud tasandeid, nagu näiteks kompositsiooni, vormi ja värsitehnikaid, ent teisalt ka kultuurilisi ja sotsiaalseid koode (reaale, nimesid, olusid). Manipulatsioone leidub siiski ka sisutasandil: muutuda võivad ideoloogilised ja kontseptuaalsed sõnumid, vahel koguni süžee. Peale lisanduste kohtame sageli ka väljajätte ning needki võivad teatud mõttes olla performatiivsed: selle strateegia kaudu tulevad

S U M M A R Y

samuti esile tõlkija ja teatri taotlused, hoiakud ja hinnangud. Väljajätud võivad olla ühelt poolt motiveeritud näitlejate puudulikest oskustest, teisalt aga võidakse neid põhjendada sihtpubliku ootuste ja eeldatava tasemega – tüüpiliselt on siis jäetud välja keerulisemaid värsitehnilisi koode, lihtsustatud kompositsiooni ja poeetilist struktuuri ning vähendatud algupärandi koomikat.

Üks artikli hüpoteese on, et eesti varases draamatõlkes on tõlkija hääle eriti selgelt väljendunud: asjaolule, et tegu on juba ajalooliselt vabama tõlkežanriga, lisanduvad ka ajastuomasele vabade tõlkenormidele, sh väljajäetude, lisanduste, muganduste ja kompilatsioonide aktsepteerimine, mis lubasid tõlkijatel tekstidega üsna meelevaldselt ümber käia ja neid enda eesmärkidele vastavalt ümber kirjutada. Nii pole tõlkija mitte üksnes vahendaja ja looja, vaid osaleb multiagentses teatripraktikas samuti ühe agendina, kes võib olulisel määral lavastust mõjutada. Originaaltekstide ja tõlgete võrdlev analüüs toetas püstitatud hüpoteesi: ilmnes, et mõnikord on tõlkija hääle eksplitsiitne – nt kui tõlkija oma ühiskonnakriitikat või õpetussõnu näidendisse sisse põimib – vahel üksnes aimatav väikeste muudatuste kaudu, kuid siiski alati tajutav.

Eesti varase draamatõlke performatiivsus avaldubki esmalt tõlkevalikute tasandil: tõlkija agentsus tuleb tõlkemanipulatsioonide kaudu üsna selgelt esile. Ent veel olulisem on, et draamatõlget võib vaadelda ka kui tekstide ja publiku vahelist interaktsiooni oma sotsiokultuurilises kontekstis. Nii on varane teatri- tõlge performatiivne ka oma laiemas kultuurilises mõjus: see loob žanre, genereerib eesti teatri lavakeelt, suhestab eesti teatrit muu Euroopa teatriga, osaleb aktiivselt eestlaste kultuurilise identiteedi kujundamisel. Selle analüüs aitab mõista nii kultuuriarengu dünaamikat kui ka seda, kuidas noor arenev kultuur ennast tajub ja mõtestab suhtluses võõraga. Just siin on ka draamatõlkel oluline ja seni ehk liiga vähe tähelepanu pälvinud roll ning mitmedki oma ajastu fenomenid tulevad selles eriti hästi esile. Võõrast peetakse küll sageli kultuuriliselt kõrgemaks ja arenenumaks, kuid teisalt hoiatatakse sageli ka võõralt põllult valimatu noppimise eest. Võõras on ühtaegu midagi, mis aitab ennast paremini mõista ja identifitseerida, kasvada ja tugevamaks saada, ent samas võib selles olla ka midagi, mida tajutakse ohtliku ja soovimatuna, nii et seda tuleks tõlgetes peita või koguni täielikult kõrvale heita.

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Performativity of Gender by Early Modern Dancers on and off Stage. The Case of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Negro

Anne-Liis Maripuu

Abstract: Elmerice Parts and Gerd Negro were among the first female modern choreographers in Estonia. The present article takes a close look at how they *did* gender in their early modern dance productions and how they performed gender in their daily lives in the 1920s.

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Keywords: early modern dance, gender performativity, 1920s, Elmerice Parts, Gerd Negro, Judith Butler

This article investigates how Estonian early modern dancers¹ represented women and performed gender on and off stage in the 1920s. Modern dance started developing in Western Europe and North America in the late 19th century. It opposed itself – at least at the beginning – strongly to ballet, a form of dance that dominated Western dance stages at the time. Modern dancers discarded classical ballet technique, defined by formalised movements and positions of the arms, feet, and body, and chose their own movements. The first female modern dancers, according to Sally Banes and Karl Toepfer, did not just break the rules of their art form, but cultural norms for women as well, by claiming liberty for the female dancing body – freedom to create new expressive vocabularies of movement and freedom from prevalent and widespread plots (Banes 1998; Toepfer 1997).

Choreographing is an activity that is closely linked to gender. There is no “pure movement,” Heili Einasto argues, as the dancers are always gendered (2002a, 36, 43). As modern dance pieces were not only performed by women, but also created by them, female choreographers had an opportunity to express themselves and comment upon their situatedness, their dilemmas, their ways of being in the world through their dance compositions, as Tomko has pointed out (2007, 105). Wendy Oliver and Doug Risner are convinced that dance art reflects gendered sociocultural patterns. “Choreographers, dancers, dance teachers, critics, and all those who are part of the dance world,” they explain, “are first and foremost individuals who were shaped by the culture in which they grew and developed” (Oliver and Risner 2017, 1). Gender itself, as Judith Butler argues, is not a fact or a stable identity, but some-

1 I use the term *early modern dance*, shortly *modern dance* in this article as a generic term. In Estonia, the terms *barefoot*, *modern* (meaning contemporary), *plastic*, *free*, and *new* dance were used between the 1910s and the 1940s.

thing we *do* (Butler 2010); it is a sum of acts of gender. This means that the content of seemingly self-evident notions like “woman” or “man,” “feminine” or “masculine” is, in fact, fluent and subject to change.

The aim of this article is to explore how Estonian female choreographers *did* gender in their early modern dance productions in the 1920s and how they performed gender in their daily lives. The focus of the research lies on Elmerice Parts (1878–1974) and Gerd Neggo (1891–1974) – two under-researched choreographers and dancers. The article seeks to find out whether they represented “traditional” or modern women on stage and, additionally, what kinds of lives they lived. The main source material of this article is printed media articles: reviews written by critics and announcements advertising dance events or informing the public about the dancers’ doings (for example, travels or performances abroad). Unfortunately, very few personal notes of the choreographers have survived. This fate is shared by many dance artists who fled Estonia in the 1940s. In order to understand how gender revealed and manifested itself in Parts’s and Neggo’s choreographies, I analyse how the reviewers described their dance productions and movements. It must be said, though, that neither of the two made gender an explicit subject of their dance art.² Nevertheless, as the dance pieces were composed by female choreographers and presented by female artists, the question concerning gender performativity is justified. In order to be able to say how the dance artists performed gender in their daily lives and whether they led a “traditional” – or, on the contrary, a modern – life, I compile their biographies and compare their life stories with the idea of the “traditional woman” from the 1920s. The choreographers’ biographies are composed using data published in the printed media; the idea of a “traditional woman” is constructed on the basis of different research publications.

This article is structured as follows. In the first section I introduce Judith Butler’s notion of performativity and give a short overview of what is meant by *doing gender*. In the second section I examine how Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo *did* gender off stage. First, I discuss the dominant gender roles and stereotypes ascribed to women in Estonia during the period analysed, then I compare the protagonists’ lives with them. The third and the main section of the article is dedicated to Parts’s and Neggo’s dance productions. Relying on the reviews and announcements published in printed media, I describe the characteristics of their dances and dance movements. The approach of this article is contextual, and, in its orientation, historical. As the research is conducted from a gender perspective, it can be consid-

² The only exception was a dance named *Woman* which Elmerice Parts brought on stage in 1927.

ered feminist. Gathered data allows me to see how the female choreographers' self-presentation was represented in the context of gender norms of the time. Did it change during the 1920s? If it did, how? In other words, how did Estonian modern dancers use the freedom to create their own dances?

Gender performativity

Judith Butler famously presented the idea that gendered behaviour is learned behaviour. This means that no-one is born as a "woman" or a "man," but learns to act as one while growing up. Gender is not a fact, the gender theorist claims, rather "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender" (Butler 2010, 190). By acting day-to-day as a "woman" or a "man," one creates the idea of "womanliness" or "manliness" and, in doing so, defines the content of the aforementioned terms. In other words, gender is a sum of gender acts. Gender, according to Butler, does not have "an internal essence" (2010, xv): a substance independent or autonomous of the acts of gender. The gender theorist agrees with Simone de Beauvoir, who claims: "to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman," to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler 1988, 522). Acts of gender are "corporeal signs" (Butler 2010, 185). It is the body, as de Beauvoir notes, that one needs to compel to conform to an idea of "woman" or "man." Dance art – similarly to gender – does not get by without the body. Therefore, dance is always gendered. While dancing, the dancing body performs gender.

Gender seems "real" or existent regardless of the fact that there is no gender – only acts of gender. Gender is performed continuously; one acts constantly as a "woman" or a "man" and this action makes them thereby "real" to some extent. "In the act of performing the conventions of reality, by embodying those fictions in our actions," Dino Franco Felluga explains, "we make those artificial conventions appear to be natural and necessary. By enacting conventions, we do make them "real" to some extent [. . .], but that does not make them any less artificial" (Felluga 2015, 214). It is possible to claim, though, that "reality" is a sum of acts. For example, the acts of gender determine what one considers "natural" or "normal" for "women" or "men." The actions then again are subject to change. The series of acts through which the body becomes its gender, Butler (1988, 523) states, are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. Therefore, it is possible to claim that by changing the actions, for example the acts of gender, we change the "reality." Female entertainers who work on-stage have a special position here: their gender performances

or acts of gender become visible to a great number of people. By presenting alternative acts of gender, they might pave the way to different or new ways of *doing* gender.

The acts of gender are repeated every day. The fact that gender is achieved through repetition makes it possible to say that gender is performative (Meyerhoff 2015, 2). Butler does not equate performativity with performance. According to her, performativity “consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (Butler 2011, 178). Performativity excludes any action from the part of the performer: her or his will remains hidden once and for all; the performer is unable to control gender performativity, Gay Morris (2005, 125) explains. “This is because the performer is inside or part of the gender system, and therefore cannot avoid it” (Morris 2005, 125). Whilst performativity contests the very notion of the subject, performance presumes one and connotes for Butler wilful control (Osborne and Segal 1994, 33).

Butler argues that as gendered subjects and performers of gender we are “compelled to ‘cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm.” (Butler 2011, 177) As Sarah Nettleton and Jonathan Watson have shown, numerous everyday norms regulate bodies and their functions (Roach Anleu 2006, 357). “Such norms specify appropriate body shapes, sizes, appearance, gestures, movements, types of adornment, and clothing. [. . .] In contemporary Western societies, femininity tends to be defined as the absence of masculinity, and gender norms specify separate roles and expectations for men and women” (357–8). The concept of gender norms should not be understood as accepted or set standards, rather they should be seen as beliefs nested in people’s minds (Cislighi and Heise 2020, 407).

As Butler has shown, gender is performative, meaning that gender is not something that one is, but what one *does* daily by repeating gender norms and enacting certain activities. This applies both off and on stage: while living everyday life and when performing on stage. The fact that female modern choreographers composed their own dances allows us to ask how they decided to perform or present gender in their dance productions. Was their female stage character in accordance with an idea of the image of the “traditional woman” of the 1920s or did she deviate from the dominant norm? What kind of reality did their compositions present?

Dance scholars have used interpretative strategies of feminist theory since the 1980s (Tomko 2007, 103, 105). Ann Daly has described the pertinence of feminism to dance studies as following: “Dance is an art form of the body, and the body is where gender distinctions are generally understood to originate. The inquiries that feminist analysis makes into the ways that the body is shaped and comes to have mean-

ing are directly and immediately applicable to the study of dance, which is, after all, a kind of living laboratory for the study of the body – its training, its stories, its way of being and being seen in the world" (Daly 1991, 2). A great overview of the conducted research on dance and gender is given by Elizabeth Claire, Wendy Oliver and Doug Risner, and Linda J. Tomko.

Estonian dance history has been scarcely researched, especially from the gender perspective. Heili Einasto has shed some light on gender relations in contemporary Estonian dance productions. She (Einasto 2002a; 2002b; 2017) has analysed how choreographers represented gender in their dance productions in the 1990s, gender relations in the ballet productions *Coppélia* and *Cassandra*, both staged by the Estonian National Opera, and different choreographed versions of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* from the gender perspective.

Performing gender off stage

In order to be able to say something about Elmerice Parts's and Gerd Neggo's dance productions, we need to understand the social environment where the dance artists created their dance productions and – most importantly – acted as women. First, I describe the features society ascribed to a "traditional woman" at the time and then I portray a modern woman who differed from her. As the urban environment, with its theatres and intelligentsia, constituted the main milieu where the stage art evolved and dancers circulated, the following focuses on an urban woman. Outside the city environment the terms "traditional" and "modern" probably had a different meaning. Class affects social norms "so that expectations for 'normal' women's and men's bodies differ in different social groups" (De Casanova 2004, Leeds Craig 2002, Lovejoy 2001 quoted in Roach Anleu 2006, 359). Cities grew rapidly at the turn of the century: at the end of the 19th century 19% of the population lived in cities, by 1922 Estonia had already 27% urbanites (Ainsaar 1997, 43).

In the 1920s there was discussion in conservative circles as to whether a woman was capable of working professionally like a man. Some believed that a woman was mentally and intellectually incapable for what were at the time perceived to be "men's professions," among them all kinds of leading positions. (Reinfeldt 2013, 17) One of them was Doctor Reinhold Kleitsman, a specialist in gynaecology and midwifery, who claimed in an article that intellectual work caused nervous and mental illnesses for women, and was therefore harmful (Kleitsman 1925, 13). The attitude towards women who decided to prove otherwise and educated themselves in universities was, according to Kai Reinfeldt (2013, 20), unfavourable. The reason was that a woman was believed to belong at home, where she was to be responsible for children and housekeeping (Reinfeldt 2013, 15, 19, 24; Sakova 2006, 126).

A married woman was placed under her husband's guardianship by the Baltic Private Law Code. According to the law, "the husband had the right to represent her in court proceedings, file claims on behalf of his wife without her authorisation, and participate in criminal proceedings when she was a victim." Additionally, "the husband was entitled to demand spousal obedience from his wife and choose the place of family residence" (Kiirend-Pruuli 2020, 4).³ However, the subjugation of women was not complete: in public-law matters, men and women were alike before the law (Kiirend-Pruuli 2020, 4). This enabled Estonian women to receive the right to vote already in 1918.

The role of women in the public sphere changed significantly during the 1920s (Kiirend-Pruuli 2020, 4; Kurvits 2013, 163). In addition to gaining suffrage they established several women's organisations, received the right to acquire higher education, and were increasingly engaged in paid employment (Kurvits 2013, 163). Women, who actively participated in the world, sought education, and had their own careers were considered modern or New (Marks, Patterson quoted in Kurvits 2013, 140). The features attributed to her were rationality, toughness, and maturity, the characteristics usually ascribed to men. In order to stress her independence and freedom, a modern woman adopted "manly" liberties – among them smoking – and traits; marriage was not a priority for her (Poska-Grünthal 1936, 29). "One got rid of everything strikingly feminine," Lilli Ibrus, a young Estonian woman revolutionary from the beginning of the last century, remembers, "cut her hair short and wore – if possible – single-coloured clothes. One attended a party in a dark dress, and with uncurled hair, some girls did not even dance." (Kruus quoted in Väljataga 2019) Ida Urbel, who studied with Neggo in the mid-1920s, remembers her teacher as a slim and boyish woman who wore trousers, large earrings and held a cigarette between her fingers (Aumere 1989, 9). Despite the growing number of New Women, the idea of a "traditional woman" prevailed – at least in the written press.

As Roosmarii Kurvits' research on the visual representation of women in the Estonian media shows, printed media presented an Estonian woman primarily as a housewife in the 1920s – her duty was to manage the household, take care of herself and her husband, and to love. The majority of the pictures in newspapers represented women as the weaker gender, requiring (male) guidance and protection. (Kurvits 2013, 170–71) Thus, it is not surprising that a "traditional" Estonian woman was considered tender, weak, childish (Poska-Grünthal 1936, 29), gentle, sensitive, refined (Kivimaa 2005, 34), passive and insecure (Hinrikus 2011, 40). In printed

³ Estonian family law was liberalised in some respects in the 1920s: consensual divorce was legalised in 1923 and civil marriage established in 1926 (Kiirend-Pruuli 2020, 4).

media Estonian women were generally used to symbolise private life and the domestic sphere (as opposed to the public sphere) (Kurvits 2013, 170). Notably, Kurvits argues, Estonian and foreign women were represented differently. While the ideal Estonian woman was presented predominantly in “traditional” domestic roles, foreign women were mainly entertainers or wives of important men (172). Photographs of Estonian female choreographers and dancers in written media transmitted a different image of Estonian woman. A female dancer, standing alone at the centre of the picture in a dance costume, proved that she as well can lead a professional and independent life.

Elmerice Parts and Gerd Negro undoubtedly were examples of modern and independent women. They rejected traditional domestic roles of women, educated themselves abroad in the field of modern dance⁴ – barely known in Estonia back then – and continued their careers as professional dancers, choreographers, and teachers. Both of them were married, but neither of them had biological children (Elmerice and her husband Kaarel adopted three children). It is not known whether they did not want to have children, or they could not have them due to medical reasons. As not having children was one of the few reasons Estonian society accepted divorce (Sakova 2006, 127), both marriages can be considered liberal. The married status of the choreographers did not seem to have affected their careers negatively; this fact shows their husbands’ tolerance and openness, especially when considering the Baltic Private Law Code.

Performing gender on stage

Now I take a close look at how Elmerice Parts’s and Gerd Negro’s dance pieces and dance movements were characterised by the critics. The focus of the research lies on their solo dances and Parts’s and Herman Oginsky’s duos from the 1920s. The data originates from the reviews.⁵ The latter were found with the help of the

4 Parts studied aesthetic gymnastics in Berlin in 1913 with Hedwig (Hade) Kallmeyer, plastic dance in Saint Petersburg in 1916 with Claudia Isachenko and modern dance with Jutta Klamt in Berlin in 1922 (Kompus 1938, 202, Maripuu 2018). Negro studied with Ella Ilbak in Tartu, with Anna Behle in Stockholm between 1919 and 1921, and with Rudolf von Laban in Stuttgart, Mannheim, and Hamburg from 1921 to 1924. In 1926 she opened her dance studio in Tallinn, which shaped a generation of dancers. She changed the opening date to 1924 in the 1930s. Additionally, Negro popularised women’s gymnastics – a field that seems to have grown more important for her with time. (Maripuu 2016)

5 Most of the reviews were published in Estonian daily newspapers: *Postimees* and *Päevaleht*. Additionally, following newspapers published articles about Parts’s and Negro’s dance performances in the 1920s: *Kaja*, *Koit*, *Lõuna-Eesti*, *Naesterahva Töö ja Elu*, *Oma Maa*, *Põhja Kodu*, *Pärnu Postimees*, *Pärnu Päevaleht*, *Rahva Sõna*, *Sakala*, *Tallinna Teataja*, *Vaba Maa*, Pärnu edition of *Vaba Maa*, and *Üliõpilasleht*. Articles were also published in the magazines *AEG*, *AGU*, *Looming*, and *Kiri ja Kunst*. DIGAR speeds up researcher’s work remarkably, although, instead of

Estonian article portal DIGAR; as a search word different name formats (Gerd Negro, G. Negro, Negro, Elmerice Parts, E. Parts, Parts) were used. When the number of search result was too small, a dance title was used as a keyword. I found a total of 88 articles and announcements. In the articles I looked for phrases describing, characterising, and portraying Parts's and Negro's dance productions and dance movements. Reading the reviews in a chronological order, one notices that during the decade there was a shift in how the female dancers and their dance productions were described by the critics. I surmise that this change was called forth by the change of their dance aesthetics which allowed the dancers to present gender in different forms and put on stage different kinds of female figures.

A considerable amount of dance criticism was written by writers, theatre directors and theatre critics. According to custom, most authors signed their articles using initials or pseudonyms; occasionally, neither of the two was used and the article was left unsigned. Due to this, not all the reviewers' names are known, which makes it impossible to say how many critical articles – if any – were written by women. The majority of the reviews with known authorship were written by Rasmus Kangro-Pool, literature and theatre critic, Jaan Pert, art and literature critic, writers Karl August Hindrey, Bernhard Linde, Artur Adson, Henrik Visnapuu, Johannes Semper, and the theatre director Voldemar Mettus. All of them were keenly interested in the new art form – the modern dance. Most of them eagerly visited modern dance performances, both in Estonia and abroad. It is known that Kangro-Pool saw Rudolf von Laban's dance performance *Prometheus* in Hamburg (R. K.-P. 1924), and Semper visited Mary Wigman's and Tanzbühne Laban's dance performances in Berlin (1982a, 1982b). Both choreographers were representatives of the *Ausdruckstanz*⁶. Thus, it can be suggested that the critics who covered modern dance performances in Estonia were in general supporters of the modernisation of Estonian culture and positively inclined towards modern dance.

I am aware that limiting the analysis to printed media articles and critics privileges certain types of text (review or announcement) and authors (critics). The collected data primarily originates from the texts written for publication to give an

the researcher's attentiveness, the number of found articles depends on algorithms and the number of digitised newspapers and magazines.

6 I understand the notion similarly to Susanne Franco (2007, 80): "The term defines a heterogeneous group of choreographic languages and teaching methods that became known in the German-speaking regions in the early twentieth century. These languages and methods agreed on certain major principles: dance was aesthetically independent from the other arts; body movement was closely bound to emotional and mental processes and reflected the rhythm of the cosmos; the dancer's role was that of creator-interpreter; and improvisation was of major importance."

overview of the dance performance and evaluate it. In a diary or a private letter, the dance productions would have been recorded differently. Every reviewer had their understanding of the art of dance, personal taste, and inclinations.⁷ Nonetheless, the reviews give a researcher a rare opportunity – maybe the only one – to learn something about early modern dance in Estonia through the reception of Elmerice Parts's and Gerd Neggo's dance productions and to get an idea of how the choreographers presented gender on stage.

Elmerice Parts's dances and dance movements as described by the critics

Parts began her solo dance career in 1920. During the eight years she spent choreographing and performing, her dance aesthetics changed remarkably. At the beginning of the 1920s she was described as a *hovering* and *graceful* dancer (here and later – all the quotes and notions from the articles are translated by the author, with the translation in italics); in the second half of the decade, she performed dances that were called *erotic* and *acrobatic*, had a *horrifying* effect and contained *grotesque humour* or *comedy*. Her dance partner was Herman Oginsky (also known as Kolt-Oginsky and Heiko Kolt, 1902–1977), a son of a circus artist with ballet training (ETBL).

Estonian critics characterised her dances and dance movements in 1921 as follows. *Round dance (Ringmäng)* passed by, according to a critic, *hovering like a vernal fairy tale* (A. S. 1921), the dance was said to be full of *playful grace* and *joy* (A. S. 1921; A. S. 1920). *Berçeuse* allowed the dancer to demonstrate her *lightness and grace* (W. M-s. 1921): hovering her hands back and forth the dancer *created an image of something so tender, lyrical, and carefree impossible to describe* (Kompus 1921). In 1922 Parts returned from Berlin with a program *The New Dances (Uued tantsud)*. According to a critic, the dancer's movements were *freer than before*, and more *ravished in passionate ecstasy* (Pr. Elmerice Partsi... 1922). *Enthusiasm for Victory (Võidujoovastus)* was *full of drive and force* (Pr. Elmerice Partsi... 1922); the dance was described as *impressive, beautiful, and fascinating* (W. M-s. 1923; R. R. 1924). *Tango* was *forceful, enrapturing, and impressive* (R. 1924); *lithe, lissom, full of élan and force* (R. R. 1924). *Grotesque (Grotesk)* was performed in a mask; it was described as an *impressive and enrapturing* dance piece displaying *angular movements* and *frozen postures*, which made it seem *nightmarish* (R. R. 1924). *Fountain or Fontaine (Purskkaevul)* was also praised as an *impressive and enrapturing* dance composition in which the dancer

7 The role of a critic becomes clearer when one considers Artur Adson's opinion of Parts's dance productions and regards the fact that he never expressed his opinion publicly. Had he done so, we would probably see Parts's dance productions slightly differently. (Adson and Tuglas 2011, 421)

ANNE-LIIS MARIPUU

managed to surprise a critic with her powerful *tempo of the arms* (R. R. 1924). Almost everyone was mesmerised by Parts's dance *Wedding Guest (Pulmapoiss)* where she used elements of Estonian folk dances (-a- 1924). It was an *intense* and *merry* dance with an *enrapturing rhythm* (R. 1924).

Parts was described by the critics at the beginning of her career predominantly as a *hovering, graceful, and jolly* dancer. Soon after her dance pieces were described prevalently as *forceful, fascinating, and captivating*. Based on the reviewers' opinions one could say that after some time Parts's choreographic handwriting gained in forcefulness. Could the reason for the change lay in her studies with Jutta Klamt, a representative of modern dance, in 1922?

Parts and Oginsky performed in Estonia in 1926 and in 1927. On this occasion, the general critical sentiment was disapproving (Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu 1927; R. K.-P. 1927; Parts-Oginsky õhtu 1927; K. Rumor 1927) and one notices that critics were losing their interest. Parts's and Oginsky's most popular dance productions were *Machine no. 13 (Masin nr. 13)* and *Morphine b (Morfium b)*. *Machine no. 13* was accompanied by *machine noise* (W. M-s. 1926) and performed in costumes that hid the dancers' faces (W. M-s. 1926). The production displayed mechanical movements and postures (Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu 1927), it was characterised as an *interesting* piece presented in a *powerful* and *extraordinary* way (Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu 1927; J. K. 1926). According to a critic, the dance presented the soul of the machine (Elmerice Partsi ja Herman Oginsky... 1926). The number did not convince all the reviewers, though. Some of them were left indifferent: "one complex of movements followed the next one [. . .], one could begin, skip, or end with a random one. The question was how exactly / aptly a human being can copy a machine" (R. K.-P. 1926). For others, *Machine no. 13* resembled a circus act and did not come close to art (R. K.-P. 1926). This made the dance according to the critic *inanimate* (Os. Ri. 1926). In 1927 the dance, now titled *Machine (Masin)*, was performed on a metal plate in costumes that revealed the dancers' faces (W. M-s. 1927b). *Morphine b* depicted, with *feeble convulsive movements and facial expressions, morphine's weakening and destructive effect on the human body and soul* (W. M-s. 1926). Facial expressions helped to turn the dance into a horrifying vision of *some kind of opium den* (Linde 1926). According to some critics, the dancers *depicted the horror of collapsing impressively* (R. K.-P. 1926; W. M-s. 1926). *Kristin and Kristof* seems to have been one of Parts's and Oginsky's *erotic* dances. Some reviewers mention the female dancer's *legs pointing up to the sky* (W. M-s. 1926; R. K.-P. 1926; K. Rumor 1927). Did the author suggest an imitation of intercourse? In the dance production *Woman (Naine)* Parts *moved her breasts voluptuously* and the movements of her hips were *as sinuous as those of a belly-dancer* (R. K.-P. 1927). The movements seemed *angular* to the critic



Figure 1. Elmerice Parts and Herman Oginsky in the revue *It's Going Already Better* (*Es geht schon besser*) at the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, 1926. Photo by Zander and Labisch. Published by 'Uhu' 02/1926. Vintage property of ullstein bild. Courtesy of Getty Images.

and hence had a *repulsive effect* (R. K.-P. 1927). In another dance production Parts distorted her mouth and eyes by pulling them, twisted the middle of her body, and opened her legs (Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu 1927). Reportedly she kept her mouth open to express strong passion (R. K.-P. 1927). Acrobatic elements were allegedly displayed in *Arena*, where Parts wrapped herself around Oginsky's body while he made pirouettes (Elmerice Partsi ja Herman Oginsky... 1926). Their art of dancing caused a heated dispute among critics. A significant number of reviews dealt with the question of whether it was art or *belonged to music halls*⁸ (R. K.-P. 1926; Parts-Oginsky õhtu 1927). It seems that their repertoire was too bold and daring for local reviewers. Additionally, critics highlighted Parts's poor technical skills (R. K.-P. 1927).

Following Parts's career through the critics' descriptions and depictions of her dance productions and dance movements, one sees that her repertoire and dance aesthetics changed significantly with time. She began as a *hovering, graceful, and jolly* dancer. Soon afterwards her dance pieces were described prevalently as *forceful, fascinating, or captivating*. A noticeable change in her dance aesthetics took place in 1926, when she joined forces with Oginsky. According to the critics, their dances had a strong *erotic* undertone. During her career, Parts put on stage, among others, a *graceful, forceful* and an *erotic* female figure. Parts's and Oginsky's dance compositions represented female sexuality in relation to a man without tying it to a marriage plot, which is common to most dance productions, according to Banes (1998, 89). Neither did the dance artists concentrate on depicting emotions; instead they illustrated the functioning of a machine or demonstrated an effect of morphine. Parts brought on stage a woman who was familiar with opium-dens and most probably knew the effect of the opiate. This woman, similar to representatives of the *Ausdruckstanz*, presented a different representation of the dancing body, in particular the female dancing body, than the high-art dancing or the light entertainments the audiences were used to (Banes 1998, 131). Instead of *hovering* to the music from the romantic period, the female dancer performed to the sounds of metal plates, distorting her face and mouth.

Characteristics of dances and dance movements: Gerd Negro

Negro began her solo dance career soon after returning from Germany in 1924. As a former student of Rudolf von Laban, she became one of the main Estonian representatives of the *Ausdruckstanz*, or the "new dance," as it was named in Estonia. Many

⁸ In Estonia Parts and Oginsky performed in theatres, whereas in Germany the dancers performed mostly in revues like Nelson-Theatre on Kurfürstendamm in Berlin (Das russische Tänzerpaar Parts-Oginsky 1926) or music halls like Alkazar in Hamburg. In Alkazar they performed together with the German dancer Anita Berber.

critics underlined the fact that Neggo's artistic work differed from that of the plastic dancers, meaning that her dance compositions were independent from music and did not interpret it (KAH 1924; -ns. 1924; J. P. 1924; I. K. 1924; M. L. 1925; -a- 1925; -n. 1927). Contrary to the *impressionist sweetness* of the plastic dancers, Neggo's dance movements were described as *precise, bold, expressive, energetic, unique, forceful, light, and full of tension*. From the reviews one learns that her steps were long and hand movements broad (K. M. 1927; ArA. 1927). The choreographer expressed herself using the *lines drawn virtuously by the body through space*, her instruments of interpretation were *a straight line, a broken line, a circle, a dot line, and a game of rare and unique rings*, a critic summarized (I. K. 1924). Her dance pieces were not inspired by an emotion, another reviewer explained, but by rationality (I. A. 1927). As she *negated literature, associations, and substance* (J. P. 1927a), the reviewers considered her dance performances abstract (J. P. 1924). Her dance productions joined *feminine charm* and *masculine force* (Gerd Neggo kammertantsude... 1924), according to another source, *sober and masculine seriousness* flowed out of them (-in. 1925). Unfortunately, reviews written about Neggo's dance evenings do not contain as detailed information about the dance pieces as the ones written about Parts's. In many cases a considerable proportion of the article contained rather general descriptions of Laban's principles. Perhaps, due to the abstract character of Neggo's dance productions, the critics found it difficult to describe them and introduced her teacher's visions of dance instead?

Three of her dances were labelled as abstract by a critic: *Phantom (Fantoom)*, *Dance of Drive (Hootants)*, and *Nightly Journey (Õine teekond)* (J. P. 1927a). *Phantom* allegedly had a *mysterious atmosphere* (El. 1927) and displayed *aerial lightness* (-s. 1927). In *Dance of Drive* the dancer was told to demonstrate *force* and *boldness* (-s. 1927); although, according to another critic, the composition *lacked drive* (H. H. H. 1927). *Nightly Journey* portrayed a traveller's urge to return and the compulsion to continue on her or his path (ArA. 1927). The dance piece had a *gloomy atmosphere* and *expressively displayed the darkness and gloominess of the night and the fear of the night* (J. P. 1927b). *Ostinata* and *Grotesque (Grotesk)* were described as unique and exotic dances that displayed *elemental force* and contained comic elements (-ns. 1924, W. M-s. 1927a; J. P. 1924). *Arlequinade (Harlekinaad)* included elements of pantomime (J. P. 1927a), the dance composition demonstrated *force* and *boldness* (-s. 1927) and charmed one of the reviewers with *the playfulness of transitions, impetus of jumps, and grace* (ArA. 1927). *Dance to Estonian Motifs (Tants eesti motiividele)* was according to a critic a *light and a jumping dance* (J. P. 1927b), displaying light and elastic movements (El. 1927).

Neggo introduced a female figure unknown to the Estonian modern dance stage up to then. Her dance pieces and dance movements did not resemble those of the

A N N E - L I I S M A R I P U U



Figure 2. Gerd Negro in dance pose, 1925. Photo by J. ja P. Parikas, Courtesy of the Estonian Music and Theatre Museum.

plastic dancers the local audience was used to seeing. Her female stage figures lacked *impressionist sweetness* and, instead of *hovering movements*, they used *energetic* and *forceful* ones. From the reviews one learns that Negro's choreographic works were not inspired by emotion, but rationality. Rationality, along with a certain soberness and abstractness that were characteristic to her dance productions as well, was the quality that differentiated her female stage figures from the ones performed by Parts in the duets with Oginsky. The latter's stage performances featured a passionate, sensual, and voluptuous woman.

In the 1920s the number of women who worked professionally and chose the profession of a choreographer and/or a dancer rose rapidly. Parts and Negro were two of them. As choreographers of their own dance pieces, they decided themselves what to put on stage and how. Reading the reviews of Parts's and Negro's dance evenings closely one learns that the dance artists on stage performed women who were characterised by the critics as *graceful*, *jolly*, *forceful*, *erotic*, and who *used their reasoning to create dance productions*. Ascribing gracefulness to a female was not and is not anything new, but demonstrating her forcefulness, displaying her eroticism and rationality meant bringing a New Woman on stage. This woman did not require male guidance and protection like a "traditional woman"; on the contrary, she was mature and rational. She used comic or grotesque effects and cast aside the implicit requirement that the stage dance had to look pretty. Sally Banes has pointed out that early modern dancers partly proclaimed their independence from men simply by excluding the marriage plot from their dances altogether (1998: 213). The marriage plot did not interest neither Parts nor Negro. Parts's and Oginsky's dance productions seem to have displayed, instead, the corporeal or physical side of love. Perhaps the boldness of Parts's and Oginsky's dance productions played a role in the critical tone of the reviewers?

Conclusion

Judith Butler claims that gender is not a fact, but something we *do*. In other words, there is no one way of being a woman or a man and the content of these ambiguous notions is in a constant flux. The starting point of this article was to understand how the Estonian female choreographers and dancers performed gender off and on stage in the 1920s: did they conform or, on the contrary, contradict the dominant gender norm? The focus of the research was on the solo dance productions of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Negro and Parts's duos with Herman Oginsky. The main source of information were the reviews and announcements published in the Estonian printed media. The 88 articles were found with the help of the Estonian

article portal DIGAR. In the texts I looked for phrases describing, characterising, and portraying Parts's and Neggo's dance productions and dance movements.

Parts and Neggo presented gender on dance stages in different ways. In the early 1920s Parts's female figures seem to have been consistent with the idea of a "traditional woman." They were described by the critics as *graceful, hovering, and jolly*. Soon after that, the female figure was characterised in the reviews predominantly as *forceful* – this applied both to Parts and Neggo. The dominant gender norm was challenged by Neggo's *abstract* dances, which were *not inspired by an emotion, but by rationality*. A "traditional woman" was considered to be weak, insecure, and rationally incapable. Parts's and Oginisky's *erotic* dance productions prefigured something radically new, presenting female sexuality in relation to a man. The private lives of the female dance artists were probably as unconventional as their art. Both Parts and Neggo seem to have lived as independent and modern women. Merely the fact that they worked professionally can be considered unprecedented in their time and must have inspired many young women. The dance artists proved that a woman does not have to dedicate herself to motherhood and housekeeping.

The choreographers demonstrated to their audiences that gender can be done in different ways. Various acts of gender create the idea of gender, Butler claims. This ties the idea or the understanding of gender at a certain time to the acts of gender. This means that by changing how one enacts gender, one changes the idea of gender. By presenting untraditional female figures in their dance productions, Parts and Neggo contradicted the dominant gender norms of their time. In doing so they contributed to the broadening of the meaning of the notion *woman* according to their own beliefs and understandings of womanliness. Finally – the stage was theirs.

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S U M M A R Y

Soo performatiivsus esimeste moderntantsijate loomingus ja elus. Elmerice Partsi ja Gerd Negro juhtumiuuring

Anne-Liis Maripuu

Võtmesõnad: varane moderntants, soo performatiivsus, 1920. aastad, Elmerice Partsi, Gerd Negro, Judith Butler

Käesolevas artiklis otsin vastust küsimusele, kuidas kujutasid Eesti varased moderntantsijad ja koreograafid oma tantsulavastustes naisi. Lisaks sellele huvitab mind, missugused naised nad ise olid. Kas nende lavategelased ja nende endi elukäigud olid „traditsioonilised“ või iseloomustas neid moodsus? Moderntantsule pandi Lääne-Euroopas ja Põhja-Ameerikas alus 20. sajandi alguses. Selle eestvedajateks olid peamiselt naised, kellele uus tantsustiil andis ennenägematu võimaluse luua ise oma tantsud. Varased moderntantsijad ei kasutanud balletitehnikat ning hülgasid baleriinile kohustuslikud kostüümielemendid. Uurimuse fookus lasub kahel tantsijal ja koreograafil, Elmerice Partsil (1878–1974) ja Gerd Neggol (1891–1974). Vaatluse all on nende 1920. aastate soolotantsud ning Partsi ja Herman Oginsky (ka Kolt-Oginsky ja Heiko Kolt, 1902–1977) duod.

Judith Butler on seisukohal, et sool puudub stabiilne identiteet, sest sugu „tehakse“. Väljaspool seda performatiivsust sugu ei eksisteeri. Terminite *naine* ja *mees* või *naiselik* ja *mehelik* sisu on ajas muutuv, sõltudes praktikatest, mille taasesitamist peetakse kas „naiselikuks“ või „mehelikuks“ ehk sellest, kuidas sugu „tehakse“. Naiseks ei sünnita, vaid naiseks saadakse, on Judith Butler veendunud sarnaselt Simone de Beauvoir'iga. Kuidas sugu „tehakse“, on ajas muutuv: 1920. aastatel olid ettekirjutused „naistele“ ja „meestele“ teistsugused kui praegu. Missugused naisekujud töid Eesti esimesed naiskoreograafid lavale? Kas nende looming aitab kinnistada ideed naise „traditsioonilistest“ rollidest või panustas selle kummutamisele? Koreograafide arusaamad jõuavad tantsuks transformeerununa suhteliselt suure vaatajaskonnani, mistõttu on oluline, kuidas nad üht või teist sugupoolt laval kujutavad. Esitades laval alternatiivseid olemise viise, tutvustab koreograaf oma publikule teistsugust või uut soo „tegemise“ viisi. Sellega panustab ta ühiskondliku normi muutmisesse, mida me soolistatud subjektidena oleme paratamatult sunnitud tsiteerima.

Uurimuse peamiseks allikaks on Eesti trükimeedias ilmunud artiklid: kriitikute arvustused ning teatud tantsuetenduste ja koreograafide tegemiste kohta (nt esinemine välismaal). Artiklite leidmiseks kasutasin Rahvusraamatukogu digitaalarhiivi DIGAR, kokku õnnestus mul leida 88 artiklit ja teadaannet. Nimetatud allikad ei võimaldanud teada saada, kuidas tantsijannad end laval väljendasid, vaid kuidas (peamiselt meessoost) kriitikud nende loomingut arvustasid. Kuna koreograafide endi tantsualaseid märkmeid säilinud ei ole, pakuvad nimetatud allikad peaaegu ainsat võimalust Eesti varase moderntantsu kohta midagi järeldada. Partsi ja Negro loodud naisekujude iseloomustamiseks analüüsisin fraase, millega kriitikud kirjeldasid ja iseloomustasid nende tantsuloomingut ja liigutusi. Koreograafide elukäikudele hinnangu andmiseks koostasid nende biograafiad ja võrdlesin neid 1920. aastatel valitsenud ideega „traditsioonilisest naisest“. Koreograafide biograafiad panin kokku trükimeediast pärit info põhjal, idee „traditsioonilisest naisest“ konstrueerisin teemakohaste uurimuste põhjal.

Partsi ja Negro kuulusid kahtlemata moodsate ja iseseisvate naiste hulka. Nad harisid end välismaal ning töötasid seejärel elukutselistel tantsijatel, koreograafidel ja pedagoogidena. Mõlemad olid abielus, bio-

loogilisi lapsi ei olnud kummalgi. Nad tõestasid, et naisel on võimalik realiseerida end väljaspool kodu. 1920. aastatel ei peetud kodust väljaspool tegutsevat naist „traditsiooniliseks“, valitses arvamus, et naise koht on kodus, kus tema peamiseks vastutusala on lapsed ja majapidamine. „Traditsioonilist“ naist peeti õrnaks, nõrgaks, lapsikuks, leebeks, tundlikuks, passiivseks ja ebakindlaks (Poska-Grünthal 1936; Kivimaa 2005, 34; Hinrikus 2011, 40).

Missuguse naise töid Parts ja Neggo oma tantsulavastustes publiku ette? Partsi looming muutus tema karjääri jooksul märkimisväärselt. 1920. aastate alguses kirjeldasid kriitikud teda kui *hõljuvat, graatsilist ja rõõmsat* tantsijat, veidi hiljem iseloomustati tema tantsuloomingut kui *jõulist, haaravat ja kütkestavat* (siin ja allpool olen artiklitest pärit terminid kirjutanud kaldkirjas). Veelgi enam muutus Partsi esteetika 1926. aastal, kui tema tantsupartneriks sai Herman Oginsky. Kriitikud kasutasid nende etteasteid arvustades sageli termineid *erootiline* ja *akrobaatiline*.

Neggost sai Rudolf von Labani õpilasena Eestis „uue tantsu“ (Saksamaal nimetati seda stiili terminiga *Ausdruckstanz*) esindaja. Erinevalt plastilistest tantsijatest, keda kriitikute sõnul iseloomustas *impressioonistlik magusus*, kirjeldati Neggo tantsuliigutusi kui *täpseid, julgeid, ekspressiivseid, energeetilisi, unikaalseid, jõulisi* ja *kergeid*. Kuna koreograaf *eitas literatuuri, assotsiatsioone ja sisu*, mõjus tema looming mitmete arvustajate sõnul *abstraktsena*.

Neile allikatele tuginedes võib väita, et 1920. aastate jooksul eemaldus koreograafide loodud naisekuju üha tugevamini „traditsioonilisest“. Kui Partsi 1920. aastate alguse *graatsiline, hõljuv* ja *rõõmus* lavakuju ei erinenud kuigivõrd „traditsioonilisest naisest“, siis *jõulisuse* lisandudes mõned aastad hiljem eemaldub ta sellest mõnevõrra. Väljakutse valitsevale soonormile esitas Neggo oma *abstraktse* tantsuloominguga, mida anonüümse kriitiku sõnul *ei inspireerinud emotsioon, vaid mõistus*. „Traditsiooniline naine“ oli teatavasti tundlik ja intellektuaalselt saamatu. Partsi ja Oginsky *erootilised* tantsud kujutasid endast midagi radikaalselt uut, presenteerides naist kirgliku, sensuaalse ja iharana.

Tuues lavale „ebatraditsioonilisi“ naisekujusid, näitasid koreograafid, et sugu saab „teha“ mitmel moel. Nad demonstreerisid, et naine võib olla *graatsiline, jõuline, mõistuslik, erootiline*. Sellega esitasid Parts ja Neggo väljakutse valitsevale soonormile ja aitasid muuta arusaamist sellest, mida pidada „naiselikuks“ või „mehelikuks“.

Anne-Liis Maripuu – Tartu Ülikooli doktorant. Tema peamine uurimisteema on Eesti ja Saksa varajane moderntants. Aastal 2018 pälvis Maripuu Rahvusarhiivi rahvusaaslaste programmi stipendiumi info kogumiseks Saksa tantsuarhiivides Rudolf von Labani Eestist pärit õpilaste kohta. Uurimistöö tulemused ilmusid aastaraamatus *Teatrielu 2018*. Maripuu on korraldanud konverentsi „Rudolf von Laban 140“ (2020) ja kaks fotonäitust: „Tantsides vabaks. Plastilise tantsu algusaastad Eestis“ (2018) ja „Gerd Neggo. „Tants ainuüksi on suverään““ (2021).

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Four Ways to Experience Augmented Reality at Museums

Jakob Ossmann, Kasra Seirafi, Carina Doppler

Abstract: Augmented reality (AR) is a prevalent topic in the museum space as it promises to bridge the gap between the physical exhibition space and digitised information. The present paper introduces a framework of four distinct experience-based categories that outline which kind of AR applications are possible inside the museum: 1) object annotation, 2) object visualisation, 3) guiding, and 4) data visualisation.

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Keywords: augmented reality, AR, app, museum mediation, technology, museum communication, visitor experience

1. Potential of Augmented Reality for museum mediation

During the last decade, Augmented Reality (AR) has been one of the most hyped technologies within and beyond the museum world. Recently AR has exited the prestigious Gartner Hype Cycle, a regularly updated graph that visualises the impact of the latest technology trends on their potential to solve business problems (Gartner 2021). The exit makes industry experts argue that the AR has reached maturity as an operational production tool (Herdina 2021).

AR, which can be defined as real-time interaction of real-world objects with digital 3D content (Azuma 1997), offers unprecedented possibilities especially for inspiring visitor experiences as well as cultural and science learning by bridging the divide between physical exhibitions and digital information. Where in the 1990s digital media and especially the Web were regarded as “parallel space,” today this dichotomy does not hold true anymore. Current theoretical concepts instead highlight that the digital and physical space have become intertwined. Tim O’Reilly and John Battelle described the Internet that emerged from the dotcom crash as a decentralised “WebSquared” platform that is built on collective user interaction as opposed to being a one-way publishing tool (O’Reilly and Batelle 2009). More specifically, Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva introduced the concept of “Net Locality” by arguing that new technology tools connect individuals to their surroundings and their community instead of creating detached parallel virtual worlds (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). The physical and the digital museum should therefore also not be regarded as separated anymore but need to be designed and conceptualised as an integrated, holistic visitor and learning experience.

Research has already highlighted AR as a powerful tool to bridge the divide between physical and digital as it proves to be a reliable medium for learning due to its knowledge transfer capabilities by creating a state of immersion that makes individuals more accessible to new stimuli (Georgiou 2018). For example, while consuming learning content about a museum exhibit, it makes a difference if the learner uses informational media parallel vs. immersive to the exhibit. With the latter, the learning content is received directly “on the object” making the access more intuitive and direct. At visitor venues AR has furthermore been proven to improve mediation, by functioning as creative playgrounds (Scholz and Duffy 2018), as media of joy and engagement (Leue et al. 2014) or as source of inspiration (Rauschnabel, Felix and Hinsch 2019). Jung et al. highlighted the entertainment aspect of AR and proved that it leads to an improved perception of a visitor experience at the museum (Jung et al. 2016).

2. Four experience-based categories for AR at museums

However, those existing theoretical and empirical analyses of AR and museums do not provide an explicit framework that outlines the type of experiences that can be created with this technology nor do they give recommendations for practitioners on how to actually best integrate AR applications into the museum.

Mark Billinghurst, the co-author of ARToolkit (1999), the disruptive open source software that paved the way for mainstream AR adoption via image targeting, introduced two category frameworks for overall AR experiences. The first is based on four types of configurations depending on how the virtual view image is combined with the real-world view: (1) video based, (2) optical see-through, (3) projection onto a physical surface, and (4) eye multiplexed. (Billinghurst et al. 2015, 128)

Billinghurst’s second AR experience categorisation is rooted in the input source: 1) Information Browsers: Interfaces for showing AR information on the real world; 2) 3D User Interfaces: Using 3D interaction techniques to manipulate content in space; 3) Tangible User Interfaces: Using real objects to interact with AR virtual content; 4) Natural User Interfaces: Using natural body input such as free hand gestures (Billinghurst et al. 2015, 165).

While providing an interesting starting point on how to create AR experiences in general, the two established categorisation frameworks described above fail to address the museum mediation context. More specifically, existing literature has not addressed the question: which kind of AR experiences can be created at museums? To address this knowledge gap, the authors of the present paper will outline four specific categories which museum professionals can rely on to plan and create new AR-based exhibitions aligned to their mediation goals. The categories described below are derived from observation- and evaluation-activities from the research

and development (R&D) projects “HoloMuse”¹ and “Museum4Punk0”², as well as from in-depth industry knowledge gained by the authors who have been working as industry professionals and early adopters in the field. We analysed those use cases from R&D and industry projects along the dimensions of user experience and mediation goals (instead e.g. the dimension of technology used). Our findings suggest four “experience-based” categories for AR at museums:

- 1) object annotation,
- 2) object visualisation,
- 3) guiding and
- 4) data visualisation.

These are neither based on the configuration method nor the input devices suggested by Billingham et al. (2015) but are instead derived from the different possible types of experiences that can be achieved by placing new layers of digital information upon the physical space of the museum and are therefore ideally suited to create visitor experiences.

Our categorisation approach is *user-based* as opposed to *technology-based*. It refers to the form of interaction between curated museum content and visitors. Thus, it refers to the crucial mission of each museum, i.e. the curated transfer of cultural heritage knowledge via its exhibits. This perspective on AR-technology turns our framework into a tool for museum professionals which allows them to connect the process of curation with technology in order to achieve intended mediation goals.

In order to make those categories operational for museum experts as well as for museum researchers, we now will discuss them individually and, in the next section, apply them to specific use cases.

1 “HoloMuse” (“Holographic museum exhibition design and visitor system based on Augmented Reality enhanced wearables”) was an R&D project funded by the “Wirtschaftsagentur Wien” (Grant P1721153), where different Mixed Reality approaches at museums were developed, analysed, piloted and evaluated (Seirafi and Wiencek 2017, Wiencek and Seirafi 2019, Wiencek 2020). Observation- and evaluation-methods were carried out via piloting events at Naturhistorisches Museum Wien (Vienna), Deutsches Museum (Munich), and the Stadtmuseum Tulln (Austria) as quantitative surveys, focus interviews and observational methods like “thinking aloud.”

2 “Museum4Punkt0” (“Digitale Strategien für das Museum der Zukunft. Erproben und Evaluieren innovativer Einsatzmöglichkeiten digitaler Technologien”) is a broad initiative of the German government to innovate the museum ecosystem (<https://www.museum4punkt0.de/teilprojekt/perspektiven-dreidimensionaler-visualisierungen-in-der-musealen-vermittlung/>). The authors participated in one project which developed new, gamified learning approaches with Augmented Reality (<https://www.museum4punkt0.de/ergebnis/kosmos-kaffee-augmented-reality-anwendung-zur-sonderausstellung/>). The developed solution was carried out in real world settings both at the museum (Deutsches Museum, Munich) and for remote use. Evaluation was carried out in partnership with the “HoloMuse” project and included museum experts and professionals.


The first category we would like to name is *object annotation*. This form of AR experience is created by placing a layer of digital information directly over the physical layer of exhibition objects. An often-prevalent form is *iconographic object annotation* which is similar to the painting style of classic iconography, where a two-dimensional artwork is enhanced by painting techniques that seemingly extend the canvas outwards in the direction of the viewer. Iconographic annotation opens up the possibility to not only present information about the artwork for the visitors to consume – as most digital mediation forms do – but to encourage and strengthen early phases of contemplating art. The AR device becomes a lens that visitors can use to frame and channel their subjective experience of an artwork. This form of *on-object-mediation* is best suited to provide additional information or show hidden information on static physical objects and to continue a story told within the work of art.

The second proposed category is *object visualisation*. This category refers to the recreation of real-world objects as 3-dimensional digital objects in the space of the museum. This mediation category not only annotates existing objects (the first category) but provides object content itself which (at least not easily) can be shown in the physical exhibition space, e.g. rare or historically lost objects. Object visualisation can also add new object content to existing exhibits, e.g. to animate/visualise the internal workings of machines. This can also create learning experiences on the objects by revealing internals and what is “hidden” at the physical exhibit. Object visualisations make it possible to place new storytelling elements in the museum space. This enables mediation professionals to add novel content contributions to the overall experience.

A third application category of AR in museum mediation could be roughly described as *guiding*. The user may be provided with directions through the exhibition spaces by digital static objects like arrows and clues. In a more immersive form of this category, the user is guided by avatars in the form of fictional or real-life characters. Those *AR avatars* make it possible to introduce elements of dialogue-based storytelling into the overall museum experience by directly addressing the visitor. Avatars can be applied to provide additional context to the exhibition or on specific objects in the exhibition space.

As fourth category we propose *data visualisation* where sources of complex quantitative data are visualised in relation to the physical exhibits. Museum objects are often underpinned by complex network relations between human interactions, history events, geospatial transitions, provenance and so forth. For example, an antique artefact at a western museum will have its own historical context but will also have travelled through many centuries, countries and owners before arriving at its location of display where it is embedded into the story of the present exhibi-

tion. This context information often is available as complex data sets which are unsuitable for visitor mediation. Proper visualisation modes could make this valuable background knowledge available to museum visitors. Objects could e.g. be connected to artist biographies and therefore made tangible via digital visualisations. This creates connections between objects, biographies and other relevant information, thereby telling holistic stories that span vast time spans and connect various different disciplines. Such interconnected mediation is difficult to achieve in traditional museum mediation formats.







AR museum experience categories				
	1  Object annotation	2  Object visualisation	3  Guiding	4  Data visualisation
Mediation goals	hidden information, contextualisation	History, fauna & flora technical learning	directions contextualisations	Historical, biographical, sensory, climate, physics and operational data
Storytelling	continuous	standalone	dialogue-based	long time horizons, connecting disciplines and geographies

Figure 1. AR Museum Experience Categories. Table: © Fluxguide.

3. Categories applied to museum practices

The four categories outlined above will now be applied to multiple museum practices and mediation goals. The authors will connect the categorial system with modes of museum knowledge transfer and underpin them with best practice use cases from international museum projects.

3.1. Object annotations

AR object annotations make it possible to show details or invisible elements of an exhibited object that otherwise remain hidden: for example, versions of a painting can be revealed through overlays of infrared, MRI or X-ray images which are augmented over the original painting. Including them in moving-image augmentations allows the museum to tell a story about the painting technique of an artist and the change of an artwork over time during the process of its creation. Object annotation is the most common category of AR museum mediation to date and has been adopted by renowned institutions like the Albertina Museum in Vienna to tell the

story of the artwork in a playful way through animations and added sound³ or the Belvedere Museum⁴ in Vienna as well as the Louvre to reveal the story behind famous paintings⁵.

Another project that uses object annotations is “HoloMuse” at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: an application for Microsoft HoloLens was developed to enhance the visitor experience in front of Pieter Bruegel’s “Children’s Games.”⁶ Specific areas of the painting were highlighted by AR annotations (see Figure 3) which was paralleled by audio narration. Moreover, the narration also connected different areas of the complex painting which then were highlighted by AR. This example shows how narrated storytelling can be extended and deepened by AR-based annotation strategies. Thus, visitors’ eyes were guided to details of the painting and paired with



Figure 2. Participants at the piloting event at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, trying out the HoloLens application for Bruegel’s “Kinderspiele.” Photo: © Fluxguide.

3 Object annotation at Albertina, concept and implementation by Artivive: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeEw_DaFQx8.

4 “Egon Schiele in Augmented Reality”, Belvedere Museum Vienna, concept and implementation by Artivive: <https://youtu.be/jEv6jZcRgrU>.

5 “Mona Lisa beyond the Glass”, created by HTC VIVE Arts and Emissive: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au_UpzhzHwk.

6 “HoloMuse”, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, lead, concept and implementation by Fluxguide: <https://youtu.be/XcKBAdEYMpY>.

contextual information to trigger engagement with the work and ultimately support learning, contextualisation and understanding of cultural exhibits.



Figure 3. View through the HoloLens showing a highlighted and zoomed image detail. Photo: © Fluxguide.

3.2. Object visualisation

AR object visualisations make it possible to place life-size three-dimensional objects in the physical space. This can be used e.g. to recreate historical objects and put them in context. The mobile App project “Ovilava – Heroes of the Roman Age” (city of Wels in Austria) offers multiple AR experiences with reconstructed digital Roman assets, like e.g. Roman warriors. Based on complex 3D modelling with strong historical and archaeological precision this enabled authentic and astonishing access to Roman history and culture – directly at the specific historic relevant spots in the city.⁷ In this case, AR visualisations also connected to elements of “gamification”: the interactive exploration of the AR scenes was followed by interactive challenges and questions about the respective content and triggered scores (coins) and rewards (cards). The new object therefore made it possible to introduce a whole new direction of storytelling connected to the Roman soldiers’ appearance into the overall visitor experience.

⁷ “Ovilava – Heroes of the Roman Age”, City of Wels, lead, concept and implementation by Fluxguide: <https://youtu.be/dNsH4wGVyg>.



Figure 4. AR visualisations for "Ovilava – Heroes of the Roman Age." Image: © Fluxguide.

Individual objects of flora or fauna can also be visualised inside the museum as AR objects, e.g. in order to reanimate extinct dinosaurs (Rieland 2012). Another good example for object visualisation of biological topics was demonstrated by the German Museum in Munich at its "Kosmos Kaffee" exhibition: an AR application offered a "gamified" simulation which enabled users to grow their own coffee plant and to observe the influence of the climate on growth and harvest. At a certain point in the game the user influences the climate conditions – rain and temperature – and gets feedback on how that affects the plant and crop. This turns the interactive game into a virtual experiment and the exhibition into a *digital laboratory*. It follows the paradigm of "show, don't tell," i.e. the user learns by observing, doing and experiencing, not just by being given information.⁸

The category of object visualisation is furthermore suited to showcase principles for complex technical objects with stand-alone three-dimensional animations such as engines.⁹ This makes it possible to create holistic learning experiences that add completely new storytelling elements to the museum which would not be possible without AR.

⁸ "Kosmos Kaffee", Deutsches Museum, lead, concept and implementation by Fluxguide: https://youtu.be/l1_wsFFy_3U.

⁹ Riga Motor Museum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjS6GIVGwA>.

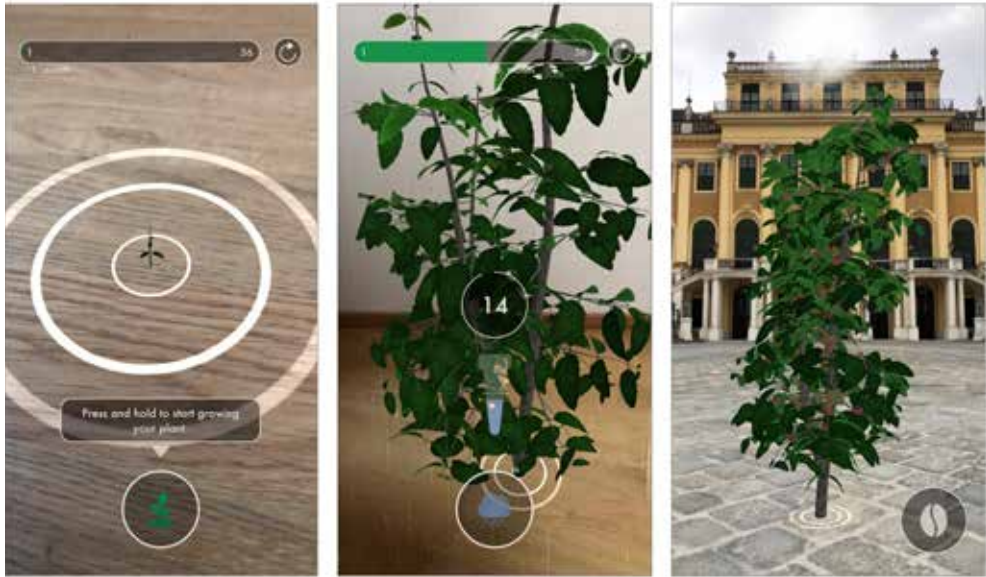


Figure 5. Prototype of the Cosmos Coffee AR-application used off-site. Image: © Fluxguide.

3.3. Guiding

Augmented reality is suited to guiding visitors through venues with digital information. This can be done for example via AR arrows or signposts. At the Landesmuseum Württemberg a mobile app offers interactive wayfinding and storytelling during the whole visit experience. At predefined locations visitors have the option to open the camera lens of their device which is augmented with dynamically animated arrows that point in the direction of the next tour stop.¹⁰ With this kind of immersive guiding spatially separated tour stops can be connected and potential breaking points in story experiences bridged.

In an even more immersive version of this AR category, visitors can be guided by *AR avatars*, i.e. real narrators appear on the spot and provide personal guiding. This can be done via so called Alpha-Channel-



Figure 6. AR Arrows help visitors navigate through the museum: © Fluxguide.

¹⁰ "Wayfinding at the LMW", lead, concept and implementation by Fluxguide: <https://youtu.be/TZqqyQuCbZw>.

Videos¹¹ with real persons which then are added into the AR view, so that the video-recorded persons directly appear in front of the user. You could e.g. record comments of the museum's director to different exhibits and then let the director pop up in front of those exhibits.

Avatars often narrate about exhibits from the specific perspectives and points of view. This can, for example, be an artist's very own perspective or insights from the viewpoint of a historic witness¹². At the Celtic Museum Hallein for example, a Celtic warrior appears to interact with the visitor at certain exhibits. Avatars can even be personified *narrating objects*, as in the exhibition "Sprechende Knochen" at the Centre

Charlemagne where bones come alive and act as first person narrators about which knowledge can be derived from their findings and burial contexts.¹³



Figure 7. AR Avatar Ranger at Nationalpark Hunsrück-Hochwald. Image: © Fluxguide.

In addition to animated avatars, actual human tour guides can be featured at on-site AR experiences: the national park Hunsrück-Hochwald (Germany) let their real rangers appear as virtual guides within an AR-powered mobile app.¹⁴ This significantly extends mere audio-only mediation, because the narrator can be experienced as human actor that directly addresses the visitor. It also extends usual video playback, because the human actor is not *besides the scene* (on the mobile) but *on the scene* (through/via the mobile). This adds a more immersive and personalised component to the guiding and storytelling experience through AR augmentation into the field of view of the user.

11 This type of video captures the recorded object (person) only and makes the background transparent. This then enables the insertion of the video into any other background.

12 E.g. this speaking Celtic at the Keltenmuseum Hallein: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DDXc04Ru3A&t=57s.

13 "Sprechende Knochen", Centre Charlemagne, concept by Domeniceau: <https://www.designmadeingermany.de/2015/81262>.

14 "AR Ranger", Nationalpark Hunsrück-Hochwald, lead, concept and implementation by Fluxguide: <https://youtu.be/OA2R7i9fmi8>.

3.4. Data visualisation

AR is being used in industry to visualise complex information and to facilitate data driven processes, as it makes it possible to analyse correlations in three dimensions and to place different data outputs next to physical reference objects (Marr 2021). Museums, however, are only beginning to exploit this potential. AR creates the possibility of linking complex data on real objects in museum spaces via augmented visualisation. This offers new ways to create connections between objects, artist biographies, human interactions, historical events and other relevant information which is difficult to present in museum spaces.

One pioneer in this category is the American Natural History Museum that is working on a data visualisation platform which interlinks data from their scientific departments and their archives to create engaging visitor experiences in AR.¹⁵

A number of research and development projects address the question on how widely dispersed cultural data can be made more accessible. One of them is “InTaVia – In/Tangible European Heritage Visual Analysis, Curation & Communication,” a H2020 research and innovation action funded by the European Commission within the Call DT-TRANSFORMATIONS-12-2018-2020 “Curation of digital assets and advanced digitisation.” The project deals with the complex possibilities of visualising cultural data for researchers as well as for the general public. The project team will develop a new platform to access, analyse, curate and communicate cultural data of object collections and historical texts, especially artist biographies. “InTaVia” aims to utilise AR in order to integrate objects and biography data with the experience of the physical world around the users. One goal of the project is to enable museum educators to enrich their own collections with foreign cultural data. In other words, diverse datasets can be implemented into the visitor experience via AR to tell stories in the exhibition space.¹⁶

4. Conclusion and outlook

This paper attempted to bridge the knowledge gap between the benefits of Augmented Reality and the museum mediation practice. Existing research proved that AR at the museum can improve mediation by functioning as creative playgrounds (Scholz and Duffy 2018) or by improving perception of the overall experience (Jung et al. 2016). However, existing literature does not address what kind of visitor expe-

15 American Natural History Museum data visualisation platform: <https://immerse.news/how-are-museums-experimenting-with-immersive-technology-f52612504e2>.

16 This project has received funding from the European Union H2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 101004825. More Information on InTaVia: <https://intavia.eu/>.

periences can actually be created at museums by using Augmented Reality to achieve specific mediation goals.

In order to address this knowledge gap, four experience-based categories for understanding and designing AR at museums were developed: 1) object annotation, 2) guiding, 3) object visualisation, and 4) data visualisation. Those categories for AR in museums are based on user experience settings in museums. They are meant for museum professionals as guiding concepts for their practice in order to achieve their educational and storytelling goals. The paper applied those four theoretical categories to real-world use cases and examples which demonstrated their applicability and validity for the museum context. Furthermore, the application made demonstrable the suitability of each category for specific storytelling goals: 1) object annotation – continuous, 2) object visualisation – standalone, 3) guiding – dialogue-based, and 4) data visualisation – connective.

The categories presented, along with the practical examples, may be used and further developed by both academics of the field and museum practitioners. The technology behind AR is constantly evolving and improving. Since the authors' approach is built on mediation goals rather than technical features, it is likely that the four categories will hold true even if the technology landscape changes for example with a mass rollout of reliable AR glass wear.

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S U M M A R Y

Neli võimalust liitreaalsuse kogemiseks muuseumis

Jakob Ossmann, Kasra Seirafi, Carina Doppler

Võttesõnad: liitreaalsus, rakendus, muuseumi vahendamine, tehnoloogia, muuseumi kommunikatsioon, külastajakogemus

Liitreaalsus (LR) on muuseumides levinud, kuna see lubab ületada lõhe füüsilise näituseruumi ja digiteeritud teabe vahel. Vastav tehnoloogia on nüüdseks küpsuse saavutanud ja muutunud tootmisvahendiks mitmetes tööstusharudes. Käesolevas artiklis vaadeldakse, millised on muuseumides rakendatavad konkreetsed kasutusviisid.

Muuseumides kasutatava LR-i põhjalikuks mõistmiseks on mitmeid teoreetilisi ja tehnoloogilisi lähenemisviise. Käesolev artikkel täiendab olemasolevat kirjandust, ühendades LR-i teoreetilisi kontseptsioone ja selle tegelikke rakendusi. Selleks võetakse kasutusele neli liitreaalsuse kategooriat, mis ei tulene mitte tehnilistest kirjeldustest, vaid hoopis kasutajakogemuse seadistustest muuseumides. Need kategooriad on 1) objekti annotatsioon, 2) objekti visualiseerimine, 3) vaataja suunamine (LR giid) ja 4) andmete visualiseerimine. Artiklis järgneb kategooriate lühikirjeldustele analüüs, milles vaadeldakse nende rakendamist eri riikide muuseumides.

Peale nende nelja kategooria rakendamist eri riikide muuseumide parimatele rakendustele väidame, et iga kategooria sobib ideaalselt konkreetsete narratiivsete eesmärkide saavutamiseks: 1) objekti annotatsioon – pidev, 2) objekti visualiseerimine – eraldiseisev, 3) vaataja suunamine – dialoogipõhine ja 4) andmete visualiseerimine – ühendav narrativiseerimine.

See parimate rakendustega seotud kategooriate kogum aitab muuseumispetsialistidel ja otsustajatel paremini mõista LR-i kasutusvõimalusi ning saavutada vahendamise ja narrativiseerimisega seotud soovitud eesmärgi.

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Under Review: *Nordic Literature of Decadence*. Edited by Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková, and Mirjam Hinrikus (London and New York: Routledge, 2020)

Ian Gwin

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Keywords: decadence, Nordic literature, philosophy, modernism, Young Estonia

"I do not yet fully understand what I have read... But I find much that harmonizes with my own ideas and sympathies," the Danish scholar Georg Brandes wrote to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in November of 1887 after receiving his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, in the mail, "the depreciation of the ascetic ideals and the profound disgust with democratic mediocrity, your aristocratic radicalism. Your contempt for the morality of pity is not yet clear to me. There were also in the other work some reflections on women in general which did not agree with my own line of thought." Approving of Brandes' term, "aristocratic radicalism," Nietzsche wrote back that December, praising this term as "the cleverest thing I have yet to read about myself" (Brandes 1914, 63–64).

The discussion that followed between the two writers over modernity, "this paramount problem of values," as Nietzsche described it in a letter one year later (Brandes 1914, 71), touches on key themes of the *fin de siècle* which found expression in a style of art and literature known as decadence. A certain proximity to death, illnesses of mind, body, and spirit, not to mention the problem of European culture, bore the marks of the overall decline (*la décadence*) of an industrialized society championing positivist science and inevitable moral progress. This disgust with life, "life turned *against* life," as Brandes wrote, produced aristocratic radicals such as Des Esseintes, the hero of Joris Huysmans' 1884 novel *À Rebours*, who retreats to a house in the country and pursues a secluded life of aesthetic pleasure and hedonist excess (Brandes 1914, 41).

In their recent addition to the Routledge's series *Among the Victorians the Modernists*, scholars Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková, and Mirjam Hinrikus have provided a comprehensive introduction to this movement as it occurred in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Estonia. Brandes' early reception of Nietzsche demonstrates the sensitivity of Nordic authors living under a dark northern sky "no longer lit by the consoling beacons of the ancient hope," as Des Esseintes cries out before returning to Paris (Huysmans 2008, 236).

In fact, as contributor Lis Norup points out, novels like J. P. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* and Herman Bang's *Haabløse Slagter*, both written in 1880, actually predate Huysmans' prototypical caricature of decadence and his overcoming of the naturalist style (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 41).

Previous works on international decadence, notably George C. Schoolfield's *A Baedeker of Decadence* (2003) and Marja Härmänmaa's and Christopher Nissen's recent *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End: Studies in the European Fin de Siècle* (2014), have also sought to describe harmonies and sympathies between Northern literatures and the places where decadence got its name. Yet until now, no introductory volume has been devoted to a comparative study throughout the Nordic region. Schoolfield did, however write his work in partial response to the shortcomings of Rafael Koskimies' *Der nordische Dekadent* (1968). While writing on Per Thomas Andersen's *Dekadanse i nordisk litteratur 1880–1900* (1992), he noted significant writers and problems ignored by either author. The question remained, for example, as to why features of mainstream European decadence were underrepresented or even absent in North Europe, such as self-parody, or the paradigm of Roman history (Schoolfield 1997, 248). Schoolfield's well-researched global history of the motifs and fixations of the era mentions August Strindberg, Arne Garborg, Karl August Tavastjerna, Oscar Levertin, Gustaf af Geijerstam, Hjalmar Söderberg, Kjell Strömberg, Herman Bang, and Halldór Laxness, yet leaves out important contributors like Ola Hansson, who, despite being driven into exile for his *Sensitiva Amorosa* (1887), had an effect within the Nordic region on writers such as Volter Kilpi (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 9). Unlike Schoolfield, who presents a series of samples or profiles to tackle the era's sensibility, Lyytikäinen et al. have co-authored an overview of the field and its history, complemented by contributions from regional scholars and specialists in other disciplines, grouped according to relations with European decadence, rural decadence, women writers, incipient modernism, and representations of the North in European decadence.

The authors of the volume conceive this virulent spreading over Europe as a constellation of primarily French influence, one that deploys the images of cultural, social, and individual decay, taking root in different grounds and climates. For them, decadence consists of a constellation of themes – an interest in decay, a reaction to modernity, and a sense of an ending – which characterized various 19th century movements between romanticism and modernism (Weir 1995, xvii).

This constellation takes shape in three notable ways, beginning with a modification of naturalism. The pessimistic view on the decline of culture, creative energy, personal morality, which Vincent Sherry (2015) argues becomes a key theme of modernism, inspired a peculiar modification and even distortion of literary natural-

I A N G W I N

ism, which can be found in authors like Jacobsen and Bang. Following this “decadent naturalism” – which had been the partial impetus for Huysmans writing of *À Rebours* – the authors describe a “core decadence” which corresponds with the canon as outlined in previous literature on the subject. Finally, the themes, methods, and preoccupations of decadence extend past this period of works into modernity’s decadent “afterlife,” as the authors argue persuasively in their afterword.

“Your nature is so absolutely different from mine that it is not easy for me to feel at home,” Brandes cautions Nietzsche in their correspondence (Brandes 1914, 63). The Danes’ uneasy relation to the German philosopher’s extreme politics, his attitudes on women, even his admonition to read the Icelandic sagas, mark the notable peculiarities of Nordic decadences. These motifs, not to mention Nietzsche’s reception in the region, could be interpreted more in line with established literary histories which avoid an encompassing “decadence,” and its possible implications of shared intentions among authors. Yet in line with other scholars of the “New Decadence,” the authors of the present volume are less interested in categorization and classification than in thinking of forms and techniques of modernist aesthetics as they circulate globally (Volpicelli 2019, 218).

When interpreted as a received sensibility, Nordic decadence becomes subject to the “lag and noise” of cultural transfer from well-developed metropolises like Paris or St. Petersburg to largely rural nations developing on alternate political and economic trajectories. Here, Lyttikäinen et al. make their core contributions to decadence at large and in the Nordic region by challenging terms typical of the national literary discourse such as “modern breakthrough,” “neo-romanticism,” and “national romanticism,” in describing these separate features of Nordic decadence.

These observations proceed from an excellent handling of historical, linguistic, and geographic nuance, which extends throughout the volume. While Brandes could write from a country well connected to Western and Central European cultural life, authors like the Estonian Gustav Suits depended on the former’s lectures to hear about Nietzsche and the rest of central Europe literary goings-on. The relatively separate cultural life of Sweden and Norway – not to mention Finland and Estonia’s late independence from the Russian Empire – are key to understanding literary developments at the time (Lyttikäinen et al. 2020, 7). The nationalist literary heritage of the Nordic regions, which the authors describe as a fusion of folk-poetry and neo-humanist ideals, held the Nordic decadents in antagonistic dialogue. These authors, marginalized in national literary histories, contended with a Lutheran church closely connected to the state and a developing democracy where women’s social roles were changing dramatically.

Thus the Bovarists of J. P. Jacobsen or Juhani Aho, while also aesthetes and dandies immersed in their own fantasies, are implicated in historical and national indeterminacies, as well as varieties of pessimism, vastly different from Des Esseintes. These young, egocentric, “weary men” – to borrow the title of Garborg’s 1891 novel *Trætte Mænd* – are less taken with exoticism and artificiality due precisely to their connection with rural life. While a provincial milieu and natural scenery characterize Huysmans’ works following *À Rebours*, Lyytikäinen et al. answer Schoolfield’s question by proposing a subgenre particular to the region, rural decadence. Following Emile Zola’s epic of a decaying agricultural family *La Terre*, they note the idealization of peasants and rural life as key parts of the Nordic national imaginary, taken over and ultimately challenged by naturalist writers.

For their thematic section on rural decadence, these scholars take on the work of Finnish novelists Joel Lehtonen and Frans Eemil Sillanpää, arguing that these authors elaborated a transgressive poetics from Nordic environments, emotions, and spirituality. Lyytikäinen tackles the contradictory emotions towards nature in Joel Lehtonen’s *Mataleena*, while Antti Ahmala follows with a discussion of another novel, *Villi*, which transposes French Bovarism into rural setting. Rossi finishes this section with a focus on primitivism and spirituality in Sillanpää’s work, noting how the epigones of naturalism – the physical and organic world – become the vitalist source of spiritual truth to dispute *fin de siècle* positivism and rationality.

The authors’ reconsideration and extension of decadence away from its core texts encourage reevaluations such as these. Considering the “alignment of pessimism and misogyny” in decadent texts, the book’s section on women writers begins to address an important blind spot for scholarship (Weir 1995, xiv). In her article, Parente-Čapková discusses how L. Onerva’s *Mirdja* (1908) reveals the gendered nature of urbanization in the region, and the relationship of natural spaces to national ideology. The Norwegian writer Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, now going through a small revival, receives some well-deserved attention in an article by Anne Birgitte Rønning. Like Parente-Čapková, Rønning notes the important contribution of women of the period to themes of cultural degeneration and natural decay. In contrast to her husband Stanisław Przybyszewski, who made “constant use of his own sexual obsessions,” Przybyszewska touches on yearnings of lust and death while surpassing a common masculine bias (Schoolfield 2003, 121).

The volume’s other sections also emphasize the potential of understanding decadence anew from a Nordic vantage point. Writing on Nordic and European decadences, Lis Norup, Susan Brantly, and Guri Ellen Barstad analyse exemplary Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian texts as influential and representative of the sensibility’s religious preoccupations and literary revitalization. Scholars of European

I A N G W I N

decadence would do well to compare these essays with Stefano Evangelista, Melanie Hawthorne, and Juliet Simpson's chapters intertwining the regional movements with Europe. In her article, "Nordic Devotions: Gothic Art as Erotic Affect," Simpson makes the important observation that Huysmans' interest in Northern Gothic art provided the writer a portal to the excessive emotion of an imagined primitive, and thus the emerging reality of an "unseen modernity" (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 250).

It's not surprising, then, how important the concept of modernity is in both these individual contributions and in the authors' afterword. In their chapters devoted to Nordic decadence's challenges to modernity, Claes Ahlund and Mirjam Hinrikus respond by bringing up the important question of nationalism in the Nordic strain. Writing on Estonian decadence, Hinrikus notes the critiques and self-critique of the Young Estonian movement, who sought to run with the newest urban literary trends but had to reckon with the ideology of a young, largely rural nation. In his 1915 novel *Felix Ormusson*, Friedebert Tuglas depicts an aristocratic radical ironically at odds with his host Johannes, an urban upstart nevertheless close to his pastoral roots. While affected by European philosophies on race and social Darwinism, Tuglas reharmonizes these decadent themes and oppositions with a setting that challenges and even overrides them (Hinrikus in Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 186).

These arguments indicate the authors' larger contribution to the critical literature on modernism: for them, the decadents represent neglected yet continually relevant aspects of modernity. In their insistence on "questioning the human subject, the revaluation of old values, and the turmoil around genders," they presented ambivalent reactions to the social changes of modernization – the common ground between Brandes and Nietzsche (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 266). Starting off with the tools of naturalism, where decadents hoped to depict the trappings of modern life, they ended up focusing on their world's negativity and boredom, reacting what Lyytikäinen et al. describe as *antimodernism*. Knut Hamsun's *Slut* gives one example of a work which begins in tragic naturalism and speeds forward through contradiction and transgression.

Opposed to this disgust at modern life, artists found themselves drawn towards a romanticized primitive, an ambivalent nostalgia for the *natural* and *primordial* (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 261). Here, the unique legacy of rural decadence comes into play, and the authors note the corruption, decay, and death in the epics of writers like Lehtonen and A. H. Tammsaare. The former's contradictory images of savage animality, combined with ideas of innocence and originality, and the latter's ambiguous depictions of empowered women, read with a sense of the negative primitive, well demonstrate this. Both of these troubling symptoms, antimodernism and the

ambivalent primitive, make up the “continuity of sensibilities and themes” connecting 19th century naturalism and 20th century neo-naturalism within core decadence as it mingles and competes with high modernism (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020, 259).

The heritage, or afterlife, of decadence in the Nordic countries picks up some salient points on themes of doom, decay, and decline in the literary movements which followed after. Lyytikäinen et al. touch on the Finnish *Tulenkantajat* (Torch Bearers), and the Estonian proto-modernist group *Siuru* (including former Young Estonians Tuglas and Suits), experimental movements both overlooked in the English language. The recycling of decadent imagery, without the matching aesthetic or philosophical ambition, into works such as that of the late Strindberg, take part in what the authors call, after David Weir, the “decline of decadence,” a paradoxical phrasing which brings into question both the decadent’s timely “sense of an ending,” and their subsequent passing out of (and back into) literary fashion.

Overall, the combined scholarship and expertise of its various contributors have made *Nordic Literature of Decadence* the comprehensive introduction to the subfield, not to mention an important contribution to studies of modernism and international decadence. There certainly remains more to be researched in the field, especially considering the volume focuses almost exclusively on works of prose. Work by scholars such as Kirsten Lodge, a specialist in Czech decadence, show how poetry could convey the themes of decline and decay modulated by a linguistic and regional reception, in what she describes as a uniquely Czech decadence of hunger, rather than satiation (Karásek ze Lvovic et al. 2008, 18). Notably absent, as well, are the works of *fin de siècle* authors elsewhere in the Baltic region, such as the poet Zemgaliešu Biruta, or the prolific Viktors Eglītis, whose work has been touched on in recent Latvian scholarship (Kalnačs et al. 2017). Perhaps the contours of the peculiar late modernism presented in decadent literature could be better understood if seen in geographic and historical relief with related national literatures. Or so it seems to the aristocratic androgyne Ruth, as imagined by the Estonian Juhan Randvere: “Tired of the salons and boudoirs” of French literature, she turns her back on them with an “unexplainable longing for home, towards the birch forests which Finnish and Estonian literature remind her of, so she can purify and refresh her soul in their gentle and homey green.” (Randvere 1909, 34).

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Under Review: Timo Maran. *Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Sara Bédard-Goulet

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Keywords: ecosemiotics, ecosystems, modelling, nature writing

In his recent addition to the Cambridge Elements of Environmental Humanities series, Timo Maran offers a detailed presentation of ecosemiotics and how it successfully extends the scope of the study of signs to ecological systems. His *Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies* argues that this branch of semiotics highlights the connection between phenomena that are usually considered to belong to different domains, such as nature and culture. Ecosemiotics would thus provide relevant concepts and tools to examine the often-detrimental relationship between humans and nonhumans, and to initiate cultural practices that are beneficial to the environment.

The argument in *Ecosemiotics* is developed in three sections. The first section underlines the semiotic character of ecosystems by focusing on the relational processes between organisms and the environment. By presenting the semiotic realm that surrounds human culture and explaining how we interact with it, this section reveals that some ecological problems are semiotic ones, for example in case of interference with other species. While there are authors (Morizot 2020; Zhong Mengual 2021) who blame the current ecological crisis on the human relationship to other life forms and lack of sensitivity towards living beings, Maran convincingly demonstrates a potential semiotic cause for ecological problems. Indeed, the notions that he presents, such as Umwelt (Uexküll 1982), perceptual affordances (Gibson 1979) and ecofield (Farina and Belgrano 2004), support a conception of the landscape as a set of resources perceivable through interfaces together with a range of species that relate to this habitat on the basis of their needs (Maran 2020, 8). This ecosemiotic perspective insists on a tight interweaving of animal species and the environment and, in turn, on the required plasticity of the semiotic relations that the former have with the latter in the face of changing ecologies. Regarding animals, Maran reminds us that their sign-based communication is mediated, agential and open, which makes interspecies communication possible, including also human animals, even when the latter ignore the voice and meaning of ecosystems. The first section of the book ends with a brief exploration of ecosystemic semiosis

SARA BÉDARD - GOULET

in which semiotic processes take part in the regulation of biological communities, forming numerous feedback cycles that provide relative stability to ecosystems.

The second section of *Ecosemiotics* presents an ecosemiotic reply to the anthropocentrism that characterizes modernity by showing how cultures based on distancing from the natural environment lead to the impoverishment of ecosystems. From the point of view of semiotics, the dominant symbolic signs in culture, which are self-sufficient, receive too little negative feedback that would connect them to objects. Building on Alf Hornborg's (2001) typology of signs, Maran shows how linguistic, and especially economic, signs are standardized and abstract, leading to the subordination of nature to abstract values or measures that shape human activities regardless of the plurality of signs and meanings of other species. Such a symbolic hegemony of humans disrupts ecosystems and their inhabitants: semiotic pollution, for instance, increases stress in organisms, whereas semicide, "a situation in which signs and stories that are significant for someone are destroyed because of someone else's malevolence or carelessness, thereby stealing a part of the former's identity" (Puura 2013, 152), can destroy nature's signscape.

Nevertheless, cultural systems are not entirely self-sufficient and they sustain connections with ecosystems. Referring to Jesper Hoffmeyer's work (1996), Maran points out how the semiotic processes of human cognition vary according to bodily conditions, in which meaningless signs retrospectively come to bear meaning – a process Michael Polanyi (1966) calls tacit knowledge. Conversely, symbols interact with ecosystems and their inhabitants, thus overcoming the representation – object divide, particularly through indexicality, which disturbs the boundaries between the index and the symbol, as well as those between human and nonhuman sign systems. As such, nature writing ties semiotic actors and (textual and environmental) subjectivities together via indexical references, forming what Maran calls a nature-text (Maran 2007; Maran and Tüür 2017). Building on Juri Lotman's understanding of communication, he argues that dialogical relations with the environment, which involve differences and depend upon non-symbolic signs, are essential for the well-being of cultures. Indeed, in a way comparable to Gilbert Simondon's encounters (2017), these interactions contribute to disrupting the symbolic order (Serres 2007) and bridging the epistemological gap between thought and body (Bateson and Bateson 1988), pointing out the importance of hybrid (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2009) and multispecies communities (Maran 2020b).

The third section of *Ecosemiotics* addresses the potential connections between cultural objects and semiosis in the ecosystem. More specifically, it discusses semiotic modelling and how it takes place, how semiotic models work and affect culture-nature relationships, while it also examines the prescriptive potential of

modelling, especially as regards artistic and creative forms. It starts by presenting key elements of Juri Lotman's semiotics in connection with ecosystems, starting with the concept of semiosphere, "a semiotic space of cultural texts, processes and interactions" (Maran 2020, 42), and introduces three ideas of Lotman's cultural semiotics: 1) autocommunicative capacities of culture; 2) semipermeable boundaries between cultural and extracultural spaces; and 3) space as a semiotically active entity (Maran 2020a, 43–47). Maran then moves on to Lotman's idea of a modelling system, "a structure of elements and rules of their combination, existing in a state of fixed analogy to the whole sphere of the object of perception, cognition, or organization" (Lotman 2011, 250). Because it combines symbolic signs, iconic resemblance and indexical references, modelling can be considered a type of translation based on a particular ground, with which it interacts. In connection with nature writing, Maran (2014) has previously proposed a distinction between zoosemiotic, linguistic, and artistic modelling, suggesting that the first type "creates a phenomenological presence for the reader" (Maran 2020a, 52), the second takes on a referential function, while the third one conveys, through aesthetic and narrative means, the author's perspective. The third section of *Ecosemiotics* ends with a presentation of the semiotic model of the forest as an alternative to models based on human grounds and a way for reconnecting cultures and ecosystems (Maran 2019). Maran identifies five characteristics of the forest as a model that would allow to describe the properties of an object of analysis: 1) distributed communication codes; 2) tolerance of meaning; 3) local heterogeneity and creativity; 4) strong ontological presence; 5) surplus of semiotic material (Maran 2020, 55–58).

The book's afterword closes on a hopeful note, touching on the potential of eco-semiotics and its creative approaches of modelling to bring along renewed engagement with the Anthropocenic ecosystems. This Cambridge Element of Environmental Humanities certainly offers a clear picture of the paths opened up by eco-semiotics as regards changing ecologies, with various phenomena that still require attention, such as nonanimal organisms, whose intricate relationship with their ecosystems would certainly provide a valuable perspective on semiosis. It can be argued that one of eco-semiotics' strengths regarding both the human and the nonhuman lies in its consideration of indexicality as a means to disrupt symbolic signs. It is effectively coupled with an attentiveness to bodies in their connection with cognition and, in the case of humans, conscious mind – a reflection that could benefit from including the unconscious mind, especially in view of eco-semiotics' concern with dialogic relations and the *other*. All in all, *Ecosemiotics* shows the rigorous concepts and methodology that eco-semiotics builds on and develops further in order to study sign processes of ecological phenomena.

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