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The energy of transit

Theatre in non-traditional spaces

Performances in disused industrial buildings, prisons, foyers, or on the street: theatre in central and eastern European is enjoying a boom in experimentation comparable to that in western Europe in the 1970s. Theatre in non-traditional spaces, writes Ramune Marcinkeviciute, is a reaction to the changes in society and a search for different means of communication. It becomes a place where the despair, fear, and depression of the contemporary individual are registered by the radical language of the new drama. It is a place where artists can be open and unencumbered by the demands of commercial success.

Recent theatrical experiments in central and eastern European countries have been noted for a tendency to use non-traditional spaces. The customary *scena all'italiana* has increasingly given way to spaces seemingly not adapted to theatre. This tendency became particularly distinct around the year 2000, when the changing social and cultural reality began to encourage the search for new means of communication. In Lithuanian theatre practice, artistic activities in non-traditional spaces were initiated by projects run by newly established cultural institutions: the international theatre festival LIFE, the theatre forum "The Shifting Point" (Open Society Fund Lithuania), the New Drama Action (Theatre and Cinema Information and Education Centre), the "Up and Coming" programme for new playwrights (Arts Printing House). The need for alternative spaces coincided with the guidelines of activity of non-governmental institutions, and can therefore be regarded as the ideological discourse of the cultural politics of the new era.

On one hand, in the context of the world theatre practice, various transformations of theatrical space have always been related to changes in the ideological conventions of society. On the other hand, the use of non-traditional spaces cannot be considered a new phenomenon. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, directors-reformers associated the processes of renewal with the search for untraditional, uncustomary theatre spaces, and actively collaborated with architects designing special, sometimes utopian, projects of theatre buildings. They held the view that a radical renewal of theatrical art was impossible without transforming the place in which it was created. It is sufficient to recall the prophetic insight of Adolf Appia defining the paradigm of the future theatre: no stage, no auditorium, just an empty space and sophisticated lighting equipment.

The idea of an empty space, which, as we know, had a crucial influence on the work of many famous twentieth century directors, also changed the understanding of actor-audience interaction. Having emerged as an alternative to commercial, entertainment theatre, the category of the empty space was a

means to create new possibilities of communication with the audience. In other words, the category of theatrical space functions in the context of innovatory theatre not only in artistic manifestoes as an ideological concept, but also as an instrument enabling a programmatically different *communiqué* of theatre.

The definition of non-traditional space established in the professional idiom of Lithuanian theatre, as a general concept describing an unusual meeting point of performers and the audience, is as follows:

- It is located outside the theatre building (from abandoned buildings no longer used for the original purpose, to closed or open-air spaces that are still operating but are not suitable for theatre).
- It is located outside the main hall, for example a space inside the theatre building not adapted for spectators (the stage, scenery workshops, rehearsal rooms) or spaces traditionally used by the audience but not related with the performance itself (the foyer, the canteen, the cloakroom).
- It is a new, specially equipped space inside the theatre building, whose architectural form differs from the so-called traditional big and small stages of a theatre (for example the Long Hall of the Kaunas Drama Theatre).

In international practice, this phenomenon is described by the concepts of environmental theatre and site-specific theatre. In all cases, the audience is invited to spaces that have been regarded as unsuitable for presenting a performance. Thus the definition of non-traditional space first of all defines a theatrical space unfamiliar to the performers and the audience, or a non-theatrical space. On the other hand, it implies that a stage — as a place where the action of the performance is set — can have any form and can be marked or laid anywhere, and refers to Eric Bentley's minimalist formula describing the processes of theatrical communication: A is playing B in the presence of C. The definition of non-traditional space used by theatre practitioners coincides with the terms theatrical space and theatrical venue, supplementing these with a qualitative component indicating the specific and unusual character of the space/venue. Referring to the research of Marvin Carlson, one can assert that any definition of a theatrical space necessarily describes it as a meeting point: "An acting space, permanent or built for a special occasion, which becomes a meeting point of the audience and the performers".¹

A meeting point not only implies a physical theatre building or, on the contrary, a specific theatrical space (ie marks the venue where a performance takes place as a geographical point), but also includes all connotations of meanings inspired by a concrete performance: the circumstances of theatrical space also create specific social and cultural meanings influencing the entire theatrical experience — the immediate relation of the space, performers and spectators forms the ideological, psychological, and aesthetic codes of performance reception.

Transformations of the model of environmental theatre

In order to evaluate more precisely the budding tendency of contemporary Lithuanian theatre to use non-traditional spaces, it is necessary to survey the influences on Western theatre in the second half of the twentieth century. This is necessary not only because in the theatre practices of the Soviet Union

during the same period there were also individual attempts to break away from the traditional stage, but also, and mainly, because it reveals obvious differences in the formation of the theory of environmental theatre, and the aims of contemporary theatre in non-traditional spaces.

The term environmental theatre became the basis of new theatre epistemology, whose theoretical definitions were presented in Richard Schechner's *The Environmental Theatre*. Schechner's main thesis is that each stage event creates its own space, even when the performance takes place in a non-traditional space. This space is a complete object in itself. Thus, this understanding of space acquires the character of a dynamic space, open to surprises, "breathing" together with the audience. The audience is granted an important role, since the term environmental theatre describes a kind of theatre that discards the conventional division between stage and auditorium, and regards the performance space as a whole that integrates the actors and the audience. It is obvious that different spatial relations also influence the change of emotional relations. Spectators find themselves inside the performance material itself; they are no longer mere observers, but formally can be regarded as participants of the performance. All this makes the presence of the audience in the theatre more active: on one hand, the barrier between the stage and the audience hall disappears, and on the other, spectators can choose which element of the stage action they are going to watch at a particular moment of the performance. One can assert that the nature of environmental theatre brings out an important aspect of theatrical communication — that the audience "creates" its own version of the spectacle. Of course, it should be noted that the audience's individual creativity exists in traditional venues as well: according to Anne Ubersfeld, paradoxically, the audience creates a performance to a larger extent than its director (by continuously revealing the image of all signs accumulated in the performance), irrespective of where the performance takes place.

However, the theatre that chooses non-traditional spaces for programmatic purposes speaks for the interactive relation of audience and performance. The development of pure environmental theatre in the United States and Europe shows that environment and event have become substitutes for stage and art. When theatre artists began to look for alternative spaces, together with sympathetic spectators, they principally rejected the roles defined by theatrical convention. This implied conscious anarchism. It was not by accident that the boom of environmental theatre coincided with the political activity of artists and intellectuals that provoked the events of May 1968. Therefore it should be emphasized that, in the Western tradition, an alternative space was also understood as a discourse of socio-political protest against official and commercialized theatrical institutions. In the 1960s and 1970s, experiments in alternative spaces formed ideological communiqués, provoked the audience's social engagement, and produced the desired effect when the audience became a factor of the contents, structure, and style of the performance.

It is widely known that directors of very different artistic views took an interest in the idea of alternative space. Some of them tried to discard the comfort and elitism related to theatre as an official institution, and opted for the ideology of poor theatre. For instance, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and Peter Brook explored and developed it as a new theatrical practice. These different artistic manifestations (overtly political or, on the contrary, delving into the very nature of theatre as ritual) obviously sought to reform the status of theatre as a consumer product in one or another way. The search was first of all directed to the study of the audience-space relation. Brook, for example, asserted that by

moving to a different space, theatre at the same time asks the audience to overcome acquired habits, something in the director's opinion, that is necessary for dramatic art. It has been noticed that the unique relations formed between the actors and the audience in non-traditional spaces, which cannot emerge in any other space, breathe new life into theatre. In this case, the chosen theatrical environment becomes a fundamental structural element.

However, the model of environmental theatre first of all refers to very concrete spatial relations, which are unstable and changing: spectators either surround the stage from all sides, or can be surrounded by acting spaces or placed among the actors. The easily adaptable structure of environmental theatre is at the same time formally strictly defined. Therefore, Lithuanian theatre practice can boast few examples of pure environmentalism. Director Saulius Varnas was one of the first to use this model: in his stage version of "The Process" by Franz Kafka at the Panevezys Drama Theatre in 1990, various parts of the performance were placed in different spaces, starting at the Small Stage and ending in the canteen and the foyer; spectators and actors were moving from one space to another. The premiere of *Sand Claviers*, directed by Jonas Jurasas in the Long Hall of the Kaunas Academic Drama Theatre in the same year, confirmed that active occupation of new non-traditional spaces were to take place in Lithuanian theatre in the final decade of the twentieth century. From the viewpoint of historical logic, this choice was natural — since the French revolution, the theatre's interest in alternative spaces should be related with ideological changes in society. In this respect, the retreat of theatre from official venues cannot be regarded merely as a search for aesthetic innovation. On the contrary, such moments create the need for interactive contact with reality. The co-author of *Sand Claviers*, Ausra Marija Sluckaite, confirms this by reminding us about the moods of Lithuanian society at the time when Jonas Jurasas was rehearsing this performance (13 January 1991 was approaching): "A poetic performance should be made in a rigorous space, so that a blossom of creation would break through concrete walls. So that the collision of hostile environment and spiritual aims would be as sharp as the one taking place behind the theatre walls at the same hour".²

Being "outside the theatre walls" was programmatically relevant to historical environmentalists. While comparing the authentic practice of the 1960s and 1970s and the productive spread of the idea of environmental theatre in the Western theatre tradition, theatre researchers note that its contemporary transformations have acquired some features of a theatrical style (environmental art, performance art). Thus a question naturally arises as to how the use of non-traditional spaces in today's theatrical experiments correlates with the experience of the above mentioned decades — if it is a new unique practice, or merely a response to fashion, confirming the conviction of the witnesses of historical environmentalism that the real exchange between theatre and life is already past. The remarkable *Woyzeck* by the Finnish director Kristian Smeds presented at the "New Drama Action" in 2003, incidentally, on the big stage of the Youth Theatre, allows us a touch of irony. At the end of the performance, the action is transferred from the stage to the street by means of a video camera. Spectators remain sitting in the hall and observe on the screen how a fairly new car left at the main entrance of the Youth Theatre on Arkli Street is smashed up. In other words, the audience is safe from danger and does not participate in this event directly. The exchange between theatre and life takes place with the help of the contemporary media. It is difficult to imagine what theatre must do to make the audience, together with the actors, go onto the street at the end of the performance and initiate an event together, as occurred in 1968 after the show *Paradise Now* of "The

Living Theatre".

The theatre movement that arose in the 1960s and 1970s, which encouraged artists to choose informal spaces (the street, apartments, garages, abandoned factories, cellars, shops, cinema theatres), demonstrated its social engagement: the chosen venue of theatrical action was presented and regarded as an expression of a certain attitude. Whereas the processes of spatial transgression of contemporary Lithuanian theatre in many cases should be more related to the concept of space as a theatrical category, when a space is considered a means of pure artistic expression. In other words, moving outside the theatre walls less often indicates social protest. If the pathos of rebellion can be identified in the vandalising of a car, then the theatre was very subtle in allowing the audience to sit in the safety of the hall while watching on the screen an outbreak of aggressive energy, in this way commenting on the contemporary individual's voyeuristic instinct, or our daily virtual presence in the world's hot spots, or our involvement in the personal tragedies of strangers. On the other hand, one can assert that the practice of contemporary theatre in non-traditional spaces reveals rebellion as an artistic experiment. Or rather, the appearance of both.

Non-traditional spaces -- a place for experimentation

The former western European experience was specifically transformed in the theatre of post-communist countries, which underwent the processes of liberalization and democratization in the late twentieth century. Also, the Lithuanian theatre, reacting to the changes, chose a new repertory, new forms of communication and, of course, waited for a change of audience. The new opposition between state theatres and non-state institutions or independent companies encouraged the latter to choose non-traditional theatrical venues. These venues attracted a new type of character in contemporary Lithuanian and foreign dramaturgy. Without expanding on the subject, it can be noted that documentary writing, expression of deconstruction, informal everyday language, the art of detail, and other features characteristic of the new drama, often written by young playwrights, fell into line with the space of unusual theatre venues. And if we recall that the focus of the new drama is a kind of marginality, non-traditional spaces, themselves being outside the limits of elite theatre venues, became suitable for extolling a different character's different experience, which was misunderstood, unattractive, or even unacceptable to this reality.

The projects of the New Drama Action launched in the former printing house of the communist daily *Tiesa* forged natural links between the new drama and non-traditional space. The objective coherence of the dramatic form and the spatial form was confirmed — the given reality of the theory of theatre and sociology was acknowledged. This space, having lost its former function but not yet acquired a new one, was well suited for play readings or works-in-progress.

It was there, in this abandoned printing house (a decaying space), that the Lithuanian audience first saw Mark Ravenhill, and heard the texts of his plays (*Some Explicit Polaroids*), as well as those by Jean-Luc Lagarce (*The Distant Country*), Marina Carr (*Portia Coughlan*), Theresa Walser (*King Kong's Daughters*), Gregory Burke (*Gagarin Way*), and Roland Schimmelpfennig (*The Arabian Night*). Since the projects (play readings) successfully initiated by the New Drama Action were no longer presented at the printing house once they had turned into fully-fledged performances, one can assert that this

non-traditional space performs the function of an intermediary space — it is a kind of springboard for new productions. For example, *The Distant Country*, directed by Gintaras Varnas, first presented as a work-in-progress in this venue, later became inseparable from the spaces of the Long Hall of the Kaunas State Academic Drama Theatre or the Church of St. Ignatius in Vilnius. Therefore it can be assumed that the space of the printing house became a structural element of an actual performance only in rare cases (eg the performance of the Keistuoliai Theatre's *Rule No. 1, or Dreaming of Vilnius Forbidden*). Its possibilities as a space attractive to artists and spectators are increasingly limited by its arbitrary asceticism, whose unusual authenticity seemed so fascinating not so long ago. Therefore, the non-traditional space of the former printing house, now run by "The Arts Printing House", increasingly performs the function of a space devoted for experiments — play readings and works-in-progress, debuts of young directors, choreographers, and actors. Following the logic of Jean Jacquot ("The structure of the audience hall is a certain replica of the structure of society" ³), the audience gathering in The Arts Printing House mirrors the studio-like, laboratory, work-in-progress nature of its activity. The lack of comfort is ignored for the sake of natural interest of specialists and professionals of different fields in everything that is new and that promises the real or apparent surprises of an experiment.

Incidentally, in this non-theatrical venue, that has become theatrical for contemporary Lithuanian culture, a dialogue of ideological discourses is developing in a very interesting way, and the contexts of the recent past and the present are interacting. One of the performances, directed by reality itself, which most precisely revealed the authenticity of the space of the printing house, was the press conference given by Mark Ravenhill during the New Drama Action in 2000. When Ravenhill, an adherent of new brutality, author of "Shopping and F*****", and friend of Sarah Kane, spoke in the former Tiesa printing house, the historical past of the space came up as a character that has lost the game: in a bastion of totalitarian ideology, various issues of work and life were discussed by a dramatist obeying no kind of censorship.

As an example of an artistically productive dialogue between a fictitious space (stage) and a real decaying space, *The Caretaker* directed by Gintaras Liutkevicius, presented at the Autumn Theatre Forum in 1997, can be mentioned. The director found an almost ideal environment for the characters of Harold Pinter's play: according to the logic of the performance, three homeless men discovered a vacant place in the very centre of Vilnius. They settled in the building of the Small Theatre led by Rimas Tuminas, at that time waiting for major reconstruction. The performance was continuously interrupted, not only by the real sounds of life going on outside the building, but also by social reality. Unusual was also the main acting space — a blank brick wall, which the characters would climb like spiders. Having found no other place to live, they made this place their home. The climbing on the wall implied a metaphor of their repeated attempts to rise from the bottom of life.

Non-traditional spaces are intrinsically favourable to experiments. They are not obliged to achieve artistic or commercial success — an unusual theatre space or theatre in non-theatrical places also predisposes the audience to be open to new experience or, in Brook's words, to change their theatrical habits. Projects presented in such spaces are often incomplete or even one-off, and thus exist as if in the state of cultural zero gravity, assume the status of the art of detail, or rely on performative freedom. It is obvious that a theatre artist in a non-traditional space can be regarded as a social phenomenon: the low budget of a concrete project objectively closes the way to the stages of state theatres or

other such venues.

It has been noticed that a large majority of artists of postmodern culture in general live "on hire purchase": the practice of experiment underlying the work of, let's say, a young director, does not exist as a social fact, and it is difficult to establish and evaluate its aesthetic space. The thoughts of the well-known Polish culturologist Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska about the expressions of experiment in contemporary culture are valuable in this respect. In her opinion, for a long time an experiment has been considered as a continuation, proof or denial of a theory that still needs to be verified. What is called an experiment today is based on quite a different kind of activity. An experimenting artist often wanders in the dark, accepting his or her personal responsibility and having no objective criteria to confirm his or her work as the reality of aesthetic innovation. In other words, in postmodern culture an experiment turns into an act of the individual ability or demonstrative provocation of every creator, who does not even expect to receive the collective approval of the majority.⁴ In theatre, this state experienced by an artist can be proved by the retreat from *scena all'italiana* and the use of studio spaces or new non-theatrical spaces as a kind of manifestation of rejecting recognition or resistance to the phenomenon of mass culture. (In Lithuania, the so-called alternativists, who are principally supposed to be outside the limits of official culture, in other words, in the zone of experiment, for example, Gliuk Theatre led by Benas Īarka, "Edmundas' Studio 3" led by Edmundas Leonavicius or the former "Arts Congregation", consciously chose non-theatrical venues or studio spaces.)

The discourse of experiment in non-traditional spaces correlates with the concept of post-dramatic theatre as well. Post-dramatic theatre is naturally granted the status of other theatre, as, in the words of Hans-Thies Lehmann, it is a kind of theatre rejected by the "large majority of the audience". The idea of otherness is also dominant in manifestations of theatre in non-traditional spaces, but here it displays not only some parallels of the ideological contents, but also certain structural similarities: post-dramatic theatre no longer aims to build a theatre composition as a structural whole composed from words, meanings, sounds and gestures, but assumes the fragmentary character. The meanings of process rather than result, manifestation rather than signification, energy rather than information are emphasized. The very act of presenting and performing is more important than what is being performed, and thus the stress is laid on the fact of theatrical communication. Non-traditional spaces as places for theatrical experiments can be defined as places of promise and risk, where the boundaries are erased between what is a complete aesthetic value and what is being articulated just using the energy of the real environment surrounding the acting space.

The anxiety of contemporary theatre and the marking of new places

Productive transformations of environmental theatre as a model of a flexible spatial structure are evident in the architecture of contemporary theatre, which places great value on mobile spaces. It would be appropriate to recall the now-popular model of black box theatre, or the identical terms of variable theatre, flexible theatre, and adaptable theatre, describing changeable theatrical spaces, easily adaptable for constructing different variants of the acting and observation territories. Changeable theatrical spaces reflect the condition of theatre in post-modern culture, since, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte, the phenomenon of process — the making, production, exchange and dynamic

interchange, in the course of which the existing structures are destroyed and replaced by constantly emerging new ones — increasingly finds itself at the centre of interests of the practice and theory of theatre.

The Lithuanian theatre community still does not have a theatre building with this kind of space, while in Tartu (Estonia) theatre artists actively use the recently built modern Sadamateater (so far the only black box theatre in the Baltic countries) as an attractive space. Performances presented in this venue during the Estonian theatre festival Draama 2003 demonstrated the possibilities of a flexible theatre space — either by filling the entire width and height of the hall with the energy of simultaneous action (*The Swan Lake* by Peteer Jalak and Sasha Pepeliayev) or, on the contrary, by limiting the acting space to a rectangular cage imprisoning the characters, as in the young Estonian director Tiit Ojasoo's production of *Roberto Zucco*.

Continuing the topic of the search for spatial interpretations of Estonian theatre, one can see that their directors are much more active in this respect. In Estonia, so-called summer theatres are very popular, in which performances are presented in the natural environment — open-air spaces, old homesteads or manor houses. "Uncle Vanya" by director Karin Raid performed in the authentic environment of an old manor house suggestively reconstructed the psychological texture of Anton Chekhov's play. The performance of the Irish dramatist Brian Friel's play *Aristocrats*, directed by another well-known Estonian director Priit Pedajas at the international theatre festival Kontakt in 2002, was also performed in a decaying manor house — the natural view of the "bankrupt" building in a suburb of Torun echoed the story of the financial and moral decline of a noble family narrated in the play. We can see how productively the experiments of Estonian theatre are developing if we recall that it was the Estonian director Elmo Nüganen who staged the complex and heavyweight pieces of his performance *Player–Piano, or the Mechanical Piano* in the workshops of the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre. This production, during the theatre forum "The Shifting Point" in 1996, accommodated the audience for the first time, seeking the necessary spatial effect. It is no coincidence that in the Tallinn City Theatre (Tallinna Linnateater) led by Nüganen, all architectural spaces of the building from the cellar to the recently built amphitheatre in the atrium have been converted into acting spaces. And it is no coincidence that Adolf Shapiro, a director of the older generation and a different school, who staged Ivan Turgenev's novel *Parents and Children* at the Tallinn City Theatre, also bravely ventured into the cellar and initiated a confrontation of generations in an extremely irregular space.

Lithuanian theatre artists looking for radically new spatial experience, compensate for the lack of modern mobile architectural spaces by presenting their shows in a real naturally existing space (true space theatre) adapted accordingly in every concrete case — the former Tiesa printing house or the Klaipėda tobacco factory (projects of the Theatre and Cinema Information and Education Centre and The Arts Printing House), the Observatory of Vilnius University (*The Great Theatre of the World* by Gintaras Varnas), an abandoned old town courtyard (*Pro Memoria St Stepono 5* by Vega Vaiciunaite), the Kaunas Artists' House (*Cassandra* by Gytis Padegimas) or central streets and squares of Vilnius (actions of the Old Town Theatre). Jonas Vaitkus placed the characters of his performance *Marquise de Sade* in the foyer of the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, and thus began to flirt with the spectators offering them unusual theatrical circumstances. In The Arts Printing House, on the other hand, he marks off a small area, in which the

characters of *Gagarin Way* are allowed to act, as if resisting the already exploited space. Gintaras Varnas makes maximum use of the possibilities of non-traditional spaces: he finds a space for *The Great Theatre of the World* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca in the Observatory of Vilnius University, puts the audience of *El Público* by Federico García Lorca on the revolving stage of the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, and places the characters of *Crime and Punishment* by Fiodor Dostoyevsky not only in the big hall, but also among the audience, leaving for the audience itself just several rows of seats in the depth of the stage. Whereas the Long Hall of the Kaunas State Drama Theatre can be regarded as a non-traditional theatrical space that gave rise to the most successful performances relying on the given environment — *Sand Claviers* directed by Jonas Jurasas, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Distant Country* directed by Gintaras Varnas.

The performances or projects in non-traditional spaces mentioned in this article were initiated by professional directors, set designers and performers of the Lithuanian drama theatre. Apparently, one can talk about individual manifestations rather than a purposeful tendency. In this respect director Gintaras Varnas carries out the most programmatic study of the possibilities of non-traditional spaces, but artists' groups that choose spaces outside the theatre walls as the sole form of their existence have not yet emerged in Lithuanian theatre. In the meantime, in the field of contemporary theatre this phenomenon functions quite actively: one can recall, for example, the Danish theatre group Hotel Pro Forma, the Dutch Hollandia, or En Garde Arts from New York. Recently, the organizers of international theatre festivals of eastern and central Europe have begun include in their programmes performances presented outside the limits of *scena all'italiana*. And not because they look for them on purpose — as urgent phenomena of contemporary theatre, these productions offer themselves.

Of the sixteen performances included in the programme, of one of the most prestigious festivals of the region Dialog–Wroclaw in 2003, as few as 3 were presented on the traditional, so-called big theatre stage. The performance *Apocalypse 1/11* by the Brazilian Teatro da Vertigem was presented in a maximum-security prison near Wroclaw. The spectators were allowed to enter the prison territory according to the obligatory rules, and together with the actors travelled along its dreary spaces, as if following the road of sufferings of the main character, the unemployed immigrant Ian. The young Polish director Redbrad Klynstra, who set the characters of Irish playwright Mark O'Rowe's play *Made in China* in a deserted apartment in one of the most unsafe areas in Warsaw, found a fairly adequate space in Wroclaw as well. It was an unsafe, badly lit, and empty street, from which three young men modelling their life in the spirit of kung-fu films entered the performance space. The view that the spectators observed through the window acquired suggestive power of impact. The leading young Hungarian director Árpád Schilling has always been attentive to the dialogue of meanings in a performance formed by the relation of dramatic and theatrical spaces. In the Kontakt festival in 2003, the director placed his performance of *Liliom* in an open-air space, in the park of the Torun Castle, reconstructing the style of the early twentieth century modernism. One of his latest performances, *W–Worker's Circus*, after Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, was highly acclaimed in various European theatre festivals, and brought the well-known dramaturgical text up to date through the connotations of non-traditional space as well. In the ample spaces of the Wroclaw film studio (which perform the function of a black box during festivals, and are very popular with directors from various countries taking part in the festivals Dialog–Wroclaw), Schilling closed the action of the

performance in a small cage covered with sand. In a world reduced to the space of the cage, using the stylistics of brutal naturalism, nude actors modelled the characters of *Woyzeck* from sand, urine, and concrete. The spectators sitting around the prisoners of the cage became witnesses to desperate self-destruction, and at the same time, a mere sign of outer civilization concealing quite unattractive instincts.

It is obvious that eastern and central European artists, moving from theatre halls into non-traditional spaces, are looking for a new social context in which their messages — in the form of performances, most often containing unpleasant information, an acute and ruthless diagnosis of the contemporary world — can be heard. In this way, the selection of theatrical space becomes a strong factor determining the processes of moral confrontation between the observer and the observed, and indicating the direction of interpretational coordinates of theatre.

On one hand, the reply to the question "what is a theatrical space?", formulated by Denis Bablet in 1963, remains urgent: "It is a place of performing as well as gathering: of the actors, of the audience; it is a place for building the affinity of the actors and the audience [...]. It is a place of exchange."⁵ On the other hand, the fact that contemporary theatre is still looking for new places to make this exchange happen testifies to certain confusion or the weakening power of impact on the audience. A venue itself does not guarantee the effectuality of this exchange, but more often imitates it with the help of its inherent attractiveness. Even the participants of the Pragiedruliai youth theatre festival, who performed at the Lithuanian Children and Youth's Palace in the winter of 2003, chose non-traditional spaces (cellars, corridors, staircases, the foyer), declaring that dull classical works included in school programmes can become relevant if presented in an unusual environment.

At the same time, the reliance of professional theatre on the venue as a crucial means to build new experiences can be regarded as a reflection of more general processes — a result of "anthropological anxiety" discovered by contemporary culturology. The changing of place also marks a disorder of balance — theatre merely reflects what is happening in contemporary society.

Leaving aside the aesthetic aspect of non-traditional theatre space, one can notice its objective attractiveness as a novel place. It is interesting in itself, because it is new. And the obvious predisposition of theatre to mark new places can be regarded as a sign of certain perturbation referring to general changes related to the influence of the new media on the contemporary individual. Current culturological research emphasizes how the growing sense of global space and the speed of information is fundamentally replacing the status of stability. In the words of David Harvey, the relatively easy circulation of information and people means that time and space has become less stable and understandable. A new type of spatial relations with the world is under formation: an individual's environment, previously noted for certain stability and related with the place of birth or residence, has now become an environment that can be described as "transit", in the words of Rene Berger.⁶ The title of the first performance by Oskaras Korsunovas "There to Be Here" (1991), which marked the beginning of new theatre in the historical experience of Lithuanian theatre, becomes quite eloquent in this respect. New distance-reducing communications provide a possibility "to be there" here and now. Every single TV or Internet nomad can find himself or herself in the most unexpected points of the world, retreating from the early Euclidian concept of three-dimensional space and diving into the pleasures of an interactive trip.

Theatre in all times provides spectators with a possibility "to be there" here and now. However, in the context of the new media, theatre finds itself in the zone of traditional or even conservative forms of communication. And if contemporary communications are improved to increase the user's sense of comfort, theatre, on the contrary, is inclined to prove that space is still an objective obstacle, and that physical efforts are necessary to conquer it.

The choice of an unusual acting space defies the established habits of the theatre audience in going to a well-known building, or sitting comfortably in the auditorium on numbered seats. Having come to, let's say, the former building of the *Tiesa* daily, spectators find themselves in uncomfortable conditions. Similar conditions exist in other venues chosen as non-traditional spaces. Spectators are made to feel uncomfortable — they are deprived of the feeling of safety formed by the conventions of theatrical behaviour in traditional theatre buildings, as an obvious demonstration of disintegration of the existing structures and unlimited variants of a meeting point of theatre and the audience.

Theatre in non-traditional spaces is a reaction to the changes in society and a search for different means of communication. Theatre in non-traditional spaces becomes a place where the despair, fear and depression of a contemporary individual are registered with the help of quite radical means of artistic impact and mainly the language of the new drama. Thus, for theatre artists it is a place to be open.

Non-traditional spaces are favourable to experiments. An artist outside the walls of a theatre as a formalized institution is not obliged to achieve artistic success. In certain cases, non-traditional spaces may be called places of professional interest — an experimenting artist or a performance in the form of a work in progress is not so relevant for the larger part of the audience.

On one hand, it is only in the case of an artistic discovery that a physical/real space acquires the status of a mental/metaphorical space. And, as a matter of fact, it is not important where it happens — in an abandoned factory or on the same old *scena all'italiana*. On the other hand, theatre that has long been related with a permanent company of actors and a building, perceived as a structure of recognisable signs of certain nature. Postmodern culture splits into dynamic, mobile structures, takes on the energy of a transit state, and looks for new experiences in various spaces of self-actualization.

¹ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, Ithaca/London 1989.

² Ausra Marija Sluckaite, *Po dvyniu zenklu*, Vilnius, Vaga, 1994.

³ Jean Jacquot, *Miejsce sceniczne w społeczeństwie współczesnym // W kregu socjologii teatru na swiece. Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossoliskich*, Wrocław 1987

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