



Rasa Vasinauskaite

Lithuanian theatre in 1990–1999: a sociological study

In looking at the context of Lithuanian theatre in the 1990s, Rasa Vasinauskaite looks back at the aesthetic experience accumulated in preceding decades.

Contemporary theatre demands more than an artistic and aesthetic response. Changes in the audience as well as of the conditions and modes of creating, showing, and presenting theatrical performances have increasingly challenged the adequacy of traditional methods of aesthetic analysis and interpretation. Influenced by audience expectations and demands, genres have mutated, as has the performance in its artistic entirety. Consequently, the aesthetic value of the performance needs to be reconsidered with regard to the ways the theatre functions in contemporary society. Two complementary methodologies are relevant here: theatre pragmatics and theatre sociology. The former analyses the communicative powers of the theatre's inner and outer structures. The latter focuses on the functioning of the theatre in the socio-cultural domain and encompasses not only the study of the social engagement of the theatre, but also the issues of its historicity, that is, the development of various theatrical models and their functioning in different social contexts. Understood as part of sociological research which studies the audience of the performance, the social status and role of its creators, analyses the functioning of the theatre and theatrical performance in social life, theatre sociology can help reveal certain changes connected with *theatrical practice*, which influence creative and artistic experiments as well as their reception.

In his book *Theatre Sociology: Sociology of Collective Shadows* (1965, 1999), one of the most famous French theatre sociologists, theatre historian and theoretician Jean Duvignaud maintains that "theatre is a social manifestation"; theatre types are formed and change along with the changing types of society: "whatever significance we attach to the theatrical tradition (which only exists for a "historian"), we need to acknowledge that *theatrical practice* and its varying genres change in the same way as does the representation of the human being and his inner world under the influence of the aesthetic experience of a feudal, monarchical, or contemporary society."¹ According to Duvignaud, "theatrical creation inevitably balances between set social structures and spontaneity, between rigid restrictions, dependencies and freedom, between traditional value systems [...] and the dynamics of modern life."² Thus theatre sociology assumes that theatrical creation is a constant tension between historical continuity (of traditions) and innovation, and specifies several directions of research in theatrical practice: 1. variations of the stage space, which "frames" a particular representation of human experience specific to a certain epoch; 2. variations of the functions of the theatre in a given society, defined as a specific type of society; 3. variations of the picture of man or the

representation of existence, manifested through theatrical works. The synthesis of such research is based on three principles. First, the relationship between social structures and theatrical creation is identified; second, the relationship between an individual artistic expression and a collective expression is defined; third, economic, psychological, and technical conditions which encourage or suppress the appearance and expression of an art work are analysed. If theatre is an arena of man's eternal fight against repressions, it cannot be studied narrow-mindedly or simplistically. According to Duvignaud, "artistic creation is constantly affected by the pulsing which is emanated from social groups and individual people, seeking to realize their desire for freedom, or by that 'constant revolution,' which models, destroys, and creates new structures and forms. Following this view, theatrical creation and social creation are two complementary aspects of the same force. Theatre sociology aims to reveal specifically these aspects."³

The methodology and research principles of theatre sociology can be effectively applied to an analysis of the period of 1990–1999, which was particularly important to Lithuanian theatre. It was a period marked by political liberation movements and the falls of communist regimes, accompanied by wars and genocides, which equal the greatest events of the twentieth century. The cultural position of resistance to official politics, which encouraged artistic movements in the socialist countries in the second half of the twentieth century, in the last decade lost its greatest "enemy" and had to look for different sources of inspiration — the process that was especially relevant to the Northern countries of the new Europe. The ensuing quest for identity, language, artistic individuality and, especially, social importance was hard and painful for many.

Certainly, some theatre practitioners did not resort to an alteration of their creative principles; some tried to adjust to the changes and learn the theatrical language anew, while others were only beginning their creative experiments and their artistic biographies. Theatre tried to respond to the audience's expectations, but these were changing so fast that it was necessary to look for new ways to attract spectators and to communicate with them. The times of the secret pact that used to consolidate the stage and the audience in their resistance to the official order were over. What windmills were to be fought now? How to appeal to separate individuals who no longer constituted an audience bound by common convictions and values? Having lost its missionary powers, how was theatre to behave in a broken, fragmented, and divided society which had only begun to develop anew? Why was theatre necessary at all at a time when the great winds of change that had swept the country were still strongly felt in every family, whose members were often split by different political convictions or by their sudden redistribution into different social classes? Lithuanian theatre was seeking answers to these questions for years following the restoration of its political independence. These questions, albeit in different forms, are still asked today, when the confrontation between generations intensifies; when a new aesthetic form is introduced; or when the depreciation of values is felt more strongly than ever. This is because the time portion separating two historical periods as well as two periods of the development of the theatre is too short, and the differences in the lifestyles and the rules of cultural and theatre consumption are too striking. In order to better understand the context of the theatrical practice in Lithuania in 1990–1999, it is useful to survey the aesthetic experience accumulated in the previous decades.

"Theatre must have its own Idea," says French philosopher and playwright Alain Badiou. The *Idea* of Lithuanian theatre did not change much from its establishment in 1920 until 1990. Andrius Oleka–Zilinskas's reformative directing was based on the idea of a theatre for all, which Oleka–Zilinskas developed following his experience at the Moscow Art Theatre and the teachings of its creators. This was an apolitical theatre, aimed solely at tackling aesthetic and creative tasks, and trying to offer the spectators a unifying aesthetic experience. In 1940, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union. After this traumatic event, it was only in 1957⁴ that the spirit of artistic opposition started to manifest itself, but towards the end of the 1960s, resistance to the Soviet censorship and the repressive totalitarian regime became especially intense. One would call it a Brechtian spirit, but it did not produce an alternative theatrical model. Instead, it created a coded metaphorical language, which masked the desire for freedom of an enslaved nation. In the words of Jean Luc Lagarce, theatre played the role of an assembly for a specific social group (spectators) and dramatised its discourse so that this group started to regard theatre as a mirror, in which they were able to recognize and reconsider their existential problems.⁵ The theatre of the time did not attempt to break into an open political or social arena. The majority of theatre "consumers" in the Lithuania of the 1960s and the 1970s was constituted of the educated middle classes seeking to resist the totalitarian regime by retaining *individual* freedom and values, which they searched for on the stage of the theatre. (According to Polish sociologist Jan Strzelecki, the 1960s was a decade of "lyrical socialism" or "patriotic sentimentalism," when the idea of national and cultural unity, supported by the literary intelligentsia, was revived."⁶) It is not accidental that, on stage, politically charged scores would frequently acquire a metaphoric and symbolic expression, which served as a reaction to the hostile official system and spoke about a "stable and meaningful order, underlying the unstable surface of the totalitarian reality."⁷ The post-war generation adopted these values together with the romantic heritage of the first half of the twentieth century, and strengthened them by prioritising *non-materialistic idealistic creativeness*.

Andrius Oleka–Zilinskas, Algirdas Jaksevicius, Romualdas Juknevicus, and Balys Sruoga were post-war idealists, romantics and individualists. The idea of missionary theatre, propagated by them, infected one of the most outstanding figures of the Lithuanian theatre of the 1960s: Juozas Miltinis. He is the only theatre director of the Soviet period not connected to the Russian school of acting and directing. Removed from the capital city, residing in a quiet, peripheral, and mundane Panevezys, a pupil of French director Charles Dullin, who belonged to the famous Parisian "Cartel des Quatre" (Cartel of the Four), Miltinis was seeking the decentralization of the Lithuanian theatre as early as in 1940. However, such decentralization was impossible: since 1920, professional theatre in Lithuania was created, financed, and supervised by the *state*, which would establish theatre institutions, preferably in larger cities, and would offer employment there as a privilege. Private donations and the freedom of independent theatre were to be dreamed about. The major aim of Lithuanian theatre during the first decades of its development was didactic: the theatre aimed to teach the nation; to be its artistic, moral, and patriotic educator. After 1940, when the social life of the country came to be controlled by the Soviet ruling system, *state theatres* remained the only space for stage artists' creative expression. If a group was formed which believed its leader, the senior or the second director, the latter's artistic experiments would become a given theatre's distinguishing mark.

Artistic experiments of such theatre directors as Juozas Miltinis, Henrikas Vancevicius, Povilas Gaidys, Jonas Jurasas, Jonas Vaitkus, Aurelija Ragauskaite, Damia Tamuleviciute, Eimuntas Nekrosius, and Rimas Tuminas mark the major findings of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai, and Panevezys state drama theatres of the 1960s–1980s. These theatres worked in two directions: for the government and for the people. According to the demands of the Soviet censorship, the directors would make changes in the repertoire and their artistic decisions; however, responding to their audience's expectations, they would turn these imposed limitations into masterpieces. Because of the ideological violence and because the said artists worked in state theatres, the Lithuanian stage did not have an opportunity to try out diverse avant-garde theatrical models; nevertheless, it could be proud of several generations of sophisticated spectators. It also corresponded to what Hans Robert Jauss calls the "horizon of expectations," which secures the theatre's communicative function in society. Time spent in the theatre was a specific "form of escaping reality," offering "more freedom, openness, and imagination"⁸ and in a very particular way compensating for the limitations and restrictions of real life, which, quite unintentionally, made the theatre even more persuasive. Instead of a false distorted reality, the theatre of the time offered artistic truth; it became a manifestation of national identity and an object of national pride.

In her book *The End of the Theatrical Epoch* (2005), Russian theatre critic Marina Davydova suggests in a discussion of the Russian theatre of the 1970s and 1980s that in the period of mature socialism, this country became essentially *theatrocentric*; for many educated people, theatre replaced libraries and art galleries, universities and conservatories.⁹ In a country, where religion was forbidden and civil freedom repressed, theatre substituted the church, the free press and even the parliament. The fall of the Soviet system ruined the idea of the messianic theatre. From that moment on, theatre was merely theatre, and a director — no more than a director. "But no less, either. [...] It is important how great the theatre is."¹⁰

It is difficult to separate the Lithuanian theatre of the 1970s and 1980s from the context of the Russian theatre of the same period. During the years of the Soviet occupation, Lithuanian theatre was strongly influenced by the Russian theatrical school and culture in general. The very first steps of our professional theatre are inconceivable without the influence of Konstantin Stanislavsky's teachings, without Mikhail Chekhov's performances, staged in Kaunas State theatre in 1935–36, without a direct experience of Vsevolod Meyerhold's, Yevgeny Vakhtangov's, and Alexandr Tyrov's works. Moreover, until the restoration of Lithuania's independence, many Lithuanian actors and directors studied in the theatrical institutes in Moscow and Leningrad. Similarly to Russian, Lithuanian culture was also *theatrocentric*; it brought the idea of the theatre up to date and recreated the theatrical language. Lithuanian drama (plays by Justinas Marcinkevicius, Juozas Grusas, Juozas Glinskis, Kazys Saja or Saulius Saltenis), which overwhelmed theatre stages at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a decade later began to disappear for two reasons: because of the dominance of the director–drama, focused on an individual interpretation and reworking of a specific text; and because the majority of available drama texts constructed social conflicts and oppositions in terms of romantic binaries and thus no longer matched the demands of contemporary directing principles. Certainly, Lithuanian theatre did not reject the romantic idea, but it increasingly began communicating with the audience in a physical language of bodies and a symbolic language of objects and sounds, which both actors and the co-producers of a performance, stage designers and composers, had already mastered. Due to the Soviet censorship

devoid of contacts both with contemporary Western and exile drama, Lithuanian theatre had mastered the ways of specifying and modernising classics — the ways which were discovered by the greatest theatre artists of the second half of the twentieth century, from Antonin Artaud to Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, and Peter Brooke. It had also adopted the artistic and creative idealism and the spirit of resistance, characteristic to the most distinguished masters of the Soviet theatre and cinema: Yuri Lubimov, Anatoly Efros, Anatoly Vasiljev, Mikhail Tumanishvili, Andrei Tarkovsky and Sergei Paradjanov. This is where the uniqueness of the Lithuanian acting and directing of the 1980s probably lies: they were grounded in the national worldview and the individual philosophy of each artist as well as in progressive ideas of contemporary art, but endowed with idealist and nonmaterialist creativity. Lithuanian theatre responded to the realities of the time, but tried to free itself from the repressions of the Soviet regime using artistic as opposed to political means. Its versatility, the power of generalisations, and the depths of both individual and collective memory made the theatre great because its content was universal and monumental.

After the 1990s the Lithuanian stage became quiet. It took the theatre several years before it adjusted to the changed local market and the market of festivals to its own and international audiences, to changes in administration and management as well as new financing mechanisms. Spectators turned into consumers, who were buying theatre performances as theatrical products and thereby influencing the stage art in new and often unexpected ways. The state system of theatre functioning was no longer effective; thus, at the beginning of the last decade of the century, there appeared independent theatre troupes and companies, which found shelter in small rented spaces. After so many years of imposed silence, artists were now able to speak without restrictions and without being surveyed by state institutions; they were able to experiment and communicate with their audiences in their own language.

Very few of these groups have survived. The audience was not always ready to accept their experiments, often based on alternative and avant-garde ideas. It was also suspicious of their often non-traditional use of the theatrical space, because, in addition to a performance, actors, and a director, the audience seeks in the theatre a specific, ritualised and conventional system which defines the role of every person who enters it. It might seem paradoxical that the same audience, which not so very long ago admired the youthful and rebellious spirit of political independence movements, reminiscent of Western youth movements, was now sceptical of those who had started using its force on stage. However, the ideas of the avant-garde of the 1960s–1970s seemed dated, just as the attempts to stage the works of the playwrights of the 1950s who, because of the censorship, had never spoken in Lithuanian. On the other hand, Lithuanian theatre had already accustomed its audience to a very particular artistic expression and stage language. According to theatre critic and historian Ramune Marcinkeviciute, Lithuanian theatre, which at the beginning of its professional development had cherished the tradition of historical poetic drama, in the Soviet period made it the dominant form of expression; historical poetic drama inspired the theatre to seek for a symbolic, stage-specific language of signs, while directors increasingly searched for persuasive nonverbal equivalents of the dramatic text (this was the beginning of the new visibility).¹¹ The new generation which came to the theatre at the end of the 1970s had already mastered the principles of *creating stage materiality*¹², which helped perfect the performance as an independent theatrical text, and turned the director into the author of the performance. It is necessary to highlight the word "performance"; even if some directors had the

privilege of "un-finishing," theirs were theatrical works based on classical principles, but also enriched by the discoveries of world experimenters and always aiming at artistic unity. It is also necessary to highlight the word "director"; the Lithuanian theatre of the 1980s is inconceivable without the personality, individuality, and even a certain dictatorship of the director. In this decade, the figure of the director came to represent the idea of an individual artistic world and creative autonomy; consequently, the work of a specific director was eventually associated with a particular aesthetic trend and type of a given theatre, the professional development of its troupe, and the expectations of its audience.

The leaders of the Lithuania's theatre of the 1980s were Jonas Vaitkus (Kaunas Drama theatre) and Eimuntas Nekrosius (the State Youth theatre of Lithuania), two directors with very different worldviews and styles, both renowned in the Soviet Union, and Nekrosius also acknowledged by Western theatre critics and audiences. Their extremely strong individual expression overwhelmed the theatre discourse of the last decade of the century and influenced its perception, both among critics and spectators. The new generation of theatre directors, which had already studied in Vilnius (Jonas Vaitkus's course), not in Moscow, and came to the theatre in the 1990s, had to decide whether to follow in the footsteps of their senior colleagues or attempt to pave their own roads. They saw very well that the theatre could no longer exist and function the way it used to; however, how to change it was not clear even to their teachers.

The borderline between the Lithuanian theatre of the 1970s and the 1980s is marked by two performances. In 1980, Jonas Vaitkus staged *King* ("Kingas") by Juozas Glinskis in Kaunas Drama theatre, and Eimuntas Nekrosius staged *The Square*, based on a novella by Valentina Vasilyeva, "The Way It Was...". In 1980, Vaitkus was 36, and Nekrosius was 28 years old, but they represented different generations and worldviews. Vaitkus had been the head of Kaunas Drama theatre for five years; his performances, *The Pilgrim of Dreams* ("Svajonių piligrimas"), based on the life and art of Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis (1975), *Ubu roi* ("Karalius Ubas") by Alfred Jarry (1977), and *The Last Ones* ("Paskutinieji") by Maksim Gorky (1978), had showed the range of the themes and means of expression that Vaitkus was interested in, from the symbolist and ritualistic aesthetics and grotesque satire to rough realism. In the three performances he staged in 1980, Vaitkus worked with the *drama of ideas*, by developing the theme of the aspirations and failures of an individualistic heroic personality, situated in a hostile, blind, and deaf environment. *King*, however, is important for other reasons. Presented as a lyrical drama and featuring the inmates of a correctional institution for young delinquents, the play by Glinskis, according to Grazina Mareckaite, "cut sharply into the sophisticated ornamental surface of the Lithuanian stage,"¹³ which was used and devoted to metaphorically and poetically actualising historical drama. The performance of *King*, in the words of theatre critic Valdas Vasiliauskas, sought to destroy "the fourth wall" that separates the stage and the audience in order to frustrate the spectators with the realities of life so that they would resolve to improve it; in doing this, *King* used "all possible means": the blows aimed at the audience were so strong and emotional that the spectators were "almost physically pressured by the actors' shouting and shrieking, by the ugliness, blood, denuded bodies, and eroticism they demonstrated, which often acquired sadist and other pervert forms."¹⁴ Such expressiveness and extremity of *King*, which were already manifest in Vaitkus's previous performances and which will become even more explicit in most of his future works, in 1980 allowed critics to conclude that his was by no means the theatre of entertainment, but the "theatre of acting objects," where

the theatrical play sooner or later reveals its artificial nature.¹⁵ The fore-grounded artificiality of such theatre pointed to the artificiality of life and the world, the recognition of which asked spectators to reconsider their attitude both towards the aims of the theatre and their own role in it, and towards the existing reality. Approving only of the active role of the theatre in society, Vaitkus demanded the same level of activeness from both actors and spectators.

The intonation of *The Square* by Nekrosius was different. While the physical expression was present, the polyphony of ominous signs was slow to appear, being born out of an intimate relationship between two people. Unlike Vaitkus, Nekrosius did not need a dramatic text: in *The Square*, it was people who spoke, not ideas voiced by their lips; apparently, even dead creatures would be able to "speak" on this stage. Thus the director did not discredit the nature of the theatre; on the contrary, he revived it and in so doing sought to revive life itself — the life that is cruel and torturing, that marginalises and disgraces the man, but also makes him continue living. The audience was also made to join those who inhabited the stage of *The Square*. The performance spoke about human relationships, about love and trust, able to overcome all barriers and prohibitions. Nekrosius' theatre was looking for the same kind of relationship with its audience.

The Square is important for several reasons. It was a performance, which undertook to construct the stage action in a different way; it rejected the purity of the genre, the traditional logic of composition, and the value of the word. Nekrosius's performance was reminiscent of a cinematographic mosaic of images and visual details, whose meaning is grounded in association. The story of a prisoner, who makes a radio set of a tin, hears a woman recite a poem, writes a letter, and eventually meets her, did not have a clear dramatic composition, but was constructed of separate episodes, marked by a different mood. It was the successful performance of the three actors who played the Prisoner, the Warder (as well as the Doctor), and the Teacher as well as the curves of emotional changes, drawn by the director, that made this story intriguing. The critical discussion inspired by the première of the performance focused on its non-verbal, physical, and poetically abstracted form, which defied familiar theatrical conventions. If the theatre had answered all questions, "would it not have deprived the spectators of the space for contemplation and experience?" asked critic Irena Veisaite.¹⁶ "The theatre community recognized and acknowledged *The Square* not only because of the precise and expressive metaphor of the human existence in a totalitarian system, but also because of a very special, exceptional theatrical language [...]; the reformatory nature of *The Square* and unexpected but relevant concretization of *non-artistic reality* endowed the performance with the conceptual value of a theatrical manifesto."¹⁷

Thus *King* and *The Square* were different in the artistic devices that were used to create these performances, and they both explicitly marked the landmarks of the two directions the Lithuanian theatre of the director was to take in the 1980s. *King* and *The Square* also differed in their relationship with the environment, that is, with social, political, and everyday human spaces, tainted by the conflict of ideas and the destruction of human destinies. According to Ramune Marcinkeviciute, "Nekrosius's performance radiated with trust and sympathy, while *King* wallowed in the unattractive pathos of unmasking the evils of society."¹⁸

Parallels — or contrasts, to be more precise — between these two directors are especially explicit in their later works. Vaitkus' most significant performances of this period, all staged in Kaunas Drama Theatre, are the oratory *Thrush, a Green Bird* ("Strazdas — zalias paukstis"), based on Bronius Kutavicius's music and Sigitas Geda's verse (1984); William Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1985); and *Calvary* ("Golgota"), based on Chingiz Aytmatov's novel *The Place of the Skull* (1987). Nekrosius continued working in the State Youth theatre of Lithuania, where he created a rock opera, based on William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet, Love and Death in Verona* ("Meile ir mirtis Veronoje"), using Kestutis Antanelis's music and Sigitas Geda's verse (1982); *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* ("Ilga kaip simtmečiai diena"), based on Aytmatov's novel of the same title (1983); and Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* ("Dede Vania") (1986). These performances, different in their style and of seemingly opposing structures, allow for identifying not only the artistic stance of the two directors, but also their theatrical models, *extrovert* and *introvert*. The first one feeds on the changing impulses of the social environment, while the second — on the memory of individual experience; the first one plays with various stylistic possibilities of contemporary theatre, while the second resorts to the mythic powers of the theatre. Several years later, both theatrical models would be drawn into the whirlwinds of the 1990s; the supporters and opponents of Vaitkus and Nekrosius would start forming the theatre as a space for an open and active artistic discussion.

The discourse of Lithuanian theatre of the 1980s is inconceivable without William Shakespeare's and Anton Chekhov's plays, which inspired numerous achievements of Lithuanian directors and the two extremities that marked the theatre of the 1990s, *theatrum mundi* and *theatrum uni*. This was not only an entire world, created on stage by a single person, where everyone and everything was engaged, but also a dramatic and even tragic separation and erasure of individual consciousness from a specific reality in order to oppose that reality. It seems that in the 1960–80s, Shakespeare became for Lithuanian theatre what Bertolt Brecht was for the Western theatre of a similar period; he restored the materiality and specificity of the Lithuanian stage space, the fragmentariness of the stage action, and the non-psychological possibilities of acting; in other words, he restored the feeling of the obvious theatre, which presupposes only the meanings that exist here and now. Chekhov, on the other hand, obviously compensated for the lack of existential or absurd drama, which with the plays of Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and especially Samuel Beckett, gave the Western theatre of the 1950s–60s the feeling of total emptiness and inevitable destruction — *no man's land*. In general, the interpretations of Shakespeare's and Chekhov's plays on the Lithuanian stage is an interesting topic, which reveals in a very specific way artistic biographies of several directors as well as their relationship with a specific time period and society. In the 1990s, their plays were staged not only by Nekrosius, Tuminas, and Vaitkus, but also by several directors of a younger generation. In part, this was determined by a sudden lack of relevant drama, though at the end of the 1990s directors started looking for new Lithuanian authors. Hans Robert Jauss writes about the change of literary forms and their reception: "a new form does not appear merely to take over an older one, which has lost its value. A new form restores the possibility of new perception, predicting the contents of the experience which first and foremost manifests itself in literature, and only later reaches reality."¹⁹ Shakespeare and Chekhov helped young artists establish a dialogue with the previous interpreters of these authors; however, the younger generation was asking different questions and was forming another "horizon" of aesthetic reception.

This extended historic retrospect does not aim to idealise the past times by contrasting them with the present. Without experience and understanding of what was important and meaningful in the past, it would be impossible to compare it with the present. On the other hand, even knowing what difficulties theatre artists and other people experienced during the Soviet period and what creative despair overwhelmed them, it is impossible not to notice certain regularities and appreciate certain discoveries, which did not depend on the twists of unpredictable history. Lithuanian theatre was able to escape being pushed to the margins of the world theatre history and in the 1980s entered the "period" of theatricality, when it was registering not only reality, but also the very existence of the stage, and when meaningful signs appeared out of the collisions of stage materiality. The autonomy that Lithuanian theatre finally acquired partly matches what Roland Barthes was writing, influenced by Brecht's "Berliner Ensemble": "theatricality is the density of signs, the informational polyphony; the meaning of such a performance is defined not by the 'sum' of authorial intentions and discoveries, but by an intellectual system of the signifieds."²⁰ Just as Brechtian theatre, the theatrical Lithuanian theatre, having freed its creative potential, allowed the audiences "to see the invisible and to hear the inaudible" — not only that which was hidden behind reality, but also what lies behind the very illusion of the theatre. (It is not accidental that in 1984 Eimuntas Nekrosius defined "a space behind words" as his theatre's programmatic principle; he meant what lies among words, the space that opens behind them.²¹ Vaitkus, on the other hand, manifested himself as a master of ideological tensions, as an architect of theatrical materiality, and as an expressionist, for whom, in his own words, the nerve of a performance was the most important thing). However, did not this triumph of theatricality bring onto the Lithuanian stage what French theatre theoretician Jean Pierre Sarazacc, using examples of Western theatre, calls the new wave of the theatricality of the 1980s–1990s, when theatre, devoted itself to *presentification* thereby rejecting the very idea of reproducing and repeating reality?²² Sarazacc urges us to listen to Jean Baudrillard's warning that "the depth of meanings is lost. The nineteenth century took pains to destroy the exterior for the sake of the essence, while the twentieth century tried hard to destroy the essence [...] for the sake of no one knows what. Now, we are left with neither the exterior, nor the essence."²³

According to Jauss, the way whereby a new work of art responds to the expectations of its *initial* audience (meets them, disappoints or contradicts) forms criteria for determining its aesthetic value. The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work of art, between what aesthetic experience turned into everyday reality and how the new work of art "changed the horizon" (*Horizontwandel*), helps reception aesthetics recognize the artistic qualities of the work of art. When the distance is overcome, and if a new horizon of experience is not opened for a receptional experience, the work becomes an example of *culinary* art, a simple *divertissement*. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, such a work is defined as one which does not require a change in the horizon as it fully matches the expectations of the dominant taste; it fulfils the desire to see beauty presented in the usual form; it intensifies sensitivity, validates the demands of the audience, becomes "sensational" by enriching everyday reality by other people's experiences, which have been adequately processed, and even poses moral questions, but only to "solve" them didactically by posing questions, answers to which are known in advance.²⁴ In 1999, Lithuanian theatre was accused of being "culinary," even a *gourmand* by a new-generation director, Oskaras Korsunovas, who in 1990 had produced his manifesto performance *There to Be Here* ("Ten buti cia"), based on Daniil Charms's and Aleksandr Vvedensky's

works. In a discussion, initiated by the journal *Lietuvos teatras* (*Lithuanian Theatre*) and titled "Theatre in the Whirlwind of Time," it was stated that Lithuanian theatre had lost its spirit of experimentation; that theatres, formed by the personality of a director, were disappearing; that the artistic language had lost its persuasiveness; that the professional level had declined; that Lithuanian plays had disappeared from the repertoires. Theatre critic Audronis Liuga was asking: "Why is it so difficult for contemporary drama and its fresh contemporary rhythm to find ways into our theatre? Haven't the best traditions of our theatre become the unifying standard? These are not rhetorical questions; they express a longing for a theatrical diversity and a desire to see theatre as an active participant in a contemporary reality[...]"²⁵

According to Duvignaud, an analysis of the functions of theatrical practice as a specific social reality is one of the richest fields of studies in theatre sociology. What representation of society is offered by the theatre? What theatre and what theatrical representation of itself does a society expect? In this respect, after 1990 Lithuanian theatre experienced a crisis due to the incongruity between the existing theatrical manifestation, society's expectations, and the social reality of the time. A reason for this crisis was a certain *dramatic selection*, undertaken not only by the theatre, but also by social reality, which sought to isolate from a collective anonymous mass artistic individuality, refusing to undertake a social role imposed upon it (in this particular case this applies both to an artistic individuality and the entire institution of the theatre). On the other hand, in the 1990s, social reality was situated in a transitory zone, haunted by the ghosts of the previous society, while a new one was only trying on novel social roles and forming a different social structure. During the first years after the restoration of Lithuania's independence, collective life was embodied and individualised by a political, not theatrical stage. According to Henri Focillon, "revolutions do not create art; they affect institutions, change lifestyles, but in doing so rely on familiar forms."²⁶ During revolutions and the years of great social and political changes, politics itself becomes a performance, a pure aesthetics, which seeks to attract people and integrate them into a "nation" as an "acting society."

The euphoria that has overwhelmed most of the spheres of life intensifies the desire for entertainment and mass activities, especially characteristic of the post-revolutionary period. Thus art, especially theatre, is quickly commercialized. During the first years of Lithuania's national awakening movement and independence, it was specifically *politics* that undertook the role of consolidating society; thereby politics became an *act of theatricalization*, which sought to reveal the existing social reality, and political activists turned into ideal heroes, who matched "the audience's" expectations by tackling social conflicts. It was only at the end of the 1990s, when the model of the new society type became explicit and its members distributed new social roles, that the real — dramatic — hero returned to the stage. He spoke of the new limitations and the new social threats. The stage was filled with the end of the century's "social drama," representing a different style of writing and a different model of the theatre. Spectators were shocked by their own mirror reflection in Korsunovas's staging of Mark Ravenhill's play *Shopping and F****** (1999). The performance critiqued the homogenous consumerist masses, which do not leave space for individuality and idealism.

"Theatre is more than a theatre," says Duvignaud. "Mankind experiences its real drama with the help of the theatre. Tragic tension as well as its release with the help of legendary or contemporary characters create a performance,

which reveals oppositions, underlying the very collective experience."²⁷ In 1998–1999, the Lithuanian stage was filled by characters, torn by inner conflicts; rejected by or unable to fit in the existing reality; untypical and thus alien to the collective consciousness; tortured by tragic premonitions; trying to harmonise the chaos of values. During these several years of a breakthrough, the stage was reserved for a lone hero, a hero–victim: Hamlet (William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* directed by Eimuntas Nekrosius, 1997); Roberto Zucco (Bernard–Marie Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* directed by Oskaras Korsunovas, 1998); *Oedipus* (Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* directed by Rimas Tuminas, 1998); Macbeth (William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* directed by Nekrosius, 1999); and Richard III (William Shakespeare's *Richard III* directed by Tuminas, 1999). This is the hero who, having been born in a different epoch and having inherited its values, is unable to adjust to the demands of the present times.

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- ¹ Jean Duvignaud, *Sociologie du théâtre*, Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France/1999, p. 11, 61, 63–64
- ² Ibid, p. 71
- ³ Ibid, p. 62
- ⁴ Theatre historian and critic Grazina Mareckaite suggests that director Henrikas Vancevicius's staging of Juozas Grusas' play *Hercus Mantas* ("Herkus Mantas") in Kaunas Dramas theatre in 1957 is Lithuanian theatre's first step towards the rejection of ideological theatrical conventions and a search for national identity, while Grusas's play is an early Lithuanian example of conceptual contemporary drama (Mareckaite, *Romantines idejos lietuviu teatre (Romantic Ideas in Lithuanian Theatre)*, V., 2004, p. 131)
- ⁵ Jean Luc Lagarce, *Théâtre et Pouvoir en Occident*, Besançon: Les Solitaires intempestifs/2000, p. 20
- ⁶ J. Jerschina, *System vartosci mlodych robotnikow i inteligentow*, *Studia socjologiczne*/1988, Nr. 4, p. 39
- ⁷ Edgaras Klivis, *Metaforinio teatro poetika: 8–9 desimtmečiu Lietuvos teatro rezisura: tekstai ir kontekstai*, daktaro disertacija (*The Poetics of Metaphorical Theatre: The Directing in the Lithuanian Theatre of the 1970s–80s: Texts and Contexts*, a doctoral dissertation), Kaunas, 2004, p. 77
- ⁸ Ramune Marcinkeviciute, *Eimuntas Nekrosius: erdve uz zodziu (Eimuntas Nekrosius: The Space behind Words)*, V., 2002, p. 272
- ⁹ Marina Davydova, *The End of the Theatrical Epoch*, Moscow, 2005, ch. 12–13
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 14
- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 18
- ¹² Marcinkeviciute's term. Ibid, p. 21
- ¹³ Grazina Mareckaite, *Laisvoji zona: Juozo Gliniskio teatras (The Free Zone: The Theatre of Juozas Gliniskis)*, V., 2002, p. 61
- ¹⁴ Valdas Vasiliauskas, *Per medziu virsunes einantis: teatras be iliuziju (Walking on the Top of the Trees: Theatre without Illusions)*, V., 1989, p. 56
- ¹⁵ Ibid, p. 59
- ¹⁶ Irena Veisaite, "Dar karta apie 'Kvadrato' stoga" ("Once Again about the Roof of The Square"), *Literatura ir menas*, 1981 February 14.
- ¹⁷ Marcinkeviciute, *Erdve uz zodziu*, p. 87–89
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p. 89
- ¹⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005, p. 83
- ²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques*, Paris: Seuil, 1964, p. 258–276
- ²¹ Eimuntas Nekrosius, Ramune Marcinkeviciute, "Kokia erdve uz zodziu" ("What Space Is there behind Words"), *Kulturos barai*, 1984, No. 2, p. 4
- ²² Jean–Pierre Sarrazac, *Critique du théâtre: De l'Utopie au Désenchantement*, Belfort: Circé, 2000, p. 63
- ²³ Ibid
- ²⁴ Jauss, p. 58
- ²⁵ "Teatras laiko verpete" ("Theatre in the Whirlwind of Time"), *Lietuvos teatras*, Fall 1999 — Winter 2000, p.p. 5–11
- ²⁶ Duvignaud, p. 383

²⁷ Ibid, p. 560

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