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COMPLETING (PUBLIC) SPHERES: THEATRE AND MEDIA IN THE BALTIC STATES

Summary. The article deals with two interconnected issues: the issue of theatre interacting with the media and digital network, and the problem of theatre functioning as a public sphere. Both questions are addressed by the analysis of three case studies from contemporary Baltic theatre: two productions of Henrik Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" staged by Lithuanian director Jonas Vaitkus in 2011 and Latvian director Alvis Hermanis in 2013, and the political project of Estonian theatre NO99, called "Unified Estonia" performed in 2010. The focus of the analyses is not on the dramatic or aesthetic structures of the productions, but on their communication as in all three cases the communication using the media and the network was an important part of the theatrical events. How the theatre producers in the Baltic States approach and deal with mass media and the digital web? What new concepts of the relationship between live physical, placed dialogue and distributed media communication are there in contemporary public sphere? What could be the contribution of the communicative practices of contemporary theatres to the development of democracy and the public sphere? Should theatres offer a radical subversion or rather a critical intervention into the political democracy dominated by electronic, digital or social media?

The theoretical background of the analyses is supported by the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, but it also considers the contradictions of this theory as well as its further development in contemporary reflections on the media, social media and the network by Therese F. Tierney, Geert Lovink, Christopher Balme and Luke Goode. The concept of distributed aesthetics is discussed as a proper analytical tool for conceptual analysis of the political projects in contemporary Baltic theatre.

The analysis of the three theatre productions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania point out how local artistic practices through mass media can reach an indefinite number of recipients and inspire further discussions in the places and communities that were usually ignored by traditional routes of theatre communication. The article stresses the possibility and the need for contemporary theatre to shift, intervene, move beyond live experiences, be in more than one place and time in the age when public and democracy does the same.

Keywords: public sphere, Baltic theatre, theatre communication, the media, social networks, distributed aesthetics, Henrik Ibsen

INTRODUCTION

On a bright morning of October 2011, Mantas Adomėnas, – PhD holder in Classical philosophy from University of Cambridge, a member of Lithuanian Parliament representing Christian Democrats and a famous somewhat of an eccentric public figure, was on his way to work when suddenly he was arrested by the posters on the street. The posters contained no images, just individual sentences stating: "People in our country are slaves of political parties" and "Is it right clever ones to be ruled by the stupid?" As Adomėnas soon discovered, those

two sentences were advertising a new stage production in the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre and they were merely quotes from the play by Henrik Ibsen "An Enemy of the People" (1882) directed by Jonas Vaitkus. The production of Ibsen was to become a flagship for the revival of National Theatre under the leadership of Martynas Budraitis – a newly appointed director. The change of administration brought in a new vision of what the national theatre should be like, and the bottom-line of this vision was a turn of the national stage to a place for public discussion on the most relevant social issues.

In fact, marketing strategies of the new National Theatre had already captured public attention a month before the incident with Adomėnas when one particular poster, advertising the forthcoming theatrical season, was officially banned by the government and was ordered to be covered up or removed. It was one of the series of posters with photographic portraits representing different social identities of contemporary Lithuanian society with short statements (such as “I will emigrate”) pointing both to the demographic realities in Lithuania and to the scheduled future stage productions of Lithuanian National Theatre, addressing those realities. The banned picture was of a young woman with a postscript “I will kill” that triggered the alarm in the media about the possible impact of this on the teenagers. The posters were covered up, but in such a way that the sign of censorship was visible and it nevertheless worked as a promotion for the theatre. The new posters attacking political parties and the ruling elite could be seen thus as a continuation and further development of a kind of “banner politics” style, that theatre chose for marketing.

After finding all of this out, the parliamentarian Mantas Adomėnas still decided to pursue the issue of “An Enemy of the People” posters which he defined as nothing other but a malicious intention to undermine the trust and solidarity between citizens and their state, in short – an anti-state propaganda. Not that he started another censorship campaign. Instead, Adomėnas informed the media of his plans to commit personally to the promotion of the new law of Culture Patronage with the intention to liberate artists and artistic institutions from the need of offensive tabloid marketing of their art.¹ His arguments along with the counterarguments by Budraitis started a discussion that ha spread across social media, press, news portals and online discussions, turning into a media event.

I would like to address this rather casual event of the cultural everyday life of Lithuania and discuss the attempts of the cultural and artistic institutions of the Baltic states to intervene in a public sphere, to leave the closed circuit of the production and consumption of aesthetic objects for civic sphere where democracy is being created and maintained.

Relating to theatrical examples (including also cases from Latvia and Estonia), I would like to analyse how after more than twenty years since the liberation of artistic culture from the Soviet censorship, Baltic theatre artists and producers are looking for new ways to redeem the social status that artistic production used to have in the late Soviet years.

In the last decade of 20th century and the beginning of 21st one, Baltic cultures confronted with new social forces, such as the dominant position of popular culture, the significance of mass media, the logic of marketing and culture industries – the forces that challenged the older models of communication of cultural institutions and their audiences. Former social significance of theatre institutions and artists, based on the concept of a theatre as a site of political resistance to the Soviet regime disguised under allegories and interpretations of classical and modern drama, became inadequate since the abolition of censorship. The ways of addressing and communicating political issues in art used in Western cultures were almost unknown due to Iron Curtain and had no traditions in the Baltic cultures to rely upon. It is only in the course of the last ten years that new strategies, concerning new adequate models of political theatre, started appearing in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. However, more important is that those new attempts concerned not only the aesthetic structures of particular theatrical productions (which could range from traditional stage interpretations of classical or modern drama to postmodern performance framework), but also the approach to communication, audiences, marketing and media.

The central focus of this article concerns the models characterising the interrelationship between theatre institutions and the media: How the theatre producers approach and deal with mass media and the digital web in the Baltic States? What are the benefits and threats of communication models that they have already tested? And as a broader issue for discussion – what new concepts are emerging about the relationship between live physical dialogue and distributed media communication in contemporary public sphere? Finally, how can art communication (rather than artistic symbolic content) contribute to

constituting the meanings and practices of democracy?

Another important issue of this article is the inconsistencies of the Habermasian public sphere, namely the inversely proportional relationship between *quality of discourse* and *quantity of participation*². The rational democratic debate can only achieve proper quality in a live *exclusive* communication among a limited number of participants (similar to live theatrical communication). On the one hand, that makes theatre a significant place. On the other hand, within the framework of mass media and national politics, the exclusiveness of theatrical communication condemns it to insignificance and marginal position. As mass involvement in the democratic politics increases and the public sphere becomes more *inclusive*, the suitable arena for the public discussions can only be found in mass media. The media, however, often appears to be a “travesty of democratic debate” seeking eventually to subject the public communication to instrumental aims and deforming the principle of the priority of unbiased rational argument. In other words, mass communication in the media compromises the quality of discussion. In the face of these contradictions, what could be the contribution of the communicative practices of contemporary theatres (providing they are defined not only as a marketplace of aesthetic production but also as a space for meaningful social interaction)? Should we see them as utopian reconstructions of the unmediated physical communication taking place here and now or creative laboratories for the testing of different mixtures of live and mediated, physical and virtual? Should it offer a radical subversion or rather a critical intervention into the political democracy dominated by electronic, digital or social media?

A LITHUANIAN DISCUSSION

The reaction of Mantas Adomėnas was by no means provoked by the very subject-matter of what the posters said – after all the two sentences were abstract slogans, aiming at no one in particular. There are popular daily TV shows (such as long-time political satire show *Dviračio šou / Dviračio*

žinios as well as *Be tabu / Be tabu savaitė, Radijo šou* etc.) that address similar political issues and offer ironic comments about the political parties on a much more direct and personal basis through satirical impersonations of major political figures of the country.³

The problem that Adomėnas addressed was rather if it is justifiable to employ the politically vulnerable issues and provocations (however distant and abstract) for the aims as trivial as marketing of cultural production, a performance? The premise of such indignation is that even if one is forced to agree that this marketing strategy worked (and it did), the use of political issues as mere marketing instruments demonstrates disrespect for the people who place the matters of democracy above economic profit or who simply find them important – more important than the box office of a theatre. Even more so as this theatre is a major state supported theatrical institution in the country.

However, things that Adomėnas saw as offensive exploitation of political public issues for private (or almost private) needs, the theatre producers saw as engagement into the public sphere.” Although the posters were intentionally provocative, they certainly were not aiming against the state – rather they were an invitation to come to the National Theatre to discuss the most relevant public issues,” the director of the National Theatre Martynas Budraitis said in the press conference that was called immediately after Adomėnas attack.⁴ In a somewhat similar way as with the banned poster of a young woman confessing of her plans to kill, in this case the theatre also took an opportunity of media attention and delivered personal invitations for the leaders of the parties to come to the opening night of the performance. The subsequent visit of the members of political elite to the performance was covered in a number of further comments (both in social networks and news portals) as a public marketing event.

As the marketing campaign started snowballing, more comments followed. Another famous public figure, a professor of social sciences Saulius Spurga joined the discussion with a comprehensive

comment on the performance and its marketing strategies, making the same point as Adoménas, that theatre should avoid fostering hysteric atmosphere in the society or escalating scandal: “As if we don’t have enough of those,” he wrote in his Internet blog.⁵ The commercial media, the tabloid press and TV news are full of disturbing information, undermining trust and hope of the people with respect to their state and government. “It is interesting to see,” says the author, “that the process is now led by nothing other but the National Theatre itself.”⁶

At this point Spurga brought out a deeper concern: even in case we agree that the theatre was actually intentionally engaging in the public sphere (rather than just public relations), should we also approve of the way it was done, namely by obeying the logic and modes of commercial mass media, sensationalist, manipulative and instrumentalist by its very definition? Even if National Theatre was not just using the political issues but was ready to actually address them, did it really have to engage in the same turmoil of a travesty of democratic debate of tabloid media? The posters with loud populist slogans, involvement with the popular press and news portals, taking use of political figures for more media coverage are the strategies of communication perceived by many as alien to the traditional cultural status that theatre occupies in Lithuania and the ways the national theatres are supposed to deal with the popular media. The comments of both Adoménas and Spurga point out that it is still a violation of discourse ethics and a case of what Jürgen Habermas called *refeudalization* of the public sphere of civil society, when self-representation rather than discussion is the primary motive of public appearance.⁷

However, the position of the theatre people was that the employment of populist tabloid slogans and popular media coverage was not an impudent plan to take advantage of political instabilities in the country nor was it a mere extension of the systematic instrumentality of the media but a price to pay for the authorization to enter the media dominated public sphere, the “master forum” (to use the term by Jürgen Gerhards) of the media by submitting naturally to the rules of the media. From the perspective of Jim McGuigan, who has pointed out three

broad stances regarding the politics of the cultural public sphere, such crafty use of the media logic was not a *radical subversion* (similar to the position of underground artistic practices during the Soviet period in Eastern Europe), nor was it a mere *uncritical populism* as the political commentators like Spurga seem to suggest. The communication strategies of the Ibsen’s production by National Theatre were rather a case of *critical intervention*, calling the popular media into play without, however, reducing the political issues raised by Ibsen’s production to a mere sensational populist entertainment.⁸ This claim can be supported by the performance itself, as corruption of the media was one of the central issues addressed on the stage both through interpretation of Ibsen’s play and deliberate use of screens and projections.

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

When Henrik Ibsen published “An Enemy of the People” in November 1882, his reputation in Norway and among European intellectuals was quite ambiguous: a conservative for many years, after publishing “Ghosts” in 1881, he was accused of anarchism and nihilism. Reflecting the unexpected turn in the evolution of his political beliefs in January of 1882, he wrote: “I am more and more confirmed in my belief that there is something demoralizing in politics and parties. I, at any rate, shall never be able to join a party which has the majority on its side.”⁹ The play that had appeared the same year depicted the revolt of the individual against corrupt political and economic authority and thus conveyed the new ideological position of the playwright and at least in some countries turned him and the play into symbols of anarchist revolt.

The main character of the play Dr. Thomas Stockmann, living with his family in a small resort town in Norway, suddenly discovers that the water used for the healing baths which are the means of support for the town people are severely contaminated by the tanneries. Naturally, Stockmann is ready to announce this discovery publicly, warning both the vacationists and the locals about the threat that they are all exposed to. Surprisingly for him however,

the mayor of the city (which happens to be his own brother Peter), representatives of the local press and the majority of the townspeople hold to the opinion that discovery of the ecologic threat should be kept in secret, as it is the only way to keep on making money from the resort services. Gradually, the relationship of Stockmann and the community of the town turn into mutual antagonism: Stockmann eventually is vilified as an enemy of the people, he and his family members lose their jobs and become besieged in their house. Stockmann experiences a transformation of his whole personality as he gradually comes to understanding that not only the majority is not always right, but on the contrary, the majority is always wrong, ignorant and eventually undermining its own well-being.

The production of "An Enemy of the People" by Jonas Vaitkus in Lithuanian National Drama Theatre effectively exposes the clash of Stockmann and the "compact majority" through a particular theatrical device, namely the use of actors (or claqueurs), seated between the spectators and impersonating the Norwegian townspeople. That way the public forum of local citizens is reconstructed not only on stage but all over the theatrical space so that the audience itself becomes involved. This involvement, however, is also frustrating, as the actual interference of spectators into the fictional play is not supported and they are left to physical passivity and the bitter feeling of delusion of democracy and public participation.

The producers have also underlined other important issues raised in Ibsen's play, including moral corruption of the authorities, the mechanisms of populism and above all the failure of the mass media to support critical publicity and debate. Both Ibsen and Lithuanian producers point out how seemingly liberal press (both from the Right and the Left) eventually uphold the position that the media should follow the public opinion instead of opposing or shaping it. Ibsen depicts Stockmann trying to mobilize the critical and unbiased position of local journalists only to find out they are a bunch of conformists. In the stage production, the projected representations of authorities like the mayor Peter Stockmann on the big screens above the performance area point out

the mutual flirting between power and the media and the manipulative potential of the mass media.

The critical attitude of the National Theatre artists towards popular media in the Ibsen's production was brought out distinctly during the public discussion held in the National Theatre after one of the opening performances of "An Enemy of the People" and involved theatre artists, politicians and political activists. As the discussion turned towards the issues of the media, the director Jonas Vaitkus commented the situation of the press in Lithuania. According to him, "There is not even one free newspaper or any independent media that you could read without suspicion of being "bought". Take any article and you will get a feel there is something hidden between the lines."¹⁰ Such direct critique of the media was further supported by the director of the National Theatre Martynas Budraitis who related to the media in his official Director's Address in the website of the theatre. Budraitis declared his own vision of the national theatre relating it to the malfunctioning of the media as the public sphere and the responsibility of culture institutions in maintaining a critical and realistic discussion: "The mass media is profiteering from the extreme pressures, the TV is madly multiplying the production of the lowest kind erasing all memories of culture, the society is balancing on the brink between ultimate pessimism and ultimate optimism. What is the position of artists, culture people in all this, and what is the attitude and the responsibility of theatre? Between optimism and pessimism there is realism and reality [...] ways to embrace reality as it is. And this is the challenge for the artists and the theatre."¹¹

Subsequently, although the rhetoric used in the posters of the National Theatre and the marketing campaign of the production of "An Enemy of the People" could be comparable to "propaganda" or at least sleazy marketing, the production itself and the discussions it inspired had a very critical character.

STOCKMANN IN RIGA

Quite a similar discussion on the interconnectedness of theatre attempting to function as a public sphere and the popular media a little more than a

year later took place in Latvia. In the spring of 2013, the Latvian stage director Alvis Hermanis staged Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" in his New Riga Theatre engaging with the media on a much more decisive and conceptual ways. Hermanis and his theatre proclaimed that this will be the first political performance in the history of theatre of contemporary Latvia – not an innocent mockery of the politicians, but a truly provocative discussion. Theatre thus will attempt for the first time in recent decades to address actual political issues not on the symbolical level and not just through live communication to elite theatrical audience.

In fact, Ibsen's production by New Riga Theatre was just one part of a larger complex project which was launched almost at the same time as the opening night of the new performance. Apart from the performance, this artistic project also included the publication of what Hermanis called a "manifesto-interview" in one of the major periodicals of Latvia "Diena"¹². As the issues addressed in the interview were similar to those of the performance, Ibsen's production was used as an occasion to give a public account on Hermanis attitude towards recent political developments in the city of Riga just before municipality elections.

The manifesto-interview titled "We become dependent on lumpens" addressed a number of questions, such as subsidies for culture, recent language referendum in Latvia, ticket prices for public transport and even recent politics of Barrack Obama. However, the main focus of the whole project was critique aimed at populist politics of one of the major Latvian political powers – the Harmony centre (the alliance of left wing pro-Russian parties). In opposition to the majority supporting the Harmony centre Hermanis brings out a proposition to change the elective constitution of Latvia and to acknowledge the right to vote only for the individuals with higher education and only for those who pay taxes, leaving thus *lumpens*, the uneducated masses of mostly Russian population, outside the field of democracy.

The openly provocative appearance of the director of the performance with the particular political

agenda and the production of "An Enemy of the People" both relate to the problems and ambiguity of the aggregative model of democracy and point out that under the conditions of such democracy the decisions made by majority often counteract the interests of the same majority. The clever ones (the educated, the minority) in the meantime are forced to submit to the stupid (in the play Stockmann makes a comparison to well-bred and ill-bred dogs) and the whole society heads towards destruction and collapse. Relating the classical play by Ibsen to a very specific political situation in Latvia, Hermanis not only makes a link between fiction and social reality but extends the performance outside the theatrical space as he himself takes the role of Thomas Stockman settled in the public sphere of contemporary Latvia.

The baldly provocative project triggered a massive reaction from political scientists, bloggers, Twitter and Internet commentators, and the popular media of Latvia. Every response published or republished in the internet news portals such as *Delfi* immediately drew at least 400 to 500 comments. The discussions actually transgressed national media as many Russians reacted to what they perceived as overt Russophobia of Hermanis. Two months after the beginning of the whole campaign, however Hermanis decided to terminate the project after what he called a catastrophic failure of the political theatre in Latvia on the 11th of July.¹³

The reason for this "failure" seemed to be twofold. First, the reluctance of the political elites in Riga to acknowledge artists as equal participants of the political discussion or, to be more specific, as valid and legitimate players beyond the limits of aesthetic domain and evening entertainment. Similar to the case of Lithuanian National Drama Theatre when political leaders and commentators severely attacked artistic project that attempted to reach beyond the preconceived limits of traditional artistic culture, the move of Hermanis was also ignored as invalid. Second, the common reaction to the political campaign of local "Stockman" eventually took a violent turn in the form of anonymous threatening messages received by Hermanis.

DISTRIBUTED AESTHETICS: COMPLETING PUBLIC SPHERES

In order to define the true political meaning of the two examples of the Baltic theatre and to evaluate what theatre producers from Latvia and Lithuania were trying to achieve – and that is theatre working as a public sphere outside the live performance framework – we have to escape the restricting oppositions of theatre and media, aesthetic production and marketing, artistic creativity and communication. I propose that unless we reject the point of view picturing media network as something fundamentally alien to the true theatrical communication, we are not ready to open up for the new contemporary modes of theatrical public sphere or in fact the public sphere as such.

The backdrop of this approach is a general condition of modernity, namely the fact that mediated experiences are insistently penetrating our physical everyday existence. The process is described by Anthony Giddens as follows: “One thing we can say with some certainty is that in very few instances does the phenomenal world any longer correspond to the habitual settings through which an individual physically moves. Localities are thoroughly penetrated by distanced influences, whether this be regarded as a cause for concern or simply accepted as a routine part of social life. All individuals actively, although by no means always in a conscious way, selectively incorporate many elements of mediated experience into their day-to-day conduct.”¹⁴

In a more recent and specific account on social media, Therese F. Tierney claims there is a historical development of spatial publics and networked publics, that both started as independent progressions but got gradually related and now appear in complex assemblages.¹⁵ In a book “The Public Space of Social Media”, she proposes a framework of three publics: spatial public (urban spaces such as Zuccotti park but also artistic events, performances where people physically come together), media public (the media) and networked public (the Internet) only to eventually point out how in contemporary world these separate categories get increasingly interwoven, and entangled in the forms of interaction, allegiances

and assemblages that cut across a variety of institutions, spaces, forums and technologies. According to Tierney, in contemporary world “spatial publics and networked publics can no longer be understood as discrete operational spheres because the two are increasingly entangled. [...] networked publics and physical publics are not separate or competing spheres; they are completing spheres”¹⁶ where the physical events stimulate network events and the other way around, and when the human actions on the physical and mediated levels can co-produce each other as we have seen in for example Arab spring.

Certainly, public sphere is created in every performance, since in every performance people gather together in order to voluntarily involve into a definition and discussion of the problems that they find important. However, shouldn't we acknowledge that in the cases when theatre is making and attempting to be something other than just production and consumption of aesthetic objects, there is a certain value in the expansion of theatrical event outside the limits of its physical development on stage, of “here and now” of direct theatrical communication through press conferences, media outlets and digital networking as part of the same publicity? As the communication of theatre and society is inextricably integrated into a bigger public communication, theatre as a public sphere can function more effectively in deliberate and well calculated collaboration with the media rather than mutual ignorance.

For a more particular approach, I would like to refer to the term *distributed aesthetics*, that theatre researcher Christopher Balme uses in his new book “The Theatrical Public Sphere”, borrowing it from the publications of Geert Lovink (for example his book on blogging and critical Internet culture, 2008). In a nutshell, distributed aesthetics is a kind of aesthetics that includes the network (mostly the Internet networks) rather than leaving it outside the aesthetic experience, aesthetic production or aesthetic activity. According to Lovink, distributed aesthetics concerns experiences that are sensed, lived and produced in more than one place and time, dealing simultaneously with the dispersed

and the situated. Relating to performances such as “Please Love Austria” by Christoph Schlingensiefel, “Call Cuta” by Rimini Protocol and “The Artist is Present” by Marina Abramovich, Christopher Balme points out that in these examples the traditional “place of performance” is turned into a “hub around which a public sphere of interaction can emerge, but such a hub – conceived as a concrete place – is not essential for distributed theatrical aesthetics to function.”¹⁷

The discussions around the Lithuanian and Latvian productions of “An Enemy of the People” show that it is more adequate to interpret them as attempts to reach out for *distributed aesthetics* rather than hold on to the older binary opposition between the artistic event and its communication. Both productions (although on different scale) exemplify the case when the creative content and dramatic images are carried to the other side of the borders of live theatrical experience and start circulating through networked media or when performative event transgresses the physical forum of face-to-face interaction and extends the theatre beyond the institutional as well as physical framework.

Eventually, the theatrical productions of “An Enemy of the People” were turned into a spectacular media events that sent ripples through major newspapers, digital media networks, internet news portals as well as a number of news groups, social networks, chat rooms and personal blogs (way beyond the traditional limits of the community of theatre critics, bloggers and commentators).

The digital media and network communication, expanding the significance of the theatrical event, can always be depreciated by the suspicion that it is intended as marketing strategy. Theatre that uses these strategies does seem to move away from its “nature” – a live and interactive discussion. Compared to the live forum of theatre mass media may seem monologic. In the theatrical framework of live discussion, situated in a concrete physical space, the arguments are addressed to a particular individual who exists in the same physical and speech context. Naturally, theatrical communication can achieve such degree of accuracy and mutual understanding

which is unimaginable in mass media. Through mass media, however, local artistic practices can reach an indefinite number of recipients (which is in itself an attractive perspective for theatre which is trying to retain the political significance in the 21st century) and inspire further discussions in the places and communities that were usually ignored by traditional routes of theatre communication. The analysis of the examples of Baltic theatre showed how artistic institutions are trying to replace the older nostalgic and utopian ways (which can still be effective for local small public spheres) and find courage and ambition to face the radical transformation of social relations.¹⁸ Namely the transformation, according to Luke Goode, characterised by “social interconnections (both between individuals and institutions and between citizens themselves) which are increasingly underscored by *absence* rather than presence” where we are affected by consequences of actions whose authors are physically (and often cognitively) absent.¹⁹

Relating to the proposition by Luke Goode to stop tragic complaints about the lost “reality” in the world of digital and electronic media, it is possible to take another point of view towards theatre interacting with the media and network, “one that acknowledges the inescapability of mediation but refuses to allow one form of mediation to have the last word.”²⁰

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND ONE MORE EXAMPLE

The examples of Lithuanian and Latvian Ibsen make us aware that distributed aesthetics only works as far as the artistic production itself is willing to accept the instability and certain amount of danger brought about by distribution and distributed media. Distributed aesthetics is not only about art’s intervention into popular media sphere, it is also about allowing the media and social networks to intervene (to transform and to enhance) the artistic communication as both libidinal economy of symbolic content and closed circuit of production and consumption. In this sense, the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre production eventually still remained locked within the traditional distinctions,

as the moment the audience crossed the entrance to theatre building, any network that mattered before was left outside and was displaced by autonomous theatrical live communication. Moreover, this communication was positioned as a true alternative public space. However, at the same moment when the theatre “shut the door closed”, its relation to the networks of public life outside the walls of theatrical institution became merely symbolical.

The project by Alvis Hermanis went a step further. His theatre production could only function as a segment (an important segment by all means) of the media and network project that started with the manifesto-interview. The fact that the project failed, however, manifested the presence of deep contraposition between the live elite theatrical communication and unpredictable mass communication of the media. The brutal reality of the media eventually appeared inconsistent with the safer theatrical public sphere.

A few years earlier, in 2010, the project by Estonian theatre NO99 titled “Unified Estonia” was launched and eventually turned into a major political and media event – a critical campaign against the use of political technologies and populist strategies intersecting contemporary democracies in the Baltic States. The campaign started with the press conference where the theatre company announced about the establishment of a new political movement headed by theatre directors Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper. During the 44 days between the initial press conference and the final convention of the new “party” in Tallinn, the fictitious political movement gradually developed a firm recognition among the electorate (a year before parliamentary elections in Estonia) and turned into a media sensation. The “mega performance” of NO99 had media coverage on a daily basis and the traditional physical locale of theatrical communication eventually was utterly dispersed into hundreds of mediated events, reproduced, broadcasted, networked and shared. Even the final convention performed in front of 7 000 spectators was also aired live on the Internet. In fact, according to Luule Epner, “this 44-day project both began and ended in mass media.”²¹ In the project of NO99, in other words, the networked

communication and distribution did not revolve around some original live theatrical event any more. This absence of theatrical event was a symbolical reference to the absence of “political event”, i.e. a proper initial political project based on rational discussion and genuine concern for social problems.

Similar to the subsequent productions of Latvians and Lithuanians, it is most revealing to interpret “Unified Estonia” as a reaction towards the gradual rise of expenditures on political advertising and public relations in Estonia (seen as a reversed reflection of the correspondent decrease in public discussions and the functioning of the public sphere) and the ambiguous role of mass media as both public forum and sensationalist entertainment. A massive political advertising, viral videos (“voting schools”), active participation in pre-elective TV and radio broadcasts, interviews in the press and all kind of provocations (carefully pre-calculated in collaboration with the media experts such as Daniel Vaarik) were mimicking similar populist technologies used by other political parties in earlier elections.

By submitting to the rules of the media, the movement of “Unified Estonia” went further than similar Latvian and Lithuanian projects as its “overidentification” with the media – an extreme and exaggerated adoption of their rules – had no supposed alternative (in the form of live theatrical performance). Politically this meant there were no safe and transparent enclaves of “qualitative democracy” (at least there were no such things any more). We have to learn to think and act within the media as it is. Aesthetically it meant something similar – the possibility and the need for theatre to shift, intervene, move beyond live experiences, be in more than one place and time in the age when public and democracy does the same.

When theatre is completing the media in the general public sphere and the media outlets are used to complete and to expand what the performance initiated or started, theatre is also important as a way to find out what character this completion has or may have. In other words, theatre is a good opportunity to research on the minor scale of the dynamic tension (including completion,

competition, collaboration, mimicry, opposition, etc.) between the physical event and media coverage, physical space and stream of comments, close communities in physical space (theatre audience) and general networked publics, presence and technological representations, embodied and discursive politics, structural media and human action as well as transitions from digital to non-digital political participations and back.

Notes

¹ ČERNIAUSKAS, Šarūnas. Politikus su kvailiais sutapatinti teatro reklama papiktino M. Adomėną. [interaktyvus]. www.delfi.lt. Prieiga per internetą: <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/politikus-su-kvailiais-sutapatinti-teatro-reklama-papiktino-madomena.d?id=51038317> [žiūrėta 2011 10 24]. Žiūrovai įvertino teatro provokaciją. *Verslo žinios*. Prieiga per internetą: <http://laikrastis.vz.lt/index.php?act=mprasa&sub=article&id=41065> [žiūrėta 2011 10 28].

² CRAIG, Calhoun. Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere. In: *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Editor C. Calhoun, The MIT Press, 1993, p. 1–25.

³ For a comprehensive analysis of “seriocomic” television programs and their significance for contemporary public sphere in Lithuania see: KAVALIAUSKAITĖ, Jūratė. Seriocomic Television: The Public Sphere à la “Colbert Report”. In: *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook 2006*. Vilnius: Institute of International Relations and Political Science, 2006, p. 54–86.

⁴ LNDT vadovas Martynas Budraitis: nesutinku, kad teatro reklama yra antivalstybinė. [interaktyvus]. www.teatras.lt. Prieiga per internetą: http://www.teatras.lt/lt/naujienos/naujienos/lndt_vadovas_martynas_budraitis_nesutinku_kad_teatro_reklama_yra_antivalstybine/.

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SĄVEIKAUJANČIOS (VIEŠOSIOS) SFEROS: TEATRAS IR MEDIJOS BALTIJOS ŠALYSE

Santrauka

Straipsnyje paliečiamos dvi tarpusavyje susijusios temos: teatro, žiniasklaidos ir skaitmeninių tinklų sąveika bei teatras, veikiantis kaip viešoji sfera. Abu klausimai pateikiami per trijų Baltijos šalių šiuolaikinio teatro atvejų analizę: analizuojami du Henriko Ibseno *Visuomenės prieš* pastatymai (Jono Vaitkaus spektaklis, 2011, ir latvių režisieriaus Alvio Hermanio interpretacija, 2013) ir estų teatro NO99 politinis projektas *Vieningoji Estija* (2010). Analizė skirta ne tiek šių kūrinių draminiams ar estetiniams struktūroms, bet jų komunikacijai, nes žiniasklaidos ir interneto tinklo panaudojimas buvo svarbi visų trijų teatrinių įvykių dalis. Koks šiandien yra teatro kūrėjų Baltijos šalyse santykis su žiniasklaida ir skaitmeniniu tinklu? Kokiomis sąvokomis šiandien galima aprašyti santykį tarp gyvo, fizinio, įvietinto dialogo ir medijų sferos? Koks galėtų būti teatro komunikacinių praktikų indėlis į demokratijos ir viešosios sferos raidą? Ar teatras gali radikaliai ir kritiškai paveikti demokratiją, kurioje dominuoja elektroninės, skaitmeninės ir socialinės medijos?

Teorinį tyrimo pagrindą sudaro Jürgeno Habermaso viešosios sferos samprata, tačiau atsižvelgta ir į šiai teorijai būdingus prieštaravimus bei jos tolesnę raidą Thérèse F. Tierney, Geerto Lovinko, Christopherio Balme's ir Luke'o Goode'o šiuolaikinės teorinės žiniasklaidos, socialinių medijų ir tinklų refleksijose. Sąvoka „skleisties estetika“ (angl. *distributed aesthetics*) yra siūloma kaip tinkamas analitinis įrankis politinių projektų šiuolaikiniame Baltijos šalių teatre tyrimui.

Trijų teatro spektaklių iš Estijos, Latvijos ir Lietuvos analizė atskleidžia, kad masinėmis medijomis *įvietintos* meninės praktikos įgyja galimybę pasiekti neribotą suvokėjų skaičių ir paskatinti tolesnes diskusijas tokiose vietose ir bendruomenėse, kurias tradicinė teatro komunikacija paprastai aplenkėdavo. Straipsnyje akcentuojamas šiuolaikinio teatro poreikis keistis ir peržengti gyvosios patirties ribas, išsiveržti iš vieno laiko ir vienos erdvės, nes tokia sklaida atitinka šiuolaikinės demokratijos formas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: viešoji sfera, Baltijos šalių teatras, teatro komunikacija, žiniasklaida, socialiniai tinklai, *skleisties* estetika, Henrikas Ibsenas

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