

# Theatre Pedagogy in a Changing World

e-Textbook for higher drama education

Drama School at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre  
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Maret Mursa Tormis



# Foreword

**Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT) organised an international conference „Theatre Pedagogy in a Changing World” which was held on 10–12 June 2016 in Theatre NO99.**

The event was exceptional in many ways. It was the first conference in the history of the Drama School of EAMT<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, it was the first conference in the history of Estonian theatre research that launched theoretical presentations and practical workshops on equal scale. The present collection is the first post-conference collection and also the first e-textbook published by the Drama School, thus being an important step in the development of the Drama School as the center of practice-based theatre research in Estonia.

The conference was focused on the history and on the future perspectives of theatre pedagogy. In doing so, it was dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> jubilee of professor emeritus Ingo Normet, and underlined the need for constant development in higher theatre education.

During the three conference days, 18 speakers held their presentations out of whom five were guests from abroad. About two hundred people took part in the conference as listeners and/or participants in workshops. Now the conference organisers wish to reach even a wider auditorium through these study materials.

The conference had a broader meaning as well. As lectures and seminars are held at the Drama School on Toompea hill in Tallinn, we must continuously and publicly respond to the questions: which subjects and how are we teaching in a changing world? As a state-financed drama school we are responsible for higher theatre education in Estonia.

Therein I do not mean only the symbolic capital and responsibility of the Drama School as the longest-working higher theatre school in Estonia. Drama School is responsible for the „continuity, quality and development of theatre education on a high level and for corresponding to the requirements of society”, according to the contract signed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

However, during the last decades the whole theatre system has drastically changed. Instead of state theatres, private theatres and special projects are gathering more and more momentum. There are about two hundred freelance actors whose everyday choices demand a platform for their personal artistic credos.

Ingo Normet, the previous Head of Drama School, is a good example of a headmaster reacting actively to the developments in the changing times. He had the skill to renew study programmes and to initiate various changes during his 15 years at Drama School.

Ingo Normet started working at Drama School at revolutionary times: he served as an Associate Professor since 1990, as Professor since 1996, and as the Head of School since 1995. He organised the admission of the first students majoring in directing (1996) and in dramaturgy (2004). Those students are now outstanding names on the current theatre scene: Tiit Ojasoo, Vahur Keller, Tõnu Lensment, Urmas Lennuk, Marion Jõepera, Maria Lee Liivak, et al.

In 1997, the first MA degree was defended in Drama School by Katri Aaslav-Tepandi, and in 2011, the first PhD degree by Anne Tõrnpu. Since then, the MA and PhD studies have been on constant rise.

Since 1999, Drama School has been running student exchange programmes with Rose Bruford College in London and has episodically cooperated with other European higher theatre schools. Therefore, a whole generation – about two hundred Estonian theatre practitioners – have started their professional career with the experience of studying in London.

The story of Normet coming to Drama School has become almost a legend. In the beginning, there were 9 books in the library, now there are 9000. In addition, students are now enjoying our video library and the popular collection of manuscripts. The same applies to all fields of management.

Ingo Normet is known as a teacher who encourages his students in most different directions and supports their explorations. The contemporary Estonian theatre scene is largely designed by his students as actors, stage directors, pedagogues and theatre directors, from actors Mait Malmsten, Katariina Unt, Indrek Sammul to stage directors Tiit Ojasoo, Mart Koldits and Uku Uusberg.

Normet invited cardinally different theatre practitioners to work as the heads of classes: Nüganen, Toompere, Pedajas, Ojasoo, et al. The overarching themes for MA courses were similarly varied: puppet theatre, voice, psychological theatre, physical theatre, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Drama School for short.

Drama School has always followed its principle: there is virtue in versatility. A theatre school should unite old and young, conservative and avant-garde pedagogues, psychological and postdramatic theatre. It is our strength.

The aim of the present collection is to store the changes of the last decades, to offer comparisons with directions of drama education abroad, and to continue the discussion on the future of higher theatre education.

There are five speeches with theoretical and six speeches with practical focus selected for the e-textbook. They are accompanied by links to the video recordings of the conference presentations. Theoretical overviews were delivered: 1) on theatre education through the prism of philosophy by prof **Airi Liimets** from Tallinn University, 2) on postdramatic theatre by prof **Luule Epner** from Tallinn University and University of Tartu, 3) on postdramatic dramaturgy by dramaturg **Marion Jõepera** from Estonia/UK, 4) on new approaches to theatre education in the Latvian Culture Academy by prof **Mara Kimele** and associate professor **Elmars Senkovs** from Latvia, and 5) on directing abroad by stage director of Theatre NO99, **Tiit Ojasoo** from Estonia.

Workshops were organised: 1) on the method of Lee Strasberg by actress **Mihaela M. Mihut** from USA, 2) on his theatrical credo by actor and stage director **Benny Claessens** from Belgium, 3) on the technique of Rudolf Laban and Yat Malmgren by associate professor **Per Nordin** from Sweden, 4) on physical theatre by prof **Jüri Nael** from Estonia/UK, 5) on improvoicing by prof **Anne-Liis Poll** from Estonia and 6) on the Alexander Technique by associate professor **Maret Mursa Tormis** from Estonia.

In addition, there are two articles included by researchers of Drama School. Researcher **Madli Pesti** offers an overview of the methods of creation of political theatre. Stage director and associate professor **Anne Törnpu** summarises her longtime experience in designing spatial perception for the audience.

The present electronic study material is meant to serve as a collection of keywords and summaries essential for contemporary drama education. It is available in Estonian and English to provide learning material for students on theatre fields and for everyone interested in theatre.

The conference of Drama School and the present e-textbook are completed thanks to the support of Estonian Cultural Endowment and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Eva-Liisa Linder  
Researcher Drama School  
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre







# Postdramatic Theatre

Luule Epner

*By now it has definitely taken place [...]: the term that was supposed to become the reasonable alternative to postmodernism which has been worn out of meaning, has become almost as difficult to use as the one it got exchanged for.*

Ott Karulin, *Sirp* 18.03.2016



The critic finds the „postdramatic“ having turned into a swear word for many, just like it happened to „postmodern“. Why are we still on the topic? Firstly, because I am not certain whether the term „**postdramatic theatre**“ has actually been sucked empty of meaning and has exhausted itself (at least in Estonian theatre criticism). Secondly, because the author of the term, a German theatre researcher **Hans-Thies Lehmann** explained in 2014 that his goal was to describe those things that took place in the Western theatre at the end of the 20th century, and to translate them into terms. I believe that „postdramatic theatre“ also helps to explain the processes which have ran their course through Estonian theatre. He says: „I see theory as something that comes after the practice and helps to lay terms around that essence which has been creatively brought to life by artists.“ (Lehmann 2014) I utterly agree with this statement.

A family of *post*-terms has been taken into use by now; apart from the **postdramatic theatre** and **postmodernism**, we also have the **postindustrial** (society), the **postcolonial** (society), the **poststructural** (theory), etc. The common prefix shows them to attain their meaning from a root term which they succeed from („post“ something). An independent title would definitely be more interesting – something that would not hold such an addictive link between the phenomenon in question and something else – but those have been few in the making, and the *post*- and now already the *post-post*-terms, like **postpostmodernism**, are the ones to procreate. It is important to remember that „post“ as a prefix does not automatically mean that the preceding phenomenon has come to an end. Dramatic theatre is definitely not dead but rather effervescent.

So when did the postdramatic appear next to the dramatic theatre? In his widely translated monograph „Postdramatisches Theater“ (1999), Hans-Thies Lehmann suggests that in the Western theatres it mainly started to happen from the 1970s onwards. He claims with certainty that Brecht’s epic theatre does not fall under this category, as does not the theatre of the absurd which came to life in the 1950s (Ionesco, Beckett<sup>1</sup> and others). In Estonia, the biggest shifts started to happen at the end of the 1980s, gathering more momentum in the 1990s and during the current century. Why did the new forms of theatre appear? There are at least two reasons.

The first driver was the so-called second wave of emancipation that took place in the theatre of the 1960s. The art of the 1960s talks about the new, the neoavangard. In theatre, this is once again a call to action for getting rid of the dependence on literature, to take a turn to theatre’s own special ways of expression. These principles are also behind the Estonian theatre renewal at the end of the 1960s (the productions of Hermaküla and Tooming in Theatre

<sup>1</sup> However, Beckett’s subsequent minimalist plays („Breath“, „Not I“ and others) are definitely postdramatic.

Vanemuine). Let it be noted that at the end of the 20th century, literature's position also weakens in culture, and people start talking about the end of the Gutenberg Galaxy.<sup>2</sup>

The second and even more important reason was the western countries reaching the Media Age, and theatre having to start competing with new electronic media. Cinema already existed, the 1950s saw television going to the masses, and with time, video and computer got added. These media mostly took over the tasks of visually depicting reality and telling/performing stories, including the functions that had been carried out by theatre so far. Indeed, a person gets most of their stories they come to contact with from movies, TV series, video games and other places. Theatre tends not to be a mass medium. In a situation like that, one part of theatre went deep into inspecting its own aesthetic bases, while the other started integrating new media – but both of the ways took theatre further away from its traditional union with literature. In this new situation, theatre had once again to rethink its tasks and resources.

How is **postdramatic theatre** defined? Lehmann is not a typical German – he lacks a meticulous system; his monograph is more like a catalogue of new theatrical forms and possibilities (he does distinguish them in theory) where „postdramatic theatre” acts as an umbrella term with two main characteristics. With both characteristics, one first has to ask what is dramatic theatre?

Let's start with dramatic theatre – what is it? First of all, dramatic theatre is drama-based in the sense of how it is made: a production is based on a literary text (may it be a play, an adaption or something similar) which gets interpreted by the director and the actors. The literary text is the beginning and the base of a production.

In postdramatic theatre, the attitude towards (literary) text changes. Postdramatic theatre is self-confident, seeing itself as an art form in its own right that can spring from a literary text but does not need to. A text is basically one of the many tools of theatre, one element of a production, known to be not the most important one already from the beginning. This kind of attitude opens up a wide spectrum of possibilities. Lehmann has also stressed that literature, text and words do not disappear in postdramatic theatre. A postdramatic production can easily be very much based in word or text, maybe nothing more even happens than the performing of the texts (for example, the documentary collage „Screams of Fatherland” [„Kodumaa karjed”] performed by Jaak Prints in Theatre NO99, 2016), or language can be the „protagonist” and the main topic of the production (for example, Anu Lamp's „The Endless Curve of Neologising” [„Keeleuenduse lõpmattu kurv”] about Johannes Aavik's neologising, performed by the students of the Drama School of Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT), 2006). But this is just one of the many possibilities and not the norm. A postdramatic production can just as well be performed without words.

Secondly (and maybe even more importantly), dramatic theatre is drama-based also in that sense that it follows the form, the structure and also certain genre models such as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, etc., of the classical drama. But what is classical drama? Lehmann answers in the following way: „[...] plot, character (or at least *dramatis personae*) and a moving story predominantly told in dialogue” (Lehmann 2006: 31). This connects nicely to Jean Alter's common sense theatre definition: theatre is „[...] public performances which are based on fixed verbal texts mostly comprised of dialogues, and during which actors perform the activities of characters drawn into the fictional story” (Alter 1990: 12). Historically, we are dealing with a strong and a rather long theatre tradition which's beginning has not been placed into Antiquity by the German theatre researchers, that is, into the source of dramatic art (because during that time texts were inseparably integrated into theatre practice) but into the 17–19th century<sup>3</sup>; they speak of a dramatic-literary theatre which evolved during that time. Postdramatic theatre does not follow the structure or the specific genre models of the classic drama, and this also applies to the many so-called postdramatic plays which are currently written and used by theatres (such as Elfriede Jelinek, Heiner Müller, Sarah Kane, and many others). At the same time, any text, including the classical plays, can be directed in a postdramatic manner if one demolishes their structure and puts it together in another way. Lehmann says: “[...] postdramatic theatre can also be done with dramatic texts, both old and new. For theatre, everything comes down to the text's type of theatricality. Nothing or mostly very little depends on the structure of the text used. Euripides and Shakespeare can be directed postdramatically, Heiner Müller and Sarah Kane dramatically.” (Lehmann 2014)

But isn't „postdramatic” just another name for „postmodern”? Why should another *post*-term be needed? One can explain it by saying that the „postdramatic” describes the new phenomena specifically in terms of **theatre** (in

<sup>2</sup> A cultural situation that began with the invention of printing.

<sup>3</sup> Before that, the so-called predramatic theatre were dominating. For example, Italian masked comedy *commedia dell'arte* is not part of the dramatic theatre, but it would be strange to call it postdramatic – it is a pre-dramatic form.

so far as „drama“ belongs to the dramatic art). We speak of postmodern architecture and novels, etc., but not of postdramatic architecture – this term is confined to theatre only. Postdramatic theatre should also not carry the seal of a certain worldview or ideology (although it is done in the postmodern era) but is meant to describe the theatre **aesthetic**, new forms and tools. Of course, the form cannot be separated from the content, and naturally, a postdramatic production also expresses a certain view of the world – in so far as its aesthetic is inseparable from that worldview, value system, etc. This worldview can be postmodern but it does not have to be. If postmodernism is mainly characterised by the irony or scepticism towards the so-called grand narratives which want to explain the world in a comprehensive manner (e.g. the idea of progress), then postdramatic theatre lacks that sort of description. With this in mind, one can definitely not count Lembit Peterson or Merle Karusoo for postmodernists. However, Karusoo’s biographical theatre where actors are performing documentary personal stories is clearly „non-dramatic“, that is, does not follow the classic structure of drama. If we look at two of Peterson’s productions from 2015, then „Tartuffe“ counts as a dramatic theatre production but the structure of „Delhi Dance“ (based on the play by Ivan Vyrpaev) is more postdramatic (variations on a theme through seven plays where the relationships and locations of the characters are constantly changing without forming a linear story), and the same can be said about Peterson’s production that keeps true to the author. A production carrying postpostmodernist attitudes (for example, a production that juxtaposes new sincerity against irony) can be postdramatic.

However, Lehmann’s reasoning from 2007 might be of interest: supposedly, the world itself has also changed, life’s drama-like characteristics have receded, and we are more likely to experience life in a more episodic than a dramatic form that is centered around conflict (Lehmann 2007: 47). This makes postdramatic theatre into a better mirror for the present world. Of course, we are talking about the Western world and about the time that is a decade old, so we can ask whether perceiving reality in the current intense situations has turned it into more „dramatic“ again (or at least the dramas get created by the mass media), so that life gets redefined as a sharp conflict of individuals or groups which has its beginning, a middle and hopefully, also an ending.

One can withdraw and differ from dramatic-literary theatre in many ways. The landscape of postdramatic theatre is already diverse and rich in species. There is no one and only aesthetic for postdramatic theatre, but aesthetics – in plural. This term resembles an umbrella which collects many manifestations under it, such as physical theatre, visual theatre, multimedia theatre, *performance* theatre, etc. One of the most important changes amongst the more general ones is the redefining of the role and the position of the audience. In dramatic theatre, the task of the audience is to observe a fictional story, to engage with it, to get absorbed into the world created by the production, and to interpret the material on the level of their absorption<sup>4</sup>. Postdramatic theatre, however, mostly offers activities, symbols (including abstract symbols that lack a clearly legible meaning) to the audience, and the audience has to perceive them and arrange them into a wholesome piece on their own, should they wish to do so. This theatre often prefers to keep some ends loose, to avoid judgement, to offer controversies (Epner, E. 2016). The audience is expected to have a more active attitude towards performance, especially when it comes to using their imagination and understanding. Quite often, the audience has to put together a comprehensible piece out of the separate scenes, since the production does not tell a linear story. „Stories are not told on stage but themes are addressed.“ (Epner, E. 2016). For example, in „gender: F“ [„sugu: N“] (2015, Open Space), scenes are united through a theme but they lack a story. (Of course, a postdramatic production can also tell a story, but it tells it differently from a classic drama.) The effect on the audience can also come from a shift in perception and from the stimulation of the senses, or from offering unusual experiences that cannot be obtained in one’s daily life. Often, that classical relationship gets changed where the actors perform on stage and the audience observes them (whereas it is not important whether the „fourth wall“ gets created or not, there is still an invisible border between them). The audience can be made into a participant of the performance through temporarily swapping their role with the performers or balancing them. A couple of examples. Mart Kangro’s „a step closer“ [„samm lähemale“] with the students of the Drama School of EAMT in Theatre NO99 (2013): the actors’ task was to ask the audience for a dance, i.e. having the audience itself turn into the performers watched by the other members of the audience. Or „FANTASTIKA“ (2015), also directed by Kangro, where the actors answer questions from the audience during the first half. The performances I visited had audience members taking liberties to ask questions when also sitting on their seats. The audience does not only have to be a co-performer, they can also become a co-author who influences the course of the performance – in those cases we are dealing with immersive theatre (for example, Cabaret Rhizome’s interactive „Anatomy of the

<sup>4</sup> It was already Brecht who started addressing the role of a different, more active audience.

Decision" [„Otsuse anatoomia"], 2015). Still, it seems that the relationship and interactions with the audience is the field where Estonian theatre does not undertake its boldest experiments.

But what is happening on the stage? Today's theatre researchers and critics look at theatre with a wider glance, keeping an eye on the entire field of performing arts.<sup>5</sup> Both Lehmann in his book „Postdramatic Theatre” and Erika Fischer-Lichte in her publication „Ästhetik des Performativen” („The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics”) keep constantly bringing examples from both theatre (for example, Frank Castorf's performances in Volksbühne theatre) and from performance arts (for example, Marina Abramović's *performances*), from dance theatre, and many others. In the modern postdramatic theatre, the expressive tools and aesthetic principles of drama, modern dance and performative arts are often crossing, intermingling or fusing in a way that the outcome is a mixed breed art form. The movement exceeds both inner and outer borders of traditional theatre. By inner borders I mean the borders between different types of theatre, such as drama, dance and music theatre. The outer borders run between theatre and other types of art such as visual arts, music, literature.

The following short and non-comprehensive overview is based on the article „Compiling the Picture: Two Decades of Estonian Modern Theatre” covering modern Estonian theatre in the article collection „Views of Modern Estonian Theatre” [„Vaateid eesti nüüdisteatrile”] (2016). At the end of the 1990s, our drama theatre starts getting influenced by modern dance which gets combined with drama theatre tools by Sasha Pepelyayev, a guest director from Moscow. The waymark is „Citizens!” [„Kodanikud!”] (1998) created with the new regular troupe of Von Krahle theatre that falls into the „conceptual physical education” genre where actors are performing a variety of movements and activities, accompanying them with utterly unrelated slogans. In the **noughties**, Pepelyayev is already regularly collaborating with both Von Krahle theatre and the Drama School of EAMT, and is also directing in other theatres: „Swan Lake” (collaboration with Peeter Jalakas, 2003), „The Cherry Orchard” (2005, with the students of the Drama School of EAMT's XX year), „tsuaf” (2007, based on „Faust”, with the students of the Drama School of EAMT's XXIII year), etc. Pepelyayev plays around with cultural tropes and clichés so that the classical pieces start telling completely new stories from the original ones. During last seasons, a wave of modern dance has even hit Estonian theatres: „Desire for Frolics” [„Melujanu”] in Tallinn City Theatre, „Adam and Eve” in VAT Theatre, choreographer Renate Keerd's production „KOON” in Tartu New Theatre – all these productions have drama actors dancing. The importance of choreography and dance has risen in this century both in Estonia and in the Western theatre. There is no point in drawing a rigid border between dancers and (drama) actors. A good example of this is a professionally trained choreographer Mart Kangro who does not only work in the field of modern dance but also in the field of drama (productions in NO99, taking part of Von Krahle's theatre production „Paradise”). As a dancer, he strongly focuses on the word, but he also brings a versatile array of movement patterns into his drama productions that are not just decorative elements.

Many trends in modern theatre have gotten their initial boost from the **visual arts**. Putting it roughly, one could even say that one part of theatre (the postdramatic part) is shifting away from literature and is shifting towards the visual arts instead. It is technological theatre (for example, Hendrik Kaljujärv's „Self-Organising System” [„Iseorganiseeruv süsteem”), 2011) that has moved closest to the visual arts, with its machines making not only drama but also the actors redundant. The instigator of technological theatre, Andrus Laansalu, has described it as „modern art that uses theatre's methods to come forth”. But the main magnet for the visual arts are the performance arts such as *performances*, happenings. When the performative impulse is strong, such theatre forms can be seen as **performance theatre**.

As a side-remark: when it comes to terms, may it be noted that we sometimes speak of performance art as of separate type of art. The performance artists put on their performances outside of the theatre system (for example, in St Canute's Guild Hall and at other places), and often oppose themselves and their creation to theatre which they, in those cases, understand in very narrow terms – mainly as the dramatic or the psychological theatre. On the other hand, „performance art” also gets used as a term that also covers theatre. I hereby rely on Erkki Luuk's definition: performance art is a „type of art that only needs for the performance to take place, leaving totally open its genre-based inclusion and the tools used for its creation. In other words, performance art is the widest and the most entailing term for describing everything that gets done in the frame of theatre, dance, declamation, agitprop, opera, operetta, musical, happening, *performance*, multimedia performance, show, etc.” (Luuk 2005: 55).

<sup>5</sup> A proof of this is also the new annual award given out by the Estonian Theatre Union – a common award for performance arts that recognises those experimental productions that are entwined with performance arts.



In Western theatre, Robert Wilson stands as the representative example of performance theatre (although not all productions can be listed under this category); in Estonian theatre, the topic has been reported and written about by the art critic Anders Härm (see Härm 2013) who counts „Pirates” (2001), a collaboration between Von Krahl theatre and the German group Showcase Beat Le Mot, as the starting point. Finnish performance artist Teemu Mäki’s „Harmony” (2008) and the film director Marko Raat’s production „Only the Fake Survive” [„Ainult võltsid jäävad ellu”] (2004) where the American cult artist Paul McCarthy’s video *performances* from 1960–1970 and other things were quoted, have both been performed in Von Krahl. Theatre NO99 also combines the tools of drama and visual arts (mostly performance art), with the influence of Ene-Liis Semper strongly present. As a novelty, NO99 started putting on one-off action theatre performances, many of them based on the principles of performance art. The first of those pieces was the artist Marco Laimre’s *performance* „Rotten Harry” [„Mädand Harry”] (2005) with the actors of NO99. Quite a number of action theatre pieces have dealt with the phenomenon of acting, for example Kristjan Sarv’s „99x” (2007) where one monologue got performed 99 times; „Peking Opera” (2009), involving theatre games and Mirtel Pohla’s simultaneous role game; Rasmus Kaljujärv’s action theatre performance in Straw Theatre (2011) and many others. A separate mention has to be made of „How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” (2007), a production with a title borrowed from Joseph Beuys that was mostly based on quotes and ideas of the classics of the avant-garde visual art. When it comes to their latest productions („FANTASTIKA”, „El Dorado: The Clowns’ Raid of Destruction”), NO99 has also described them as interlacing installation art<sup>6</sup> with theatre’s tools. In *performance* theatre, the focus is moving from dialogue to physical activities. NO99 is working with the so-called abstract symbols where the physical activities do not express (legible) psychological meanings or tell a story. One way for creating these symbols is through the unusual, strange behaviour of the actors which gains its symbolic meaning from the lack of a story that would explain them and bestow them with meaning. In other cases, the most commonplace activities are shown in close-up, so that the beauty of the performative activity, the rhythmic patterns and other similar elements delete the context of the fictional. For example, in Lauri Lagle’s „Wednesday” [„Kolmapäev”] (Theatre NO99, 2013), the audience can be captivated by Kaie Mikhelson washing and wringing a large white sheet (a commonplace activity), or surprised by the way how Inga Salurand ends up throwing both the plastic bag and the towel into the big pot of boiling apples (a strange activity). Mart Koldits, Lauri Lagle, Andres Noormets („Vaterland”, 2008; „köök/keittiö”, 2013) and others have also worked within the aesthetic framework of *performance* theatre.

Attention should also be brought to the fusions of drama and **music** that cannot be categorised as musical theatre nor as a traditional genre, such as *singspiel*: Uku Uusberg’s productions that grow out of music („Head Exchange” [„Pea vahetus”], 2009; „Force” [„Jõud”], 2010, defined as musical mystery) or Riina Maidre’s and Maike Lond’s concert performance „Post-Uganda” (Von Krahl theatre, 2009); also Ingomar Vihmar’s productions where he influences the performance by choosing his music live on stage (for example, Martin Algu’s „Bloom” [„Õitseng”) and „Zebra”, 2014), so that the musical patterns that change from performance to performance convert the rhythms, atmospheres and the play of actors.

Picture-based or **visual theatre** is also spreading, performing strange, mesmerising and other similar visual designs and conditions without tying them together into a coherent story. For example, Gabriela Liivamägi’s „Tiedtogetherbyspine” [„Selgroodupidikoos”) (Tartu New Theatre, 2014) depicted the dream world of a little girl; there was no word-based dialogue, although song was included. Visual theatre is also being practised by the grouping Frank (for example, „Bistro Beyond”, 2013). It has been thought that many new theatre forms fit more easily with the audience who feel at home in the visual arts or music. Indeed, some performances can to a large extent be received purely aesthetically, as an art show or as a concert: through observing visual harmonies and dissonances, through listening to the harmonies and dissonances in sounds, etc.

Visual arts are adjoined-intertwined also with **intermedial theatre**<sup>7</sup> which uses various technological media such as film, video, television image, computer graphics, and similar others. To this gets added the modern sound and lighting equipment which enables to process the actor’s voice and to create intricate sound effects. All that together creates a completely different perception environment than in classical theatre. One can generally also talk about implementing the so-called new media in theatre. The main principle for the new media is numerical

<sup>6</sup> An installation is a spatial composition that can also use sounds (sound installation) and video clips (video installations) as its material.

<sup>7</sup> The other widely used term is multimedia theatre. When „multi-” stresses the incorporation of many different media (channels for intermediating artistic info), then the prefix „inter-” places the stress on their mutual influences, on the collaboration of different media.

representation, its objects are comprised of digital code (see Manovich 2012: 68). When in the beginning of this century, the video screen on stage was still a separate event, then currently the video has become a normal part of the theatre language, with computer technology also becoming more widely used. However, technological solutions reached Estonian theatre a lot slower than they reached visual arts where video art and installations started quickly developing already in the beginning of the 1990s. In the field of theatre, Von Krahle theatre was the groundbreaker with Peeter Jalakas considered the first multimedia director in Estonian theatre after „Multiplied Human” [„Multiplitseerit inimene”] launched by Leonhard Lapin in 1980. Media structuralises a performance differently than traditional theatre. This applies to both the stage space and the experience of the audience. In inter- and multimedia theatre, the on-stage environment is spatially fragmented, divided by the screens, although the action takes place at the same time. A performance hence takes place directly here and now, and also on the screens. The actor is present in the performance space but also as an image on the screen, etc. A screen can be a succession to the performance space, bringing those areas into view for the audience that do not fit on the stage, like in Peeter Jalakas’s production „Gilgamesh or the Button of Eternity” [„Gilgameš ehk Igaviku nupp”] (Von Krahle theatre, 2011) where the hero’s journey with the corpse was shown on the video screen. A screen can make space for comments that are not directly linked to the actions on stage, like in the production of „How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” where the audience was shown the art historian Eha Komissarov’s video lecture on avangard art. The relationship between the imagine and the (living) body gets intensified by the technique where actors are „stepping” from screen to stage and back to screen or where objects are handed from screen to stage, etc. – the real performance space and the virtual space are in a successive relationship and interact with one another. *Live*-cameras also get used quite often, imposing new conditions for acting itself: the actor has to play for the camera and through the camera for the audience, and often relate to or engage with a digital image of themselves on the screen. Using new media creates different levels of reality (including virtual reality) into the performance space, and one can play with those relationships and transitions from one level to another, etc. With *live*-cameras, the operator (often one of the actors) becomes an active participant of the production. The audience can simultaneously observe the immediate actions performed in the performance space and its (selective) coverage on the screens, thus witnessing how reality is manipulated and modelled, how the production world gets made. For example, the following productions of Mart Koldits that he created with the scenography students are based on that very same idea: „Department of Desires” [„Ihade osakond”] (2011) and „Simulacrum” (2013, both in Von Krahle theatre). In his book, Lehmann describes the forms of postdramatic theatre under general headlines of „Beyond dramatic action” and „Beyond illusion” [„Jenseits der Illusion”]. The second headline takes us to the question surrounding the relationship of **fiction** (image, fabrication) and reality. In theatre, these notions live an intricate double life: everything happens here and now, there are humans of flesh and blood – actors – on the stage in front of us, but they are bringing one fictional world into reality. A large part of postdramatic theatre can be defined through its aspiration towards realness, genuineness, authenticity, while withdrawing fiction<sup>8</sup>. One of its manifestations is documentary theatre which has been on its way up during the noughties also in the western theatre. But mostly the relationship between the real and the fictional is tense and theatre loves to play on its borders. Our grand example is NO99’s „Unified Estonia” [„Ühtne Eesti”] (2010) which knowingly balanced on the following border: whether the things taking place are theatre (which depicts reality) or is it part of the reality, an actual political event.

The search for realness, authenticity is of course not limited to documentary productions. Theatre that is a material (not abstract) phenomenon can be defined through time, space and the body. The question also lies in how the theatre brings the real time and the space of a performance forth in a way that the audience cannot but perceive it, that they do not get fully immersed in the imaginative (fictional) world of the production, and perhaps that world does not even get born? These questions have been addressed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her book „The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics” (2008). The (real) temporality of a performance is brought to the fore by its unusual duration, for example – a performance is either very long (the so-called endurance performances that last for hours, even for 24 hours) or very short, so that time itself is being focused on and becomes an aesthetic factor. The same effect can be achieved by an unusually slow pace (for example, a super slow motion of performers in many of Robert Wilson’s productions) or a super fast pace. It can also be achieved with manipulating time through repetitions (up to monotony) and disruptions which create powerful rhythm patterns that are not justified by the situational atmosphere.

<sup>8</sup> Desire for the real, the authentic also characterises visual arts, resulting among other things in bringing theatre and visual arts closer together.

The real space gets especially highlighted in productions that take place in the so-called found spaces; in spaces outside of theatre where the atmosphere of the performance space, the meanings connected to the space, etc., start influencing the audience (very common in summer productions). One rather new phenomenon in the Estonian theatre scene are performances where the audience undertakes a journey, where they are guided (or transported) through various places, like in „Odyssey” (2015) of Tartu New Theatre. But the audience can also be placed in a way that they see each other, especially in the so-called environmental theatre where a shared performance space gets created with the performers moving between the audience, etc. (For example, Von Krahle theatre’s „Budapest”, 2015).

The physicality relates to actors or performers. Here, modern theatre uses strategies such as bringing a „real” person, that is, a non-actor on the stage („Real Women, Real Men and Real Others” [„Tõelised naised, tõelised mehed ja tõelised teised”), 2015, performed in the Open Space) or bringing attention to bodily vulnerability, fragility, imperfection. This also includes the question whether an actor can perform on a theatre stage as themselves, outside of all roles. Theatre NO99’s dramaturg Laur Kaunissaare writes the following: „However, the underlying tendencies in theatre are currently moving towards the actor not acting but just being on stage, performing their presence in its pure form. Zero version, but intense. Is it possible? Is it interesting?” (Kaunissaare 2012). These questions shall not be addressed in this piece which does not focus on the actor in the postdramatic theatre.

For the actor, the spread of new theatre forms firstly means that when she is interested, she can work in various fields of performing arts, such as take part of installations, *performance*-type events, modern dance productions, etc. which all come with different tasks than playing a certain character in a fictional world of a play. Secondly, as the actor was playing a role in the dramatic theatre, then the roles are not disappearing in postdramatic theatre either (although they are played differently), but next to or instead of depicting a character, the actor can also present or self-present (when it is the „actor herself” on stage) while performing, which has led to the change in the relationship with the audience.

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[Luule Epner’s article is based on her conference talk that can be viewed HERE.](#)





# Challenges of a Postdramatic Dramaturg in 2016 and in the Future

Marion Jõepera



With the birth and the development of the postdramatic theatre, the role of the theatre dramaturg has also changed. A new dramaturg species has been born – a postdramatic dramaturg. The latter can be distinguished from the traditional dramaturg (and also from the production dramaturg) both through their role, goals and also their daily technical arsenal.

The main task of a postdramatic dramaturg is still narrative creation but she does it through space and audience. In postdramatic theatre, narrative does not get compiled in front of the audience but in their minds, through the audience's actions and experiences, and in the crosspoints of various media and performers. Thus, the role of the postdramatic dramaturg is to turn the audience both into a player and into a narrative compiler. The content of her job is to create (mostly) **hidden dramaturgic structures** which generate the necessary conditions for the people entering her world and for the people playing in the **play space**.<sup>1</sup>

**To build a play space**, the postdramatic dramaturg uses:

- **chance** as an element that holds the immersive narrative together,
- **space** as one of the main characters of the play space,
- often also the principle that **intense shifts in perception** stem from our spatial perception and from our feel for the space (that is from our perception processes and our base space – our body),
- different linguistic and dramaturgic strategies, techniques and cross-media experiments for creating large shifts or changes in perception (or creating a chance for them to happen).

In postdramatic theatre, dramaturgy is a tool for creating a framework for a production or the play space. The dramaturgs of such theatre are currently working both in theatres, outside of theatres, and more and more in the bordering fields between theatre and performing arts.

From one hand, the role of the postdramatic dramaturg is the same with the one of a dramaturg – to offer the experiencers of a play/play space a chance to create their narrative. But in postdramatic theatre, this takes place through the audience. So the difference comes from the attitude based on which the play space is created and which is used for letting the audience-players to enter those spaces.

The job of a postdramatic dramaturg is to create play spaces that can be inhabited both by professional performers and the audience members. And also to enable the players to experience spaces where they could depart on a journey which is a discovery process for them. The important factor is also the offering of being-in-process, (apparent) freedom of movement for the players.

Based on the characteristics mentioned above, now follows a short overview of nine fields and directions where I can see postdramatic dramaturgy heading.

<sup>1</sup> *Play space*: a space inhabited both by performers and audience members where the unfolding event/performance/game takes place, which has a fixed group of rules for all participants, and which is (very often) free to explore for everyone.

## 1. Audience as Player

The most classic postdramatic theatre **play worlds** are those theatre productions where the audience is invited into action together with the performers in every scene and/or space, into creating the story together. This category also entails the unfixed productions, the participatory productions utilising **hidden dramaturgy** narratives. The audience has the right to interfere in the scenes, to touch the props, to choose the order of scenes they want to observe, to only stay in one space, to follow one performer around, etc.

This is a play world where one can wander about, and which can be explored over and over again. The task of the dramaturg is to fix certain events or their basic impulses that take place in the play world.

The ideal example is Punchdrunk's production „The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable“ that premiered in London in the summer of 2013. In this play world, the performers' role freedom also transformed within time, extending step by step also to the audience who came to experience the production more than once.

## 2. Adventure Games in Real World

This category includes street games with a more intense competition element and adventure games that have given a certain set of rules for the participants.

These types of games can either be based on a movie, on a book, on a videogame, or can be originally created for the real world game format. Often, these games fall into the adventure game genre where the players have to follow the game rules to solve tasks and venture through the play world.

An ideal example of this is a street game „2.8 Hours Later“ which revolves around a zombie apocalypse. But also „Scent Trail“ that has a certain story and related tasks, and where each team is given a scent hound to start solving tasks with the help from their team mates and the dog. This category also covers those Geocaching games that revolve around a narrative, and where players are not just on a treasure hunt but become part of the bigger adventure world through playing. So depending on the specific game structure, the adventure games can thus include Geocaching but not include most other sports games.

## 3. Incorporated Spaces

Theatre productions that have been „pulled open“ into time and space and which also incorporate the non-theatrical, regular spaces.

This category includes large-scale productions with many collaborating theatre groups that use various spaces and institutions in the creation of the play world; for example, spaces that are based on the locations of the novel that has been used as a base text, such as gyms, public saunas, etc. For moving from one location to another, the audience has to either walk in that world, to use public transport, etc. All everyday activities (eating, using the toilet, etc.) thus become a part of the play world.

But now we take a step away from theatre and have a look at other fields where postdramatic dramaturgs can be used.

## 4. Service Design

Service design is a continuously developing species of postdramatic dramaturgy which is only now fully starting to understand its own significance, and which is important both from the viewpoint of business competition and user convenience.

This is a field where the title „postdramatic dramaturg“ is seldom heard. However, the creation of hidden dramaturgies is also taking place in here. The development of such dramaturgic structures can either take place in design or strategy design agencies that employ creative directors. Sometimes, a designer is doing the work of a postdramatic dramaturg as well.

Since the job of the postdramatic dramaturg is to enhance the creation of different mental and physical space narratives, the dramaturg's field of work takes her everywhere where user journeys and user narratives are needed.

This category includes organisations of all possible sizes whose everyday work is focused on interacting with people who come from the outside, that is all institutions who deal with clients on a daily bases, from the main

building of the Estonian Energy to the airports. Postdramatic dramaturg can, for example, design the first meeting point between the traveller and the airport (when the traveller is still planning her trip), or the first entry point to a new space, or how people should feel, what knowledge they should carry when moving from one space to another, what facts should they connect in the minds, etc.

To design experiences for humans is the task of a dramaturg. The focus shift from form to experience is one of the main characteristics of postdramatic dramaturgy.

## 5. Audio Journeys

This category includes audio journeys that are not purely podcasts, radio theatre productions or city guides. And also environments that have been created with the use of hidden dramaturgy and which's goal is to offer people/players an experience that is becoming increasingly rare – an experience of an unstructured space.

Taking into consideration that various podcasts, audio books and audio series have gathered immense popularity and copious followers over the past decades, and that during those exact decades a large part of entertainment options and arts have taken a turn towards a highly individual approach, I dare to suggest that soon our phones/mp3-players can be equipped with downloadable, artistic audio games that bring together a selection of journeys and rules that the players must follow amidst a well-layered story which helps to transform the space for the listener. This means that we could be dealing with games that make the listener proceed through a certain space (for example, Tallinn's Old Town) and perform certain physical and mental activities while on their journey. The artistic journey can in this case be complemented by the story heard from the „audio guide“.

You can have a try at a podcast-game „[Surrogate Forests](#)“ (in Estonian only).

## 6. Event Dramaturgy

This includes a versatile set of events from company and state jubilee parties to graduation ceremonies, summer outings and freshman week activities – all larger events designed with a specific target group in mind and carrying a well-defined goal. When designing events, when embedding them with details and tasks, postdramatic dramaturgs can create intense and meaning-rich journeys with a memorable atmosphere and a structure. In other words, they can embed adventure into the newly-created space of the everyday world.

The category also includes events which's locations are kept secret until the very last moment, but which's goal or theme together with performers, menu and/or dress code is known to the participants in advance.

## 7. Environment Design

The implementation of postdramatic dramaturgy schemes is that part of environment design which the architects and interior architects often do not have to dwell on in a very detailed manner (or not from a dramaturgic perspective).

This includes all possible entertainment institutions but also public spaces where a person needs to feel/experience that they are free to make their thematic or spatial choices. For example, the dramaturg can help to develop a spatial logic in a museum with a very large thematic exposition which would help the guest to obtain a very coherent, exciting and a clear overview of everything they have witnessed.

The task of the postdramatic dramaturg is also to be responsible for the emotional structure of large closed and open spaces. And also for the feeling that the person experiences when moving through them. For example, back in the day, the Tallinn Creative Incubator needed a person (not an architect or an interior designer) who would be responsible for the coherent story, for the environmental narrative of their building – in other words, for someone to be responsible for how the building influences the people who work there or the first-time visitors, for when and how the building interacts with people (through texts and visual design elements on different surfaces), etc. I believe that postdramatic dramaturgs will be getting more involved in helping to design open public spaces but also interior space narratives.

The category also includes various (official) nature trails, and travelling exhibitions where the dramaturg needs to take into account how the exhibition is interacting with its surrounding space, how people perceive themselves while moving from one space to another, etc.

## 8. Customised One-Off Games

Creating customised games based on the wishes of a small group or a person is definitely the most decadent part of the postdramatic dramaturg's job. This category includes games that get tied together with the player's everyday life (spaces, people). These are games that have been brought into physical space for those players who are tired of video games and cross-media games (and who have not heard of *Pokemon Go* yet), and who wish to experiment with the next level of experiencing the (game) world and in interacting with it.

For example, the player can order a game where they can experience how it feels to be stalked for a month in a row. To begin, they have to let the dramaturg know their personal (mental and physical) limits which the game can reach. The dramaturg will then chisel out the game goal from the client brief: to create horror. The next challenge for the postdramatic dramaturg is now to come up with a game idea (the client does not usually offer a very fixed idea), to develop a suitable game world, to design it and then to contact either performers or other people who could help to bring the game to reality.<sup>2</sup> These types of games incorporate elements such as texting and emailing the players and inviting them to certain events or locations where performers (e.g. stalkers) can directly contact them, invite them along, etc. The player can also give the dramaturg access to their calendar (in more extreme cases also to their bank account), so that the latter can freely choose when and how to pull the player into the game, thus leaving the player with an ever higher chance of experiencing „pure“ chance.

## 9. Social Playing Fields

In the 1980s and 1990s, historically unique generations grew up – children who regularly played computer games and who thus developed a different type of thinking, a different way of consuming and creating narratives. When very young, these generations developed a different kind of collaborating, abstracting, organisational and strategy creation skills. Today, these generations have grown up and brought the developmental aspects of computer games into the masses.

When playing computer games for one or two hours a day, our brain reaches the state of flow (McGonigal 2012), the state which keeps us in the absolute present. The flow state bestows us with energy also when we have left it behind. It has an enhancing effect on mental work. By 2016, the beauty and the positive effect of game structures have been noticed also outside of theatre and computer game fields, in fields such as medicine (rehabilitation), education, and others.

I dare to forecast that postdramatic dramaturgs can start using game logics that incorporate hidden dramaturgy also more widely when it comes to socially necessary activities, both in the education and in the health sector. Hopefully, the day will not be far when the compulsory physical education classes in schools start re-thinking their teaching methods. And good news will probably come to those who are currently too scared to leave the virtual world behind and go walk in the real forest.

• • •

This talk focused on the challenges of the postdramatic dramaturg in relation to fields which incorporate living performers, and hence did not offer an overview of the dramaturgy of certain computer games and augmented reality games that can technically be listed under the postdramatic dramaturgy category but which are in turn connected to a completely different field.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, sometimes other people are included already much earlier.

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Marion Jõepera's article is based on her conference talk that can be viewed [HERE](#).





# Methods of Creation of Political Theatre

Madli Pesti

## The Strategy of Devised Theatre

The core of devising methods is a rehearsal process with no pre-written dramaturgy and completing the production with all troupe members taking part in it. The main characteristic of devising method is creating the production without any pre-written text or scenario. As the focus is clearly on the creational process, the text can be created during the process. It often happens that the members of the troupe start the rehearsal process by presenting their ideas and searching pre-written texts as well as introducing photos, paintings or music. This mode of creation can be called **bricolage**. The

production is formed with ideas and works collected during the rehearsal process. (See Epner 2011 and 2013)

British theatre researchers Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling (2006: 5) point out different aims of devising methods: creating a community or reassuring its identity, etc. The aim of the devising method can be uniting life and art as well as bridging the gap between performers and spectators. The roles of performers and spectators are reinterpreted. There is a noticeable effort towards **documentary** and **authenticity**. Artists using devising methods wish to experiment with **non-hierarchical structures**, meaning that all participators are equal. Thus, stiff hierarchial structures are shifted and a democratic basis established.

The general aim of devised productions is to **reflect social reality** and/or launch social change. This is one of the most important aims of applied theatre. Heddon and Milling list the characteristics of devised theatre as follows: expressiveness, creativity, innovation, risk, spontaneity, experimenting, portrayal of author's death and sceptical attitude towards words and literature. (Heddon, Milling 2006: 5)

However, all of the aforementioned goals and characteristics may not be utilized. Although the non-hierarchical point of departure is often stressed, artists rarely succeed in fully carrying it out in practice. It is difficult to generalize the position of stage director as it varies from one company to another. Still, it is a specific trait that instead of being enthroned on top of the hierarchy the stage director is in the middle of the creative process and is supervising the cooperation of the troupe.

**The attitude to written text** also varies from one devised theatre troupe to another. Some troupes create a production using devised methods, then returning later to pre-written plays (e.g. **Theatre de Complicité**). There are not many devised theatre companies using no words in their performances. There is a tendency towards combining different mediums. For example, words can be integrated into productions by dance troupes.

The use of **improvisation** is a must-have component of the devised theatre. Improvisation is used mainly in the following ways: 1) for bringing a full-scale play on stage, 2) in creating an alternative production, 3) in applying principles of improvisation outside the theatre field. (Heddon, Milling 2006: 8)

Using improvisation requires using a non-hierarchical structure: all practicing people are of equal status. Improvisation has the aim of uniting life and art as well as striving for authenticity. Improvisation means spontaneity, risking, creativity and expressiveness.

An advantage of devising methods is creating the production by one and the same people, which allows making **constant** and **quick updates**.



## Examples

- **Gob Squad**
- **andcompany&Co**
- **Showcase Beat Le Mot**
- **Forced Entertainment**

## The Strategy of Documentary Theatre

Documentary productions use **pre-existing documents** as their base material: journalistic texts, archive documents, reports, interviews, letters, statistics, speeches, photos, radio recordings etc. These documents can be presented on stage without any changes.

The extent to which documentation is used can vary from one production to another: the documents can serve only for inspiration, the wording can be changed, and the material can be framed with more or less documentary context by the stage director.

The authors of documentary theatre should hold wide-ranging **political and sociological knowledge** and they should be able to carry out **scientific research**, argues **Peter Weiss** (1998: 253), the legendary playwright of documentary theatre. The focus of documentary theatre is **the relationship between theatre and reality**, creating a dialogue between different viewpoints and opinions, solving a conflict or moderating it. It is important for contemporary documentary theatre to discuss the problem from contrasting viewpoints and place events into **different contexts**, e.g. to research an historical event in the light of various political regimes. Therefore multiple viewpoints and approaches are introduced.

The aim of the documentary theatre is to **rethink history and today (the present)**. It is one of the main and most widespread functions, which has two equally important aspects: rethinking history and dealing with contemporary problems. Those two poles are interconnected: history is reinterpreted from the contemporary perspective and current problems are discussed with the help of historical experience. Frequently, a **suppressed community** is often the subject of documentary theatre, e.g. the situation of women in the job market or in the family, or the problems of homosexual couples.

**The function of self-reflexivity:** dealing with the notion of documentary. Documentary theatre can criticize the functioning of documentary as well as fiction. In other words, the author consciously uses documentary materials as well as materials created by himself and thereby makes visible the problematics of documentary as a carrier of truth.

Documentary theatre can mix **biographic material** with **history** and serve to store oral history.

In evaluating documentary theatre one of the main criterion is **the tension between documentary and fiction**. While creating a piece of documentary theatre or writing a documentary play a dramaturge/playwright can manipulate with facts and keep the spectator and reader under his/her influence. As the relationship between spectator-participator is more intimate than in fictionary theatre, the **responsibility of the author** is especially emphasized in documentary theatre. Furthermore, the question of the possibility of objectivity arises in case of documentary theatre and verbatim theatre (discussed below), although it is mostly left unanswered.

There have been discussions on **objectivity** of documentary theatre. An important notion is „**authenticity**“, which is related to documentary and objectivity. „Authentic“ means „based on sources“, but also „genuine, original, real, undisputed“. It has caught the attention of theatre practitioners and researchers for a long time. One can note even a kind of (new) explosion of authenticity during last decades in performance art. The questions of authenticity (the relationship of fiction and truth) arise especially during the current era of **digital documents**. With the rise of digital technologies the possibility of simulation and manipulation of truth is enhanced. Even shots by hidden cameras and webcams have become documents of documentary theatre. Today almost everyone can film a situation with a handycam or a mobile phone. (See Marschall 2010: 21)

Katharina Keim (2010), a theatre researcher from Germany, uses the notion of **egodocument** in the context of documentary theatre. The egodocument or so-called personal document (the confession or recollection of the participator) is widespread in documentary and verbatim theatre.

As the egodocument is a product of a constructing „self“ (*als Produkt einer Ich-Konstruktion*), Katharina Keim argues that it can involve the danger of stylizing (marketing) oneself by changing or not mentioning facts (Keim



2010: 132–133). As Keim sees the widespread use of egodocument as a threat, we can sense an element of negative shade in formulations of egodocuments. However, the use of egodocument should not be treated as a threat, but rather be taken as a fact. Egodocument is successfully used in postdramatic documentary theatre, where it brings forth polyphonic viewpoints.

There doesn't have to be a direct connection between authenticity and documentary. The presentation of documentary material on stage is mostly genuine and authentic. However, presentation of fictive materials can also leave an impression of reality and authenticity. In my opinion, authenticity should be considered rather as a strategy of reception by the spectator. It is something the spectator senses and even demands in contemporary theatre. Theatre makers offer authenticity by using certain strategies (e.g. documentary and verbatim technique).

One characteristic of documentary theatre has always been and still is the use of **new technologies** and the overall connection of technology with the media sphere surrounding theatre.

One form of documentary theatre is the **re-enactment** of historical events and conflicts. Although the practice hasn't been extensively used in Estonian theatre, it is more widely used in other parts of Europe in theatre and other arts.

**Re-enactment** means re-enacting historical events in historical places. There can, but does not have to be audience, which means that everyone can take part in a re-enactment. The aim of a re-enactment can be research and education as well as entertainment.

The notion of re-enactment has been taken into visual arts, where it carries more specific meaning. In the beginning of the new millennia the talks of re-enactment have become more frequent in the arts. For example, many theatre and performance-artists re-enact their works (Marina Abramović, Jan Fabre) or theatre practitioners re-enact works from other art fields (e.g. Gob Squad presenting videos by Andy Warhol in their production „Kitchen“).

Jens Roselt and Ulf Otto (2012: 10–11) name aspects, which characterize different re-enactment practices with artistic application. I have added my comments to those aspects.

1. Mostly **unprofessional actors** take part in re-enactment. However, this is not the case of professional troupes with artistic goals. Milo Rau, for example, has staged re-enactments with professional actors.
2. It is characteristic that re-enactment develops **non-psychological** performance practices. An event is **enacted**, not experienced. Here I would like to point at one characteristic: re-enactment unites past and present, brings forth the distance with history and therefore observes history from different perspectives and presents different possibilities.
3. The re-enactments **question the gap between active performers and passive spectators**.
4. Many re-enactments are related to **creating community and identity**.
5. One of the most important aspects of artistic re-enactment, stressed by Roselt and Otto, touches upon **the change of medium and being aware of the inner construction of the medium**. Many re-enactments are based on a change of medium. For example, an event is transported from courtroom to theatre hall: the change of context creates **distance**, which enables to see the events or problems more clearly. Being aware of how a medium functions in essence involves self-reflection, which has been previously presented as an important feature of documentary theatre. The directors of re-enactments must be aware that they don't only re-enact, but it means also the change of time and context, which further can change meaning.

**Verbatim technique** is one of the strategies of documentary theatre. All devised projects don't belong to documentary theatre, but all verbatim theatre is documentary in its essence. Verbatim technique is a devising method while documentary theatre, as shown before, is a broader notion. Unlike verbatim theatre, documentary theatre does not have to be based on sayings of real persons. Documentary theatre can use other materials as well.

The notion „verbatim“ denotes a **technique of text creation**. In order to compose a text, interviews are conducted. A dramaturge writes down the interviews (sometimes only with the help of memory) and distills important aspects. S/he can use official documents as well. The collected material is edited, rearranged and put into context.

Derek Paget, a researcher of documentary theatre, describes verbatim technique as a form of theatre that is connected with interviewing „ordinary people“. The aim is to research a specific region, topic, event or the combination of all of three (Paget 1987: 317, see Watt 2009: 194–197).

Actors represent real persons, who have been interviewed, and use precise words. In rehearsals actors can use laptops and headphones to listen to the recorded speech and pronounce it as precisely as possible. Therefore the notion „verbatim“ does not denote any specific content nor form, but is a technique. A production can be accomplished in any style or topic, but the staged material is documentary. (Hammond, Steward 2008: 9–10)

Today many **techniques of oral history** are used, one of which is the re-enactment technique. Researchers of oral history collect interviews and store them in bookstores and archives to keep them for future generations. The artists of verbatim theatre and re-enactment put those stories on stage. In doing so, they have started to incorporate **audiovisual documents** as well as printed ones.

### Examples

- [Rimini Protokoll](#)
- [Hans-Werner Kroesinger](#)
- [Milo Rau ja International Institute of Political Murder](#)
- [Teatr.doc](#)
- [DV8 Physical Theatre](#)

## Strategies of Applied Theatre

**Applied theatre** is an umbrella term, which encompasses theatre practices, where **non-aesthetic aims** are more important than aesthetic and where practitioners and spectators are positioned outside of the frames of traditional theatre. Such theatre practices deal primarily with **„ordinary“ people** and their stories. (Prentki, Preston 2009: 9)

Applied theatre is mostly created in unusual rooms and **non-theatrical spaces**. The geographical and social dimensions of the spaces can be varied: schools, day centres, streets, prisons, cultural houses or meaningful rooms of a community. Applied theatre addresses the goals of participants and mostly includes them in the creative process, but on a different scale than the practitioners. Applied theatre is based on **improvisation** and is distinguished from traditional theatre where the focus is on the rehearsal process before the final presentation on stage.

The aim of the practices of applied theatre is to change something – either in the communication or in the relations of participants and society. Theatre is a means to turn attention to hidden stories and problems. An **educational aim** is also common.

Applied theatre is in its essence an **exploratory** practice. Research is carried out for every production. Participants can take part in the research, which can encompass social sciences, participatory and action research as well as theoretical academic research or creative research which is characteristic to theatre studies or practice. (Hughes 2011: 186–187) In this sense, applied theatre can use different scales of **participation**.

According to Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009: 19–21), the participatory practices of applied theatre are:

1. **Theatre for a community:** e.g. a theatre troupe visits youngsters in schools or in local community. The participation of the audience doesn't differ from the one of the „ordinary“ theatre.
2. **Theatre with a community:** e.g. a workshop or theatre process, which encompasses participants using the devising method. The activity can, but does not have to be brought on stage.
3. **Theatre by a community:** community creates and performs a production on their own in a found space. The tutor can be a professional of applied theatre, but the performance can be created also fully by the participants, who are all directors, designers and performers.

One of the most important common characteristics of applied theatre is **connectedness with education**. According to Lars Göhmann (2003: 81), a German theatre researcher and pedagogue, educational drama can be an umbrella term which includes four different types: a) drama in education, b) theatre in education, c) drama education and d) theatre education.

**Process drama** or audience-encompassing storytelling, which has developed out of theatre studies in Great Britain, stresses its educational aspect. The notion of „process drama“ was introduced at first by Cecily O'Neill in 1995 (Owens 2010, Owens 2014). The term can have wider meaning: the motivator of process drama can be a story, but it can also be a piece of music, a photo, piece of news etc. Process drama is participatory theatre, where the participants take the roles of actor, dramaturge, audience and also of critic and analyzer. Afterwards, all participants analyze the process together.

One of the most widespread practices of applied theatre is **community theatre**, which encompasses different genres.

**Playback theatre** focuses on stories of a small group or community. Audience members, whose stories are enacted, are included in the presentation. Their approach is personal. It encompasses a wish to change something in people's lives. The pioneer of playback theatre in Estonia is Aivar Simmermann.

Changing personal lives is also the aim of **psychodrama**. In Estonia the school of psychodrama is functioning at Moreno Center.

In Western Europe the practice of **reminescence theatre** has also taken ground. Reminescence theatre uses methods of theatre and playback theatre in order to include **elderly people**.

Socially assisted performances may include **hospital clowns**, whose goal is to rejoice children in hospital care.

**Improvtheatre** is in a sense part of community theatre. The aim of improvtheatre can be purely to entertain, but also serve to integrate different communities and personalities as well as solve personal problems. Improvisational performances can include the participation of audience.

All methods developed by Brazilian stage director **Augusto Boal** (1931–2009) are considered to be methods of applied theatre (mostly also as community theatre). In Estonia there are many active groups of **forum theatre**. With the help of forum theatre people can deal with different topics and problems. In Estonia their activity is directed mostly to young people and the focus is on school violence; but, they also visit prisons, medical institutions etc. Forum theatre is a form of participatory theatre, that focuses on dialogue. A group of people enact a problematic situation. Spectators can intervene at any moment and offer their solutions. Outside of the forum theatre performance (or stage activity) participants can not discuss.

## Community Theatre

The aim of **community theatre** is to focus on a certain place or group of people, on hidden stories and topics. Eugen van Erven (2001), a researcher of community theatre from Netherlands, defines community theatre as a group of people whose acting is based on **local and/or personal stories** (not pre-written dramaturgical texts). The stories are the starting point for improvisation and can be later developed into production. One can notice here intertwining with devising methods.

Van Erven calls people dealing with community theatre „**people living in the periphery**” (van Erven 2001: 2). The notion of periphery can have geographic and social connotations. Theatre lends a space to draw attention to problems of a community or to the culture of a certain area. It should be noted that community theatre justifies the sociocultural and artistic self-expression of a community. The material and aesthetic forms of such theatre rise from the community, which viewpoints the production aims to express. (Ibid: 3)

Jan Cohen-Cruz (2005: 7) introduces a similar interpretation: the material on stage has clear connection with the community and the topic is important for the producers. The plays of community theatre are based on local topics and history of the area, dealing mostly with under- or non-represented cultures. (Cohen-Cruz 2006: 432)

Practitioners and researchers of community theatre share the belief that artistic practices can influence society and mainstream politics. Community theatre represents **cultural democracy**. Practitioners must be dedicated to dialogue, communication and the belief that the audience – i.e. community – has something to say. (Kuppers, Robertson 2007: 1–2)

Productions of community theatre are characterized by **communication between artists and participants** who share identity or other common conditions. Professional artists stage a production, which has been produced by, for and of a certain group. Community-based art is situated between two oppositions: entertaining vs functional art. More precisely, art can have an effect in educational or therapeutic fields; it can act against written or fixed history or in the name of social change. (Cohen-Cruz 2006: 427) **The forum theatre** of Augusto Boal is a good example of participatory democracy as spectators intervene in the performance scenario and act out their own ideas. Community-based theatre manifests common values, which are characteristic to cultural democracy. Furthermore, it tries to include various communities into solving common problems.

Community theatre, however, does not have to carry clear political messages. The issue is about orientation to the process. The **process** may have positive results for members of the community: social, political or personal effects. (Heddon, Milling 2006: 136–137)

**Participation:** including the audience. The key principle of community theatre is participation. It enables the audience to take the lead and create communities, because it gives the audience new roles: as artists, as managers of culture or as creator of community. (Haedicke 1998: 132)

Community members can participate in different ways and take various roles in a performance. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling identify **different aims of working with a community**: a) creating and reinforcing the identity of a community, b) concentrating on the core of a production, i.e. speaking about topics that are important to the community, but untouched publicly, and, c) producing therapeutic results, mostly for personal change. (Heddon, Milling 2006: 136–137)

Theatre professionals can take part in creating a piece of community theatre. They may carry different roles: they can complete the final piece, lead the process or stand aside. Professional actors, directors and dramaturges can come to a community (or live there) and derive historical material, stories and problems from the specific place and people. The production can be wholly controlled by professionals, or, it can include the participation of locals. (Heddon, Milling 2006: 136–137)

While expanding the notion of participation we need to pay attention to the process of creating community, which is considered a **prolonged process** by Jan Cohen-Cruz (2006: 435). Community theatre focuses on **pre- and post-actions of a performance**. Such process corresponds to **ritual**, which aims to trigger **change**. An example of a ritual is getting married. At first a couple is dating or living together, then getting engaged and then marrying. The result is the changed status and behaviour after getting married.

Richard Schechner presents the model of seven phases of a performance: first four phases are training, workshop, exercise and warm-up (which he calls the first step of ritual), where the differentiation from ordinary life takes place. Those phases happen before any contact with the audience. The liminal step corresponds to the fifth phase by Schechner. It means the performance, during which the change is presented, but hasn't yet taken over into everyday life. The last two phases (cooling down and aftermath) correspond to reintegration in terms of ritual. People, who have passed the ritual, unite with their society when changed. (See Schechner 1985: 20–21)

In community theatre, the performance does not have to be the central point. At first people participate in overall training, then in workshop. The community contributes to building up the performance. They start with collecting materials, mostly interviews, and use verbatim technique.

One phase of workshops can be called involvement, which means they include topical institutions and people outside of the theatre field. Warm-up is a phase that precedes performing. What follows is performing itself: it offers performers and audience different possibilities for communication, which is important for community theatre. The phase of cool-down takes place straight after the performance and can mean discussion with the audience. Cohen-Cruz points to a drawback of the last phase: the performers may not be eager to discuss with the audience directly. The phase of aftermath denotes longtime action and influence.

A goal of community-based theatre is **sustainability**. It can be called influence as well, as noted before in the description of applied theatre. Artists must leave something for the community: 1) either locals have received skills to continue their process, 2) networks have been established, or 3) it becomes possible to carry out certain activities or politics. (Cohen-Cruz 2006: 435–438)

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# Trickster Point as the Designer of the Audience's Spatial Creation

Anne Törnpu

*The article is based on Anne Törnpu's presentation given at the 10th Annual Conference of Estonian Social Sciences „Estonia 100 – towards openness?” which took place on March 24–25, 2017 at Tallinn University. The presentation was in turn based on the results gained from the Space research lab which took place at the Drama School of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT), and was supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia.*



To start I will look into the paradigmatic shifts in the Estonian theatre which have prompted the search and the need to identify the tools that the Drama School's research lab focused on. From there we will reach the results of the lab where we used the **actor's attention** as the main tool for establishing spaces and spatial shifts. Then, based on Konstantin Stanislavski's theory, we shall show what has been the historical content for the term „**actor's attention**”. We shall look into the mechanisms behind spatial creation in perception theory, referring that the most powerful moments are the shifts and not the durations. We shall call the strongest shift in spatial creation a **trickster point**, and explain how the trickster from the mythologies of people with a traditional lifestyle, has prompted this term. We shall talk of the **trickster point** as of the phenomenon which allows to hack into the audience's spatial creation, where one can smuggle in otherwise inadmissible information, in turn leading to the transformation of the audience member's **self** that is perceived as the highlight of the performance.

## Paradigmatic transformations in Estonian theatre

Modern Estonian theatre reveals segments of structural changes that refer to wide paradigmatic shifts, transformations in theoretical and practical drama studies, including in the higher education pedagogy of drama.

The new social and cultural stage that started with Estonia regaining its independence has brought forth structural changes on at least five levels:

### 1. Opening up of the cultural space

The cultural exchange that took place mostly with Russian and the Baltic theatre during the Soviet times has rapidly been boosted by the contacts from the European theatre after the borders were opened. International festivals and guest performances have opened up the cultural space and deepened the influence of European theatre, added performance venues and enhanced the job offers for actors. A shining example is the success of the theatre NO99 at international theatre festivals and their collaboration with German theatre groups. Due to all the aforementioned developments, we are now naturally considering modern Estonian theatre to be part of the European theatre, we are, so to speak, part of the same language family. At the same time, the „global village” has brought forth mental-phenomenological changes in the reception processes of logic, causality, narrative and memory on an

individual level. Due to all the previous, the modern theatre language gets built up differently both when it comes to dramaturgy and directing, and to acting, bringing with functional changes both in attitudes and division of labour.

## 2. Institutional level

The project-based theatre groups that have sprung up next to state-funded and municipal theatres have become a force to be reckoned with both due to their number and their artistic achievements. New venues have been taken into use, including found spaces, meaning spaces that have been used as theatrical venues for the first time, such as manor houses, farm houses and natural environments. As a new trend, theatre has consciously started creating and shaping the public space (for example, theatre NO99's one-off summertime international festival Straw Theatre in the Skoone bastion in Tallinn's centre).

### 2.1. Changes in the internal structure of theatre as an institution

The legal status change of theatres from state-funded institutions to foundations has in turn led to new focus points in the repertoires, and has made many groups into more business and sales-interested entities, focused and dependant on marketing. Transformations have taken place in the balance of creative, administrative, technical and marketing personnel. Ensemble theatre is getting exchanged for project-based groups more and more.

## 3. Widening of theatre's themes

After the social passivity caused by the closed system of the Soviet times, theatre has started to talk on new, mostly social topics. For the first time, a theatre has materialised which is socially topical and actively reactionary, and which takes part in forming the thought models of the society. To analyse the themes of the newly active political theatre (in Estonian context), Estonian theatre theory needs new frames and techniques, new theories, angles of approach and terminology.

## 4. Aesthetical changes of theatre

Instead of postmodern aesthetics, one can more and more notice the characteristics of the postdramatic theatre as they have been described by the theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann (Lehmann 2006). The traditional narrative structure has been abandoned, the dramaturgical order and structure are replaced by ambivalence, chaos and multitudes of being, the linear perception form with the multitude of perspectives, dialogue with polylogue. The meaning and functions of the language are changing, the priority of the text is diminishing, the autonomous language of theatre is rising into focus. More and more frequently, modern theatre arts incorporate visual arts and modern dance. Non-hierarchical labour structures are used when putting together a production: the author of the production can be the author of the text (author's theatre), the entire production group (devised theatre) or the audience (immersive theatre). The traditional relationships between the stage and the audience have changed.

The mentioned changes and the new situation need analysis and deductions. Both in directing practice and in the university level drama pedagogy, the hermeneutical-semiotical viewpoint has been overtaken by the performative one. This starts from an observation that one can experience moments during the production which can not be described in an ordinary language as a written text or by the symbolic representation of the dramatic role conceived by the pre-existing author. These are moments that are perceived emotionally and physically, and which cause strong physical reactions.

Focusing on the performative dimension has revealed the limitations of the semiotic approach and the possibilities of the phenomenological perception theory. Using performativity theories (Fischer-Lichte 2008) as a starting point, the shift in perspectives takes places: the movement from representation to being in the present, from referentiality to materiality, from symbolic thought and semiotic meanings to experience and sensory cognition which reflects the oscillating perception processes of the performances. This oscillatory sphere will remain the main focus of the question I'm addressing: what are the things we experience, and why do we experience them?

Basing my thought on the presumption that the measure of performativity needs to be understood as „transitional, ephemeral and as a reciprocal process between the performing actors and the receiving audience“ (Risi 2011: 283), I shall hereby ask about the identity of the **Self as the perceiver** (both as a performer and a receiver) as a spatio-temporal phenomenon.



In modern human sciences and humanities, the general term **Self** is used to note identity, individuality, subjectivity and personality, but also consciousness and memory. In her dissertation „**Self as a spatio-temporal product**” (2005), **Reet Liimets** has stated how „I am” as a sensory experience or a feeling never exists as an unstructured flow of consciousness, but is a natural, spatially constructed dimension of the consciousness, and a modality which crosses the entire identity of an individual.

Thus, identity can be seen as the deeper psychic pattern of the individual’s *Self*, a conscious quality – a structure which connects the person to different levels of reality and gives them the ability to move through the space. Identity as such is the result of an individualisation process – constantly being fixed, changed and recreated. By receiving new information, by learning, the spatio-temporal construct of the *Self* changes, changing the *Self*.

Due to the prevailing of the temporality dimension in various approaches to theatre, the focus is mostly drawn to the changes in spatial qualities in the stage space as an environment which become visible in details springing from the temporality of the performance and lead to the transformation of spatial perception of the audience. How and through what can the person on stage direct these processes, and can we describe these processes with the help from phenomenological perception theory?

As a result of the Space research lab that took place in the Drama School of EAMT, when searching for tools which help to change the spatial perception of both the actor and the audience, we noted down **actor’s attention** as one of the tools.

Theatre researcher **Mori Mitsuya** argues with Peter Brook’s „empty space” concept when talking about the actor’s attention in her article „The Structure of Theatre”. Brook’s defining statement is the following: „I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space, whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre.” (Brook 1972: 7) Mori claims the opposite, saying that many things exist before a man walks into the space. „A space becomes „empty” for the audience only after a man has walked across it.” Mori stresses that the actor’s actions turn all the preceding things which are not actualised by the actor’s current actions, invisible. (Mori 2002: 77).

Thus it is the actor’s actions, the direction of the actor’s attention forming the basis of those actions which creates the space for the audience.

In his work „An Actor Prepares” (1955: 144, 160–162), Konstantin Stanislavski divides the process of the actor’s attention into the following circles of attention:

1. The smallest circle of attention: solitude in public,
2. Medium circle of attention,
3. Large circle of attention,
4. The biggest circle.

The circles of attention refer directly to the changing use of space, and link it to the communication levels which, according to Stanislavski, are the following:

1. communication with self,
2. communication with an object,
3. communication with partner,
4. communication with audience.

Due to the latter, the spatial change created by the shift in actor’s attention enables us to kind of step into the widening circle of a projector beam. In order to understand Stanislavski’s important component – the approach to attention – better, let’s try to find its sources and the elements of the landscape of ideas.

Stanislavski researchers Sergei Tcherkasski, Sharon Marie Carnicke and Larissa Gracheva have pointed out in their research that when creating his system, Stanislavski relied both on the science and on the occult world view of his time (see Tcherkasski 2016, Carnicke 2009).

Thus, the terms dealing with attention come from the Breton psychologist and pedagogue **Théodule-Armand Ribot**’s (1839–1916) publication „Psychology of Attention” (1889) that was published in Russian in 1897. The substantive approach to attention, however, is based on the American lawyer and writer **William Walker Atkinson**’s (1862–1932) works published under the pseudonym of Yogi Ramacharaka that were an odd compilation of Indian yoga philosophy and the oriental occultism of the western world. This is the place where Stanislavski’s attention

circles and different circles of communication come from. When talking about **prana**, Ramacharaka's book „Hatha yoga" (1904) states that prana radiation can be consciously directed. It was this promise that made the concept of **prana** into one of the most important loans from Ramacharaka's yoga for Stanislavski. This Sanskrit word ('wind, breathing, life') is used in yoga philosophy to denote a person's living energy, soul and life force that are related to breathing. (Tcherkasski 2016).

For Stanislavski, it is prana radiation and its conscious direction that become the tools and the guarantee for communication with the partner, with one self, an object and the audience. For Stanislavski, prana became the measure through which to infect the partner and the audience with the actor's sensitive emotional life. According to Ramacharaka, prana was the world energy that manifested itself in gravity and in electricity, in the movement of the planets and in all forms of life from the lowest to the highest. Prana is the soul of every force and energy. This is the principle that gives birth to activity that is characteristic of all living things. It was prana's radiation which became the movable essence of the actor's stage presence in the Stanislavski system, and the solar plexus became the nest of prana radiation in the human body, the starting point of all gestures. The solar plexus is also used in actor's work: in situations of communication where the internal monologue is carried by the dissonance of thoughts (head) and feelings (heart, solar plexus).<sup>1</sup>

This is why the main goal of the Drama School's Space research lab was to research the actualisation of the actor's circles of attention.

We can find a parallel to the attention circles from the language of cinema:

- **extreme long shot**, where the person is an object;
- **long-shot**, where the subject/object appears in an environment and the person is in full length;
- **mid-shot**, where the object fills half the screen, the person can be seen up to their hips and the focus is not on movement but on the quality of movement that can create a new space;
- **close-up**, where the framed fills most of the frame, the person's head and shoulders can be seen; the shot shows and does not create the space, attitude of relating is important;
- **detailed shot** (extreme close-up), where the frame is filled with an image of the detail of a specific object/subject; the focus is on facial moment and the details put the story together the fastest; a detailed shot was the fastest one to create a mental space.

It became evident that the actualisation of spaces happens through the base space, the human body. A shift in attention changes the body usage pattern of the base space. When widening the circle of attention, the amplitude of movements also grows. When it came to an object, the mental space was dependant on the direction of the protruding element and the amplitude of movements. A change of space comes from the lack of balance or from searching for it.

Since meaning is mainly carried by change and not by duration, we found ourselves at one moment dealing with moving from one circle to another. The attention also fixes on the larger circle that carried the possibility of creating a mental space which can be even bigger from the physical measurements of the stage space.

Space research lab of the Drama School helped to state that:

1. We are not dealing with a real space nor are we describing it. We are dealing with the human reception of space and with the problems stemming from the latter.
2. Creation of space is a human process. It is an endless process, since as soon as one space has actualised, we start using it as a background system and start looking for new, so-called sub-spaces through differentiations.
3. Creation of space is always connected to receiving new information. Thus, the audience's spatial perception is an ongoing process that accompanies the reception of new information.
4. Creation of space does not almost involve any will, it is an automatic, reflective process which takes place all the time – it is our job to hack into the process, so to speak, and to direct and influence this automatic process.
5. Creation of space is an experience-based process. The content of spatial perception is expectations based on previous experiences, and the fulfillment or the unfulfillment of the expectations. When the expectation gets

<sup>1</sup> On the background it is quite notable to know that during the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Russian art and cultural intelligentsia was in love with radio waves and x-ray radiation which's discovery and implementation created the feel of capturing the true essence of reality. The new world view penetrated into visual arts, literature and into the language of theatre.

fulfilled, we get a confirmation about the actualised space (and start with the procuring and searching of the sub-spaces). In case of an unfulfillment, we start looking for and evaluating the new information.

6. The mental space of which we talk about is therefore imaginary, sense-centered, experience-based, unstable, framed (centered on the visual) and homogeneous.

The fact that we constantly refer to the past as to the thing that was or that we are influenced by the past, is called **retention** (*retentio* – ‘the act of being retained’), and the never-ceasing referring to future expectations as **protention** (*protentio* – ‘act of stretching forwards’) (Husserl 1996: 19–72; 2001: 3–49).

When the actor actualises the space or uses their body in a way that does not comply with the **protention** of the audience’s spatial creation, it leads to the dismissal of the preceding **retention** and to a heightened expectation towards new sensory impulses. Let’s call this moment a **trickster point** where the actualised space is missing (has been destroyed) because the preceding spatial experience can not be used any more and a new one has not been created.

Why are we using the term „trickster point”? In my doctoral thesis „Trickster Creating the World and Itself” (Türnpü 2011), I came to a conclusion that the **trickster** can not be defined through themselves, because the trickster is what it is and what it is not. Thus one had to research what happens to **reality** when it comes to contact with the trickster.

I worded that **process** in the following manner:

1. invasion of uncertainty,
2. revelation of borders that awakens (as a potential) the border crossing, the play, the creativity,
3. new orientation which launches
4. identity creation / individualisation which launches
5. engagement with transcendentality and together with that
6. a creation of style to communicate with reality,
7. the actualisation of new spaces,
8. the stagnation of the new space, the readiness for a change.

Thus, to come to light, the trickster needs a stagnated space. We call a space stagnated when it has launched a **protention** which is appropriate to **retention**. We call the arrival of the non-compliant mental space to **protention** a **trickster point**.

In that superbly open moment where the phenomenon of the human liminality gets revealed, humans have less filters for the reception of the environment, and the hunger for information changes the reciprocal processes (between the performer and the audience) into needs. In that moment where the person forgets their *Self* it is possible to transmit information to the receiver (the audience) which would otherwise not be received due its strong differentiation. It is possible to transmit information that is outside the **reality** that is in the person or which contradicts it. This results in the change of the *Self*. It is perceived as the highlight of the performance.

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# On the River of Forgetfulness or on the Philosophy of Education in the Drama School

Airi Liimets



I've been associated with the Drama School of Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre since 2005. Until 2011, I taught philosophy of education for the MA students. From 2012 onwards, the doctoral students of the Drama School together with the musicians have been listening to my lectures on the philosophical and pedagogical anthropology. I taught the course „Philosophy and Theatre” for the physical theatre MA students studying in the Drama School from 2016–2018, and am currently teaching a course on „Pedagogy of Drama”. I can not step away from the most important thoughts mentioned on those courses also in this current piece of writing.

My following story received its initial impulse from Ingo Normet's drama school primer „To Swim in that River”, published in 2011, and from the words in the book's foreword. In that sense, the current text can also be seen as a tribute to professor Ingo Normet. Despite of the fact that I am going to argue against a couple of thoughts expressed in the foreword, and will fill certain ideas with the content of my own. But my guess is that Ingo Normet, being a person who is open to discussion and who values the multitude of opinions and variety, might exactly like that.

In the foreword to the drama school primer under question, Ingo Normet has asked: „What are those universal truths that we all need to know, whether we are violinists, artists and actors; what are the truths that help to open up individualities instead of killing them?” (Normet 2011: 11). I think that a very general answer to this question can also be found in the foreword, on page 13, where Normet says that „an actor recreates himself as a human”. And that „an actor uses details of himself to compile a new human being with every role”. These two sentences can be seen to hide the essential core to the philosophy of education of the Drama School. It means that the **most important problem** and the field that one needs to know is the **human being** – human being as such, both in the general and in the wider, and also in a very specific way that is characteristic to drama studies. Ingo Normet has not exactly worded it that way. This is my way of wording it, knowing that philosophy of education as a discipline's main issue is focused on the human being as such, on the question of „who or what makes a human?”.

The latter connects nicely to the following Ingo Normet's sentence: „Intuition and improvisation cannot be underestimated, but the entire system needs to be seen as a whole again and again, that whole needs to be constantly questioned, re-thought.” (Normet 2011: 14) This is the part in the primer's foreword that I would like to question, where Ingo Normet speaks about swimming in that river. He has written: „I have walked exactly those paths with my students, have swam in that river. And if someone else starts doing the exercises described in the book, the river stops being the same. It becomes another river. But to become a good swimmer, one definitely has to swim in many rivers. [...] The most important experience has been to swim **in that river** [Ingo Normet's emphasis – A.L].” (Normet 2011: 15)

At this point, however, I would claim the following: in order to become a good swimmer, one does not definitely have to swim in many rivers, for example in the Ingo Normet's or Elmo Nüganen's or Lembit Peterson's river, or in the River Emajõgi, in the Seine or in the Rein. One river would suffice, but only that kind which would give one the experience of having swam in all the possible ones. Where to find such a river? In my approach, experiencing multitudes in a single river would be possible in the River of Forgetfulness, or in the River Lēthē (Ancient Greek for *lēthē* – 'forgetfulness'), if one wanted to express themselves in the original thought language of the Occident. Through Ancient Greek it also becomes evident that forgetfulness goes together with truth – a term that is indeed quite unpopular according to tenacious postmodernists at modern times. The root for the Ancient Greek word 'alēthēia' ("truth" in translation) is 'lēthē', forgetfulness. In Greek mythology, Lēthē is the river in the underworld where people who had reached the land of the dead had to drink from in order to forget their previous life and their past.

If a human, the constant creation of the human, remains the main question in both the philosophy of education and for the theatre school, it is relevant to ask: which type of truth about the creation of a human can be connected to forgetfulness and to the Lēthē River? Let it be said that similar ideas carrying the same content are enabled both by the River of Forgetfulness and by one of the most important symbols depicting the human in the Occident – the laughing/crying theatre mask. In Ancient Greece, the mask was originally described by the word *persona*. Later, the meaning of *persona* got transformed, starting to also denote the role played by an actor, and even later, any of the roles people take on in their everyday lives. Today, the word *person* denotes a person as a human being. But the mask as such has become the symbol of the human who plays, and of theatre. About what type of a human, and perhaps additionally also about what can the laughing/crying theatre mask and the River of Forgetfulness as symbols talk about?

For me, they talk about: 1) a place as a difference, as a border as such, 2) a human as a border, as *limes*, and about the human individuation, of humans becoming individuals, 3) a human as the difference of masks. All the topics are utterly intertwined, so I shall try to keep them connected also when looking deeper into them.

Different masks are used as a symbol for theatre: the laughing mask mostly symbolises a comedy, and the crying one a tragedy. Every mask of that type is exactly what it is, expressing a certain fixed identity or a character (see below a picture of two different masks).

A lot more multi-meaningful is the mask where those two sides are together, where there is a mouth which's corners are simultaneously pointing downwards and upwards, so one can indeed talk about the laughing/crying theatre mask, and not about the laughing and the crying one. In Estonia, this can be seen on the symbol mask of the Vana Baskin theatre.

The mouth depicted on the laughing/crying theatre mask is the territory which simultaneously connects and distinguishes the antagonistic poles, where both of these phenomena – laughter and crying – get born and start from. Following the logic of philosophy of difference, this area can be named a place as a difference, in other words a border territory, a border (Latin for *limes*). The border, the border territory as such carries the same characteristics as the phenomena that it unites and distinguishes. When looked at separately, the thing that is called a border becomes a thing that carries no special meaning as an independent phenomenon (cf. Liimets 1999: 109–116; 2009a: 389–395).

When in Greek mythology, Lēthē, the River of Forgetfulness, is the border between the worlds of the living and the dead, it is related to both the living and the dead. As such, the River of Forgetfulness could be seen as the symbol of the human's wholesome being-in-the-world. Since life and death are indeed the most general phenomena related to human existence, subpar to none. There is no death without life and no life without death. Hence we can deduct that the River of Forgetfulness as a border makes both the existence of life and death possible and real. Madis Kõiv (2005: 537–551) has said: „space – it is communality [...]. Space is eternally becoming, never an existence that is". Thus, the communality that characterises space as such according to Kõiv, is also the characteristic to my approach to border as space. The idea of synthesis of communality and eternal becoming claimed by Kõiv should basically presume that whatever space only exists in living change and in the becoming, and never in a so-called perma-death. But here inevitably a question rises whether there really is a difference between any space as such and the border as space? If there is, then what creates that difference? I claim that in the end, everything depends on connecting space to people and to their mental attitudes.





While being on the River of Forgetfulness as on a border but not drinking from it, the current will inevitably carry one with, turning the human into a part of the border. To be a living, spatio-temporal human who unites life and death, just like they are united and differentiated by the River of Forgetfulness, means to exist as a liminal phenomenon. But humans also have the right to stay either on this or on the other side of the border, to make a choice whether to belong to the world of the living together with the mental attitude of excluding death as such from one's life all together, or by drinking from it, to enter the land of the dead on the River of Forgetfulness, and thus reaching the so-called perma-dead state where all kind of life is ruled out. In a similar manner, the laughing/crying theatre mask expresses the liminality of the nature of a human being and the choice a person has: to be that one specific or the other specific mask; or to be a border that potentially includes all masks, identifying with multitudes and with maskability as such.

Using this approach, the laughing/crying theatre mask and the River of Forgetfulness both talk about personal individuation, about the way of becoming an individuality; and also about the personal freedom to be: a) on either this or on the other side of the border, that is to be a creature with a fixed identity, b) to be on the border and the border – which is to be the human as *limes*. I will followingly present two visions/masks of people born from this deductive thinking. I as a person as *limes* have found the impulses for creating these from here and there, but mostly from my very own Self.

## What does it mean to be a human on this or on the other side of the border?

- 1) It means identifying oneself with certain roles, certain specific masks which are only what they are, and only that. The person is similar to a closed system. For example, when someone takes the role of a director or a secretary or a stage director or a student to such an extent that they do not know any more how to be anything else than a director, student, secretary or a stage director, then this person's life is but an existence within a certain role. It is also known from theatre life that some actors tend to perform the same role over and over again their entire life. It is as if they can't remove the mask from their face. Or those school children and students at universities who identify themselves with the role of a good student who exhibits the characteristics of a publicly approved good student, and who try to live by certain rules only to be that good student. Or one does something in the name of the expected success since one identifies oneself with the success mask. This is how the measure of freedom in the person gets revealed – that is the wish, the skills, the capability and the want to identify oneself in only one specific way (with one mask and role) or through different means (with a multitude of masks and roles).
- 2) Belonging only to this or to the other side of the border, having a fixed identity means that one tends to see the entire world of life only through the mirror of the one and the same stereotypes: metaphorically thinking either only in a laughing manner (corners of the mouth pointing upwards) or only in a crying manner (corners of the mouth pointing downwards), but not in various different ways. One bricks oneself into a prison of their own making, always staying and being that one specific mask/person who they have been and still are, not knowing how to be anything else. One follows certain standards, becoming a standardised person. For example, one always uses the one and the same automatic techniques for role creation in theatre (you could ask whether this could be the result of swimming in that one river?), putting themselves together from the exact same pieces and bits, not knowing how to take new ones into use.
- 3) Being either on this or on the other side of the border, identifying oneself too much with whatever is accompanied by a danger of a person becoming a player who is paralytically clinging either to a goal, an expected result or the profit achieved, and just can not do anything else than follow those actions that have become a stereotyped compulsion in order to achieve the goal, the result or the profit that has become the most important thing in their lives. The human-player does not belong to themselves any more. He does not even know who he is. These type of people also speak with „strange words“, words that do not belong to them. Stereotypical, hollow slogan-like expressions get used. A certain system, action or discourse has gotten hold of the person and is being ruthless with them, playing them to their own will.
- 4) The human on this or on the other side of the border is not the creator, since he does not feel joy or how to let himself be carried away by the process (or the current on the River of Forgetfulness), but finds his importance in certain set goals and outcomes which have been given to him and demanded of him from the outside. Creation happens when creating something has been accompanied by creating the person itself here and now, while in the

process. That person with a fixed identity actually completely lacks one – their own Self, a subject-Self that acts, perceives and feels. They only have their object-Self, a construction of the self put together through reflection and thinking. The roots of the object-Self are mostly located outside the person – in the knowledge about himself that has been instilled there by other people. Reflective thinking can never catch the present subject-Self – the Self that exists while in movement and that becomes aware of their own existence not through thinking but through feeling and perceiving. Focusing on the object-Self and becoming more aware takes the person away from his own Self. It is as if a certain type of monster is created from one's Self – a mask that then gets constantly uplifted, never reaching the Self. This is why the person with a very fixed and settled identity proves to be very insecure. Since he lacks his Self and he does not know who is is, although he thinks he does, he stays constantly on a defense mode in order to protect himself from the imaginary enemies that threaten his identity.

- 5) The person on this or on the other side of the border has a great fear of death, he tries to avoid thinking or talking about it. This means that he steers clear from the River of Forgetfulness as a border. One does not risk to step on the border as such because in there one is already closer to death. One of the characteristics of a creative person, however, is the bravery to take risks and to constantly touch all sorts of borders. Although in life, a person tries to avoid death, then when after drinking from the River Lēthē (since at one point he needs to do it any way) he only meets perma-final death and fugacity in the land of the dead. That is, when using Heidegger's words (cf. Liimets 2009b), that person is only prone to the past (*Vergangenheit*) (that does not shift or move), and not to the bygone (*Gewesenheit*) that is constantly coming back from the future and creates the bridge between different times and spaces. That person never comes back from the future and will never live across times through his creation, since when living he did not temporalise himself based on his own potential but based on material objects, on his career and on the profit he could gain through others. Thus one can say that in overall, that person was basically dead the entire time, like a living corpse.

This would be the portrait of a person who positions himself on either this or on the other side of the border, having a fixed mask and a stereotypical identity. From philosophy, the best kind of example about a this type of person would be the „last man” from Friedrich Nietzsche's „Thus spoke Zarathustra”.

## The possibility to be the human as *limes* (border) or to be a human on the River of Forgetfulness

But there is also a **different way to be**, expressed by the crying/laughing theatre mask and the River of Forgetfulness, that is **the way to be the human as *limes* (border), and to be liminal, that is to be a human on the River of Forgetfulness** (see the visual of the mouth as a border on the Vana Baskin theatre's symbol mask where the independent crying and laughing mask both start from, but that belong together on the border). That choice made by the human would mean for him:

- 1) the chance to use his freedom in order to define himself into infinity within the open measure. The mentioned chance also springs from the meaning of the Latin word *limes* – it means *limes* as a border value that is connected to approaching infinity and zero. Due to that, the human is kind of placed between bottomlessness and infinity, and just between his own object-Selves. What does it mean to self-define into infinity within the open measure? In order to understand that, one should know: a) the meanings for the word „border” in Ancient Greek philosophy, b) the founding ideas from self-consciousness to non-cognitivist theories.

Amongst other things, in Ancient Greek philosophy, the „border” (see also Luik 2002: 37) also signifies the aim of reaching one's own measure, thus creating a whole together with the thing one is related to. This type of Ancient Greek approach connects well to contemporary theories of human self-consciousness (for example, see about those theories from Reet Liimets 2005) where it is not related to thinking and reflexivity or to the object-Self. According to non-cognitivist approaches, self-consciousness in its most primeval form is related to the being-in-the-world of the subject-Self<sup>1</sup>, in other words to human's present I-amness (German for *Ichbinheit*) which is not available to reflexion; and is mostly related to human's corporeality and spatiality, to movement in space and

<sup>1</sup> If one keeps in mind the simple scheme of „I am me” which expresses self-consciousness, then according to non-cognitivist theories, the „I-amness” that is the basis and the speaker of the „I” can be conceptualised as the subject-Self, while the second Self in the sequence, towards which the subject's intentionality is directed, can be seen as the object-Self. The cognitive theories do not ask about the content and the meaning of the „I am” (that is the I-amness) phenomenon, but sees this scheme as comprising of three independent components.



to somatic sensitivity. It has been claimed that humans are already born with a brain model of the Self and with its so-called virtual Other. While moving in space we also perceive our surroundings directly with the surface of our skin and thus exist in a symbiosis with the world through it. Thus, the „I-amness“ is a phenomenon which's components are: a) a certain specific Self just as he is when being directly identical with his corporeal and mental person, and b) the virtual Other of this same Self, the thing/being what a person also becomes (albeit partially existing in the person in its non-existence) due to being in contact with the world. Since the world in its multitudes is altogether infinite, then in the case of human openness, the what-is-not-a-territory that belongs into him is also infinitely expanding. When moving in space, the human recreates himself in every moment, recreating yet newer masks, but not rigidly identifying with any of those, but remaining a human as the difference of masks – a moving border that connects all possible masks into one, yet differentiating between all of them, continuously expanding his what-is-not-a-territory due to being open towards infinity. The more individual a person is, the more complementary he is, when the (at first sight completely) contradictory poles can form a whole.

- 2) Being on the border – this means continuously being on the search for one's so-called anthropological and virtual Other: either on the search for a mirror which would reveal oneself to oneself when looking into it, or on a search for what one is not yet, but potentially could be, in order to expand his human measure as such. To expand one's measure is possible through expanding one's borders to outside but also through digging deeper and deeper into the layers of subjective reality. The phenomena that exist in the non-being-condition in a human can become existing when the uninterrupted journeying, *being in the process as such* becomes of most important value instead of a mask and the role related to some outer gain or profit, honour or fame, or the practised stereotypical way and the system of being. One puts on a first mask, then a second one and a third one, etc.; one learns how to approach the world and oneself from one, another and yet another angle yet never completely identifying with any of those. A good actor can also go into whatever specific role and also come out of it, still remaining internally free. The reason for being on the journey is no specific mask or a role, goal or outcome, or the acquirement of something, but the driving force behind the movement should be the joy of the process, of creating all the possible masks, and the authentic interest carried by the internal motivation. When being on the border, being in the process, the person who values the process above all can thus be just like on the River Lëthë. On the River of Forgetfulness one lets the river carry oneself: to forget about one's self, the goals and the results, but yet remaining aware of the process as such, and of the creation that gets born from it; to remain aware that one is on the River of Forgetfulness. Thus one stays on the border – in the space as communality where forgetfulness and awareness belong together. The more self-forgetting yet more aware the process, the more ambiguous is the outcome that gets born from it – the creation and the meaning it requires; the more active becomes the questioning of the thing that is being created, with both getting born at the same time – the creation and the metatext.
- 3) Being on the border as being on the process is a present phenomenon perceived as happening in the moment which at the same means forgetting about the past and the future. I-amness – it is intuitive, spontaneous indivisible feeling of oneself in a present moment. On the border, on the River of Forgetfulness is where the human transcendence happens (getting out of one's borders, crossing them, and expanding the measure of the human as the whole). But it only happens when the process has started from the human's inner potentiality and also flows back there, not circling the world around it, for example, the means and the tools (artefacts) enabling success, certain goals, achievements and profit-bringing results. No expanding and no refashioning of the human measure takes place when between the end of a certain process cycle of being open towards infinity and the start of a new one (see more, Liimets 2005) one does not reach the so-called 0-territory<sup>2</sup> where the things „carried from“ the world and made into one's own values get accumulated into subjectivity as certain subjective semantics. Based on all of that, individuality as indivisible whole gets shaped, being internally ambivalent, polystructural and externally perceived as complimentary.
- 4) The human as *limes* is characterised by the away-intention, by a constant yearning towards a place he is not in yet, what he is not yet, since the expanse of the what-is-not-a-territory that resides inside him sets the limit for the measure of his whole. When the human as *limes* exists in movement and in flow, and is carrying out his freedom to spatialise and temporalise himself through constant self-transcendence and through the away-

<sup>2</sup> In mathematics, the calculation of the liminal value also connects infinity and the approach towards zero, for example in the function  $y = 1/x$ . When  $y$  approaches infinity, then  $x$  approaches zero. And *vice versa*, when  $x$  approaches infinity, then  $y$  approaches zero.

intention towards a place which does not exist yet or where he is not yet, then he is consequently spatialising himself into utopias and ideals (Greek for *ou-topos*, 'no-place'; a place that does not exist). Utopias and ideals (not goals and results) – these are the home of a creative being. The away-longing is thus comprehensible as a mental dimension that expresses the limits, the width and the quality of the measure of the creative human. Consequently it proves to be the determining factor of how wide is the what-is-not-a-field that exists in every person.

Hence while being on the border, while letting yourself to be carried away by the Lēthē River, by recreating masks, by being filled by the away-intention, the human's 'Self' gets born and created, that can be interpreted as the difference of masks – as something that remains between all the different masks that connects and differentiates them all. When creating a human gets accompanied by the creation of masks, at the same time giving meaning to maskability as such, creation is born. The birth of creation also presumes playful (not player-like) attitude to life which enables to look at the world and at oneself from many different angles. As a result of all that, the play's depth and seriousness grows, the legend of the theatre gets born, the actor becomes a symbol – the human as a difference of masks, the mask as such, a *persona*.

- 5) A border also means limitations. The human as *limes* (being what he is, and that what he is not) when limiting his measure is constantly also creating a wider whole of himself, for that, placing himself onto the horizon of life and death (thus incorporating qualities from the both shores of the River of Forgetfulness). Due to that he is himself infinite and becomes life that re-creates himself in every moment (I-amness). At the same time, due to the constant crossing of the 0-territory, it is as if he is also constantly dying, by gifting and giving himself away either to his creation, to other people, or to something similar. Paradoxically, at the end, the more one gifts himself away, the more one renounces himself, the more he stays alive and survives throughout the times.
- 6) The human as *limes* (border) is also a human in a constant starting position, as if being and remaining a child who does not yet know life. Every time when the human crosses the 0-territory and stands at the footstep of a new process cycle, he has gifted something of himself away, renouncing himself, as if partially drying from one side, but from the other side, refashioning and refreshing himself, standing like a child, as a clean sheet on the doorstep of the opening door. When in his primer that was referred to earlier Ingo Normet said that an actor technically puts together a new person for every role from his own details, then the human as *limes*, understood as he was described, would be able to do that. One could also say that the more mature a person, the more identity-free he is. His only certain identity is the unlimited freedom to either be a someone or to be a no one. The entire process is in action until the human can not resist the urge to drink from the Lēthē River any more, because once it is also bound to happen, since the desire of life is accompanied by the desire of death.

## How to educate the human as *limes*?

Education as such has been defined in many ways (see, for example, Liimets 2009a). From the point of shaping the human as *limes*, I find the idea of education as a way of enduring the aporias (Greek for *a-poros* – a lack of a road, roadlessness) the most suitable. One needs to educate how to tolerate the paradoxicality of the existence, how to tolerate oneself as the I-amness which is developing towards infinity and can never be fully accessed even by oneself. One needs to teach how to endure a situation where there kind of is and kind of is not a road to whichever destination; how to tolerate the fact that at the end, no question comes with clear and finite answers. The human way of becoming a human is an aporetic way just like the River of Forgetfulness is, being claimed to be in the underworld, and what perhaps it is not, due to which there is nothing else to do than to swim in that river like recommended by Ingo Normet. But one should swim in that river while not afraid of utopias and with a hope that it is the River of Forgetfulness. Otherwise there exists a danger of becoming the catch to that lame death that preys on this or on the other side of that swimmable river.



Airi Liimets with her father - on the River of Forgetfulness?  
(photo: private collection)

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Airi Liimets's article is based on her conference talk that can be viewed [HERE](#).



# New Approach to Acting Studies in Latvian Academy of Culture

Mara Kimele, Elmars Senkovs<sup>1</sup>

**Mara Kimele:** Latvian theatre has undergone big changes. Actors have changed from performers to creative performance artists. Acting as such is considered prestigious, and many young people audition for the theatre school. But we wish that they would all also get a job in a theatre.

Years ago, as a member of the admission committee for a new year of students, I came to a recognition that young actors experience psychological difficulties when starting their job in a theatre.

First of all, the theatre school educates them in a way which fills them with tremendous respect towards more experienced actors, and hence they automatically become the so-called second line of command.

Secondly, our theatre education system has been copied from Russia, and it follows the principle where young actors spend their first two years doing exercises and sketches, playing scenes during the third year and performing in their graduation productions during the fourth. As a result, the young actors entering real theatres are greeted with criticism on them not knowing how to do anything. But we are actually dealing with talented young people. They just end up in a bit of a pickle when starting their jobs in theatres and do not know how to break out of the closed circle themselves.

When I admitted the new year of students, I decided to change this system. Together with the young director **Elmars Senkovs** we started to develop a **new study programme**, with all its aspects connected to performing. The goal was to minimise the distance between exercises and performances. We started putting on performances already during the first year.

We put on three performances during the **first year of study**, all of them incorporating exercises that were also part of the curriculum.

The first exercise was: **the monologue**. The goal was to understand what a monologue is. We approached this from two angles. The first was opening up personally and sharing one's experiences. I suggested the topics and the students started building up monologues based on them. The other approach was observations. Each student had to find one stranger. And play that person in their monologue.

For many actors, monologue is the internal machine that requires a lot of work. The students had to find a stranger from the streets and make their acquaintance. They could not have a single acquaintance in common. They had to become acquainted with someone so well that the stranger would trust them with their personal story. The task of the acting students was to copy that person – both their physical and speech characteristics, intonation and timbre. It is a difficult task that set the bar high for the students.

The other exercise was **the fairy tale**. I am convinced that a fairy tale needs to be performed. The more exotic the tale, the more enthralling it is. For example, a fairy tale from India or Japan. This gives the young person a feeling of being free from responsibilities, since fairy tales connect us to something simple and child-like. You lose the sense of



<sup>1</sup> Mara Kimele's talk was translated from Latvian to Estonian by Epp Kubu, and Elmars Senkovs's talk by Dita Lince.

fear when performing a fairy tale. But fear is one of the biggest obstacles that the actor needs to overcome before stepping onto the stage.

Our third production was on the following topic: the wonderful Latvian author **Eduards Veidenbaums**<sup>2</sup>. We created a performance based on his poetry. The impulse to combine the materials came from the students themselves and was not initiated by me as their teacher. The task was given in a way that everyone had to read through all of Veidenbaums's poems. And everyone had to find the material they liked. To choose certain lines. They also had to familiarise themselves with the poet's life and find real life situations, such as the poet running into difficulties with paying his rent. These are practical issues which are familiar also to the Latvian students. Each student made their choice, choosing exactly that material that they liked. Thus, the students compiled the base text for the production themselves and also prepared it for the performance. It is important to note that since the theme was the life of the author Eduards Veidenbaums who died at a young age, the students did not suffer from stage fright since they connected the poet's life situations to their own life, and went along with them emotionally.

We did not perform these three productions in the theatre school but gave guest performances. We performed in schools, kindergartens, and were also earning money while doing it. This is how the students overcame their fear of performing in front of strangers. Performing a fairy tale in a kindergarten does not feel scary, does it? At the same time, the kindergarten audience is very demanding. If they don't like what they see, they just leave. Performing to children helps the actor to develop a sense of how he is received and understood, and whether what he says is relevant.

Hence the goal of the first year was to get over the stage fright and to learn drama.

On the **second year of study** we planned on doing two productions. We focused on ensemble play and on spatial perception: how to move naturally? Of course, at the same time we had lessons on movement, singing and speech. But the question was how would the student know how to implement all that material in a performance? Hence we created two of them.

The first performance was Jānis Rainis's „Golden horse”. It was a movement based production, directed by a young Lithuanian director who was himself also a theatre student. All of our students took part.

The second performance was Bertolt Brecht's „Mother Courage” which also had all the students stepping on stage. The performance was held together by monologues focusing on modern war. The actors' personal reactions to the war situations, depicting their own feelings, were important. For example, one girl told what she would feel in a situation where she'd have to work as a prostitute and her mom would get shot. Then all possible wartime situations got performed. Thus, the performance turned out to be an integration of documentary theatre and fictional, literary texts.

On the **third year of study** we worked on a realistic, psychological play. The second semester was dedicated to Shakespeare.

Estonia has lots of modern, contemporary theatre. But in Latvia, the actor is mainly expected to perform the text of a play. Of course we also have contemporary theatre. But we do not have many productions that are not based on a play, and it does not pay well to play in them. At the same time, in theatres paying a decent salary, the actors have to play roles. This is why the students need to learn how to analyse a play and how to create a character on their own. The current Latvian directors do not help actors with role creation. This is why the actors need to be heroes and do that on their own.

I propose a **questions-system** for role creation. When you ask questions about your character, you will know more things about them. For example, one student asked for my advice about not knowing how to solve the role of Juliet she needed to play. I asked: how old is Juliet? It turned out that the student had not thought of that. Then we looked into it, discovering that Juliet was 14 years old. We then used the method from the first year of our studies: go and look for a 14-year-old girl and try to imitate her.

The communication between partners is also important. This is something we try to train from the get-go.

Psychological productions are home to this strange phenomenon that only applies to theatre, and not to any other field of arts: **simultaneity**. Actors are lucky people, for they can simultaneously be themselves and someone else. No one else apart from an actor is able to divide their lives into two. It is important for the young actors to understand that identifying themselves with their role is a way to madness. But if you only play yourself, it already becomes tedious to watch at a third time. It is important not to lose self-awareness when playing a role, the distance

<sup>2</sup> Eduards Veidenbaums (1867–1892), Latvian poet and translator.



from the self. One needs to enter the other character without being tortured, without ripping out their guts. When you control your play with your mind, it is as if you have a horse and the reins to lead them. The miracle happens only when your consciousness is free to observe what you are doing. For example, becoming an old lady very quickly.

When we worked on roles during the third year of study, we spent our time discussing the meaning of the character's inner monologue. It does mean that you cannot lose self-awareness. You don't play a text, you play the person. Words carry a huge power. The actor often glues themselves to the words and starts serving the word. To illustrate the text. But a text lives its own life. And the character needs to think, to react and to feel at the same time. To live their own life. A character is not a text. And every actor should understand this.

When I started directing when I was younger, I first focused on a play by a Russian author that the Soviet officials had wanted to censor. The entire Ministry of Culture was gathered and long talks were held whether this production was even fit for the stage. I could not understand how they could turn such a grand and a happy thing as making theatre into a massive problem. Theatre should be exclusive – a lifestyle that makes you happy. But if it does not create joy and happiness for you, you should choose another profession.

It is an absolute miracle that an actor manages to surpass the border of the physical world. They are able to move from one person into another, and to do it lightly. To spend time in different eras. To meet different people. Hundreds of times. To derive joy and pleasure from it. When the actor starts working on Chekhov's or Shakespeare's play, they personally meet the author. Meeting the author is the most certain and most enjoyable method of work.

One other thing which interests me in theatre is the fact that we can condense time. Playing has a specific character, namely that the stage time is not correlated to real life time. There is no worse thing than the stage being used for playing things in real life time. On stage, time needs to be pressed together, since everything happens a lot more intensely. By this, I do not mean hurrying. It does not mean that everyone should play quickly. Only the space and the reaction speed become bigger. For example, when we play a text-intense play, such as Chekhov, in a condensed way, a new quality gets born. The speed of thoughts.

My students have currently studied for three years. On the **fourth year of study**, they will have a *commedia dell'arte* course and their graduation productions: Shakespeare's „A Midsummer Night's Dream" and „Richard III", one Chekhov, and one play by a Latvian author.

I hope that after graduation, this year of students is psychologically better prepared for working in theatre. Otherwise, the talented youth just disappear. Not because someone considers them unworthy. But because those people who are already in theatre, are very strong. For example, Alvis Hermanis, the head of the New Riga Theatre, is planning to make half of his theatre troupe redundant. When the young actors are not capable of achieving the same level within two years that the actors who have worked there for twenty have, they get fired. This is why we are trying to teach our students how to work independently. They can't sit around and wait for someone to offer something to them or to do the work for them. One needs to be self-sufficient.

**Elmars Senkovs:** I am a student of Mara Kimele. After graduating from the pedagogy speciality, I started studying in the Latvian Academy of Culture. Two years after graduating from the academy, I was offered a job in the theatre school. I did not say no. I wanted to show that something could be changed in the school.

When starting, it became evident that the current system of study had many good and also quite a lot of bad points. I had felt all of them on my own skin. Back in my school day, it was quite usual that we slept during theory lessons. It is because you need to be physically active all the time. But despite of everything, the actor also needs to be intelligent. This is why we tried to join theory and practise in the academy. For an actor, theory becomes interesting when they can immediately put it into practise. When they are working on Shakespeare in the acting lessons, they read about the same era in culture theory and also understand the background of the play better.

I tried to figure out what would help the students with role creation. When the actor plays a role, they come up with their own story about it. A story they are an author to, and a story to which they give an additional artistic value. From this point of view, a role is a choice of free expression. At this time and age, we only want to see **personalities** on stage. Not the actor. In order for the personality to be born, it is important that the students would fully let go. Lots of exercise books are used in theatre school every day: Chekhov, Stanislavski, etc. I used to do exercises every day during school time. And then I understood that 60% of them do not work. Or I did not know how to interpret them correctly. This is why I try to explain to the students with every exercise why we are doing it. Why it is needed. Then they have a lot higher motivation for doing them.



When starting their first year of studies, everyone is cramped up, sort of behind a defensive wall, afraid of one another. We had to deal with opening up the students. It turned out that some introverted characters were actually really interesting.

We are not finished with our reform. For example, there are some pedagogues in Moscow's theatre schools who demand that students cut all their hair equally short and that everyone should look the same. It is easier for the pedagogue to work with this type of students, of course. It is because their personalities have been subdued. In an opposite manner, we are trying to find out what is the personality of each student.

Right at the beginning of their school year I asked the students to bring me all sorts of materials that interest them. Back in the day I was 29, they were 18-19. That 10-year gap seemed huge. They brought me music, travel photos, etc. This is how I obtained information about them, and found it a lot easier to communicate. We can advise someone only when we speak the same language with them.

The next thing that we with Mara Kimele are trying to do when it comes to the students, is to foster their independence. It is important for us that they could work with different directors in a professional theatre. Directors can be smart, emotional, aggressive, etc. But it is the actor's task to find the common language with all of these directors. So, in short, it is important for the actors to be independent and to know how to create their role.

I also wanted to mention the following: a while ago it was popular to talk about intuitive pedagogy in the pedagogic sciences. I once asked a doctor of pedagogy what it was. Because it seemed to me that my work followed intuitive pedagogy. The doctor said that such a thing does not even exist in a fixed form. Because as soon as you write it down, it stops being intuitive pedagogy. But nevertheless, the scientist talk about it as if of a serious term.

What I want to say is that as a teacher you need to be flexible. When we admit the new year of students to the school, then we will probably already be working in a different manner. I also changed the way I taught, because you have to have a feel for the era and for the way your students think. We need to pass on our knowledge in a way that the young actors would become independent. Each student has their own approach. This is why Mara and I talk with each student individually. I remember from my own school days how important it was for me for Mara to approach me, and to tell me a significant keyword about my development. This is why it is also important for me to talk to my students even about the everyday things.

## Further Reading

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Mara Kimele's and Elmars Senkovs's discussion is based on their conference talk [that can be viewed HERE.](#)

# Directing Abroad

Tiit Ojasoo

One can write memoirs on the topic of directing abroad, or share words of wisdom to students who are planning to go abroad to direct. Already during school time you are in touch with people who come from a different theatre space and also from a different theatre language. How to be properly ready for such a meeting?

I've always carried the idea of going abroad within myself. Every time I've been directing somewhere else, the personal exposure has made me feel as if I've gone through doctoral studies. It has been a life-changing experience. It is also one of the main motifs why we have left the Theatre NO99 troupe with Ene-Liis Semper for a couple of months. The goal is to get a wider picture, to obtain a more difficult and a more interesting experience. I've directed abroad many times. And have led some masterclasses in addition.

I got my first experience already at school time at the event Baltic Seaside Drama where theatre students from around the Baltic Sea got together. Five productions were made during one month. One of them was directed by me. The theme was „**The Prince of Homburg**”<sup>1</sup>. This play has not been translated into Estonian. I did not find it in English. I did not know enough Russian to read it, not to mention German. A situation emerged where I had to stand in front of my colleagues, other directors and local pedagogues, and had to speak in a language which I actually did not speak, about a production that was based on a material which I actually had not read. But through some miracle I did manage to speak. And a synergy was born between the Finnish, Icelandic and Russian actors.

Some years later, I happened to sit at a table at Peeter Jalakas's place with Alvis Hermanis, Kristian Smeds and Peeter Jalakas who had himself directed abroad when younger many times. Both Hermanis and Smeds were saying that going abroad to direct will quickly eat up your soul. The main thing is to stay with your troupe, your actors and your people. That might have been about ten years ago. But history has taken such a turn that Hermanis is basically only directing abroad now. And Smeds keeps consecutively saying no to jobs that are placed outside of Finland. And even those jobs that he does outside of Finland are still made with Finnish people. But I as a young man did not listen to them. I thought that I would still like to try.

We ended up in Hamburg's Thalia Theatre thanks to the production „**How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare**”<sup>2</sup> which we guest-performed there. After that, Joachim Lux, the intendant of Thalia Theatre, made me a proposal to come and direct at Thalia.

**Thalia theatre** is one of the two biggest theatres in Hamburg. The other one is Deutsches Schauspielhaus which is the overall biggest theatre in Germany. Thalia theatre is located just a few hundred meters away from it, and is also quite big in our terms. The main space seats 1000 people and about 400 people work in the theatre.

We have made four productions at Thalia. The first one of them was called „**Fuck your ego!**”<sup>3</sup>. And that is the exact description of the work process itself. Not only for me, but also for all the actors and the rest of the troupe members.

We made our next production, „**Hanuman's Journey to Lolland**”<sup>4</sup>, on the studio stage; the production was based on Andrei Ivanov's novel of the same name, and talked about being an immigrant from the insider's point of view.



<sup>1</sup> „The Prince of Homburg” is a play by the German playwright Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), written around 1810.

<sup>2</sup> „How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare”, directors Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper, premiere on 10.03.2009 at Theatre NO99.

<sup>3</sup> „Fuck your ego!”, directors Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, premiere on 26.04.2012 at Thalia theatre, Hamburg, Germany.

<sup>4</sup> „Hanumans Reise nach Lolland”, directors Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper, premiere on 14.12.2013 at Thalia theatre.

This was followed by two productions in the big house. The first one was Peter Handke's „**The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other**”<sup>5</sup>, in which Jaak Prints also took part, and where Jüri Nael helped us with the physical side. During the rehearsals, Jüri Nael spent two months in Hamburg. The daily work with the actors' physiques was important part of the directing process.

In 2016, Ene-Liis Semper and I saw the premiere of our „**Pygmalion**”<sup>6</sup> also in the main space. The production was based on George Bernard Shaw's play but it was the modernised version of it.

When I started working on my first production at Thalia theatre, then the indendant led the introduction to the rehearsals, saying the golden words: „As artists, we are always yearning for meeting something new, strange and unknown which would inspire us. But when we meet it, then we are not satisfied by the stranger not being like we are.” Words more prophetic than that would have been difficult to find.

The first production was „**Fuck your ego!**” which was based on Anton Makarenko's „The Pedagogical Poem”. I was enthused by the idea of an ideally coordinated society, by communism or socialism in its best possible meaning which Makareno succeeded in building in his colony. But for the Germans, this was something utterly fascist, unbelievably horrible. And any type of playing together like we have held dear at theatre NO99 was found to be absurd.

This is the place where the **conflicts** start. The dramaturg for the production was Eero Epner who, as a joke, thought of „**Fuck your ego!**” as the title for the production. But the theatre found this title to be a really nice one, and a title more prophetic than that would have been hard to find. This production process revolved around the idea of coming together as people. For me, getting students to stand in a row in the beginning of a physical education class and ordering them to count down seemed like the most normal thing. But the Germans said that if one of the PE teachers would actually do that, then he would be hung the next day. This is absolutely out of question in Germany. We had lots of fun with marching practise. Marching in a row, which was a normal thing during my childhood both in kindergarten and in school, seemed totally unacceptable for the Germans. Of course, we made that into a lengthy scene. The actors were taught the easiest movements and turns. And then everyone could be the order giver: „Right face, left face, straight, stop, about face!” Then we could see the sparks of joy in their eyes – to be able to give commands to their colleagues.

This production dealt with the question whether and how it is possible to gain integration in individualistic Europe. The tensions among the troupe members and between us and the troupe members started telling the story that was the content of the production. The rehearsals were not easy. One excess and nervous breakdown followed another. But through that we were dealing with the topic of how we learn to know each other, what things we accept and what things we do not.

Many **cultural problems** became evident. In Germany, there is a habit of eating in the rehearsal space. But I was wondering how you could eat when we are working? I had thought that Germans would be on time, that the German exactness would apply. But when everyone was 15 minutes late to the rehearsals, I asked about where that German exactness was? To which they answered: „Yes, but we would actually like to be more like Italians”.

At the same time, there was an actor who had not had a day off for 40 days in a row. There were rehearsals almost every day, and a performance. This type of welfare which is demanded in here by the union, that one needs at least 36 hours of uninterrupted downtime, is not yet happening in Germany. They are, however, moving towards starting to count the work hours of actors, at least.

This shows that from one hand one can indeed get mad if they are constantly 15 minutes late to the rehearsals. But if you look at it the other way: they just finished a performance at 11 at night, and have now arrived to the rehearsal by 10 in the morning, they have not had the time to eat, and in the meantime, at 8 in the morning, they also had a costume rehearsal at the other end of the town – this is why they are late and eat in rehearsals. Basically, being an actor in Germany means that you are working 17-18 hours a day. Now, I'm mostly speaking about one big theatre, but I've been exposed to other theatres as well.

There is always an inherent **tension** between the **actors** and the **director**. When the actor needs to be the concentrate of life, and when, as a director, you need to insist on them to now please change into that concentrate of life, and it would be especially nice if you could do it on an abstract level, then that is quite a vast effort. This is when the tension gets born between the actor and the director that is inevitable, beautiful and not at all bad.

<sup>5</sup> „**Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wussten**”, directors Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, premiere on 30.04.2015 at Thalia theatre.

<sup>6</sup> „**Pygmalion**”, directors Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, premiere on 19.03.2016 at Thalia theatre.

**Language** is added as one source of tension. I did my first rehearsal period with an interpreter who was really good. They were able to simultaneously translate into my ear what the actor was screaming. But all my later directing jobs I've done in English which is not my or their mother tongue. Then we all feel equally like standing on an uneven ground. Language needs to be learned. Most of the troubles spring from words not being understood.

When I think about how we argued about every nuance in the rehearsals of the last production, „**A Midsummer Night's Dream**”<sup>7</sup>, then that would have been difficult in a foreign language. From one hand this is where the beauty lies. But on the other hand, this is also the reason why our productions are more visual than text-based.

But German theatre has many nice things as well. The **work arrangement** also differs in that way that there is an important person, the **director's assistant**, whose significance I fully understood during my third production when we moved to the main space. The stage-manager as we know it, is not known in that meaning; the stage manager sits at the lighting desk and tells the lighting technician when it is time to cut to the next sequence. But the director's assistant is the directest and the closest helper to the director. Even at a time when the performance is still in repertoire and the director has left the theatre, the director's assistant gives notes to the actors in order to keep the artistic level from falling.

The system of assistants is generally very big in Germany. Both the director and the set artist's assistant always have a higher education. Ene-Liis Semper's first assistant had a degree in scenography and architecture, and she made drawings, purchased things, was superbly intelligent and truly talented, but her own chance to become a scenographer arrived only after she had worked as an assistant for years. It is the same case with the director's assistant, they all have usually graduated as directors.

A separate topic is the **individuality of actors** which I also mentioned earlier. There is no union for actors. Already from school, people learn that they have to stand for themselves, to represent themselves. Since the intendant of the theatre changes in every five years, it means that a big part of the theatre troupe moves to a new theatre. Which in turn means that you need to constantly be in the good books for the market. This leads to a situation where playing alone happens a lot. But the longing for playing together is strong. When „*Filth*”<sup>8</sup> travelled to Hamburg in winter and that theatre troupe with whom we were working at the time saw how theatre NO99's actors were breathing in the same pace, they were mesmerised. They were the committed fans of this production. But they themselves have difficulties in achieving such a togetherness in play during just one production process.

About working arrangements. Since the time for the main space is expensive, then Thalia theatre, which is quite a tough theatre, only gives you 10 rehearsals on the big stage which is truly a small amount when it comes to productions that have a difficult sound and light solution. But despite of that there is *Bauprobe*. Many months before the actual stage rehearsals start, they build the set from any available materials. For the artist and the director to see it for a while. From one side, the use of time is very limited. From the other side it feels like splurging – an entire day is taken to build a set for just to look at it.

When we were working on „*A Midsummer Night's Dream*”, we also had such stage rehearsals in Estonia, and they helped a lot. The space was different. From one hand, the Russian school usually builds a set mock-up. Ene-Liis and I also use a lot of imagination – discussing amongst ourselves what is on stage and what effect does it have. From the other hand, when you enter a more difficult space where objects and viewing angles become more complicated, the set design rehearsal is very useful.

*Bauprobe* brings to mind the joy over the workshops' work quality at Thalia theatre. When we were there the last time, the engineer of the theatre came up with a solution to a difficult set design. And when we later checked how the design was implemented, it was an incredibly high quality one! Unbelievably beautiful! I learned the habit from Eevald Hermaküla to sit and watch how the set gets dismantled. Which is one incredibly beautiful and coordinated activity. At festivals I usually do not help my technicians. Because I love watching them. It is so beautiful. Dismantling the set. And when they have done it a couple of times, then the time for dismantling becomes many times shorter. But in Germany you can observe how beautifully the set gets created. In one production we had a parquet floor. They told us that we can't use real parquet and they will make all the parquet strips themselves. 2500 parquet strips that were also separately painted. This kind of work ethic and technical perfection is incredibly beautiful.

But naturally, all this has its downside. In recent years, my assistant at Thalia has been an Italian **Giacomo Veronesi**, who can be greeted also in Estonia thanks to Jüri Nael's year of MA students. In addition to Italian theatre

<sup>7</sup> „*NO40 A Midsummer Night's Dream*”, directors Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, premiere on 01.06.2016 at Estonia Concert Hall.

<sup>8</sup> „*NO43 Filth*”, directors-set designers Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, premiere on 17.10.2015 at Theatre NO99.

schools, he has also studied under Anatoli Vassiljev and Alvis Hermanis. But in order to get a job in Germany he worked as an assistant at Thalia for a long time. We discussed how we see German theatre and the way theatre is made in Germany. From one side, there is absolute forethought, incredible professionalism and pleasure when it comes to the technical side of how a production gets born: the make-up, the set and the woodwork workshops. How they build it all together and how they are given the time and opportunities to do that, thanks to the unions. But the same approach is attempted on the artistic side – optimisation goes as far as it possibly can, everything is driven to disquietude. The result is that changing an actor without the knowledge of the director is considered normal. Because the assistant knows how the actor needs to play. For me, this is absolutely not acceptable. By now, Jaak Prints had played the Handke production for about 30 times. And he can assure that the full cast has been on stage just a bit more than on half of those times. From one hand I understand that we have a space that seats the audience of a 1000, that Jaak has been flown in from Tallinn and that the performance needs to be put on. From the other hand – even in a production where the actors are seemingly just walking across the stage, it is the personal charm and the charisma of the actor from which everything has been put together.

The same applies to the **work of the actor**. If you could now imagine that you have five premieres in a year. You have no Sundays. When you have a premiere on a Saturday and you go to a rehearsal again on Monday – into the same rehearsal space, with the same colleagues –, and you will have a new director who says „Now let’s start firing!”, then of course you, as a human, will try to find a middle way for getting this next production done. We all know that this is the minus side of the repertoire theatre. But sometimes one needs to ask: what about my heart and creation? This brings money into the scene. Some actors at Thalia are from Belgium, and say: „You are rich like Croesus! Such comforts! When they start putting together a production in here, then everyone takes out their last pennies in a hope that they can pay up their debts in a couple of years.” The Italian said that in Italy, theatre is only made from a heart. There is nothing else. There is no space, no money. Only the heart gets pulled out of the chest and gets used for making theatre. So, from one hand, technicality and riches create opportunities. From the other, those riches come with their own responsibilities.

One important character in the theatre context is the **dramaturg**. There are not only one or two dramaturgs working in a big theatre. There are at least five – six – seven. Every production has their own dramaturg who is kind of a controlling link between the production process and the intendant. The dramaturg manages to conceptually analyse what is played in every rehearsal, where it is heading, which are the individual clichés of the actors, what is unexpected, what is interesting. You always have a person to talk to. The job of a director is quite a lonely one already in Estonia, and when abroad, the homesickness definitely adds to it. But at least then you have the chance to talk with the dramaturg, specifically about the meanings. The question is not how to solve a certain scene, but what do we need in this scene? What are we trying to say with this scene, conceptually?

To sum up, I would like to reminisce how Ingo Normet took us on a graduation trip during school time. We spent ten days at the Theatertreffen festival. This was our first encounter with German theatre. Ingo managed to organise it in a way that we lived in a four-star hotel and we got also given a daily allowance. But who would ever spend their allowance on food! Some bought footwear, some bought CD-s, some got beer. The first encounter with German theatre was totally shocking: why are they doing it that way? Many people from our year gave up on watching theatre – those who spent their money on beer. But Ingo was excited, he watched the entire time: „Oh, how exciting!” So I also went to see things, to see where the excitement was. And over time, I started understanding a few things here and there. The trips to Berlin and to other German theatre centres have always been eye-openers. Who in modern European theatre has not borrowed from Frank Castorf, Christoph Schlingensiefel, René Pollesch!

But now, when I go to Germany as a guest director, it is important to step above all the cultural misunderstandings. And at the end of the day, to do your own theatre. That theatre which only you can do. And not try to be one of the many directors of German theatre.



Tiit Ojasoo's article is based on his conference talk that can be viewed [HERE](#).







# On the Method of Lee Strasberg „Actors at Work“

Mihaela M. Mihut

I was practicing last night for the presentation as it is difficult for me to stand in front of people where I do not have to portray a character, but rather to come up and speak as myself.

So I was trying to start with the first tool of the **Actors Studio**, which is **relaxation** in the chair. I tried it, it was not working. Then I decided to go to the next tool, which is **concentration**. Concentration would stop my mind from wandering and going through all the negative thoughts that I have, and that we all have, as actors, like „Am I good enough to be here?“ or „Will they find out that I am a fraud?“.

Trying the tools of the method over and over again, and finding a technique from the Actors Studio as I have learned it and as I am teaching it now in New York and internationally, gives more of a foundation to the actor to have to rely on than depending on getting up in front of people and not having anything to ground themselves on.

The Actors Studio is a unique place, in my opinion. It is a place for professional actors who work continuously on the process and development of their craft. The Actors Studio was founded in 1947 by the American theatremakers Elia Kazan<sup>1</sup>, Cheryl Crawford<sup>2</sup> and Robert Lewis<sup>3</sup>. Lee Strasberg<sup>4</sup>, considered the father of method acting in America, became its artistic director in 1951. The Actors Studio is dedicated to realistic acting that provides tools to help the actor achieve creative inspiration in a concrete and dependable but not a rigid way.

Pushkin wrote that the role of an artist is to supply truthful feelings under given circumstances. If the ability to reach the creative mood in its full measure is given to the genius by nature, Stanislavski wondered, then perhaps ordinary people may reach alike state after hard work with themselves.

Method acting provides a series of tools for the actor. These tools inspire their creativity and the embodiment of the characters they portray. It encourages the actor to free their instrument, and to surprise themselves by exploring the many options the actor/artist has to bring their characters to life. We all have within us the greatness, the bad, the joy, the sadness, love, betrayal, light and darkness. There is no need, in my opinion, to look for the characters outside of ourselves. Instead, we discover the characters by working from within. The self that we reshape each time we work provides us with new understanding of human behaviour. It allows us to bring characters into life in an authentic way. No one can be like you. No one can interpret like you. Only you can be original, surprising, specific and therefore universal.

The method teaches actors how to use their instrument: their mind, senses and body, their personal experiences and imagination to fully realize the souls they portray. The method is a fastly adoptable series of techniques. Not a formula. Not a rigid path for artists to follow. Actors must rely on their impulses, instincts and original choices. The method provides them with dependable tools they can rely on to support their freedom of expression when accidental inspiration does not happen.



<sup>1</sup> Elia Kazan (1909–2003) was a Greek-American director, producer, writer and actor.

<sup>2</sup> Cheryl Crawford (1902–1986) was an American theatre producer and director.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Lewis (1901–1982) was an American actor, director, teacher and author.

<sup>4</sup> Lee Strasberg (1901–1982) was a Polish-born American actor, director and theatre practitioner. From the 1920s until his death in 1982, he developed method acting, which revolutionized the art of acting by having a profound influence on performance in American theatre and movies.



Some people say that it takes 20 years for one to become an actor. I say: it takes a lifetime. Representing humanity is a responsibility. It requires practice for entire life. As you change as a human being, so does the artist in you. You stop the work of the actor when you stop living.

My personal path from the stage of the Actors Studio as an actress to teaching in the School of Visual Arts in New York has helped me to learn to modify and adapt the technique of the method so that it would be effective for filmmakers and actors. It has taught me to be an observer and to guide my students based on their individual means as they begin their journey to fully express themselves.

I am grateful for having been invited to Tallinn. And I want to thank all the amazing actors that I have had the opportunity to work with for the last days. I want to thank them for their courage to allow themselves to be in **the state of not knowing**.

I think that the actor's work is always one that is not certain. I think that no matter how much we rehearse and prepare, as soon as we go on stage or in front of a camera, that moment is another one. So you have to begin the actor's work from the beginning. It is an ongoing process. It never ends.

The Actors Studio allows and encourages professional actors from beginners to actors with great success to come back to that place whenever they have challenges as actors. They are not ashamed of not knowing how to begin work on the character. Even if they have done that for 30 or 40 years. They understand that it is an ongoing process. It is not a 4-year or 10-year educational period. It takes the whole lifetime. Because, as we change and grow every day, we understand and see life in different ways because of the experiences, the losses and joys that we have had. That reshaping of ourselves needs to be allowed and given freedom to be brought into those great characters that we are lucky enough to portray.

Reach for your characters, do not bring the characters down to you. Be free, experience, be wrong. In the Actors Studio we are always told not to be afraid. To be wrong. To go out there and be bad! If you are given this permission, you feel scared at first. Because you do not want to be bad. You want to impress. You want to be worthy. However, we as human beings are worthy just because we are here.

Therefore, I decided to do the presentation with the actors who were generous enough to allow me to share my work with them for the last week. The workshop is called „Actors at Work” and we are going to demonstrate a little bit of the work of the actor and give you a glimpse into some of the sessions that are ongoing in the Actors Studio for more than 60 years.

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Click [HERE](#) to view the recording of  
Mihaela M. Mihut's conference talk and workshop „Actors at Work”.

# How to Develop Actors with the Technique of Rudolf Laban and Yat Malmgren

Per Nordin

My background is that I was educated in the school as an actor and I had **Yat Malmgren** as a teacher for my first two years. After that I worked as an actor in Sweden. But I wanted to learn more. So I studied Rudolf

Laban and Yat Malmgren technique of acting. Now I teach the technique in the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

I am going to tell about the background of Rudolf Laban and how Yat Malmgren took over his work. I am going to introduce some of the terms and tools of the technique, and will do exercises with the second year students of the Drama School. It is not the whole technique but the starting point of the language or the first words of the movement.

It all started around 1900, the time of a paradigm shift in the arts and in the society as a whole. Just some decades before, Charles Darwin had published his famous book about the origin of species. It was no longer the church and the Christian belief that decided how people should think. Rather, the scientific thinking became the norm more and more. In 1899, Sigmund Freud published his „Interpretation of Dreams“. Later on, Carl Gustav Jung started publishing his ideas and his famous study „Psychological Types“ (1921). There were a lot of things happening. The expressionistic movement started to develop in visual arts, theatre, literature and dance, where Laban's name became iconic.

**Rudolf Laban** (1879–1958) was born in the middle of Europe, in Bratislava, nowadays the capital of Slovakia. At that time it was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Laban's father was a military man and thus Laban as a young man had a chance to travel and to see a lot of movement: military, folk dance, the whirling dervishes dancing in Turkey, etc. However, Rudolf Laban did not become a military man, as his father had wished for, but studied architecture.

In the 1920s he went to Munich, an important centre in Europe. There were painters like Wassily Kandinsky, expressionistic artist theatres and cabarees. Laban developed his dance style called **expressionist dance**. Furthermore, he researched movement scientifically. He wanted to know what a movement was. How can we pick a movement out and see what it actually is? He was interested in movement for the dancer on stage, but in movement in life, too.

He developed what he called **movement choirs**. There were thousands of people who participated in those movement performances, amateurs and professionals. Laban started a lot of schools in different parts of Europe: in Germany, France, Switzerland, etc. These schools were led and taken care of by his students. Thus Laban successfully undertook different activities: dance schools, theatre and dance troupes, research, publishing books, etc.

At that time, the Nazi Party took power in Germany. They wanted to run the Olympic Games in 1936 as a big propaganda event. Parallel to the sport games, cultural games were organised. At that time, Rudolf Laban was the dance master of the Opera of Berlin and he was asked to create one of these big movement choirs parallel to the Olympic Games. And he did. But Joseph Goebbels, who was the minister of propaganda at that time, came to see







the performance some days before the premiere. And he said: this is enough, this is not according to Nazi agenda. Soon Laban, like many others, was not allowed to work in Germany.

He went to Paris. And then to the United Kingdom, invited there by **Kurt Jooss** (1901–1979), one of his former students, who was also a very prominent person in expressionist dance or free dance movement. Kurt Jooss had refused to adjust to the Nazis and had escaped to England before. Laban was invited to Dartington Hall, an important center at that time in South England. Russian-American actor, director and author **Michael Chekhov** (1891–1955) was also invited there, and he was teaching and developing acting and training methods for two years in Dartington Hall. We are not sure whether Michael Chekhov and Rudolf Laban met personally in Dartington Hall. But if we look at Chekhov's and Laban's terms, they are similar.

In England, Rudolf Laban's work changed. He started to research movement and teach movement to actors. He started to develop movement for young children in schools. He started also a branch that later became **dance movement therapy**.

In the 1950s, Laban developed his analysis of movement. He started to translate his tools and terms from German to English. He wanted to connect his own research about movement with Jung's psychological movement that he found was closest to him. Laban and William Carpenter, his assistant at that time, found that Jung was closer to the arts than Freud. We do not know if Laban and Jung met each other, but they were around the same time in Switzerland. When Laban and Carpenter tried to connect their theory with the one of Jung, they called this research „Movement Psychology“. As Carpenter was the one writing the research down, it was very important for Laban to have Carpenter continue his work.

Coming back to **Yat Malmgren** (1916–2002) we see that he trained himself in movement and dance in Berlin and developed his way of **solo dances**. He was a solo artist, sometimes dancing even without music. In 1939 he won a gold medal in a dance competition of free dance. As at that time Germany was not a safe place, he went to the United Kingdom.

There, Kurt Jooss invited Malmgren to Dartington Hall. And it was around that time that Yat Malmgren and Rudolf Laban met for the first time. I remember Malmgren telling us that he thought Laban was a strange isolated man who made models and geometric forms.

Followingly, Malmgren joined Kurt Jooss's dance company. They toured in England, North and South America. After the company split in the 1940s, Malmgren ended up in Brazil where he developed his form of dance. He met people who had studied with Russian theatre practitioner **Konstantin Stanislavski** (1863–1938) and who had left Russia. So, for first time in Brazil, he got connected with the Stanislavski system that showed its importance for him later. Afterwards, Malmgren returned to Europe where he toured with his solo dances.

When back in Europe, London became his base. In 1950s he had an unfortunate back injury and could not continue dancing. Instead, he started to teach movement in London. More and more actors came to his training. About that time Laban heard that Malmgren was back in England and was giving classes that had become popular. Thus, Laban invited Malmgren to teach in his center in Manchester (now [the Laban Guild for Movement and Dance](#)).

When Carpenter died unexpectedly, Laban gave a bunch of papers to Malmgren and said: „This is what I have researched so far. I have not enough strength to continue this. I see you can continue it.“ Malmgren told us when we were students that when he was back on the train, looking at these papers of „Movement Psychology“, he saw his whole dance career explained in terms that could be understood by others. He saw a start for a new method.



Yat Malmgren started developing this structure and these terms of Laban's method so it would be suitable for actors and dancers. However, Malmgren saw the technique more suitable for actors as he worked more with them. He developed the technique with his colleagues and started a school in 1963, called the **Drama Center London**. On the background of traditional English actor training the center caused an uproar, a big change. Many students of another drama school came over to the Drama Center London.

But how did the „Yat technique“ develop in Sweden? Before the 1960s, actors used to train at different theatres. For example, famous actors started their school in the City Theatre of Gothenburg. But in the 1960s, the government decided that the government itself should run schools for training actors, opera and operetta singers. Three schools were founded. One of them in Gothenburg, which newly assigned principal went to Europe to find inspiration and methods for teaching acting in his drama school. At the end of his tour he reached London where he was recommended to visit the Drama Center London where a Swede was teaching a technique he needed. He found that the structure of the actor teaching method of Laban and Malmgren was suitable indeed. Thus Yat Malmgren was invited to come to Gothenburg to teach his method. He came in 1966 and was teaching up to 1973. I was fortunate to have him as a teacher for two years. This way his method started developing in Gothenburg and elsewhere in the world. It has become known as the Rudolf Laban and Yat Malmgren technique of acting, based on the Stanislavski system and on the movement psychology. As follows, we will demonstrate in the workshop some exercises of the „Yat technique“ with the students of the Drama School of Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

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[Click HERE to view the recording of Per Nordin's conference talk and workshop.](#)



# Traditional Theatre

Benny Claessens

I want to express my gratitude for all these methods and ideas of performing arts. Although I must say that I have some arguments. I am looking for something else.

I have been acting and working a lot in Germany and in Belgium with different directors, like Alvis Hermanis and René Pollesch. But in a way they all talk about the same. Although it's still different from what I want.

I could situate myself in the postdramatic theatre. Although I must say that these ideas become very abstract for me. I am looking for something concrete. In Belgium and in Germany people think I make contemporary dance or that I make *performance* art or installations. But I think I make very **traditional** pieces. And if I talk about tradition I do not mean white male

heterosexual supremacy. I am interested in what actually is a person in this world? What does a person see? Not what a person feels. For me most important is what is outside of a person. Basically, for me this is an exact link to the tradition of Greek theatre. The Greeks walked around, talked, then put on a mask and went on like „I am Antigone“. Looking at the world is important for me as a performer and as a director, but also for the audience. Because I have a feeling that people just can't look around any more.

Also, here in the conference space, we are in a very intense black room. I would like to get life in it. That's also what I try to do with my work – make us watch life again. And not actors. Not theatre. Not the gorgeous faces of dead people. And this is not a provocation or „oh, we do not need that any more“. But as said here before – speaking texts should be a personal meeting between a performer and an author. It should be a meeting of works. Instead of a meeting with your inner self.

We talked about Freud. I must say there is a big misunderstanding about Freud. According to Lacan, Freud says there is no inner world. There is no „me“ inside of me. I am empty, actually. So the world that exists is only the world that I see.

What I try to do with my pieces is to give people their time and their lives back. I want to say: let's go out, walk, look at the world and see what happens. Because they do not have time to watch reality. But I have. It is my field. I am an artist.

I have seen these people. All over Europe. They go to work at 9 o'clock in the morning. They drive out of their garage box. They do their job. They drive back to their garage box. And they watch TV. But they've never seen anything about reality.

Getting time back is like learning to walk and looking around again. Because when you are sitting in your car and driving to your job, you haven't seen anything pass by.

There is some kind of spiritual touch for me in that. For instance, in Bali, people have a ritual. They pick up leaves. They gather with their leaves and make it into a beautiful present that they give back to nature. So the whole day they are busy with the leaves. Not what is inside of them. I think that talking about what is inside of you is the disease of Western culture at the moment.

The object of my desire or the object of my interest is outside of me. Lacan says that it is modern psychology that people always think that they have to relate to other people, they have to understand what and why they do. But actually you don't have to understand them. You can just state the fact that there are other people around you.

That is also what Susan Sontag says about writing. It is not interesting to write the same book every day. So you have to look outside of yourself. And not to be „richer“ than you are or to try to find your inner emotions.







Content-wise, what I want to do with my work is to see how far we have gone from the beginning. Which is actually a Susan Sontag quote. You have to see where you came from. Not everything is based on what we take as a normality in this European culture (like male-female scenes). So I think it is nice to go there with the theories and to see what are the borders of this culture. And what is the border of theatre. We have a lot of reading about postdramatic theatre. And there are a lot of questions about my theatre which arises the similar question: is it still theatre? That's all comprised within my work.

I want to make this kind of theatre where the **body** comes first. In our show „**Learning how to walk**“ (2016) we wanted to know, literally, how to walk again. What is the step? How can I move towards something? I like to change the perspective in theatre.

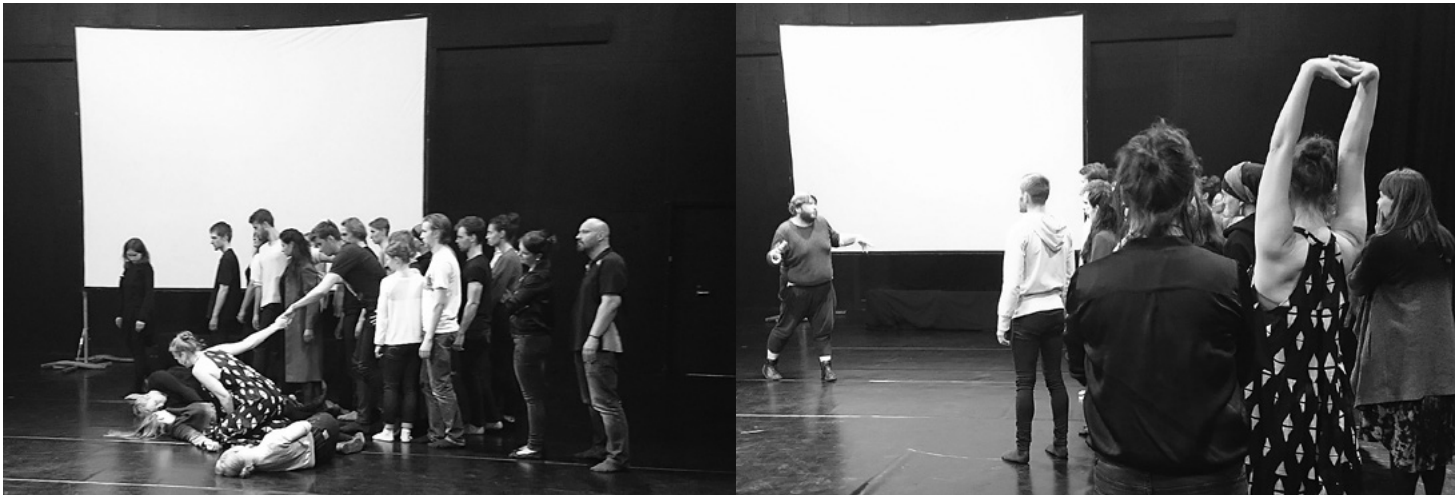
What is also important to my work is that it is **against interpretation**. Which is also again Susan Sontag. I do not believe in interpreting all texts or finding new interpretation to an old work. That is where we come to the meaning of **tradition and experimental work** for me. In the first scene of my show „**Hello useless – for W and friends**“ (2016) I just named everything that was in the room: table, laptop, floor, etc. Because in theatre people tend to see everything symbolically: this notebook goes for Bible, the white thing there is the light of future, etc. This interpretation thing is really crazy. Because things are just what they are. The chair is just a chair. And that's already enough. It has been said that the humanity has fallen so low that we have to start naming things again. And not naming the things as they could be but as what they are.

If I tell people in Belgium or in Germany that my theatre is very traditional theatre, then they do not believe me. Here I come to the meaning of **tradition** for me. For instance, when **Thomas Ostermeier** makes „Hedda Gabler“ (2006), then for me that is experimental. For me it is not traditional theatre just because you have old material. They all say it is about today. But it is not. Because „Hedda Gabler“ was written in 1912 and it tells about that time. How people lived in 1912.

I don't believe in the fact that you make an old material „modern“. Tradition for me is that you look around and you create something of your own. Of course it is important to read a lot if you are in this kind of postdramatic theatre tradition. When you are in a black box.

When I am making pieces, I at first structuralise time. So I am able to say that this scene is going to be about 40 minutes. And then we see what happens. So it is not that we make a scene and afterwards we see how long it lasts. I know before I start rehearsals how long the show will be. If you sometimes feel you don't get inspired by the content of the scene, then you just have to wait. Which I think is sometimes much more interesting than to see people acting. That is basically how actors should be on stage. You do not have to concentrate all the time on some bad text written by some bad German. When you concentrate on what is around you, that concentration becomes bigger than concentrating on the piece. For instance, at the moment I could concentrate on the fact that „oh, the floor is sticky“. Did they have a party here? Or is there a show going on? You can not ignore the fact. When you have a „Romeo and Juliet“ scene and the floor is sticky, you can not ignore where you are and what is around you. So you have to be wide awake all the time.

Thus we come to **vulnerability**. Vulnerability is something very necessary. It is a weapon in a way. But real vulnerability. I am always in the pieces myself. Because we have a shared responsibility. I have to share the



responsibility with my team until we come to an end. If a scene does not work, then I intend to cut out the scene instead of working on the scene. Normally, a director goes in the theatre like „How we going to find it? We must find what the scene is about.” But I think it is very unsexy and unattractive. If the scene does not work, then do another one.

In the show „Learning how to walk” which focused on the childhood, I asked a 4,5-year-old girl to come and direct us. Those were the two most exhausting days of the whole process. However, afterwards I noticed that we were doing improvisations that were basically using all the material she had given us. We had to sleep, we had to play waking up, we had to play music instruments. She told us to go home and to come back next morning. She said that every child was different. I know it sounds naïve. But it is true. Everybody is different and should stay different. We should not be acting robots or turbo machines, playing every role. Each actor has to stay autonomous. Of course you have different techniques, but actors and students should be free to choose between them like in a supermarket – when Laban does not make the trick, then do not buy it.

The **radicality of love** is very important to me. Because directing is not about expressing your authority. You have to love people before you work with them. You have to accept them with every monstrosity they have. It counts also for the life out there – you love people because they are different. I am really not interested in myself. When I work with people, I love them in a very radical way. Because they are not me.



[Click HERE to view the recording of Benny Claessens’s conference talk and workshop.](#)



# Physical theatre

Jüri Nael

Couple of months ago I was in Italy where a study session took place at the International School of Theatre Anthropology<sup>1</sup>. For years, Barba has followed a principle of inviting a representative of a certain theatre tradition to attend the sessions. The master will then lead workshops and explain the philosophy and the principles of their tradition. With the people he invited, Barba also conducted two-hour-long interviews on the topics of the teachers' personal narratives and on what obstacles they have encountered while honing out their technique. I understood that knowing the personal narrative is very important in understanding the teacher's teaching method and the values they carry.

I will say it out aloud as a first thing: physical theatre is a difficult term. It is an umbrella term that holds very different phenomena under it. In Estonian, the term „physical theatre” sounds strange since all theatre involves physicality. It would be more correct to talk about the physicality in theatre.

When talking about narrative, I first need to introduce my personal one. So how have I ended up here and why I am dealing with physical theatre? Long time ago, I graduated as a dancer, choreographer and as a dance teacher from Viljandi Culture Academy [in Estonia]. Some years later I started teaching dance to Drama School students. We had high hopes with my first students. I approached the actors as a choreographer-dancer, teaching them multitudes of exciting choreographies, starting from short pieces from the musical „Grease” and ending with improvisations. We trained a lot and obtained a lot of joy from our training. At that point in time, these Drama School students did the best pirouettes in the school's history! At the same time we were also looking into musical theatre. We were proud of our achievements. But slowly, my passion started to abate.

I understood that all the training had a good effect on the acting students' bodies – they were in good shape and had better coordination skills. Yet at the same time, I understood that the chosen method would not help the actors in their everyday work, apart in a way that they have a better circulation, good endurance and improvisation skills. I started to become interested in the links between my work and the benefits for the actors in their daily work when they are not engaged in a project that requires pirouettes, somersaults or musical theatre. How can the mastery of one's body help the actor in their acting?

The head of the school, Ingo Normet, said that I should go and study abroad. At the time that seemed financially difficult. But Ingo was resolved, like he always is. He helped to organise funding with what I was able to study the Laban technique in London. So I went there and did that. I studied for a year. I thought that I had now acquired all the tools for doing everything. I returned and taught for a year. But I still felt that there were many questions the Laban technique did not provide answers for. I worked for a couple of years, I taught and I searched. Then I felt the need to continue with my studies. I enrolled at RADA<sup>2</sup> in London where I obtained my second masters degree. After that I started my doctoral studies at the University of London.



<sup>1</sup> **The International School of Theatre Anthropology** (ISTA) is a theatre school founded by the Italian theatre director and researcher Eugenio Barba in 1979 that has become a research centre for theatre anthropology. The main centre is based in Holstebro, Denmark, but since 1980, sessions have been organised in different parts of the world. On April 7–17, 2016, the 15th session of ISTA took place in Albino, Italy.

<sup>2</sup> **The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art** or RADA is a drama school in London; founded in 1904, it has grown into a world renown educational and science centre.



After graduating from RADA, my old teacher invited me to help with the choreography for the school production of „The Brothers Karamazov”<sup>3</sup>. I conducted a sample lesson with the acting students. And the things that started happening were strange. We were doing our exercises and at one point one young man completely burst out in tears. For me it was a shock. I had been using the Suzuki method and the concept of Anne Bogart’s viewpoints. The situation was made even more strange since I had been training different methods but I had never witnessed someone reaching the state that this young man had. I considered it to be a unique case. A couple of days later I had my second lesson with the students. And once again, something happened. And again. And I understood that the training method I had developed has a deeper effect on the actors’ psycho-physicality.

By now I have reached a stage where I am not interested in what I can add to the actor’s body during the acting training. Of course it is nice to know different tools, such as Laban’s movement qualities, the use of space, etc. But I am more and more interested in what the actor already carries within themselves. For example, when we speak about different theatre traditions, we can end up with Grotowski and with his *via negativa* block eradication. But I am interested in what lies behind the masks. When we are looking at an acting students or even at a professional actor, then what hides beneath the surface? I am interested in how the actor’s physical training could give them a chance to experience something that they would never experience in their daily life outside of the training.

I believe that it is important for an actor to feel fear and to know what fear is. Or to know how to run for their lives. But no one wants to experience it while escaping a criminal on the streets. I also want to know: what does it mean to meet another person, to totally meet them. To look them in the eye, to remove all masks. Or what does it mean to be engulfed by rage. There are so many situations and emotions that can not be fully expressed since the social context does not allow for them. Sadly, life is moving more and more towards political correctness, in England but also in everywhere else. Social norms are governing our lives. At the same time, the existence of instincts and their conscious utilisation is also of significant importance.

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<sup>3</sup> „The Brothers Karamazov”, director Sue Dunderdale, premiered at RADA in 2012.



[Click HERE to view the recording of Jüri Nael’s talk and workshop.](#)



# Improvoicing: the **Technique** for **Voice Games**

Anne-Liis Poll

I have spent a lot of time on searching for the voice, the stories that can be sang, and the so-called vocal oddities. Drama School plays a part in this. One of the main questions in drama studies is how to make the actor audible on stage, so they would speak clearly. For me, the question turned into how a singing lesson can support the actor's speech technique, and make their voice audible and clear.

Thus I can say that Drama School plays a big part in me starting to research **speech sounds**. Especially the mother tongue sounds in order to train the technical base both in speech and song. When we think about speech, then speech is made of music and music is made of speech. A word consists of sounds and each sound has a special **colour** what can be used for play and for transmitting emotions.

When we put these resonance colours together, we get a word. The word has a meaning. But the word also has an emotional meaning. And it is that emotional meaning which is extremely important for me, probably because of my background in music, since the ear works more through resonance and sound.

A completely separate goal for me is to help the actor understand that when they create a role where they are using voice and speech, then their voice can also be musical. This way, the character's emotion gets expressed in their voice. The emotion of the character gets enhanced by the speech sounds making up the word.

The base technique of **improvoicing** is made up of sounds. It is common knowledge that sounds are divided into speech sound groups: voiceless consonants, voiced consonants and vowels. For me, it is important not to compartmentalise the work of the voice instrument into speech voice and singing voice. Usually, a conflict tends to rise between people who speak and people who sing. A thought that has helped me in this is me having only a single instrument that I can use in different ways. Maybe this will also help you understand and quickly comprehend how we move from speech to song and from song to speech. Because an active speech is also the basis for a beautiful song. This is why I started working with speech sounds, and keep emphasising them and bringing them into focus. I can say that every technique needs to get a lot of training and practise.

The term improvoicing or voiceplay [*hääkimine* – Est.] comes from a voice related activity. It is a new word in the Estonian language, denoting improvising and playing with one's voice. In my method I have drawn a parallel between those two activities. The first half of my technique focuses on sound play that sets play as priority. The second half is improvoicing where the term „improvisation” also gets used. But in reality these two words have a similar meaning for me.

When learning improvoicing, a strong focus lies on the technique. That is, on training the vocal technique through play. The other half directs focus on the compositional factor: how to develop a character and create a story.

How much time can we spend on voice games at Drama School? A bit here and a bit there. I have directed the actors' attention more towards speech technique for them to get some extra support with their main studies. We reach composition later. One can study Modern Improvisation at the MA level in the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre where the students go through a longer process of those two directions – the technique and the compositional approach – during their two years of studies.







In the following workshop we shall demonstrate the technique for the voice games which everyone can join and to which everyone is invited to add.

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[Click HERE to view the recording of Anne-Liis Poll's conference talk and workshop.](#)



[Anne-Liis Poll also recommends listening to an exercise „BODY AND VOICE” \(2011\) and improvisational pieces „PERSPECTIVE” \(2005\), „QUARTET” \(2009\), „HERE AND NOW” \(2011\).](#)

# Introduction to the Alexander Technique<sup>1</sup>

Maret Mursa Tormis

What is the Alexander Technique or AT in short? It is a tool developed by **Frederick Matthias Alexander** (1869–1955), based on conscious inhibition and aimed at regaining a natural posture, allowing for the best use of voice and body.

F. M. Alexander was an Australian actor whose specialty was reciting Shakespeare. He encountered severe vocal problems. When looking into the reasons behind his loss of voice, he discovered that he had developed an automatic habit of pushing his head back and down before starting to recite. This movement forced

tension into the back of his neck and made him lift his chest up and forward which in turn shortened his lower back.

If one observes the axis of the body, then the over- or underuse of the areas out of the axis can cause obstructions and constrict the internal organs, including the diaphragm.

In actors' training, the smooth functioning of the **mechanism of posture**, the adequate sense of one's position, and the awareness of oneself and of one's psycho-physical entity are of utmost importance for designing an individual training programme (addressing voice, diction, body use, etc).

AT helps us to notice and consciously get rid of our undesired automated habits. Throughout our lives we have accumulated things and habits that we have no need for any longer. These automated postures and reactions become a „dark zone“ that we do not even notice until we consciously take time to stop and „calm down“. AT encourages us to investigate our body's response to a mental stimulus in order to catch ourselves „in the act“. Only then can we choose whether to continue with the old habit like we used to or to surpass the fear of making mistakes and to take a plunge into the unknown.

Within that moment of stopping, of calming down, Alexander developed his **directions**. He discovered that the neck area needs to remain free for the head to be balanced. Then the back can lengthen and widen. „Head forward and up“ is one of the main orders Alexander gave himself within this moment of inhibition. Later he termed it the **primary direction**, which activates the entire vertebral column.

So we need to stop in order to notice. Alexander has called this ability to stop and delay the reaction until we are adequately prepared for the desired activity, **conscious inhibition**.

Alexander's ideas have been later backed up by scientific research. The neurologist Benjamin Libet (1916–2007) discovered that a mental event starts about 350–400 milliseconds (about one third of a second) before we are aware of intending the voluntary movement, but 200 milliseconds (about one fifth of a second) before the action has begun. This time window permits a possible veto or a selective control of the action.

To build on the keywords of previous workshops and lectures, we can say that AT helps us step from the safety of the familiar into the unknown, to take risks and to adapt fast. I will give an example from the Laban technique workshop. When the students started moving in slow motion, they kept their attention firmly on the establishment of the contact between the foot and the floor. Nothing else was important. The goal was to stay in control of the movement, which required the mastery of precision mechanics. Slow motion movement requires coordination of the deep muscles. The deep muscles can work only if the muscle groups supporting the posture are ready for every



<sup>1</sup> The following talk is based on Maret Mursa Tormis's doctoral research at the Drama School of Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

next step in the most optimal, non-disrupted manner. This type of focusing during a task creates the necessary experience of mindfulness.

The mechanism of posture is controlled by input from three mechanisms that add to each other and that also compensate for each other when necessary: the visual cortex, the organ of balance (in the vestibular system of the inner ear) and proprioception (the sense of position). When working with actors, I notice the sense of position being disturbed more and more, and that can be restored with the Alexander Technique. The smooth functioning of the mechanism of posture is a prerequisite for performing to perfection in a stressful stage situation.

The performer's preparedness to perform well equals the fitness of their „coat of muscles“. Mental attitudes, subconscious emotions and habitual elements automatically kick off a fraction of a second before the action itself, causing unnecessary tensions and obstructions. The obstruction that gets activated in a stressful performance situation inhibits the functioning of the posture mechanism.

The Alexander Technique has also been called **the farmer's technique**. When we look at old photographs of farmers working on the fields we can see how their body operates on an axis. The back is open in its full length and width. Lifting weights and doing physical work require an economical use of the body. The natural axis is defined by the arrangement of vertebral arches. They act as arches of power that together create a supporting axis.

The principle „think first, act later“ holds true in AT as well. This technique teaches how to spot a result-centered thought process that needs to be put on hold, if only for a second, in order to find the means through which to attain the goal.

The Alexander Technique also focuses on the constantly changing, **dynamic relationship** between the head, the neck and the vertebral column. There is no such thing as a correct posture, only the right directions, mental acts. A free neck and a balanced head enable the back to lengthen and to widen. The original dimensions of the body are a prerequisite for the proper functioning of the diaphragm. The anti-gravity axis we are born with can be restored with the help of the technique.

We always have two directions when we move: up and forward. When we only react in a result-centered manner, we often lose the „up“ direction. This, in turn, inhibits the movement and openness of the vertebral column.

For a student it is important to know the position of the **atlas**, the topmost vertebra, which supports the head. We can take the height of the tip of the nose as our guideline. When the head is balanced on the atlas vertebrae it weighs almost nothing. But if the head is out of balance, it inhibits the openness of the vertebral column.

A famous pianist has said that the best hand position on the keyboard is the one that can be changed with maximum ease and speed. The same holds true for body positions and posture. A good posture is not a fixed state but inherently incorporates hidden or conscious movement.

The Alexander Technique has helped professionals in very different fields, from actors to professional athletes.

## Further Reading

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[Click HERE to view the recording of Maret Mursa Tormis's conference talk and workshop.](#)





