

In memoriam

**Eimuntas Nekrošius
1952–2018**



Photo by Dmitrijus Matvejevas.
Courtesy of Lithuanian Theatre, Music and Cinema Museum.

Theatre Studies 3.0

Introduction

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There are two ways to use terminology. Some use the terms in a very strict sense – a perfect example being science and its discourse. Another way to use the terms is to understand them metaphorically. Omnipresent “spillover” is a perfect example which, in physics, simply means an amount of liquid that has become too much for the object that contains it and overflows. Yet in the social sciences and humanities, the same term means the effects of an activity that have spread further than was originally intended. The space that lay between the strict and the metaphoric sense is always a space of invention and unexpected (re)discoveries, yet also of tension and risk where possible appropriations and distortions loom.

In the field of theatre studies a need has arisen for working on context and comprehension in a way that demands the use of metaphors, mainly because this field cannot be described without using operational and practice-oriented terms. For instance, it may be useful to make use of geographic metaphors and terms from physics as these terms can be recycled in dramaturgic, artistic and contextually descriptive contexts. The usefulness of such an approach has been demonstrated by Ib Ravn and Claus Emmerich *et al.* in their book on “the new vocabulary of science” (*De nye videnskabers ord*)¹. “New vocabulary” in this case

¹ Ravn *et al.*, 1994.

is the invention of new terminology for scientific discoveries that science and natural sciences otherwise would have difficulties in naming: here, exemplified by terms like 'black holes' or 'human ecology'.

Let us take the geo-cultural perspective as a metaphoric derivative from geography as well as from geology. Geology may especially be considered as one of the sources of metaphors which allow us to use the intriguing notion of tectonic fields, among others. Tectonic fields are the fields and segments moving in relation to each other within the surface of the Earth. These fields could be taken as an image of the complexity within different structures of knowledge. When using the notion of "tectonic fields" in a metaphoric sense, the notion itself is transformed into an image of scientifically complex patterns, and thus exceeds the traditional scientific terminology and boundaries of applicability for research.

The stepping rocks or large stones that were rolled astray by the ice when the glaciers retreated is another image of how scientific research itself shifts between artistic metaphors and traditional scientific terminology. For the Austrian philosopher and artist Richard Jochum (1998) complexity within science may be comprehended as constituting facts through interdisciplinarity. Jochum is inspired by Michel Serre when he speaks about concepts of complexity, claiming that the purpose of the humanities should not be the imposition of one unilateral perspective to all points of view. The way Jochum sees it, the purpose should rather be that of catalysing mutual processes to gain access to the complex. Jochum further explains the aspects of the complex when saying that: "Simple and complex interlock. The assumption of a static balance – not insignificant for the history of scientists – has been proven since the discovery of the Second Law of thermodynamics."² In Jochum's opinion, practising science will be an unpredictable process in itself. The complexity will stand as a paradigm to open the sciences and convey a new potential of mutual acknowledgement and new creativity. Such an approach might lead to enlarged possibilities and a contemporary perspective of being in contact with reality.

There are times when the practice of theatre demands a revision of research methodology. For instance, when, after the 1980s, theatre had become increasingly post-modern in the sense that the spectacular or visual became central to a performance. This happened in parallel to the deconstruction of the great narratives and truths which more and more became material for paraphrasing and recycling processes. During this process, new academic tools were required to understand and analyse, first based in structuralism and semiology, and later more and more towards the metaphorical use of concepts.

² Jochum 1998.

Swedish dance critic, choreographer and writer Mårten Spångberg may have paraphrased the title of a song by Tina Turner, “What You Get is What You See”,³ into something like “you see what you get, you get what you see”. This ironic proverb was, as one might remember, appropriate to discuss a very ironic and social choreographic event created by Spångberg and architect Tor Lindstrand in 2004. This was at the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt/Main during the 5th International Summer Academy, and the event as such is described by Florian Malzacher as an example of curatorial strategies.⁴ A concept or saying like this is very appropriate to describe ironically, and in a pop-cultural way, the audience perception as well as curatorial strategies in postmodern performing arts. It reflects the role of the gaze as immediate and situational in experiencing the performative. It is further more an example of how criticism in the performative can open up to both subjective metaphoric perspectives, and thus maybe seen in opposition to or in interaction with empirically provable references.

Research methodology based on metaphoric sense can be useful in giving a new perspective on theatre history by situating the image or visual dimension into a synchronic perspective. This would then oppose the traditional way of giving the text supremacy above the images by the classical linear way of seeing theatre in the Aristotelian tradition as a representational means of expression. There is a breaking away with reason and the political as a carrier of ideologies in a synchronic and circular way of looking at theatre history. Thus, theatre history can be seen in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Diachronic theatre history is told in a linear way, which is a limitation of the periods into a close circuit. History in this sense always goes forward and does not look back. In this way of expanding on theatre history, history stops. However, in a synchronic perspective, there is a kind of remaking and researching taking place, and theatre history turns out to be circular.

Re-visiting notions of theatre, dramaturgy, and performance studies was the ambition of the conference organized by the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars in 2017 at beautiful the premises of the University of Aarhus. This special issue of Nordic Theatre Studies represents a collection of invited articles that are either developed versions of presentations at the conference tellingly called “Re-think Theatre, Dramaturgy and Performance Studies: Re-search, re-consider, re-make”, or contribute to its scope.

What happened to theatre studies – Niels Lehmann (University of Aarhus) asks in his article. Does theatre studies as an academic discipline in Europe slip into the conceptual framework of science in front of our eyes? Has it arrived at the verge of

³ *What You Get is What You See*, 1986.

⁴ Malzacher 2017, 35.

a conflict between its own nature and external expectations, and thus must reinvent its *raison d'être*? One of three major strands of change which Lehmann sees as having implications for the development of “theatre studies 3.0.” is the *expansion* of its field. All the following articles of the issue demonstrate how wide the space is between understandings of what theatre studies and its objectives are.

Beginning with seemingly traditional issues of dramaturgy, Ulla Kallenbach and Annelis Kuhlmann (University of Aarhus), in their article, re-address the issue of drama analysis. The authors state that the corporeal, spatial, performative, and cognitive aspects of the drama text have to be “re-inserted” back into the analysis of the drama text together with an emphasis on the historical and scenic context. Thus the “spectatorial” dimension of the text could be grasped and, above all, the potential for involving the audience into the performance revealed.

The third article of the collection, written by a team of three authors – Laura Luise Schultz, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, and Sofie Volquartz Lebech (University of Copenhagen) – suggests a manifold analysis of performance art. The genre as such is re-articulated by a) examining the performance artist as “a figure” that destabilizes various norms of representation, b) juxtaposing elements of performance art to the neoliberal work ethic, and c) performance art is considered as a form of activity that produces new and possibly alternative knowledge.

Solveig Gade (The Danish National School of Performing Arts) in her article “In-between Figure Working in a Precarious Field: Re-engaging with Notions of the Dramaturg” addresses the notion of the dramaturg as a subject and indeed an object of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural environment. Being a protean, creative and agile figure “in-between”, the dramaturg somewhat becomes an embodiment of the post-Fordist distribution of work and remuneration. The author sets out to criticise the model of “in-betweenness” dwelling on empirical research thus expanding the methodological apparatus of theatre studies.

The article by Teemu Paavolainen (Tampere University) is provocative in many ways: the author challenges the current President of the United States and his presidency on the grounds of “vertical” and “horizontal” performativity. Yet primarily, Paavolainen deconstructs the concept of performativity itself: dwelling on the ideas and notions of the philosophy of Anthropocene, the author puts under the question “the magnitude” of the performance, articulating the idea of two models, where one is direct, singular, vertical, and fast, and the other is systemic, plural, horizontal, and slow. The author suggests that an understanding of and the ability to identify these models are crucial for the perception of immediate reality, and thus elevates the elements of performativity giving them the status of tools for investigating global dynamics.

The article by Jurgita Staniškytė (Vytautas Magnus University) is the only one that analyses actual artistic practice – the author performs a classical procedure

of theatre studies and applies the theoretical framework for analysis of specific productions. However, the approach is less traditional – Staniškytė investigates the role of the audience within the structure of performance adapting the notion of “prosumer”, the producing consumer, which is considered as one of the key factors for encouraging participation in the arts and audience development. In the same vein, yet from a much more empirically centred perspective, Maja Šorli (University of Ljubljana) and Hedi-Liis Toome (University of Tartu) investigate the issue of the possible relevance that theatre can have on a personal and social level. Despite the philosophical nature of the research question, both authors present empirical data gathered in Tartu (Estonia) and Tyneside (UK) via questionnaires filled out by audience members and suggest that audiences appreciate skills and forms of particular performances as well as their emotional and cognitive engagement. However, they find them not very relevant in a social and personal sense. In their research, the authors used the methods (the data from the quantitative questionnaire was analysed with SPSS Statistics software) typically found in the field of social science. In terms of the thematic scope and structure of the present issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies* it seemed to be a very suitable coda for the investigation of the future of theatre research.

The issue is dedicated to the memory of Eimuntas Nekrošius (November 21, 1952 – November 20, 2018), who was among those capable of expanding the art of theatre and the ambitions of its studies.

References

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