Spectatorship, Politics and the Rules of Participation: Re-discovering the Audience in Contemporary Lithuanian Theatre

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ABSTRACT
Contemporary theatre performances offer many examples of audience engagement - its forms range from physical interventions into public space to mental emancipation of the audience's imagination. These practices put into question the effectiveness of the existing tools of audience research because, in some instances, theatre serves as a manipulation machine, "tricking" the public to perform specific social actions, while in other cases, it becomes a tool for the deconstruction of manipulation mechanisms at the same time serving as a platform for engaging entertainment. Audience research paradigms, based on dichotomies such as passive/active, inclusion/exclusion or incorporation/resistance are no longer able to address the complex concepts of *spectatorship as performance*, co-creation, or audience participation. Therefore, new practices of audience participation, conspicuously emerging in contemporary Lithuanian theatre, can only be adequately addressed by combining methodologies from different disciplines and critically evaluating historical and theoretical implications of these practices. In my article, I will focus on the historical implications of the term "audience participation" as a form of public engagement and issues of its application as experienced by theatre artists and audiences in Lithuania. The article will also examine the theoretical implications of the notion of participatory turn and its effect on theatre productions at the same time challenging the conceptual equations of "active spectatorship" in the aesthetic sphere to the emergence of "active participant" in the public sphere.

KEYWORDS
Audience, participatory turn, participation, performance, politics, spectatorship.

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According to Jacques Rancière, since Romanticism, thinking about theatre has been understood as "a set of perceptions, gestures and attitudes that precede and pre-form laws and political institutions."[1] Thus, theatre can be interpreted as a place where various modes of participation in the community or patterns of citizen's behavior can be rehearsed. Traditional theatre, which serves as an immanent model for many descriptions of post-industrial society (*la société du spectacle; system of simulations*) presupposes a passive spectator. However, contemporary performances offer many examples of audience engagement: the forms of construction of "contemporary spectatorship" range from physical interventions into the public space to mental emancipation of audiences as "distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them."[2]

Audience members, dressed in disposable overalls, take part in a funeral procession as mourners of Hamlet's Father, walking outside the theatre building in the performance "Code: Hamlet" – an escape from the room type game interpretation of the Shakespearean play, produced in the Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania by stage-director Olga Lapina in 2016; communities and individuals with loaned headphones walk the streets of Klaipėda and occasionally are invited to a surprise dance-session in the performances „Lucky Lucy" (2016) or "Moving Churches" (2015) by dance company "Paddi Dappi Fish"; the public wander the rooms of an abandoned hospital building in Vilnius, filled with various installation-type artifacts and staged environments, embodying the contemporary

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[1]   Rancière 2009, 6.
[2]   Ibid, 13.

experience of refugees and replaying the archetypal fear of the Other in Oskaras Koršunovas production of a site-specific performance based on the Lithuanian fairy-tail "Eglė – the Queen of Serpents" (2016); blindfolded volunteers from the audience are led by actors to experience the tactile sensations of the blind in Karolina Žernytės production of the theatre of senses "Stone Water Sting" (2014); audience members are invited to actively participate in a preparation for the riot in a simulated Maidan tent village in "The Rebellion" (2016), performed on the main stage of Kaunas National Drama Theatre, directed by Agnius Jankevičius – these are just a few examples demonstrating the conspicuous tendency of Lithuanian theatre of the last years: the wave of artistic preoccupation with audience participation and engagement.

These practices put into question the effectiveness of existing tools of audience research because in some instances theatre serves as a manipulation machine, "tricking" the public to perform specific social actions, while in other cases it becomes a tool for the deconstruction of manipulation mechanisms at the same time serving as a platform for engaging entertainment. Research paradigms, based on dichotomies such as passive/active, inclusion/exclusion or incorporation/resistance are no longer able to address the complex concepts of spectatorship as performance, co-creation or audience participation. In my article, I will focus on the historical context as well as the theoretical implications of the term "audience participation" as a form of public engagement and issues of its application as experienced by theatre artists and audiences in Lithuania and demonstrated by the analysis of two case studies. The article will also examine the theoretical implications of the notion of the participatory turn and its effect on theatre productions at the same time challenging the conceptual equations of "active spectatorship" in the aesthetic sphere to the emergence of "active participant" in the public sphere.

PARTICIPATORY (RE)-TURN: THREE WAVES OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IN THEATRE

In order to fully understand the emerging practices of audience participation in contemporary Lithuanian theatre, one needs not only to combine methodologies from different disciplines but more importantly to critically evaluate the historical context of these practices. Looking back at the historical past, it becomes evident that the "audience participation" conspicuous in a contemporary cultural landscape has existed in various shapes throughout the history of theatre and was particularly intertwined with socio-political transformations. "How we have imaged audiences and what we have expected of them reveal much about our sense of citizenship and equality," concludes Richard Butsch, the author of two seminal books on audiences – "The Citizen Audience" and "The Making of Ameri-

can Audiences."[3] Indeed, throughout history, theatre has served as an arena where various types of audiences practiced their being together in public and different historical periods were more favorable for the development of a certain type of audience. For example, in the beginning of the twentieth century, during the period of the First Republic in Lithuania, when 'nation building' was described as the urgent task of all arts, theatre was thought to be a "powerful engine" for sustaining and fostering the national community and was considered to be the medium most suited for creating ideal publics who had the knowledge and character to fulfill their duties as citizens of the emerging new national state. The cultivated public as a unified community capable of deliberative action was the ideal for the theatre audience in Lithuania at that time.

Admittedly, "categories like "the "audience" are socially and culturally constructed, their attributes typically described in terms of dichotomies."[4] According to Richard Butsch, "the two dichotomies that persist throughout the history [of audience research] are the distinctions between active and passive audiences and between public and private audiences."[5] Such dichotomies are created in order to describe the current *ideal audience* which, in turn, represents the positioning and the stratification of publics within a society at a given moment in history. For example, the distinctions between "passive" spectators, as passive individuals acted upon rather than acting and "active" audiences as those capable of civic participation form the basis not only for many contemporary debates about the audience but for artistic practices as well. Such a distinction, however, lay the foundation for the other dichotomies, as Jacques Rancière has argued in his seminal book "Emancipated Spectator", that the binary of active/passive is an allegory of inequality, because it "specifically defines a distribution of the sensible, an *a priori* distribution of the positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions."[6] Similarly, Claire Bishop writes that the binary of active/ passive "always ends up in deadlock: either a disparagement of the spectator because he does nothing, while the performers on stage do something – or the converse claim that those who act are inferior to those who are able to look, contemplate ideas, and have critical distance on the world".[7]

Commonsensically, as any other dichotomy, this schematic separation of audience types can be interpreted, according to Richard Butsch, as the division between good and bad audiences. Paradoxically, during different historical periods, the labels of "good" and "bad" shifted: "in the nineteenth century, critics feared

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[3]   Butsch 2008, 141.
[4]   Butsch 2000, 2.
[5]   Ibid, 3.
[6]   Rancière 2009, 12.
[7]   Bishop 2012, 38.

active audiences; in the twentieth, their *passivity.*"[8] According to the research-er, "nineteenth-century theatre audiences were, and were expected to be, very active."[9] This participatory tradition was shared by all classes. As Richard Butsch concludes, audiences asserted their rights to judge and direct performances, while theatre managers and civil authorities "continued to recognize the rights of audience sovereignty until the mid-nineteenth century."[10]

However, one should note that audience passivity or activity is induced not only by the social context or institution; it can be embedded in the structure of artistic practice itself. Different aesthetic styles require different audience be-havior: for example, the emergence of naturalism and realism at the end of the nineteenth century resulted in the construction of the "fourth wall", an illusionist means for separating the stage space and the audience in order to achieve the effect of reality. According to Richard Butsch, "these changes quelled audience interaction"[11] and as a result, theatre as "an exercise in practices of the public sphere as well as ground and rehearsal for collective action"[12] has disappeared.

However, these modern aesthetic innovations were quickly counteracted by the artistic practices of the historical avant-garde based on the assumption that the col-lective actions in the theatrical space can foster the ability of the theatre public to act collectively and actively in real life situations. Although the tactics varied from the physical engagement of the spectator ("Living Theatre", "Performance Group") to consciousness-raising through the distance of critical thinking (Bertolt Brecht); from "constructing situations" for new social realities (Guy Debord or guerilla thea-tre) to bringing down the distinction between performer and audience, production and reception, professional and amateur (spect-actor by Augusto Boal) – all the practices of the historical avant-garde were focused on the emancipation or activa-tion of the spectator. In this context, according to Claire Bishop, physical involve-ment was considered as an essential precursor to social change[13]. Looking at the artistic practices of the modern avant-garde in the context of contemporary partici-patory culture, Claire Bishop concludes that even if today this equation of partici-pation and social change is no less persistent, its terms are perhaps less convinc-ing: "the idea of collective presence has (for better or worse) been scrutinized and dissected by numerous philosophers; (…) participation is used by business as a tool for improving efficiency and workplace morale, as well as being all-pervasive in the mass-media in the form of reality television."[14] Nevertheless, contemporary

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[8] Butsch 2000, 2.
[9] Ibid, 3.
[10] Ibid, 5.
[11] Ibid, 15.
[12] Ibid, 14.
[13] Bishop 2006, 11.
[14] Ibid, 11-12.

theatres are eager to appropriate these modern theatre strategies of audience engagement not only for artistic or political reasons, but also for pragmatic audience development. However, we should not dismiss the effects of physical audience engagement for the building of communal bonds: the techniques of applied theatre, theatre of the oppressed and some forms of popular theatre have become powerful tools, not only for personal development but also for strengthening community activism through inclusive performances.

In the middle of the twentieth century another incentive to look closer (or as a matter of fact – to look back at) the theatre audience appeared as the poststructuralist approach "discovered" the spectator as the one who actively created his / her meanings grounded in his / her own subjective experience: Umberto Eco in his notion of "open work" and Roland Barthes with his declaration of "the death of the author and the birth of the reader" both advocated not only the openness of the text to various perceptions, but also the audiences as active agents in the construction of meaning.[15] Ultimately, it became obvious that it is not necessary for the spectator to act onstage together with Hamlet in order to be active: when the spectator is offered the possibility to participate in the collective elaboration of meaning, he / she can be active even while peacefully sitting on a chair.

Eventually these creative collaborations between audience and performance, with a free circulation of energies and meanings, were supposed to become not only the platforms for emancipating individual creative agency, but also a means of the democratization of the art sphere. Nevertheless, as Hal Foster has bitterly remarked, collaborative creativity quite often generates only the illusion of interactive democracy, for it is built on an unproblematic equation between open work and inclusive society.[16] At times, he states "the death of the author" has meant not the birth of the reader, but rather the befuddlement of the viewer."[17] Despite the skepticism, one might conclude that if employed properly, open performance practices are able to ignite flashes of individual creativity. However, these open work strategies are less conspicuous, more intellectually demanding and thus much more ephemeral in their effect. But the invisible nature of this type of creative communication prevents it from being easily instrumentalised or appropriated for commercial ends. However, looking at contemporary Lithuanian performances that embrace audience participation as their main creative and communicative strategy one can conclude that physical engagement similar to that of the historical avant-garde rather than intellectual "open work" techniques seem to dominate.

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[15] Eco 1989. Barthes 1977.
[16] Foster 2006, 194.
[17] Ibid, 193.

THEATRE 3.0: BETWEEN INTERACTIVE GAMING
AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Even though Gareth White begins his influential book "Audience Participation in Theatre" with an ironic remark that "there are few things in the theatre that are more despised than audience participation," one can conclude that contemporary theatre practices are increasingly influenced by the "participatory impulse" of contemporary culture.[18] In the broadest sense of the word, the participatory turn in arts can be defined, rephrasing Claire Bishop, as a desire to "overturn the traditional relationships" between the stage and the audience, where the "audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant."[19] The etiology of these transformations is traced differently by various researchers; however, several identifiable trajectories of thought can be delineated.

One is best exemplified by Claire Bishop herself, who states, in her seminal book "Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship", that "artists' preoccupation with participation and collaboration, accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art's relationship to the social and of its political potential can be traced back to the collapse of a collectivist vision of society in the fall of communism in 1989."[20] This point of view conflates participatory practices with the socio-political objectives of social art, implying that the main purpose of these artistic endeavors is the recalibration of social relationships and the activation of the sense of social inclusion. As Claire Bishop notes, "This desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order – be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship. Beginning from this premise, participatory art aims to restore and realise a communal, collective space of shared social engagement."[21]

However, according to many scholars who analyse the participatory turn, this transformation was heavily accelerated by user-oriented technological innovations: broadband Internet, phones with interactive multi-media capabilities, file-sharing and social media platforms, etc. As a result, the notions of interactivity, participation and engagement have permeated almost all areas of contemporary society – culture, academia, economy, politics, and human relations: researchers write about participatory creative cultures, participatory knowledge cultures, participatory economic and political cultures, transhuman participation, etc. For a moment, it seemed that this technologically enhanced universe of endless partici-

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[18] White 2013, 1.
[19] Bishop 2012, 2.
[20] Ibid, 3.
[21] Ibid, 275.

pation possibilities would considerably contribute to the positive reconfiguration of power structures. However, this "technological optimism", hailing the democratizing potential of the "brave new world" of user-oriented transmedia IT did not last long and was quickly counteracted by "a dystopian backlash to the formulated utopia of participation."[22]

It turned out that easily accessible interactive networks of digital media were used less for the production of more transparent participatory governing models and much more for the political manipulation of data, dissemination of fake news or playful forms of self-centered entertainment – "a meme-filled world of sneezing pandas, awkward pre-teens, and piano-playing felines."[23] As Claire Bishop has noted, "In a world where everyone can air their views to everyone we are faced not with mass empowerment but with an endless stream of egos levelled to banality. Far from being oppositional to spectacle, participation has now entirely merged with it. This new proximity between spectacle and participation underlines the necessity of sustaining a tension between artistic and social critiques."[24] Precisely this tension between artistic and social critiques, entertainment and political activism, or more generally the question about the actual socio-political implications of participatory artistic practices becomes the central focus of almost all debates on audience participation. In the context of these transformations, can theatres become places of live and enabling participation? Having looked at the historical development of audience participation strategies, one should not become overly optimistic about the possibilities of artistic practice to ensure or even to facilitate the transition from social exclusion to inclusion because the discourse of participation, creativity and community was easily appropriated by post-industrial commodity culture and has become, according to Claire Bishop, a cornerstone of post-industrial economic policy, a form of soft social engineering often used in order to reinstall a "pseudo-community of consumers".[25] In order to understand the implications as well as effects of audience engagement in theatre, one needs to analyse the strategies employed and outcomes provided by the particular performance.

"CODE: HAMLET" AND "THE REBELLION": THEATRE AS A COMPUTER GAME OR SIMULATION OF A REVOLUTION?

In contemporary Lithuanian theatre, the techniques of audience participation range from playful collective games, similar to interactive computer entertainment ("Code: Hamlet") to politically ambitious carnivals, aimed at deconstructing politi-

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[22] Schäfer 2011, 172.
[23] Delwicke *et al.* (eds.) 2013, 7.
[24] Bishop 2012, 277.
[25] Ibid, 14.

cal manipulation machines ("The Rebellion"). The analysis of these two opposing examples of audience participation in Lithuanian theatre best exemplifies the complexity and tensions embedded in the notion of participatory theatre, which turns out to be not just a new form of rehearsal of social interactions, but rather a locus of risk and ambiguity.

The performance "Code: Hamlet" (2016) – "escape the room" game type interpretation of the Shakespearean play, produced in the Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania by stage-director Olga Lapina and set designer Renata Valčik, is played to an audience group of a maximum of twelve people in specifically arranged environments. Various spaces of the Russian Drama Theatre – from its unused cellars and attics to the main stage and dressing rooms – were designed as twenty locked chambers representing fragments of the Shakespearean play and packed with visual and performative references that should help audience members to solve the riddle hidden in each room, find the key and move to the next one. The main "code" for solving the riddles in each chamber – the book of "Hamlet" – is handed to each group by facilitating actors. The performance starts in the theatre's locker room, where a funeral procession for King Hamlet uniting audience-participants and actors-facilitators starts and moves outside the theatre building, marches around it through the streets of Vilnius and re-enters the theatre through its cellar doors, leading to the claustrophobic boiler-room, where the King's ghost is about to appear.

The experience generated by "Code: Hamlet" is similar to that of immersive theatre practices, described by theatre critic Anne Glusker as "theatre for the interactive age, (where) instead of moving a cursor you simply move yourself."[26] The only difference is that in "Code: Hamlet" audience members must succumb to the rules of the "escape the room" game and therefore their freedom of movement is limited – they are not allowed to roam free within the environment of performance or choose their own path through it. However, contrary to the usual individual experience produced by the classical immersive theatre examples, this performance engages the audience as a group, thus dealing with social relations and group dynamics, however temporary. The audience members are made to feel interdependent, relying, to rephrase Jen Harvie, "on shared negotiation of space, some discussions or some argumentation."[27]

It is difficult to follow the plot or to grasp the overarching narrative of "Code: Hamlet", as the authors of this performance rely on the audience's prior-knowledge of basic elements of the tale of the Danish prince. Furthermore, the nature of the game eventually starts to dominate over performance narrative, however fragmented. Naturally, the audience response to the performance is affective,

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[26] Glusker 2006.
[27] Harvie 2013, 58.

rather than intellectual: the senses of excitement, surprise, adventure, competitiveness, claustrophobia, fear and unease are generated by visual, aural and performative space designs constructed in each room through which the spectators are moving. Admittedly, the agency delegated to the audience in "Code: Hamlet" can be described as limited or rather minimal: participants are not able to change the course of performance or alter its structure. If members of the group are unable to collectively solve the riddle in each room, they will remain trapped in the chamber for 60 minutes, only enforcing the sense of group frustration and collective affect until the facilitating actors will let them out. Evidently, this kind of audience engagement cannot be defined as co-creation, but rather, to use the term by Jen Harvie, a "spectre of participation".[28] Nevertheless, these staged environments, loosely connected with the narrative of the play, create a sense of theatre as a collective trap – physically challenging social experience, in which the intellectual, psychological, social, creative skills of audience members are tested.

The social aspect of the kind of participation present in "Code: Hamlet" is embedded in the experience of a somewhat "forced" group interaction, which at least partly mirrors the fabrics of social relations and goes against the grain of "conventional" expectations of theatrical spectatorship as individual/private contemplation. This game-like interpretation of Shakespearean classics challenges audiences to overcome their anxieties, fears, to give in to curiosity and requires participants to interact, negotiate and collaborate. The group hierarchy – the roles of leaders and side-kicks are recalibrated throughout the entire journey as the playful modeling of social interactions visibly unfolds during this theatrical trap-game. This kind of playful participation involves audiences, not so much within specific political or social topics, but helps, according to Jen Harvie, "to seek to form better social relations by participating in models not so much of delegation but of shared responsibility and mutual dependence, however provisional those models might be."[29]

"The Rebellion", performed on the main stage of Kaunas National drama theatre and directed by Agnius Jankevičius, was created with an absolutely different intention: its main purpose was to recalibrate the contemporary meanings of political theatre. In this partially interactive performance-instruction, actors try to convince audiences that contemporary forms of political uprising – the so called "people movements" or "color revolutions" are not self-directed bottom-up movements springing from the will of the people, but rather top-down events of political theatre, constructed and executed by notorious political spin-doctors.

The performance was inspired by the book *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* by American political scientist Gene Sharp, whose works on non-violent political

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[28]   Ibid, 41.
[29]   Ibid, 61.

resistance, according to *The Guardian*, "ended up being an inspiring influence on the Arab Spring."[30] Stage-director Agnius Jankevičius articulated his artistic intentions behind the "Rebellion" in the interview right before the premier in the following way: "We live in a world of illusions and think that these revolutions were born out of communion, or mass protests. Unfortunately, there was a lot of staging involved. In my opinion, color revolutions are just like commercial enterprises, which have their own script and can even be commissioned – just try to log on to the website of the Serbian group 'Otpor' and see how it works.[31] One can state that the purpose of "Rebellion" was not so much to employ theatre as a tool for engaging into political critique or a declaration of political alternative, but rather a participatory exercise in deconstructing the mechanisms of political manipulation.

An artistic gesture that deconstructs the various ways of the operation of a political manipulation machine embodies the notion of contemporary political theatre *par excellence.* Precisely the initial strategy behind the production of "The Rebellion" – to openly demonstrate how different systems of power form our perception of reality - can be theoretically described as the most effective political attitude in contemporary arts. In the context of Lithuanian theatre, such a bold and direct investigation of the mechanisms of the construction of political power involving audience participation could showcase the break with the Soviet tradition of the symbolic political resistance of metaphorical language. According to Hal Foster, post-totalitarian political art cannot rely simply on the representation of a program, a critique or a desired utopia – it must interrogate the means of representation themselves as structures of authority.[32] "Understanding that it cannot place itself outside the object of its own critique, contemporary political art should act as a collaborator and a critic at the same time."[33] However, this kind of *political* theatre is more ambivalent and contradictory; it aims at both subverting and establishing ideology and requires subtle as well as innovative artistic tactics that would engage spectators in testing the various ways a theatrical manipulation machine (with its extensive use of attraction, empathy, immersion, distance and didactics) works.

Another question is, however, whether it is possible to define these kinds of deconstructing strategies as effective in a social sense, as they are not straightforward in the way modern political theatre has been. The case of "The Rebellion" demonstrates that these techniques if not properly employed can easily get lost somewhere between various pastiches of modern theatre techniques: ironic agit-

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30 See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/30/gene-sharp-dead-arab-spring-political-scientist (April 11 2018).
31 A. Jankevičius interview, see: http://dramosteatras.lt/lt/spektaklis/maistas/ (March 06 2018).
32 Foster 1985, 153.
33 Staniškytė 2006, 69–81.

prop performance, didactic Brechtian edification and various forms of audience engagement taken from the books on the historical avant-garde.

During the first half of the "The Rebellion", actors performing the members of the Serbian revolutionary group "Otpor" tell the story of personal disappointment with the political system while demonstrating the possible ways of solving social problems with the help of peaceful protests. Actors try to involve the audience by asking them to voice their opinion, vote for their favorite ideology, food or politician; however, the division between actors and audience in this part of the performance remains intact. During the second half of "The Rebellion", the intensity of audience involvement increases as spectators are invited to freely roam the imaginary revolutionary square – a tent village constructed onstage.

A protest village installation is built onstage to serve as a performatively engaging provocation to collaborate, to build a community of protest. The tent village, according to stage director Agnius Jankevičius, on the one hand, was supposed to operate as a multifunctional circus and, on the other, as a laboratory of revolution or creative workshop of protest.[34] Spectators strolling around the tent village are invited to take part in various actions: a basketball game, making and eating sandwiches, listening to relaxing music in headphones, reading newspapers, etc. Yet, similarly as in the production of "Code: Hamlet" participants have very limited agency to make choices about their actions as they wander through these controlled environments and take part in games and sports.

Audience members do not engage in acts of democratic participation, resistance or social critique, but rather in entertaining acts of simply having fun while playing, cooking or singing along. Various actions devised in order to turn individual spectators into a protest community fail to create "an impression of a space of freedom"[35] (Gareth White) or a laboratory of deconstruction, where the modes of community building via carnivalesque actions can be disclosed and openly analysed. The staged environment of the protest village retains an aura of artificial Revolution-land, where spontaneous communities of fun are created. To rephrase Jen Harvie, audience participation in "The Rebellion" reduces the quality of our experience of art, as distracted by the specters of distributed authorship, audiences start to embrace experience over content and play over narrative."[36] Therefore, when during the last part of the production, audience members are asked to go back to their seats and listen to the didactic "moralitè" about the consequences of the "commodification of protest movements", they refuse to play along and ignore the stodgy attempts of actors to convince them about the fabrication of all color revolutions, including the Lithuanian singing revolution of 1991.

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[34] See http://dramosteatras.lt/lt/spektaklis/maistas/
[35] White 2013, 148.
[36] Harvie 2013, 55.

The democratic nature of theatrical interaction backfires on those who launched it – once freed from the theatrical conventions of passive spectatorship, audiences are not willing to go back.

Furthermore, it is not clear what social or political model "The Rebellion" is actually supporting or envisaging. Even though during the performance audience members develop a certain "ambivalence towards concepts such as institution, system or governance," the only conclusion that they are able to draw from the production, according to theatre critic Renata Bartusevičiūtė, is that "singing together feels nice, free sandwiches taste good and throwing papers at an abstract figure of a bureaucrat is fun."[37] Therefore, the possibility to build performative forms of "reciprocal action and empathic identification on which new forms of sociality might be based" is lost in the carnivalesque nature of audience participation in "The Rebellion", which fails to establish a meaningful bond between the performance's deconstructive intentions, its chaotic structure and didactic epilogue.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysed examples demonstrate two prevalent modes of audience participation in contemporary Lithuanian theatre: playful participation as an extension of the DIY culture of prosumerism ("Code: Hamlet", "Lucky Lucy", "Moving Churches"), and audience participation as a social act, which continues the protest culture of the historical avant-garde ("The Rebellion", "Eglė – the Queen of Serpents"). However, a closer analysis of these works demonstrates that the binary opposition between the two should not be taken for granted, but rather investigated in order to disclose the continuous tension and interplay of individual/collective, playful/critical, passive/active, entertaining/political that is present in every act of participatory theatrical interaction.

Even if a performance can be defined as "flirting with spectators" and constitutes a playful "come-play-with-us" or "don't worry, theatre can be fun" attitude rather than a critical or reflective investigation of the role or power of the audiences, it can still produce "specific affective intensity of social exchange."[38] However, performances with political intentions behind audience participation techniques often fail to produce the desired effect of the activation of social bonds or to delegate a real agency to determine the development of a performance to the audience. As Claire Bishop writes, "participatory art is not an automatic formula for political art, but one strategy (among many) that can be deployed in a particular context to specific ends."[39]

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[37] Bartusevičiūtė 2016.
[38] Bishop 2012, 22.
[39] Ibid, 277.

To summarize, one can observe the increasing willingness of Lithuanian the-atre creators to overturn the traditional relationship between performance and audience; however, these shifts can be best described as modest forms of re-engaging spectators without a willingness to involve them in processes of co-production or co-creation that would challenge the autonomy of the theatre artist.

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