

Introduction

Theatre and the Nomadic Subject

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This special issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies* focuses on the topic “Theatre and the Nomadic Subject”, which was the theme of a nomadic conference in April 2014. The event began with lectures at the National Theatre in Helsinki, followed by presentations in a special train cabin on an 800-kilometre trip to the Arctic, and ended with papers at the University of Lapland and the Arctic Centre in Rovaniemi. The conference, which was organized with the support of the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars and hosted by Laura Gröndahl at the University of Lapland and Pirkko Koski at the University of Helsinki, was partially inspired by the writings on nomadism by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (such as their “1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine” in *A Thousand Plateaus*) and Rosi Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects*. Some of the participants in the conference drew on Deleuze and Guattari’s and Braidotti’s texts, which present poststructural notions of desubjectivation and which critique normative notions of Eurocentric, white male subjectivity and advocate, what Braidotti calls, “the ‘non-unitary’ [...] subject, [and] issues of fragmentation, complexity, and multiplicity”. Other participants took their inspiration from the geographic nomadism of the train journey to consider relations between the centre and the periphery, between settled and migrant peoples, as well as between stable theatrical venues and itinerant actors or mobile audiences.

This special issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies* consists of a few of the papers that were presented at the conference as well as specially commissioned ones, all of which have been developed further as peer-

viewed essays. The essays tackle nomadism from a variety of perspectives and help to establish the concept of the nomadic subject as a fruitful tool for analysing theatrical activity. They address nomadism conceptually as well as geographically, considering issues of desubjectivation and deterritorialisation, problems of migration, asylum and national identity, as well as the nomadic practices of artists, companies and audiences.

In “Nomadic Performativity and Immanent Ethics of Life”, Audronė Žukauskaitė examines Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of nomadology and applies it to Italian director Romeo Castellucci’s production of *Tragedia Endogonidia*, which travelled from one European city to another, adding new episodes as it went. Žukauskaitė considers the production not only as geographic and rhizomatic nomadism but also as promoting the concepts of desubjectivation and multiplicity. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s works, Žukauskaitė argues that nomadic performativity creates a kind of non-representational theatre, based not on identity but on continuous variation and differentiation. If theatre as a form of representation creates a hierarchized or “striated” space that embodies and increases power, the non-representational theatre creates a nomadic or “smooth” space of continuous variation, which transposes everything into a constant becoming.

Similarly, Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink is influenced by Deleuze and Guattari’s “Treatise on Nomodology” in her essay “Mobile Performance and Nomadic Theory: Staging Movement, Thinking Mobility”. She applies the concept of nomadology

to two case studies that exemplify aspects of deterritorialization and reterritorialization: the ambulatory performance of *No Man's Land* by the Dutch director Dries Verhoeven and a mobile research symposium called *Thinking Scenography*. *No Man's Land* is an auditory performance in which participants wearing headphones follow migrant-performers through their multicultural neighbourhoods in European cities. Rather than the bordered area of a stage, participants individually follow designated migrant-performers through the urban landscape while listening on their headphones to stories and experiences of being a migrant in a European city. The symposium-expedition *Thinking Scenography* was a mobile journey through the rural and urban/industrial landscape that challenged normative differences between real and artificial space. Groot Nibbelink demonstrates that both of these events were not only geographically but also conceptually nomadic in defying the expectations of the audience.

Like Groot Nibbelink, the essay by Manilla Ernst and Willmar Sauter on “Antigone’s Diary

– Young Audiences as Co-creators of GPS-guided Radio Drama” also investigates an ambulatory performance that highlights the environment of an immigrant population. Wearing headphones, the participants of *Antigone’s Diary*, most of whom are secondary students, follow the auditory instructions in their headphones to various sites in their Stockholm suburb and respond to issues relating to the role of Antigone in opposing the status quo. The interactive piece raises questions for the young people that reflect their integration into the country as second-generation immigrants, living in a community with a history of social discontent. Thus, the essay by Ernst and Sauter comments on the nomadic and interactive quality of the ambulatory performance as well as on the reactions of the students to a rebellious figure from classical Greek tragedy.

Pirkko Koski’s “Challenging the Centre: Asylum Seekers Encounter Native Citizens” also considers a performance involving immigrants. The production of *Paperiankkuri*, devised by Hanna Brotherus and Jussi Lehtonen, brought together professional actors and former asylum seekers in an experimental pro-



Participants at the conference “Theatre and the Nomadic Subject” in a special train carriage on the way to Rovaniemi. In the middle, Rūta Mažeikienė chairs a panel discussion. Photo: Laura Gröndahl.

duction for the Small Stage of the National Theatre in Helsinki that confronted the Finnish audience with uncomfortable questions about government policies and popular attitudes towards asylum seekers in Finland. Koski not only discusses some of the theatrical and affective techniques used by the National Theatre production to overcome resistance to the marginalised in society, but also asks why the performance failed to attract a larger audience.

Martynas Petrikas' "Centripetal Force of Locus: Dilemmas of Nomadism in Contemporary Lithuanian Artistic Practices" also investigates the theme of migration and national identity in Lithuania by examining two case studies: *The Heart in Vilnius*, a play by Arvydas Juozaitis from 2012, and a project called Give Yourself to Vilnius from 2014. Petrikas argues that the topic of "roots" in Lithuania has been debated, but Vilnius, especially after becoming the national capital after 1990, is now represented not only as the political but also the spiritual centre and a centripetal force for Lithuanians. *The Heart of Vilnius* depicts two major international figures who left Vilnius to take up opposing careers in Poland and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, at least one of them wanted his heart to be returned to Lithuania after his death and buried in Vilnius. Likewise, Give Yourself to Vilnius is a campaign to attract rural-located Lithuanians to the delights of the nation's capital. Both of these pieces could be regarded as nationalistic, but they failed to attract an audience. Thus, Petrikas's article interrogates the theatrical representation of social and ideological forces at a time when Lithuanian sovereignty is being threatened by Europe from the west and Russia from the east.

Rūta Mažeikienė's essay, "From 'rooted out' to 'rootless': Images of Emigration in Lithuanian Drama", also considers the topic of migration in Lithuania, specifically the theme of emigration as it has been represented in Lithuanian drama. She demonstrates that the recent performance of *Expulsion* by Marius Ivaškevičius, depicting the unrewarding lifestyles of recent Lithuanian emigrants to Britain, follows the pattern of traditional narratives in Lithuanian drama from the nineteenth century that featured the difficult experiences of Lithuanian emigrants to the USA. In providing a

sociological and historical background to *Expulsion*, Mažeikienė details the emigration statistics in Lithuania over the past 150 years that have now reached alarming proportions and analyses the different conceptions and perceptions of emigration that have emerged. In discussing *Expulsion*, Mažeikienė reveals that some of the social practices in Lithuania under Soviet occupation account for the ongoing feelings of displacement and anomie that feature in the play as well as in Lithuanian society today.

Ina Pukelytė's "Reconstructing a Nomadic Network: Itineraries of Jewish Actors during the First Lithuanian Independence" uncovers traces of Jewish itinerant actors who tried and failed to establish stable theatre companies in Kaunas and therefore led nomadic lives for most of their careers. As a result of extensive archival research, Pukelytė has assembled significant details about a forgotten period of Lithuanian and Jewish theatre history. Some of the actors from this era had surprisingly successful careers, travelling across Europe to North and South America and back again. Because of the holocaust, however, many of them died and their histories went unrecorded. Pukelytė has recovered important details about their productions and their efforts to establish theatre companies in Kaunas, as well as their global itineraries.

Anneli Saro's "Mobility and Theatre: Theatre Makers as Nomadic Subjects" also focuses on the mobility of the theatre artists. In reviewing the activities of touring companies and summer theatres in Estonia over the last century, Saro demonstrates that touring theatre practices have changed considerably over the years and especially since the Soviet era. Recently summer theatres have become a boom industry as the result of specific productions that have attracted an unprecedented audience. Using Latour's actor-network-theory, Saro demonstrates how linguistic and technological factors as well as the mobility of spectators, actors and theatre companies affect the dynamic nature of the theatrical network.

Finally, Maria Berlova's "Transnationalism of Swedish and Russian National Theaters in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: How Foreign Performative Art Sharpened the Aesthetics of National Identity" examines the mobility of theatre

artists in the Swedish and Russian national theatres of the eighteenth century. Both Gustav III of Sweden and Catherine the Great of Russia, who were cousins and went to war against each other, employed many foreign artists, especially from Italy and France, to create their national theatres. Berlova illustrates some of the contradictions involved in developing nationalist theatre enterprises that were staffed by foreign artists, but she also demonstrates the many similarities of Swedish and Russian artistic policies and how they proved to be effective.

In conclusion, in focusing on nomadism in theatre practice, dramaturgy and theatre historiography, this special issue indicates some of the areas of research that could be addressed by using nomadism as a theoretical tool. Moreover, some of the essays in this collection also address the contrasting notion of territoriality. Territoriality opposes nomadism by setting borders and frontiers. Nomads cross borders that territories try to police. Thus, implicitly or explicitly, some of the essays in this issue question the exclusionary practices of the nation state in policing its borders and protecting its own citizens but not always catering for migrants, e.g. those who migrate across borders and in some cases seek asylum. As this special issue of the journal goes to press, the position of unsettled and displaced people becomes an ever more pressing issue. In this issue, Groot Nibbelink, Ernst, Sauter, Koski, Pukelytė, Petrikas and Mažeikienė demonstrate how theatre can expose the problems of immigrants and refugees and interrogate the practices of nation states. Hopefully, theatre will continue to address this important topic in the future. Finally, I want to thank Pirkko Koski and Anneli Saro for their editorial advice in preparing this publication, and I want especially to thank Laura Gröndahl for organising the train conference from Helsinki to Rovaniemi.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi, trans., Continuum, New York 2004, pp. 387-467.
2. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011.
3. Ibid., p. 3.