

TEXT AND TIME DIMENSIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE DISCOURSE

Keywords: dramatic text, actual and historical time, author, post-dramatic theatre

After all the mercantilist society keeps a writer not because of his production (he produces nothing), but because of the damage caused?¹

The author and his relationship to the text is still one of the main topics of theatre research discussions. Though the author-playwright's death has been predicted for almost a hundred years, in one or another form he remains in the theatrical discourse and affects it. During the last hundred years the dramatic text as a discourse has gone through many transformations – having absorbed the searches of different eras, in the beginning of the 21st century, it seeks to recover lost ground from which it was pushed out by a directing theatre dictate.

In the Lithuanian theatre the rise of Sigitas Parulskis', Marius Ivaškevičius' and Herkus Kunčius' texts shows a comeback of the text and its priority with respect to the other theatre discourses (directing, visual). The dramatic texts that appeared at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries show not only the breakout of the Lithuanian dramaturgy from the closed form implicated by Sovietism, but also reflect the evolutions of European dramatic texts that took place during a century. The object of the article is the reflections of this evolution in the dramatic works of Lithuanian authors. There are highlighted two text trajectories existing alongside each other in the creative works of the playwrights – actual and historical time.

ACTUAL TIME SEARCHES

One of the most important dramatic aspirations of the 20th and 21st centuries is to reflect the present time and to grasp the future. Peter Szondi was the first who tried in his work *Theory of the Modern Drama* to describe the ways of showing the time, highlighting the treatment of time differences between the classical drama and new drama. According to Szondi, in the conception of classical drama the author does not exist in the text – he does not speak, but gives the discourse, exhibits the drama. The words of one character to another are not the author's words, but an appeal to the viewer; the relationship between the author and the character is not visible, there is only a combination of them, showing a dramatic person. During the period of classical drama (beginning with the Renaissance and finishing in the end of the 19th century), the drama is given a preference and the time of the drama is always the present time.

Time canon of the dramatic text that had existed for some centuries started to change in the end of the 19th century. Such well-known authors as Henrik Ibsen, turning the past into the discourse of the present, Anton Chekov, insisting on non-existence of the present time, August Strindberg, suggesting the author's "me" attitude, or Maurice Maeterlinck, creating an autonomic dramatic language, showed new writing techniques. The aims of these authors to reflect a new period by new language discourses transform the main concepts of the classical drama.

Szondi names these concepts as *an act between human beings in the present time*. In modern drama all these three concepts – the present time, relationships between human beings and the action – become absolute, as the time context necessary for the classical drama now becomes irrelevant. The past, utopia or future – all time dimensions merge in one *here and now* time of the drama. All these times are actualized; the only thing that according to Szondi transforms in this triad is human relations.² If in the classical drama human relations started and were dealt with in the level of subjects – characters, in the new drama the component of relations between the object and the subject – the character and the author – becomes more and more important.

The experiments of the dramatic text at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries developed in the middle of the 20th century. The most striking text writing trajectories of that period are of the epic theatre and the theatre of the absurd. Unlike the modern era theatre which had highlighted the author component, the epic theatre more implicated the viewer and the actor. Both were invited to distance themselves from the dramatic text, get to know it, go deep into the logic or social meaning, treating it as an object under investigation or interpretation. The viewer of the epic drama is encouraged not to identify himself with the time, but to know it and reflect it. If human relations in the modern theatre become irrelevant, in the epic theatre, according to Szondi, they go even further. It impels a man to further move away from himself toward greater *autoalienation*³. (*autoaliénation* – Szondi's term by which he describes the self-alienated state of a person).

The component of *autoalienation* becomes more striking in the theatre of the absurd where the actors seek to reveal themselves “through a process of renewal and destruction as a result of the passing time”⁴. According to Martin Essler, an attempt to feel oneself is tragically thankless – it is impossible to reveal the complexity of people's communication in the world where the boundary between the dream and the reality is constantly changing.⁵ The theatre of the absurd more clearly than other trends in theatre tries to reveal human confrontation with the time, waiting for a moment between

the birth and death: “To wait means to experiment with the action of time which is permanently changing. As nothing ever really happens, this change is only an illusion. The constant activity of the time destroys itself; it is without an object, so it is without a future.”⁶ Considered as the starting point for an innovative dramatic text, the theatre of the absurd with its characters communicating with minimalist phrases in fact brings us back to the theatre source – the intersection of Apollonian and Dionysian theatres, their dialectic and tension. The representative text-centrist theatre is replaced by a theatrical theatre of being. Freed from illusion to grasp or survive the time, the text in the theatre of the absurd becomes a minimal form of communication and shows the end of the period of experiments with the text.

When the text as the main discourse of the theatre was exhausted, the artists of the 7th–8th decades looked for the other ways of expression. Antonin Artaud becomes an ideological leader of new searches. He in general denies the text considering it to be a servant of public representation. Entering into polemics with Artaud's approach to the representation, Jacques Derrida insists on the impossibility of the theatre as the art of nonrepresentation; however he notes that the representation in the theatre of cruelty is of a different nature than the classical theatre – it is “the reconstitution of an original, closed, representational space, archi-manifestation of force or life.”⁷ The theatre allegedly reveals what lies deep in human nature, what to bring into limelight and what exists beyond time context. The performer or actor becomes the most important mediator of what lies deep in human nature. The works of such directors who are able through actors' body and voice to express life archi-manifestations become very important (Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba).

In the 9th decade, the searches of such corporeal theatre came to an end, however, unlike the theatre discourses of earlier periods the latter is not a negative one. Postmodernism as also one of its representational tools – the theatre refuses to represent an idea or discourse. There is recognized the possibility of coexistence of many ideas, concepts and

paradigms. The visual theatre (Robert Wilson, Jan Fabre) forms as one of the possible theatre development trajectories. It enables the emergence of new time interpretations in the theatre as for instance “time of a glance” or a present continuous tense.⁸ The continuous penetration of new technologies into the spheres of art causes these new time interpretations. Their influence changes the concept of relation among the speed, theatre space and viewer. When the visual theatre as other earlier stage discourses begins to crack, in its cracks there appear new theatrical languages such as an interactive theatre (Gob Squad).

When the image and interactivity were firmly established as a discourse of the post-dramatic theatre, in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century the theatre returned to its oldest representative – the word – ready for language games implied by poststructuralist intentions. On the one hand, the text is used as an equivalent element to other stage discourses, as “not the language of characters (if on the whole, the characters are clearly defined characters), but an independent element of the theatre”, not the dialog, but “linguistic planes”.⁹ On the other hand, it again emerges as the most important element of stage discourse and becomes a medium of what is impossible to present, but still is sought to reveal. Writer’s word puzzles are formed without apparent rules; he works in order “to set rules of what *will have been done*. Just because of that the work or text reminds an event that always begins too early.”¹⁰ Jean-Francois Lyotard describes the epoch of such a creation as postmodern, based on the time paradox *futur (post) anterieur (modo)*. Showing such a paradoxical time or dependent on it text requires from the author a new relationship with the text, and from the viewer – new possibilities of perception. The moment, when the viewer resists the new text of the author as having accepted it soon would again expect a new perception challenge, is the continuous present of the theatre discourse, aspiration toward which the theatre moves forward from the beginning in various forms of showing/representation or being/present.

In the end of the 20th century the British playwrights

of ‘In-Yer-Face Theatre’ Mark Ravenhill or Sarah Kane and German playwrights Marius von Mayenburg and Dea Loher became the representatives of a new relation with the text. All of them are ideologically connected or, according to Jacques Lacan, their traumatism is shown by unsuccessful meetings with reality, confusion between the subject and the world, interior and exterior. Almost at the same time the representatives of the new Lithuanian dramaturgy start demonstrating the similar aims. The first text reflecting the Soviet reality as trauma is Sigitas Parulskis’ *P.S. the Case O.K. (P.S. byla O.K.)*. The tool showing trauma is not a form, plot or content, but first of all it is the language and time metamorphoses revealed through it. Connecting different discourses – philosophical, political, poetic, archetypal and everyday ones – into one whole and paradoxically combining them the playwright not only plays with the language, but also creates in the Lithuanian theatre a new time puzzle: the time existing at the same time in various past, present and future forms. At the time of putting on the play – in 1997 – as show the discussions of critics of different generations, this way of speaking, time *mélange*, was considered to be hurtful, spoiling the language, so incomprehensible and unacceptable.¹¹ Reflecting his text, the writer acknowledges that such inability to understand stems from the difference of linguistic codes and symbols used by a new generation.

Searches of a new language seen by the texts of Parulskis and other young writers – Herkus Kunčius and Marius Ivaškevičius provoked intellectuals’ debates about the dramatic piece in general in order to review and clarify the causes and consequences of Lithuanian writers’ grappling with the language.¹² At the same time when a crisis of new Lithuanian dramaturgy was revealed, the revival started – 36 plays were presented for a New Drama Action in Vilnius in 1998.

The most interesting drama example after the already mentioned Parulskis’ text is Ivaškevičius’ play *Neighbour (Kaimynas)* (1998). Unlike *P.S. the Case O.K.*, in which the author uses such universal archetypes as Isaac and Abraham, Oedipus and Father’s ghost, Ivaškevičius confines himself to the types of the 20th-century Soviet generations and

stigmatizes their being. Like Parulskis, Ivaškevičius does not deal with the matter of form (he uses the canon of dividing the text into acts and scenes), but looks for a new ways of language extension, theatrical revival and recognition. The present, the author wants to show to the viewer, is a mixture of reality and a dream; chronological time is mixed up with fragmentary memory recorded time, so an impression of continuous relevance is made. In such a text combinations of paradoxical unbelievable situations become real, and grotesque meaningless dialogs – convincing and intriguing. *Neighbour* is one of the first post-Soviet texts which tries to look at the present through the European perspective and further through the global perspective or, as the playwright offers in his another play *Near City* (*Artimas miestas*), from a bird's-eye view, space perspective. The time here cuts not only chronology, but synchrony as well; it is encompassing, overwhelming and it does not exist. The time element becomes especially cacophonous in the third act when two time perspectives intertwined in different spaces of Australia are all the time seen next to each other. Using Lehmann's term it is possible to say that the Lithuanian author uses time distortion technique: "when the time becomes the object of 'direct' experience, time distortion techniques are very important. Only different from usual time experience provokes to perceive the time no longer as a self-evident reality: the time becomes the subject of reflections (...). And this is a new phenomenon of theatre aesthetic (...). The time becomes an object of theatre aesthetic experience"¹³. Such aesthetic makes the stage the place of reflections on the act of audience observations.

Having drastically destroyed the medium of time and it seems having rejoiced at such opportunity given to him by writing Ivaškevičius in his play *Near City* (2005) deals with time calmer and more moderately. There are two time spaces – actual and symbolic. The first one is represented by the individuals of the global Western society living in the more prosperous countries of Western Europe – Denmark and Sweden, and the second one is represented by the archetypical characters of these countries. Swedish "citizen" Carlson's monologues in the presence

of Mermaid in Copenhagen stops the current time and gives it universal, mythic dimensions, linking it with what there was, is and will be. The microcosm of a typical Western family – father, mother and their child – highlights the present time. That time has lost its ideological integrity, is cracking and in its cracks there are holes of a dream turned into reality.

As in the play *Neighbour*, in *Near City* the playwright interweaves a detective thread and adds to the dramatic text a criminal time dimension. The latter gives to a vertical text interpretation a horizontal narration line, a chance to find out the plot and intrigue. Taking into account the abundance of criminal stories in various modern media, it can be assumed that the criminal time is one of the most exploited times and stimulus for important texts (of literature, film or theatre) of the present time which "swallows" the perceiver in *here and now* time or eliminates that present time by the relevance of the text. That is to say, the interesting crime story returns to the theatre its classical dimensions.

In his newest play *Expulsion* (*Išvarymas*) (2011) the storytelling fun takes place of the experiments with time and space. The text as a narrative is coded in the character of Benas the narrator who again as if from the bird's eye view gives the perceiver the panorama of his life emphasizing what he considers to be the most important. In chronological order there is given the kaleidoscope of one man's life and his identity changes at the same time presenting the versions of other characters' lives. Ivaškevičius' epic story is full of theatricality: it is especially evident in act III – Ben's and Vandal's dialogues. They show the possibilities of clownish, buffoonish text interpretations. With the help of characters' dialogues the author breaks not only the emerging canon of the post-dramatic text, but also the dramatic text creation rules in general: the play has no scenes; dialogs are extended in such a way as it suits the author. The only convention used by the playwright in order to control the story is the division of the play into four acts. Some dialogs, e.g. the dialog between Benas and Vandal in the end of the third act, stop the stage time, enlarge it and give it prominence. The duration of friends' meeting in the dramatic time

is disproportionately long compared to other segments of the text – it sort of becomes the central axis of the dramatic text embodying the primordial nature of theatre art. Rather than forming a new dramatic language or original story, the author cares more about telling without time restriction in order to reveal the larger narrative panorama of the story, to cover a variety of characters and to revealing their importance. However, *Expulsion* like *P.S. the Case O.K.* staged in 1997 though unintentionally oversteps the norms of the traditional language and becomes object of public debate.¹⁴ Characters of the play speak their own social dialect, their language is rich in Russian swear words: they become an inseparable part of the characters' self-expression and their relationship to the world of expression. As more than ten years ago had done Parulskis, Ivaškevičius reveals a state of the new post-Soviet generation, "vomits out" it in words, in such a way making angry that part of the public which wants to see the reality as simulacrum. The writer's "damage" is far from being not unacceptable to the viewer of a mercantilist society – the play *Expulsion* has become the National Theatre hit returning to the theatre other than entertaining theatre audience and also bringing money to the box office. According to Roland Barthes, both to the author and inquisitive perceiver the ideology is not important, only the pleasure given by the text: "the origins of this audacity are not liberalism, but a perversion (...). In such a way a moral unity that the society requires from any man-made product is destroyed, broken"¹⁵.

HISTORICAL TIME IN THE PRESENT

Dramas in which the attempts are made to speak about concrete events important to the history of mankind do not have the dramatic factor in themselves, so they are more interesting to the perceiver in a written and not stage form. That is partially confirmed by some Herkus Kunčius' and Marius Ivaškevičius' plays for the interpretations of historical facts.

Kunčius uses such historical characters even in three texts: the first – *Genius' Workshop* (*Genijaus dirbtuvė*) appeared in 1998, then the opera's libretto

Kipras, Fiodoras and the Others (*Kipras, Fiodoras ir kiti*) in 2003 and *Matthew* (*Matas*) in 2005. In all three texts the author "mixes" a cocktail of historically important personalities that existed in reality, by such characters seeking for the post-dramatic effect. Marius Ivaškevičius acts in a similar way in his plays *Madagascar* (*Madagaskaras*) (2004) and *Mistras* (*Mistras*) (2010). Both authors convey the versions of historical figures with the help of linguistic games, shattering the well-known clichés about famous personalities. Speaking about *Matthew* Edgaras Klivis aptly summarizes such a presentation: "linguistic games (...) are the most important as the subject of the newest Kunčius' play is language, more exactly – speaking, flow of words, sequence of symbols."¹⁶ The theatre researcher also gives a possible name of such a speaking manner in *Matthew* – totalitarianism as a linguistic mode. In his turn Ivaškevičius invents a certain linguistic mode in his play *Madagascar* – the first Lithuanian independence could be called a linguistic mode of this play. Restoring the characters of that time the author does not avoid the stereotypes of the language of that time, making barbarisms topical and giving them a new content of the present time. It is obvious that watchdogs of the old ideology do not like such games. Like Ferdinandas Kauzonas reviewing *Expulsion*, Silvestras Gaižiūnas criticizes Ivaškevičius for such things likening such authors to "postcolonial monsters, destroyers" who care not about history, but "gathering of its fragments and placing them according to their self-created pulp scheme"¹⁷. According to him, postmodern language games are only a primitive pulp literature and press – "the content is replaced by external effects, attention is directed to the third-rate things with the help of popstyle."¹⁸ Not troubling to give arguments, the author makes a drastic conclusion that to "dehumanized consciousness, daily fed adapted feuilleton media products and pseudovalues, solid talking about the Lithuanian culture is intolerable as every other serious discourse."¹⁹ The author of the article does not recognize the motion of the dramatic language during the time, the attempt to reveal the relationship with the historical period during the current theatrical language games. As a

researcher, he does not seek objectivity, while trying to squeeze the object of his investigation into the narrow ideological framework; moreover, he does not recognize the possible freedom of the perceiver – the perceiver, who can and is able to interpret the language of the author in the present time perspective, that is, poststructuralism epoch.

The articles that attacked dramatic language search to show that in terms of the reception the more provocative plays are connected with Lithuanian subjects. Both in *Matthew* and *Madagascar* the reader can easily decipher the language codes the authors use revealing to the perceiver well-known historical periods. Both in Kunčius' and Ivaškevičius' texts they are identical. Both playwrights, seeking a critical approach to represented persons or epochs, do not avoid grotesque, demythologization; place the cult characters in mundane, everyday situations that cause to pale their romantic and noble beauty, so dear to the Enlightenment mentality of the reader.

Weaker from the point of view of reception are the authors' plays with ideologically less active personalities in the Lithuanian context. In both Kunčius' *Genius' Workshop* and Ivaškevičius' *Mistras* the action takes place not in Lithuania – both authors choose Paris. Kunčius in his play confronts the artists of the beginning of the 20th century – August Roden, Camille Claudel, Vaclav Nizinski, Sergei Diaghilev, Isadora Duncan and Rainer Maria Rilke, and Ivaškevičius in his *Mistras* brings together the celebrities of the middle of the 19th century – Adam Mickiewicz, Honore Balzac, George Sand, Frederic Chopin, Lithuanian nobleman Andrzej Towianski, etc. Like in Lithuanian historical plays, both writers through a variety of language games – quotes, puns, pseudo-importance of Lithuanian mythology, historical facts and pastiche – try debunking historical characters and their disclosure in the present time perspective.

As these interpretations of historical time of the two authors show, such emphasis on historical time is rather theoretical, because, according to Lehmann, the historical time, although is “significant for the dramatic theatre, working with older texts and showing past stories and their characters” in the theatre is fused into “one and only time of theatrical experience”.²⁰ Despite all searches of the twentieth century related to the time dimension this time of theatrical experience was, is and will remain the present.

Notes

¹ Barthes, Roland. *Teksto malonumas*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1991, p. 285.

² Szondi, Peter. *Théorie du drame moderne*. Lausanne : L'Age d'homme, 1983, p. 64.

³ Ibid, p. 102.

⁴ Essler, Martin. *Théâtre de l'Absurde*. Paris : Buchet/Chastel, 1977, p. 66.

⁵ Ibid, p. 66.

⁶ Ibid, p. 49.

⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *La clôture de la représentation*. In: Derrida, Jacques. *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris : Seuil, 1967, p. 349.

⁸ Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdraminis teatras*. Vilnius: Menų spaustuvė, 2010, p. 123-124.

⁹ Lehmann, ibid, p. 23.

¹⁰ Žukauskaitė, Audronė. *Postmodernizmas*. Kaunas: Kitos knygos/Meno parkas, 2006, p. 22.

¹¹ Marcinkevičiūtė, Ramunė. *Sigitas Parulskis, “Man nepatinka norma”*. In: *Teatras*, 1997, No. 1, p. 26-31.

¹² *Lietuvių dramaturgija vakar ir šiandien*. In: *Lietuvos teatras, 1998–1999*, p. 62-73.

¹³ Lehmann, ibid, p. 234.

¹⁴ http://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/nuomones_ir_komentarai/bus_isklausyta/fkauzonas_isvaymas_is_teatro/, see 2012 02 01.

¹⁵ Barthes, Roland, ibid, p. 290.

¹⁶ http://www.ebiblioteka.lt/resursai/Ziniasklaida/Teatru_sajunga/Lietuvos%20scena/2006/LS_2006_02.pdf, p. 10-11.

¹⁷ Gaižiūnas, Silvestras. “Madagaskaro” džiunglėse, arba *Petro Cvirkos pėdomis*. In: *Literatūra ir menas*, 2005 06 17, No. 3053.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lehmann, ibid, p. 231.

TEKSTAS IR LAIKO DIMENSIJOS ŠIUOLAIKINIAME TEATRO DISKURSE

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dramos tekstas, aktualus ir istorinis laikas, autorius, postdraminis teatras

Santrauka

Straipsnyje atskleidžiami laiko sampratos pokyčiai XX a. Europos ir lietuvių dramaturgijoje. Klasikinės dramos laikotarpiu laikas atliko dramos aktualizavimo funkciją, tai yra, jis visada buvo dabartis. Nuo XIX a. pabaigos laiko kanonas pradeda trūkinėti. Šiuos įtrūkius atspindi Henriko Ibseno, Antono Čechovo, Moriso Meterlinko, Augusto Strindbergo kūryba. XX a. vid. ryškiausius laiko ir dramatinio teksto eksperimentus vykdė epinio ir absurdo teatro autoriai. Naują teatrinio diskurso etapą ženklina XX a. 7–8 dešimtmetis, kai teksto – reprezentacijos įrankio – bandoma atsiskyti vardan performerio, aktoriaus, kuris geba per kūną ir balsą transliuoti gyvenimo archimanifestacijas. 9-ajame dešimtmetyje plėtojasi postmodernaus teatro diskursai – vizualusis teatras, postdraminis, interaktyvus teatras. 10-ojo dešimtmečio teatrinę kalbą paveikė poststruktūralistiniai ieškojimai – tekstas tampa kitų scenos diskursų lygiavertis elementas. Lietuvių dramaturgijoje šie ieškojimai ryškiausiai atsispindi Sigito Parulskio ir Mariaus Ivaškevičiaus dramatinėje kūryboje. S. Parulskio *P.S. Byla O.K.*, M. Ivaškevičiaus *Kaimynas*, *Artimas miestas* atskleidžia naujus žaidimo su laiku aspektus, jis tampa teatro estetiškos patirties objektu. Be aktualaus – dabarties – laiko M. Ivaškevičius ir Herkus Kunčius konstruoja istorinio laiko pjeses, tačiau šios pjesės yra tiek aktualios, kiek jos atskleidžia dabartį. Teatrinės patirties laikas, nepaisant įvairių su laiku susijusių ieškojimų, yra tiek aktualus, kiek jis atspindi visuomet aktualią dabartį.

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