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NEW THEATRE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The ground for this article is technology that is subordinated by our wish to explore human being and the world, and theatre that doesn't necessarily need theatre halls and that spreads outwards the word. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts write in their book *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader* that technology has created a new vision of the world, and theatre can now be expected to deal with the complex treatment of complex subjects, and of complex responses to 20th century life.¹

Unfortunately Estonian theatre has not yet dealt with a complex treatment of the subjects — it stands still while commercial entertainment that marks the intelligent is growing. This is the reason why examples of Estonian theatre are lacking.

I will present 10 forms of new theatre (the basis for the classification of these forms are performances, and not theatre groups, nor individuated artists) that show three different ways to use Internet:

- 1) *Internet as a Tool*: different theatre forms that explore reality versus virtual reality through the use of Internet
- 2) *Internet as an Output*: theatre that uses virtuality in order to become partly machine, human and theory
- 3) *Internet as a Tool and as an Output*: theatre forms that consider environment to be more important than the space itself

My aim is not to make a deep analysis but to introduce the terms.

INTERNET AS A TOOL

The INTERACTIVE THEATRE got its name from an interactive performance *Hotel from Hell* (2002)² by Australian Kelli Dipple aka Gravel Rash³ who used Max/MSP object orientated programming, tracking the motion of a live performer and sending data across an ethernet network, in order to control the audio levels of a soundscape and the time frame for playback of short video clips.

The text as an illustrative mean is replaced by the pre-recorded sound of the neighbours and live audience, and by video images that create illusionary space perceived as a real space by the spectators. We have multiply repeated chain model linking the space, motion of the person, and technology: computer and Internet. All three components have to work, otherwise the chain will break and the world will fall apart.

The MULTIMEDIA THEATRE is based on the performance *Escape Velocity* (1998) by Australian group Company in Space.⁴ *Escape Velocity* creates dialogues between our visual, aural and kinetic perception, using real space and virtual space that is created by ISDN (Integrated Services

Digital Network) video conferencing. Company in Space shares Patrice Pavis' vision that the theatre space is conceived as invisible, unlimited, and linked to its users, space as a substance not to be filled, but expanded and extended.⁵ Reality may be exceeded when real actor is accompanied by virtual actor who has been brought to the stage using technological means. We can describe two realities — the space in which the performance is held and the space where one dancer is watched by a camera. These two realities create the third that is common for both dancers.

The TELEMATIC THEATRE questions concepts such as identity, space, and time, perception of reality, the natural and the artificial. In the performance *Dementia of Angels* (1994) by Canadian group Corpsindice⁶ the dancers have a double presence; a direct and real one, and a telematic one. Every dancer has coded captors placed on their bodies that generates data, the formatted data is sent to the other location where the data generates musical space. In this interactive creative circle every dancer can be aware of the result of their actions and movements - a sound produced in one place have an impact on the sound of the other.

ISDN video conferencing posits time at the centre of the performance and widens its meanings. During the transfer of a dancer, it may happen that the time zones and units will be mixed up — the time where past, present and future intertwines I call a 'dimensional time'. Theatre no longer deals with physical objects but the digital signal, modified and combined in real time.

The AVATAR-PERFORMANCE is a laboratory where an actor is a participant of an experiment and a director is a scientist. *Movatar*⁷ (2000) by Australian Stelarc⁸ is an experiment where physical body is animated by 3D computer generated virtual body. *Movatar* is an inverse motion capture system where instead of a body animating a computer entity, the avatar possesses a physical body in the real space. Stelarc's arms and upper body are controlled by 'the skeleton of the avatar', but his legs are free to move and touch the floor sensors that prompt and modulate the avatar's behaviour. *Movatar* shows that evolution of technology has brought us to a point where our fantasies about modification of the human being do not have to be limited by 'ordinary use' of forms (costume) and colours (make-up).

INTERNET AS AN OUTPUT

The CYBERTHEATRE *honorio in ciberspazio*⁹ (1997) allows the audience, with aid of Internet

and a computer, to stay at home. *honorio in ciberspazio* reflects the time we are in. We can meet people in the net whom we have never met nor seen. Through exchanged texts characters will be born but the person will remain textual information until we meet him/her personally. Cybertheatre mediates the perception of the audience — the observational senses are limited, and it presses the experience of psychological processes at the audience's home. Guy Debord considers media and technology as powerful mechanisms keeping individuals numb and docile, watching and consuming, rather than acting and doing.¹⁰ *honorio in ciberspazio* is entertainment that controls the viewer but simultaneously it shows convincingly — life is not on the one side and the theatre on the other.

The IRC-DRAMA *Hamnet* (1993) by The *Hamnet* Players¹¹ took place on a specially created channel on IRC called #hamnet. IRC has the elements of theatre — direct speech, the (global) presence of people and an audience. Stuart Harris, the author of the script, shows-off his linguistic playfulness by mixing archaic characters Hamlet, Ophelia et al. with contemporary IRC-characters Prologue, Audience et al. whose task is to perform the text and not the play itself. *Hamnet* plays around with language, creating wordplays that turn everything — activities, characters, and sounds etc. into the text. In order to enjoy the wordplay fully, it is necessary to be familiar with the work of Shakespeare, to know English, coded net-language like emoticons and acronyms, and IRC commands quite well. The minimal text is enriched by the improvisation of the actors who demonstrate their splendid use of the language.

Harris proves that we can have all the glory of the text when the actor's music is poor and that Shakespeare's texts are immortal, rich and contemporary no matter the year in which we are living.

Italian dlsan¹² cuts *Macbeth* and renders it with sounds and images into a new medium, HYPERTEXT. In *HyperMacbeth*¹³ (2001) several narratives are told simultaneously both in Italian and in English. The traditional theatre has main characters and main plot; hypertext has all the characters on the stage at the same time, all equally important. Hypertext lets a viewer create his/her own story, making every way unique, being a net of possibilities, similar to our everyday life full of options and results. The hypertext of *HyperMacbeth* is special among its kind because although the audience makes the choices, it has an engine, created by a programme by dlsan that decides randomly which words-sounds-graphics are linked. dlsan has created complete symbol-

theatre, applying Artaud's idea of the word: the word has to be treated like a solid object in order to use it to move things.¹⁴ At the theatre, as in everyday life, people do not pay enough attention to the words. *HyperMacbeth* is a thinking-practise that can help overstressed and hurried contemporary people to focus, think, and analyse.

The TWO-DIMENSIONAL CYBERFORMANCE follows the specification of a term "cyberformance" by Helen Varley Jamieson to describe the activities of group Avatar Body Collision.¹⁵ Over a 12 hour period they presented four performances of *Dress The Nation*¹⁶ (2003) that was created for free downloadable chat application The Palace. Actors and spectators were online, represented by avatars and their speech was displayed in cartoon bubbles. The instructive cyberformance explored the production of meaning in relation to 'idle' reception of chaotic world politics presented in our media. The process of education is entertainment that makes the form milder without the disappearance of the message and meaning. The Palace makes prolongs the existence of our body (by its multiplication). One can create unique avatars and change costumes as characters with just one single touch of a keyboard; also one can play several roles and even all the roles alone. Story, space and characters fuse on the computer screen that for Sherry Turkle¹⁷ is the new location for our fantasies, both erotic and intellectual, showing that our imagination is the only limit we have.

INTERNET AS A TOOL AND AS AN OUTPUT

English group Blast Theory¹⁸ introduces with its *Kidnap*¹⁹ (1998) the SURVEILLANCE GAME. The group launched a lottery in which the winners had the chance to be kidnapped. One month before the actual kidnap 10 finalists were chosen at random and put under surveillance. Later on two winners were snatched in a broad daylight and taken to a secret location where they were held for 48 hours. The whole process had live broadcast on the net and the audience were able to control the video camera inside the safe-house and communicate live with the kidnappers.

It is realistic surveillance game that reflects a society whose members are treated like test animals. The circumstance that all participants are voluntarily and knowingly playing a 'game within a game' lifts it up from that reflection, and gives to it the quality of theatre. The essence of *Kidnap* is the method-based experiential art of Stanislavski. Similar to actors who need to know their characters, Blast Theory has to do the same, using three forms of surveillance techniques: pedestrian, ve-

hicular and residential. *Kidnap* has fixed rules : fixed players, a defined beginning and end, an improvised middle, a conceptual through-line, and a defined time and task. Unfortunately it does not take on a war-game dimension that would have enabled interesting and critical situations, raising a question — what would have happened if the frames would have been shifted and it would not have remained just 'a rehearsal of life'?

With PLAYFUL INSTALLATION *Blinkenlights*²⁰ (2001) German hacker group Chaos Computer Club (CCC)²¹ turned Haus des Lehrers (the House of Teachers) into the world's largest interactive computer display. Webcam was set up for those who were not in Berlin and/or who wanted to have a remote view of the building. CCC painted 144 windows (eight floors with 18 windows) in white and put behind each window a single lamp on a tripod. The pattern of animations, text and image messages were created when the lamps were switched on and off. The computers that communicated using network protocol shared the control of the whole system in separate modules: control, playback and telephone interactivity. Everyone could create messages using free downloadable software made by CCC. Also it was possible to attach a simple text file to an e-mail in order to send it to CCC and play Pong, using mobile phones or send popular love letters. CCC changed the building into a scenographical info-body, adding the dimensions of a spectacle to it and creating a feeling that the environment is more important than space. Info is limited and simple as in the city-space, consisting of short words and signs — reality has been turned into a sign-language and 'multicultural party'. The most astonishing thing about this spectacle was its up-to-the-minute responsiveness, proceeding directly from its environment and its time, and expressing exactly what the audience wants.

CONCLUSION

New theatre carries the traditions of old theatre, telling important and meaningful stories about the human relationships and the problems of the society. But the whole process has been taken into the contemporary circuit of communication, fixing the view that theatre does not stand apart from society but is a global and playful organ that functions as a totality of components of the era. The sense in which reality is heightened as communication without barriers evolves presents potential for a dynamic existential revival of the theatre of the 21st century. Whether the new theatre will remain a utopia, or not, is left to the theatre and its audience to decide.

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NAUJASIS TEATRAS XXI AMŽIUJE

S a n t r a u k a

Teatras ištisus amžius kuriamas pasitelkus technologiją, filosofiją, skirtingus teksto panaudojimo būdus, fizines raiškos priemones ir pan. Taip patvirtinama M. McLuhano mintis, kad medija yra priemonė, priverčianti kultūrą veikti, o žmogų mąstyti. Galima pastebėti, kad teatras, kaip savosios eros ženklas, yra apimtas sąstingio ne vien Estijoje. Teatro istorija liudija, kad spektaklis turi išlaikyti pušiausvyrą tarp intelektualaus vaidinimo ir pasilinksminimo. Atrodo, kad naujosios teatro formos, pvz., *interaktyvusis teatras*, *telematinis teatras*, *dvimatis kibernetinis spektaklis*, *IRC drama* ir pan. tokią pušiausvyrą išlaiko.

Straipsnyje pristatoma 10 spektaklių, kuriuose vienaip ar kitaip yra panaudojamas internetas. Autorė skiria tris pagrindinius internetinės erdvės funkcionavimo spektaklyje būdus: internetas yra naudojamas kaip įrankis įvairiuose spektakliuose, tyrinėjančiuose realybės ir virtualios realybės santykį; internetas funkcionuoja kaip išvestis teatre, kuri panaudoja virtualumą, kad taptų vienu metu mechaniškas, žmogiškas ir teoriškas; internetas naudojamas kaip įrankis ir kaip išvestis teatre, kur aplinka yra laikoma svarbesne už erdvę.

Naujasis teatras tęsia senojo teatro tradicijas pasakodamas reikšmingas istorijas apie žmonių santykius ir visuomenės problemas. Tačiau pats procesas atsidūrė mūsų laikų komunikacijos lygmenyje tuo patvirtindamas, kad teatras nėra atskirtas nuo visuomenės, bet veikia tarsi globalus žaismingas įrankis, siejantis skirtingus šiandieninės eros komponentus. Ar naujasis teatras liks utopija, ar ne, gali nulemti tik pats teatras ir publika.

PAGRINDINĖS SĄVOKOS: *medijos, teatras, internetas, interaktyvusis teatras, medių teatras, telematinis teatras, kibernetinis spektaklis.*

KEY WORDS: *media, theatre, internet, interactive theatre, multimedia theatre, telematic theatre, cyberformance.*