

Writing for Theatre: New Developments in Estonian Drama of the 1990s and 2000s

Luule Epner

Institute of Cultural Research and Fine Arts, University of Tartu

Ülikooli 16, Tartu, 51014, Estonia

Email: luule.epner@ut.ee

Abstract The article examines the new developments in Estonian playwriting of the 1990s and 2000s in the context of Western postdramatic theatre. Democratization of Estonian theatre system (first of all, the appearance of small privately-managed theatres as an institutional alternative to state theatres) and the abolition of Soviet-time censorship created the necessary makings of artistic changes both in the field of theatre and playwriting. The changes, supported by lively exchange of influences and ideas between Estonian and Western theatre, have been rather gradual than radical. The spread of new writing practices like so-called directors' dramaturgy and collective devising of performances have given rise to substantial changes in the poetics of playtexts, based to a great extent on postdramatic aesthetics. The documentary theatre of Merle Karusoo and the post-modernist playwriting of Mati Unt are observed more closely in the article, as well as particular modes of devising performance and textual strategies, used by the Theatre NO99. The new playwriting practices, most closely intertwined with the processes of creating theatre performances, put forward a range of questions related to the definition and status of drama as a literary genre.

Keywords postdramatic theatre; Estonian drama and theatre; collective creation; devising performance

General Background: Theatre System in the 1990s

The aim of the present article is to discuss the new developments in Estonian drama of the 1990s and the 2000s. Needless to say, that drama as a literary genre has always been strongly affected by and has developed together with the art of theatre. Most contemporary theoretical definitions of "drama" include one way or another the dimension of theatre, instead of contrasting the dramatic genre only or mainly with its literary neighbours, i.e. drama is understood as being shaped by the presence and/or absence of theatrical elements.¹ First,¹ a play as a text written for the stage

is (in)formed by an implicit conception or vision of theatrical performance. Anne Ubersfeld argues that on a deep level, both (dramatic) text and theatre performance have a common coded genotext (*g no-text cod *); the dominant theatrical code of an age plays the role of a matrix “informing” the text. She says: “One writes for, with or against the pre-existent theatrical code” (Ubersfeld 14). Secondly, the available theatrical codes depend to a greater or lesser extent on theatre system and practices of making a performance of a particular age or national culture. Therefore it is necessary to introduce discussion of Estonian drama with a brief overview of how the Estonian theatre landscape has changed since regaining of independence in 1991, under the influence of major economic restructuring and political democratization.

Unlike most post-socialist countries, the fundamental political reforms of the early 1990s affected Estonian theatrical structure and practices of theatre-making only marginally. The Estonian theatre system — about ten state-supported professional repertory theatres, scattered over the whole country — remained largely intact. Though the first small privately-managed theatre groups made their appearance already in the late 1980s, they had little impact on theatre processes until the mid-1990s. However, this institutional novelty turned out to be of crucial importance in the long-term perspective. Whereas the Soviet regime absolutely excluded the idea of any “free troupes”, in the newly independent Estonia these troupes (often operating as flexible project-based theatres) gradually developed into an institutional and to a great extent also an artistic alternative to big repertory theatres. The most influential were (and still are) the experimental and multimedia-oriented Von Krahl Theatre (founded in 1992), and the minimalist and traditionalist *Theatrum* (founded in 1994). Together with the abolition of Soviet-time censorship that kind of institutional diversification contributed to a general switch-over to the Western model of culture and created the necessary makings of artistic changes both in the field of theatre and playwriting.

Re-orientation was supported by now free communication with Western countries: a lot of guest productions were brought to Estonia, and Estonian theatres participated at various festivals abroad, not to speak of frequent travels and studies abroad which became a normal part of life experience for artists, critics, scholars, etc. One must accentuate the role of the international festival of alternative theatre, called *Baltoscandal* (founded in 1990 and held every other year), in both introducing new international trends to Estonia and Estonian theatre companies to foreign artists and critics. There has been an intense exchange of ideas and influences between Estonia and Western world over the last decades.

As regards the artistic changes, they have been rather gradual than radical, i.e. manifesting themselves by lots of minor shifts and novelties. There was no sharp stylistic change in the 1990s; instead, the Estonian theatre seemed to have settled

for a period of relative stabilization.² The leading stage directors of the period, working almost exclusively in professional state theatres, remained relatively close to traditional (psychological and realistic or modernist) modes. Somewhat unexpectedly the interest of theatres in original Estonian playwriting even dropped in comparison with the Soviet period — throughout the decade only about 25% of new productions were based on Estonian material — instead, the repertoire was dominated by translations, especially of modern Anglo-American authors.

Drama in the 1990s

The change of generations was much less evident in playwriting than in Estonian poetry and fiction. The most prominent and most unconventional newcomer of the 1990s Madis Kõiv (b. 1929), a physician by profession, belongs to the older generation. As a matter of fact, many of his plays were written in the Soviet period, but they were “discovered” by the theatres only in 1990s — before, they were largely regarded as technically unstageable and untheatrical. Kõiv’s work has been deeply affected by his keen interest in classical Western philosophy, from Kant to Wittgenstein. His themes range from the history of European philosophical and cultural thought (dramas involving Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, or Beethoven and Hölderlin as main characters) over ordinary Estonian peasant life to the traumas of national history. Kõiv’s plays combine a highly original thinking with visionary quality, often manifested by a rather wild and vivid surrealistic imagery. Their visionary form was likewise a serious challenge for the Estonian theatre of the time; at the same time it proved to be the basis of their strong theatricality, once they were put on stage.³ Kõiv’s work clearly demonstrates that a drama text which is innovative and even risky, regarding current theatre conventions, could have a fertile impact on theatre aesthetics and become a driving force of artistic development because it requires the invention of new theatrical means for expressing the playwright’s intentions and for representing the fictional world of the play on stage.⁴

Among notable young playwrights, Andrus Kivirähk (b. 1970) and Jaan Tätte (b. 1964), both an actor and singer should be mentioned in the first place. No doubt Kivirähk is the most popular present-day playwright in Estonia: the stage production of his *Eesti matus* (*Estonian Funeral*, 2002) has enjoyed the largest audiences in Estonian drama theatre of the start of the 21st century, and his other comedies, such as *Jalutuskäik vikerkaarel* (*A Walk on the Rainbow*) (1997), *Aabitsakukk* (*The Cock of ABC-Book*) (2006) and *Voldemar* (2007), has caught attention of the audiences and the critics as well. Kivirähk is mainly preoccupied with Estonian national history and mentality, often deconstructing old national myths in an ironic manner. His technique that could be called post-modernist, involves mixing of documentary and fictional,

representation of everyday life through the poetics of fairy-tale, pastiche and parody, and he intertwines joyful playing with bold irony.

Kivirähk's work has powerfully contributed to the shift in processing the issues of national identity and collective memory that could be observed in literature as well as in theatre during the 1990s: the nationalist pathos characteristic of Soviet time has largely been replaced by a more ambivalent, often self-ironic and/or tragi-comic approaches.⁵ Recently, Kivirähk has been one of the initiators of the wave of pseudo-historical plays, treating the real persons and events from Estonian history (notably from theatre history) with effervescent fantasy.

In contrast to Kõiv and Kivirähk, generally seen as deeply national writers whose work is not easily translatable, Jaan Tätte's main subject matter is more universal and his plays, usually coloured by warm humour, manifest traditional humanist values. It might be the reason why his plays quickly found their way to the international stage. Tätte's first and best-known play *Ristumine peateega ehk Muinasjutt kuldsest kalakesest* (*The Highway Crossing or a Tale of a Golden Fish*) (1998) has been staged in more than 30 different theatres abroad, in the first place in Germany. This rather "well-made" play re-uses an old fairy-tale plot to put to the test the young characters' values — their love versus really big money. Though some of Tätte's plays stand out by experimental formal solutions (such as utterly long monologue and sophisticated game with time levels in *Sild* (*The Bridge*) (2000)), his work on the whole could be well interpreted in the framework of "new sincerity" or "new simplicity" as one of the post-post-modernist trends in present-day literature.⁶

As regards the (inner) theatricality of a drama text, Tätte's excellent knowledge of theatre practices (as said before, he is a recognized actor) and conformity with actual stage conditions contrast sharply with Madis Kõiv's work — untheatrical at first glance, though revealing interest in the deepest essence of theatre, understood as an universal phenomenological framework for human perception of the world.

I would stress that apart from some innovations in the dramatic form, the Estonian drama of the 1990s remained rather traditional (perhaps with the exception of some plays by Madis Kõiv). The same could be said of the drama of other Baltic nations — in the 1990s, the rhythms of development in Estonian drama writing resembled much to that of the closest neighbours of Estonia with whom Estonia is more closely connected through a similar past and sociopolitical situation than with the West European theatre and drama. One has to agree with Latvian literary scholar Benedikts Kalnačs: Baltic drama of the turn of the centuries is marked "by ... the co-existence of both modernist and post-modernist elements, the deconstruction of social and national myths, and the still preserved close connections to the traditions of drama writing" (Kalnačs 214).

Changes in the Theatre of the 2000s

By today both the theatrical context and stylistic look of Estonian drama has changed, when compared to the theatre landscape twenty years earlier — largely thanks to the changes in theatre practices, promoted and supported in its turn by lively interaction with the European theatre which is characteristic of the period after the re-establishment of an independent democratic state.

Among the most recent developments one should mention the emerging of a new wave of little and/or project-based privately managed theatres. This type of theatre had not been a widespread and artistically influential phenomenon in Estonia before, but since 2004 its position and reputation have started to rise and they have firmly rooted themselves in Estonian theatre system.⁷ Their number has increased remarkably; for instance, in 2010 the state supported financially 17 private theatres and 12 state and municipal theatres. At present, about one third of the Estonian theatre performances are given by the private theatres. In view of these facts one could claim that the Estonian theatre system has become increasingly similar to that of Nordic countries like Finland or Sweden, well in line with the democratization and europeanization of the whole cultural field. The growing impact of German theatre that can be observed today, is explicable by the historical background (the long-lasting overlordship of Germans, resulting in strong cultural influences up to the Soviet occupation), as well as by the attractiveness of (post)modern German theatre for the younger generation of Estonian theatremakers.

The Estonian theatre landscape has become more fragmented year by year, and new troupes emerge constantly. The spread of small troupes is related to and partly caused by the differentiation of tastes and expectations of theatre audiences which in its turn reflects the structural changes in the participation of Estonian people in the cultural field over last decades, notably multiplication (or splitting) of cultural attitudes and interests. New theatres are expected to produce novelty or at least variety, and it seems that smaller troupes are able to operate more dynamically in artistic matters. Their artistic innovations range from combining live acting with modern audiovisual media (technological theatre) to the attempts to revive ancient ethnic heritage (folklore-based theatre).

As to the repertoire, the rise of small troupes runs parallel to the renewed interest in original Estonian dramaturgy. In recent seasons performances based on Estonian material have already taken up about 40-45% of the total number of new productions — against 25% in the 1990s. It appears that this increasing diversity of theatre system could have promoted original playwriting. However, it must be admitted that the mentioned revival is only in (smaller) part evinced by the appearance of new talented

playwrights creating new dramas. Certainly there are some young playwrights, like Urmas Vadi (b. 1977), Martin Algu (b. 1973), Urmas Lennuk (b. 1971) — it is worth noting that all of them have an educational background in theatre (acting or directing). Besides them, a literary scholar and fiction writer Jaan Undusk (b. 1958) made his debut in drama with *Good-bye, Vienna* in 1999; later he has written plays about writers of wide renown, such as *Boulgakoff* (2008) about Russian Mikhail Bulgakov and *Quevedo* (2003) based on Spanish writer of the Baroque era Francisco de Quevedo, focusing on complicated interrelations between political authorities and intellectuals. But more importantly, the “explosion” of original dramaturgy occurred thanks to considerable shifts in how and by whom playtexts are created. The spread of new writing practices, labelled as “new authorship” in recent Estonian theatre criticism, to a great extent evidences the vigorous emergence of the aesthetic paradigm of postdramatic theatre (as opposed to traditional text-based or dramatic theatre) since the start of the present century.

The notion of postdramatic theatre introduced by Professor Hans-Thies Lehmann in his seminal book *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999) covers a wide range of artistic phenomena in contemporary theatre. Their common ground consists of leaving traditional drama (i.e. conventions that govern a dramatic text) as the artistic basis and model for theatre performance, and sometimes reducing verbal text to merely one of the many elements of theatrical production. Postdramatic theatre does not aim at illustrating a pre-written literary text but rather equalizes the text to other, non-verbal theatrical means (visual images, actors’ performance, music, etc.) and uses it as material to create a performance. Ideas about postdramatic theatre definitely can be (and have been) applied to plays, i.e. to texts written for theatre and addressing this new paradigm. According to Malgorzata Sugiera, the basic structural principle of texts written for contemporary theatre often turns out to be their immanent theatricality which is understood more as a reflection upon theatre as a medium (addressing cognitive and perceptive processes of spectators) than upon theatre as a domain of artistic activity.⁸

Stephen Chinna has noted: “The a-priori text, whether written or visual, remains a part of performance. However, and importantly, it is not necessarily the starting point for performance. Texts, as a record rather than a recipe, can be assembled during the preparation time of a performance, during the ‘actual’ performance, as well as after the ‘event’” (Chinna 138). This claim clearly draws attention to the new ways of creating texts for theatre and, respectively, to the shifts in the manifestation of the authorial function.

Stage Directors as Playwrights

In the present-day theatre, stage directors themselves frequently write or compile texts for their productions (or, in fewer cases, playwrights prefer and are able to stage their plays themselves). The reciprocal impact of writing for the stage and staging written texts can obviously not be overlooked in these cases — the processes of writing and staging tend to fuse. Of course, “directors’ dramaturgy” does not necessarily produce postdramatic type of theatre, but usually it does so. Some well-known examples are American playwright and stage director Richard Foreman, the founder of Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, American artist Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage in Canada, or René Pollesch, a theatremaker of younger generation in Germany. All of them have made performances out of texts compiled or written by themselves, and they have quite often based their stage productions predominantly on powerful theatrical imagery, created with the help of non-verbal means of expression.

In Estonia, directors-playwrights have emerged since the mid-1980s, when the earlier censorship first weakened and then disappeared. The institutional framework is in some cases the traditional state theatre but mostly it is preferred to work with a smaller circle of kindred spirits or to stage the so-called project-performances. From the aspect of aesthetics the dramaturgic output of stage directors is variable although mostly the postdramatic textual strategies are preferred. The most important stage directors, who have prepared the ground for the present-day “new authorship” in Estonia, are Merle Karusoo and Mati Unt.

The creative work of female stage director Merle Karusoo (b. 1944) is quite unique in both Estonian and European theatrical context. In criticism, her stage productions have been called now documentary theatre, now memory theatre or theatre of biographies. She prefers to name it sociological theatre herself, and to describe it as *Not Belonging to the Mainstream* — which was the title of her M.A. thesis (1999). Karusoo started her projects in sociological dramaturgy and theatre already in the early eighties, and in 1987 she founded one of the first alternative theatre groups called Pirgu’s Memory Department. Later she has worked also with amateur actors and theatre students. She has been called an outsider on the general landscape of contemporary Estonian theatre on the part of the critics⁹, and this applies even more to her position on our literary landscape — nonetheless she has deserved a number of literary and theatre awards.

Karusoo has always taken a keen interest in socio-political processes in Estonia, but she could not find any relevant original dramas, and therefore she started to compile texts herself. She has focused on the risk groups of the Estonian society (e.g. teenagers, immigrants, children in orphanages), and has produced documentary plays on topics such as drugs, HIV, teenage problems, homicide, etc. In preparing her stage productions, Karusoo uses data from sociological research, and makes use of

questionnaires, polls, interviews, school essays, etc.

Over time, Karusoo became convinced that the trouble spots of a society are most clearly revealed through the life experience of people in risk groups. (She has stated that the entire Estonian nation could be classified as a risk group because of experiencing numerous social traumas during national history.) Life story becomes the central entity of her theatre, while she remains aware of and is influenced by conceptions of life stories derived from the social sciences. A constant theme of life stories theatre developed from the end of the 1980s closely associated with the life stories collection campaigns started under the auspices of the Estonian Literary Museum during that same period. The political situation of the period was the restoration of independence, and the primary purpose of collecting life stories was to use collective memories to fill in the gaps in the nation's history, and to make public the social groups marginalized and silenced during the Soviet period. Alongside restoring true national history ("giving the Estonians back their history" in popular rhetoric), hidden personal biographies were re-discovered — "giving the people back their life stories" in the words of Karusoo (70).

Thus Karusoo staged life stories of those who, in 1944, failed in their attempts to escape to the West [*Sügis 1944 (Fall 1944)* (1997)], people deported to the Siberia [*Aruanne (The Report)* (1987)]— based on the diary of an elderly farm mistress) and those who assisted the deporters [*Küüdipoisid (The Deportation Men)* (1999)], conscripts of the Soviet army who fought in Afghanistan in the 1970s-1980s [*Misjonärid (The Missionaries)* (2005)], etc. Even in *Kured läinud, kurjad ilmad (The Cranes Gone, Bad Weather)* (1997), based on Estonians' stories about their love relations and sexual experience, Karusoo continued talking about the historical fate of our nation, as she put emphasis on contradictory interrelations between private and public spheres of life. Karusoo believes that revealing "hidden" life stories has a therapeutic impact, helping to cure individual and national traumas (Karusoo 55).

In texts compiled by herself or in some cases co-authored by the actors of her troupe, Karusoo employs predominantly the form of monologue. This could be explained by the fact that texts are created on the basis of long and detailed interviews with people, or written life-stories of "ordinary" Estonians. Thus, Karusoo builds her text from authentic, mostly oral speech, carefully preserving individual manners of speaking, idiolects, and intonations. On the part of theatre scholars, parallels have been drawn with directors-playwrights like Ariane Mnouchkine, leader of Théâtre du Soleil, American solo-performer Anna Deavere Smith, or Latvian director Alvis Hermanis.¹⁰ Similarly to Karusoo, the latter's *Latviešu stāsti (Latvian Stories)* (2004), *Latviešu mīlestība (Latvian Love)* (2006) and *Kapusvētki (Graveyard Party)* (2010) use documentary material, gathered by the actors, portraying real characters and

celebrating “ordinary” people’s life experience.

Another outstanding director, whose artistic handwriting was in many ways an opposite to that of Karusoo, was Mati Unt (1944–2005). He started his career in the early 1960s as a fiction writer and came into notice as one of the leaders of the generation of the “golden sixties”. Unt’s novels and short stories of the 1960s and 1970s represent the Estonian literary modernism of the highest degree, while the novels *Sügisball (The Autumn Ball)* (1979) and *Õös on asju (Things in the Night)* (1990)¹¹ mark the breakthrough of postmodernism in Estonian literature. At the same time, Unt had strong ties with theatre: from 1966 to 1981, he worked in theatres as a dramaturge; in the 1980s he developed into a notable stage director and occupied one of the centre positions of Estonian theatre landscape in the 1990s.

Unt held an opinion that one should not overvalue the authorship in contemporary theatre: neither a playwright nor a stage director is the sole author. In his words, the latter’s proper function is to organise a kind of cluster consisting of his own as well as the writer’s, scenographer’s, actors’ and others’ intentions. However, in his own work Unt very often fulfilled simultaneously the tasks of a dramatist, a director and a stage designer, creating a kind of “auteur theatre”, in order to express his personal creative vision. As a rule, Unt rewrote in depth the literary texts his performances were based on (often the world and Estonian literary classics or myths), using intertextual strategies and giving an ironic turn to classical texts. One can mention a few examples like *Hot* (the modernised version of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, staged in 2002), *Kärbeste saar (The Island of Flies)*, an assembly of texts with island motifs, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as dominant texts, staged in 2003), *Vend Antigone, ema Oidipus (Brother Antigone, Mother Oedipus)*, staged in 2003) on the basis of tragedies by Sophocles and Aeschylus. Quite a number of these rewritings and adaptations were published under Mati Unt’s name — he has been viewed as an excellent dramatist in his own right.

Unt has also departed from texts that lack any dramaturgical potential and are hard to adapt to theatre. For instance, the base text for *Vaimude tund Kadrioru lossis (An Hour of Ghosts in the Castle Kadriorg)* (2000) is Gaston Bachelard’s *La poétique de l’espace* (1957, translated into Estonian in 1999), i.e. the sophisticated philosophical essay. Unt added some similarly themed quotes from other texts (for instance, from the article “Language” by Martin Heidegger, and a poem by Estonian poet and actor Juhan Viiding), and re-structured fragments from Bachelard into a refined and poetic dialogue between Lord and Lady. *Stiil (Style)* (2003) is based on Peet Vallak’s three-page short story *Maanaine (Country Woman)* (1921) that has practically no events at all; in Unt’s play text this story is presented in more than 40 stylistic variations, inspired by Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices de style* (1947).¹²

Both as a writer and as a stage director Unt was fascinated by playfulness and bright theatricality. Whereas Karusoo places above all a high value on authenticity, Unt used (or reused, to be more precise) abundant cultural material from “the archives” of Western culture. Special features of his dramaturgy are, in the first place, rich intertextuality, metatheatricality and postmodern cool irony.

New Practices of the Playwriting in the 2000s: Devised Theatre

Even a more important novelty among the recent developments in the Estonian theatre is the appearance of a “collective creation”. This term refers to a collaborative method of both playwriting and producing that has been widely practiced in Western countries since the artistically tumultuous 1960s. It has been propelled by a wish to democratize the creative process in the theatre, and generally regarded as an alternative mode outside of mainstream theatre. The movement of collective creation that developed in Europe and the United States included well-known companies like Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop, Ariane Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil etc., which are by now already part of the canon of alternative theatre. As to the Estonian theatre, one should emphasize that under the Soviet regime this kind of playwriting was strictly outlawed because of censorship: each play text had to receive the censor’s permission to be staged early before the beginning of rehearsals, so, any attempts to compile or create text during the rehearsal period were excluded. Once the Soviet censorship was abolished (in the late 1980s), the new practices could make their appearance.

Collaborative theatre largely uses the method of devising performance. Devising could be defined as “a process for creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script”, i.e. the process of writing or compiling the text is simultaneous to and most closely intertwined with the process of making a particular production (Heddon 3). Devising as a collaborative method typically produces a non-dramatic text: fragmented, non-linear, displaying multiple perspectives and viewpoints.

To give an example, I will briefly describe the particular modes of devising performance, used by the troupe of the small state-subsided Theatre NO99 (founded in 2004), the most internationally recognized present-day Estonian theatre: their stage productions have been performed at numerous festivals in Germany, Russia, Finland, Poland, etc. This company clearly represents a departure from mainstream style and practices.

NO99 moves between working on pre-existing play texts and devising performances. The starting point for the latter is some problem or conception (artistic and/or social); all of them tackle topical problems of Estonian society and mentality,

and therefore function as political theatre. Their devised performances include, for instance, *Nafta! (Oil!)* (2006), concerned with problems arising from the assumable end of the oil resources and critical of the capitalist over-consuming society; *GEP (Hot Estonian Guys)* (2007), dealing with the demographic crisis and the possible extinction of Estonians; *Kuidas seletada pilte surnud jänesele (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare)* (2009) about the marginalization of the arts in the present-day society, but also about the essence of theatre; and *The Rise and Fall of Estonia* (2011), aimed at providing an overall picture of Estonia's contemporary history and the present day. In the case of NO99, the authorship is attributed, first and foremost, to the artistic director Tiit Ojasoo (b. 1977) and the scenographer Ene-Liis Semper (b. 1969) who usually are the authors of the original idea and control the whole process of making a production rather firmly, although the dramaturge's and the actors' contribution should not be underestimated.

The scripts are compiled mostly by bricolage: during the preparation time various texts, stories, and ideas more or less relevant to the topic of the production are collected, including autobiographical material (personal experiences) drawn from the performers' lives. The special characteristic of the work of NO99 is quite extensive and long-lasting "fieldwork": interviews with experts in the given field, carried out by the theatre's dramaturge and directors. *Nafta!* was compiled on the basis of conversations with the leader of the Estonian Green Party; for GEP population scientists were interviewed; *Kuidas seletada pilte surnud jänesele* includes a video-lecture of prominent art historian on Joseph Beuys (whose famous performance gave the title to the production) and avant-garde art in general. Relevant research results as well as various cultural and media texts are used, too. This very heterogeneous material, partly purposefully collected, partly "found", is then directly quoted in the production or used as a basis for dialogues and scenes, which take shape through improvisations of the actors. The verbal texts of these devised stage productions function rather as a script or a score: they do not dominate the performance but work together with the non-verbal means of expression, more often than not only scarcely referred to in the written text. The textual and performative strategies, devices and solutions intertwine and affect each other already during the process of preparing the production.

Most of the above-mentioned NO99's performances could be viewed against the background of the tradition of political theatre, first of all, that of German theatre innovators Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. Some critics have also drawn parallels with the work of the contemporary German dramatist and stage director René Pollesch, who is interested in great political and economical questions: globalization, neo-liberal capitalism, power relations in the present-day world, etc. Creating texts

really resembles along general lines. Pollesch writes his own texts and does it before and during the rehearsals, not formulating them as dramas. The text is in both cases taken as a component of the production, not as an independent work of literature. Radical stage productions of Pollesch definitely fall into the category of postdramatic theatre. There are no narrative and almost no real dialogue in his performances; instead, texts are composed of excerpts from theoretical and philosophical essays, newspaper articles, sociological and economical studies, etc. The Pollesch theatre has been called a “culture theory theatre” and a “discourse theatre”, as it researches critically the discursive and medial practices of today. Massive quotation of non-fiction texts could create an impression of documentality and authenticity but the result of combining the academic discourse with mass media and pop culture is that they estrange and abolish one another.¹³

In a similar vein, NO99 has been working across different discourses, as well as different art forms, resulting at times in blurring of borders between theatre and other artistic and cultural practices. Their main textual and performative strategies (as claimed, they intertwine most closely) are inter- and metadiscursivity, intermediality, recycling (a broader concept than all too familiar intertextuality) and authentication (creating an effect of authenticity). Recycling is quite characteristic of postdramatic theatre that reuses lots of cultural material. We can see self-reflexive use of “the archives” also in the productions by NO99. Two opposite examples are recycling of the modern classics of visual and performance art (*Kuidas seletada pilte surnud jänesele*), and, on the other hand, of formats of popular entertainment and advertising industries (*Nafta!*), not to speak of “recycled speech” — abundant quotation of documentary and literary texts.

The use of documentary material and of quotes from different sources most likely creates expectations about the high authenticity of the text and its performance. However, the closer analysis demonstrates that NO99’s postdramatic theatre is not so much aimed at breaking illusions and revealing the “very truth”, but rather mixes the authentic and the fictitious. Authenticity is revealed being produced by textual strategies, as well as staging and acting techniques, and also as something depending on the disposition of the spectator.

Finally, inter- and metadiscursivity is in a sense an umbrella term for the most typical strategies of NO99. The discourse can be defined as a certain manner of linguistic performance which also encompasses creating and interpreting texts and typical patterns of socio-cultural behaviour. In a wider sense we could talk of discursive practices constructing social reality. In the texts and productions of NO99 elements from different discourses are combined and related to each other, in order to reflect critically current modes of speech and thought, to explore their inner

mechanisms and dominant rules. For example, in *Nafta!* social criticism, scientific discourse (lots of data and figures used to illustrate the claim about the exhaustion of oil supplies) and popular entertainment (forms of cabaret and musical) were combined. Thus the production worked at two levels: it dealt critically with the topical social problems but demonstrated also the ways of camouflaging the troubling problems with the help of mass media. In *GEP* the national discourse (mediated with a great emotional force with songs from the period of new national awakening and poems of beloved Estonian writers) collided with the postmodernist academic discussion about a nation as only an “imagined community” (to use the concept coined by Benedict Anderson).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I would accentuate the interrelatedness of playwriting and theatre, both in its institutional and artistic aspect. Recent developments in Estonian drama clearly demonstrate such mutual influence: one could observe how the democratization and diversification of theatre system together with the spread of postdramatic aesthetics have brought about the emergence of new playwriting practices like directors' dramaturgy and collective devising of performances which in their turn have given rise to substantial changes in the poetics of playtexts. It seems that playwriting is more than ever intertwined with the processes of creating theatre performances. This puts certainly forward a range of questions related to the literary status and estimation of these texts. The genre of drama, as we can see, needs constant definition and re-definition.

Notes

1. About definitions of drama as literary genre, see, for instance, Manfred Pfister, *Das Drama: Theorie und Analyse* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977); Benjamin Bennett, *Theater as Problem: Modern Drama and its Place in Literature* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1990). Cf. also Gerda Poschmann, *Der nicht mehr dramatische Theatertext. Aktuelle Bühnenstücke und ihre dramaturgische Analyse* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997).
2. See Jaak Rähesoo, *Estonian Theatre* (Tallinn: Estonian Theatre Union, 2008) 83.
3. See Jaak Rähesoo, *Estonian Theatre*, 87.
4. For further reading about Kõiv, see Aare Pilv, “Madis Kõiv – Writer to an Ideal Reader?” *Estonian Literary Magazine* 19 (Autumn 2004): 10 – 15.
5. For further reading about the topic, see Piret Kruuspere, “The Role of National Theatre at the Turn of the Millennium: Estonian Theatre Interpreting Estonian Literature in the 1990s.” *Interlitteraria* 5 (2000): 186 – 199.

6. Tätte's plays have been translated into English by Krista Kaer and Triin Sinissaar: Jaan Tätte, *Plays* (Tallinn: Tallinn City Theatre, 2003).
7. About changes in theatre system, see Anneli Saro, "The Dynamics of the Estonian Theatre System: in Defence of Repertoire Theatre." *Methis 3* (2009): 93 – 107.
8. See Małgorzata Sugiera, "Beyond Drama: Writing for Postdramatic Theatre." *Theatre Research International 29.1* (2004): 26.
9. See Piret Kruuspere "Merle Karusoo's Memory Theatre." *Interlitteraria 7.2* (2002): 280.
10. For comparative analysis of Karusoo and Anna Deavere Smith, see Pamela Monaco and Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "Investigating Wor(l)ds: The Personal Is Political in the Drama of Merle Karusoo and Anna Deavere Smith." *Interlitteraria, 7*, Vol. II (2002): 290 – 304.
11. Translated into English by Mart Aru (*The Autumn Ball*) in 1985 and Eric Dickens (*Things in the Night*) in 2006.
12. For further reading, see my article "Director as Playwright in Postdramatic Theatre." *Interlitteraria 12* (2007): 210 – 224.
13. About René Pollesch, see Birgit Lengers, "Ein PS im Medienzeitalter: Mediale Mittel, Masken und Metaphern im Theater von René Pollesch." *Text + Kritik XI. Sonderband: Theater fürs 21. Jahrhundert*. München: edition text + kritik, 2004. 143 – 155.

Works Cited

- Chinna, Stephen. *Performance: Recasting the Political in Theatre and Beyond*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Heddon, Deirdre, and Jane Milling. *Devising Performance: A Critical History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Kalnačs, Benedicts. "Images of Home in Inga Ābele's and Jaan Tätte's Plays." *Turns in the Centuries, Turns in Literature*. Ed. Anneli Mihkelev. Tallinn: The Under and Tuglas Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, 2009. 214 – 223.
- Karusoo, Merle. "Põhisuunda mittekuluv." MA thesis, University of Tallinn, 1999.
- Ubersfeld, Anne. *L'école du spectateur: Lire le théâtre 2*. Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1981.

责任编辑：邹 晶