Edīte Tišheizere
Dr. art., theater scholar
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
E-mail: edite.tisheizere@lulfmi.lv
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Visual Metaphors in Latvian Theater in the 1970s–1980s and their Contemporary Context

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Summary The period of the so-called Stagnation (1970s–1980s) in the history of the USSR was a productive time for art in some ways: the momentum of the Khrushchev's Thaw continued, resulting in a shaky ideological framework containing artists that had learned to either violate, ignore, or only verbally support the canons of socialist realism. In the socialist areas of Eastern and Central Europe, art had become a kind of "resistance movement", with subtle subtext used to express rebellion against the political and social setting. One of the key fields of this "resistance" was theater, where visual metaphors became an especially important means of expression. In many cases, the audience was able to perceive a narrative containing a vastly different message than the one in the literary text of the production. Scenography gained a special significance as the main provider of such visual metaphors. Looking back, certain parallels can be drawn between theater phenomena of that era in Soviet states and in the West. These parallels are further drawn by comparing Soviet era research concepts with Western theories in theater.

Kopsavilkums Politiskās stagnācijas periods (20. gs. 70. un 80. gadi) bija savā ziņā labvēlīgs laiks mākslai: turpinājās Hruščova "atkušņa" inerce, sociālistiskā reālisma kanonus mākslinieki bija iemācījušies pārkāpt vai ignorēt. Sociālisma areālā – Austrumeiropā un Centrāleiropā – māksla kļuva par savdabīgu "pretošanās kustību", zemtekstu valodā izsakot protestu pret politisko un sociālo situāciju. Viens no svarīgākajiem šīs "pretošanās kustības" virzieniem bija teātris, kurā par īpaši nozīmīgu izteiksmes līdzekli kļuva vizuālas metaforas. Tajās skatītāji prata nolasīt naratīvu, kas saturēja atšķirīgu vēstījumu, nekā iestudējuma literārais teksts. Īpašu nozīmi ieguva scenogrāfija kā galvenā vizuālo metaforu nesēja. Analizējot šīs metaforas, saskatāmas noteiktas paralēles starp padomju, vai plašāk, sociālistiskā areāla valstu un Rietumu teātra parādībām šajā laika posmā. Šīs paralēles redzamas, arī salīdzinot padomju laika scenogrāfijas teorētiķa Viktora Berezkina secinājumus par darbības scenogrāfiju ar Hansa Tīsa Lēmana un Ērikas Fišeres-Lihtes 20. un 21. gs. mijā izstrādātajām postdramatiskā teātra un performativitātes teorijām.

In the mid-1970s, while the Soviet Union was going throught the so-called Stagnation period, in the Western European theater a paradign shift took place in its relationship with the spectator. In theoretical literature, this would come to be known as the "performative turn". On the one hand, actors turned from impersonators of roles into performers, their form of existence changed to "become more presence than representation" (Lehmann 2006: 85); on the other hand, the audience transformed from observers to active participants.

Even though Soviet theater was separated from the West by the Iron Curtain and a lack of information, many commonalities can be seen from today's perspective. Among them, a growing importance of the actor's presence and much more active participation from the audience could be observed in Soviet Latvia at the time. Processes in the West and in the Socialist area cannot be called identical; however, it is important to highlight and evaluate the **different expressions of shared trends**.

One of the most important and influential theoretical studies of the 21st century, Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, begins with the following sentences: "On October 24, 1975, a curious and memorable event took place at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck. The Yugoslavian artist Marina Abramović presented her performance *Lips of Thomas*. The artist began her performance by shedding all her clothes" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 11). Fischer-Lichte goes on to write about the performance – Abramović cutting a five-pointed star into the skin on her stomach with a razor blade and laying down on a cross made of ice blocks, which melted away while the artist was bleeding. The performance was interrupted by members of audience who could not bear the sight (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 13). It reveals key characteristics brought into Western European theater by the so-called "performative turn". Each of the spectators not only physically perceived Abramović's pain, but also, each in their own way, grasped the visual metaphors – the bleeding red star, the ice cross that she has been "nailed" to – and combined them into a **personally comprehensible narrative**. *Lips of Thomas* became an emblematic event in Western European performative arts.

One month prior, on September 25, 1975, the Dailes Theater in Rīga held the premiere of Henrik Ibsen's dramatic poem *Brand* and, at the culmination of the performance, a crowd "nailed" the half-nude protagonist to the corner of the only element of scenography, an inverted pyramid. *Brand* went on to become an emblematic performance not only for Latvian theater, but also all over the USSR. Moreover, it marked a new stage in the development of interaction between theater and spectator: its expression in movement and music, its visual metaphors formed a new narrative

beyond the plot. In a manner different from (and sometimes even opposite to) the Western approach, the audience became active participants in the performance. Their presence did not mean passive observation anymore but rather an active deciphering of subtexts expressed through metaphor, and combining them into a **collectively comprehensible narrative**. It became a common "language of subtexts" shared by actors and spectators.

This chronology is not coincidental. It is one example among plentiful evidence proving that, despite a separation and a lack of exchange of information, many processes in art developed simultaneously and similarly on both sides of the Iron Curtain even during the era of Stagnation. However, there were many principal dissimilarities.

Dynamic scenography as the socialist version of the performative turn and its similarities with postdramatic theater

Another piece of evidence is the development of new theories in theater studies both in the West and in the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, Hans-Thies Lehmann formed his concept of postdramatic theater, based on his experience of Western theater after the 1960s. The key postulates in Lehmann's theory, as summarized by Zane Radzobe, is that postdramatic theater (1) has no hierarchy where the spoken text would be the most important part. (2) Rather, "space, visual and musical treatment, movement, etc., are as important (oftentimes even more so)", and (3) the narrative structure is "formed by signs simultaneously communicated through various channels" (Radzobe 2015: 138).

In order to name the various informational channels through which the audience are simultaneously receiving information in the postdramatic theater and to mark the increase in the importance of scenography and visuality in Western theater in the 1970s, Lehmann wrote:

> [P]ostdramatic theater establishes the possibility of dissolving the logocentric hierarchy and assigning the dominant role to elements other than dramatic logos and language. This applies even more to the visual than to the auditory dimension. In place of a dramaturgy regulated by the text one often finds a visual dramaturgy, which seemed to have attained absolute dominance especially in the theater of the late 1970s and 1980s [..]. Visual dramaturgy here does not mean an exclusively visually organized dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic (Lehmann 2006: 93).

In the early 1970s, Russian theorist Viktor Berezkin developed the much narrower concept of "dynamic scenography" based on the processes observed in theaters across the Soviet Union, especially in the Baltic states, Ukraine, Moscow, and Saint

Petersburg (then called Leningrad). According to his concept, at the beginning of the 1970s visuality, mainly through scenography, often dominated the structure of the performance, with directors aiming to "reveal global problems of human existence, create a generalized metaphorical environments [..] that are materialized and apparent embodiments of forces or circumstances opposing the protagonists and expressing the essence of the dramatic conflict of the play" (Berezkin 1981: 146).

Thus, dynamic scenography "is a general expression of the emotional and spiritual content of the performance through movement" (Berezkin 1977: 203). According to Berezkin, the leading scenographers in Soviet theater, whose works were the basis for his concept of dynamic theater, included Latvian artists Ilmārs Blumbergs, Andris Freibergs, and Marts Kitajevs.

In retrospect, we can say that Berezkin's concept of scenography shows certain similarities to Lehmann's concept of postdramatic theater. Berezkin developed his concept at a time when scenography and space in general, including the choreography, was the most unrestricted part of theater which could not be subordinated to the laws and censorship of Socialist Realism. It could therefore be examined with an emphasis on issues of form creation and with hardly any regard to the content. Lehmann developed his concept later, and it is much broader and includes all aspects of theater and other performative arts.

Nevertheless, the presumptions that (1) dramaturgical text is not the only provider of meaning and (2) the visual layer forms a parallel semantic field are the most important but not the only similarities between the two concepts. Berezkin defined the sovereign nature of the scenographer's work, and sometimes its dominance, as "plastic directing". In Ilmārs Blumbergs's works of the 1970s, Berezkin saw plastic directing in "search for a clear, abstracted, maximally generalized and concentrated plastic formula" (Berezkin 1983). This definition of plastic directing shows certain parallels with Lehmann's idea of visual dramaturgy which "can [..] freely develop its own logic" (Lehmann 2006: 93).

Lehmann analyzed this type of independent visual dramaturgy, for example, in the works of visual theater representatives Tadeusz Kantor and Robert Wilson, but it was just as prominent in the works of Blumbergs and Freibergs. Even though Blumbergs and Freibergs developed their visual dramaturgy in close interaction with directors, Blumbergs claimed total authorship only in selected works never implemented on stage. It must be noted that Viktor Berezkin also wrote about Kantor and Wilson in the early 2000s; however, he narrowed his field of research even more and viewed them as representatives of a specific "scenographer's theater" (Berezkin 2004; 2003).

This article will explore three groups of metaphors and their metamorphoses in the theater of the era of Stagnation. They are: the Temple; Time and Power; the

Faceless Chorus and Immobilized Hero. This division is, of course, relative, since metaphors can be interpreted in many ways even within the context of one artist's work depending on the research focus; moreover, they often overlap even within the same work. The examples used in the article are drawn mainly from the works of influential Latvian artists, supplemented with similarities in the theaters of other Soviet republics for context.

The Temple as a Metaphor for Lost/Possible Spirituality

Religion and Christian values were among unwritten taboos in Soviet society. However, they snuck into theater at the early stages of dynamic scenography through visual metaphors and sometimes through movement or sound.

In 1969 Pēteris Pētersons, the head director of the Dailes Theater in Riga, staged Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* in collaboration with painter and graphic artist Kurts Fridrihsons. Together, they created one of the first abstract stage spaces in Latvia, fitting various interpretations. For the performance, which was presented as an allusion to the path of suffering of Jesus Christ also taken by Prince Myshkin, Fridrihsons had created screens resembling punched cards which, under stage lighting, formed direct associations with a church, further intensified by music – hymns sung by a choir, written by composer Imants Kalniņš in an Orthodox-church-inspired manner. Ieva Zole, a researcher of the directing by Pētersons, has written:

> The lightweight wire frames are covered by a white perforated material, like punched cards with information coded by some unknown hand, a cosmic energy that helps the light effects create a sense of infinity. The rays illuminating the perforated surface seem to be coming from the sun and create the same play of light that enters a cathedral when rays of the sun break through the stained glass of its windows. A space that is closed and inhibits the public, yet seems infinite because the ascetic definitiveness leaves an impression of spiritual expanse (Zole 2000: 242).

Myshkin entered this space arriving from the outside world, a Swiss clinic. However, both Switzerland and the clinic were mere allegories; what was important was that the closed space welcomed someone who had previously been on the outside, which could provide some comfort to those who were not able to escape the closed frame. As Zole notes:

> [Their] hopelessness reaches an inner apotheosis and transforms into a physical sense of heaviness bringing everyone down onto their knees. With the sound of a prayer growing in intensity until it turns into a shaky psalm, people dressed in grey and black are mingling in their powerlessness, yet their prayer is heard, and Prince Myshkin enters from the back of the stage among the kneeling people. Just like

> Christ walked among a tortured humankind. This is how church paintings depict Jesus Christ's descent from heaven. (Zole 2000: 240)

The combination of scenography, lighting, music, and choreography created the metaphor of a temple, which the audience were able to decipher and evolve in their imagination by reflecting upon spiritual values, which were the sole providers of internal freedom in the reality of a Soviet country.

It is significant that the metaphor of a temple, though indirect and oftentimes transformed, appeared in theaters of other Soviet republic as well in the early 1970s. Similarly, the image of a temple – specifically, the Kyiv Saint Sophia Cathedral – was used by Ukrainian scenographer Daniil Lider in 1970 in the staging of *Yaroslav the Wise* at the Ivan Franko Theater in Kyiv. For this production about Yaroslav, medieval Grand Prince of Kyiv, who had attempted not only to unite his lands and find possibilities for harmonious power but also to establish contact with Europe, Lider created a space delimited by frescoes copied from the Saint Sophia Cathedral and "torn" off the walls. According to one researcher, "D. Lider deliberately strip[ped] the fresco of its support, its basic architectural foundation. Released, it succumb[ed] to chaos purposefully created by the artist. Not completely, though. As if it has learned the solid rules of harmony, as if it has once felt the security of domes and walls, it carrie[d] their memories and a longing for them" (Kovalenko 1980: 10). The frescoes partly covered restorers' scaffolding, which provided a superficial hint at modern construction without burying the narrative of the key visual metaphor of faith as a path towards a lost harmony that can be found again.

Both *The Idiot* and *Yaroslav the Wise* were created on the threshold between the Khrushchev's Thaw and Brezhnev's era of Stagnation. In both of these productions, the metaphor of the temple was a declaration of inner freedom and a person's spiritual life as its expression. Later, this metaphor gained another meaning.

In 1975, Māra Ķimele staged Jean Anouilh's *Médée* at Valmiera Theater. This can be considered the first site-specific theater production in Latvia, performed at the St. Simon's Church in Valmiera and the Anglican Church in Rīga. Admittedly, both churches were secular spaces at the time – a branch of a museum and a youth club respectively. However, the very architecture and aura of the churches became a metaphor in itself. Ilmārs Blumbergs's laconic scenography, a frame made of crude logs with a torn sailcloth hung onto it and reaching across the floor as a sliver of seashore, was arranged under the high arches like an immense, infinite universe, its atmosphere enhanced by the specific acoustics of the church as well. This universe, symbolized by a temple, provided the opportunity for a mixing of eras, innovative for Soviet theater in the 1970s. Māra Ķimele admitted: "It was a densification of time and space. There is no wedding in Anouilh's play, but I made one, people in modern

clothes suddenly rose and started celebrating a wedding [..]. Médée is right next to Créon's bride and feels her youth, beauty and grace .. and Médée falls to the ground and gives birth to evil. We staged Médée's monologue as labour" (Zole 2007: 140). In this instance, the temple was a metaphor for the universe and the absolute order of things that people had defied and perverted.

The metamorphosis of the image of church was significant in the final stage of the era of Stagnation, on the verge of the Third National Awakening and the following renewal of state.

In 1987, director Edmunds Freibergs staged the comedy *Ar būdu uz baznīcu* (With a Shack to the Church), written by Pauls Putniņš about *perestroika* in the life of a *kolkhoz*, at the Andrejs Upīts Academic Drama Theater which would soon regain its historical name of the National Theater. No church was shown on stage – at the center of the space, created by scenographer Artis Bute, was a wooden shack with a tractor inside and a long table intended for Party Committee meetings. This time, the church as a metaphor for rebirth and national ideas appeared in the text – the monologue of the protagonist Marianna, ending in: "We want church, church!"

In 1988, this same metaphor was deeply questioned at the Latvian Youth Theater in the production of *Dzīvais ūdens* (Living Water) by Māra Zālīte, adapted by director Ādolfs Šapiro together with scenographer Andris Freibergs. The play was a poetic parable on the legitimacy of lies for the sake of a greater good, the freeing of a nation. A Preacher has kept people's faith with the help of "living water" for decades. This water is said to miraculously appear in a vessel at midnight, but in reality, the Preacher has been getting it from a well. The truth about the origins of the "living water" makes the Preacher's Apprentice commit suicide. Margarita Zieda, researcher of Andris Freibergs, points out: "How does one strengthen the national spirit when the truth can kill? – The production of Māra Zālīte and Ādolfs Šapiro asked questions that cannot be answered" (Zieda 2015: 175). A temple carved into a cliff, as devised by the playwright, was implemented by Andris Freibergs as a mirage – a beautiful and impossible structure whose upper level looked like a cathedral and the foundation was formed by a stripped-down theater scaffolding. The scenographer explained his conception: "A path. Two poles – where we come from and where we are heading. The decoration has two levels. Visual dramaturgy is created by leading the actors across these two levels" (Zieda 2015: 175). In the finale of the performance, under special lighting, the windows of the cathedral seemed nailed shut, but two of them featured silhouettes of young people. "This scene was reminiscent of [..] legends about building churches with virgins walled up inside to keep the buildings from collapsing" (Geikina 2011: 242). This intensified the dramatic effect of the metaphor. The production of Ādolfs Šapiro and Andris Freibergs posed questions "that will have

to be resolved in freedom" (Zieda 2018: 175), and they are still not resolved: even thirty four years later, lustration has not taken place, and Soviet-era culture and arts have not been comprehensively reevaluated. Freibergs's mirage temple turned out to be a foreshadowing metaphor.

Metaphors of a Destructive Time – Fate, Power, War

As illusions of democracy and the creative momentum of the 1960s Thaw faded, Destructive Time, which degrades both a personality and a nation, emerged as a key metaphor. Many synonyms were used to denote it in Aesopian language.

Destructive Time and destructive power that obliterate not only personalities but also nations is one of the key themes in Andris Freibergs's works in the 1970s and 1980s, prominent in his collaborations with various directors and forming the key visual metaphors for each production.

In Arnolds Liniņš's *Richard III* at the Dailes Theater in 1972, the protagonist was history and time, embodied by Freibergs's scenography. War was the chronotope of the performance where time and space met. Guna Zeltiņa, a Latvian researcher of Shakespeare, writes: "The performance started with a sharp, harsh sign: the stage lit up for a few moments, and one could see spearmen with raised spears: it seemed like they were about to charge at the audience [..]. In A. Liniņš's conception, Richard's God was War – not just as a means to save the state and its nation in a particular historical situation but, in his understanding, also as an ideal and an escape from the mundane dimension of a restricted life" (Zeltiņa 2015: 420). The battle of Bosworth was depicted through a stage-design solution. Valentīna Freimane, who has documented this production, claims that the conception for the scene was born at the very beginning of rehearsals when the technical possibilities of the stage and actors' swordsmanship were determined. The sword fight, which could have been rather fake if performed by a crowd, was shown in a radically different way, symbolically: "A violent spear fight takes place in the background of an empty stage. From both wings of the stage, they strike the floor with immense force, they crash and bang as they cross, clash and hit the ground. It is a precise image, free of any naturalism, a hieroglyphic that the viewer can read in an instant" (Freimane 1973: 58).

Time as a universal metaphor for power and destruction was widely used in Soviet theater. *Hamlet* at the Moscow Taganka Theater became one of the most significant manifestations of this. In 1971, scenographer David Borovsky created an outstanding visual image for this staging of Shakespeare by Yuri Lyubimov. Thanks to tours in socialist states and in France, this image became emblematic beyond the

scope of Soviet territory. It was a coarsely woven wool curtain, hung on a special bracket in the center of the stage, able to move parallel or perpendicular to the ramp line and to turn. It embodied a complex, fluid metaphor with meanings that could change in each scene, but it could be generalized as Time or Fate (Lyubimov called it the "wing of fate") – a power dominating people's lives. Sometimes, this curtain directly symbolized power as violence – for example, when four swords pierced the curtain, placed parallel to the ramp line in the "throne room", and Claudius and Gertrude "sat" on them like on thrones. In other episodes, it became Time – for instance, when Gertrude wiped her face on the curtain while talking to her son during the bedroom scene. With her bright make-up rubbed off, the audience saw a woman with a suddenly aged face. It pushed Laertes towards a "grave" dug in real soil. For Hamlet, the curtain was a wall which he was not able to move despite hitting his head against it. In the finale, it literally swept the remaining survivors off the stage and then ceremoniously crossed the space of the stage, like a page being turned by someone's hand.

A powerful "hieroglyphic" of power and violence that the viewer could instantly comprehend was used by Freibergs in the production of Aleksandr Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* (1974) by Zinovy Korogodsky at the Leningrad Youth Theater. The violent era of dividing Russia was symbolized by cast iron cannonballs which seemed to move across the stage and group in various combinations, and stage lights as bells "rung" by the actors; however, in a land tormented by brutality and war, the "bells" had been stripped of their voices.

At the very end of the era of Stagnation, when the first signs of the *perestroika* were already visible, Šapiro and Freibergs created one of the most powerful metaphors for time and power not only in Latvian theater, but in theater of the entire Soviet Union, in a staging of Bertolt Brecht's *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1985). It was the graduating production of the actors' class of the Youth Theater, and it must be stressed that the visual metaphors in this performance stemmed from the expressivity of young people's bodies in combination with scenography. After such a combination, Freibergs would always say that "in essence, our stage environment is not only inanimate matter but the actors themselves" (Nodieva 1978: 89).

While with the help of the mythologists of Soviet socialism/communism, its creators sought to form not only the collective image of the new man, *homo sovieticus*, but also his "picture of the world" (Artymyshyn, Holyk 2021: 92), in this production "Šapiro continues to examine the impact left on people by totalitarian regimes and the machineries for such degradation and destruction of the person" (Zieda 2018: 157).

Freibergs had literally created a metaphor for the machinery of degradation – the stage featured bicycles placed on several levels, and Hitler Youth rode them into their bright future, zealously cycling and enthusiastically singing. However, the

bicycles were bolted to the floor and did not move, and the youngsters' energy was poured out in vain. Aside from riding bicycles they also exercised, climbed onto each other's shoulders and formed human pyramids, which instantly echoed the aesthetics of mass celebrations in Hitler's Germany and in the communist Soviet Union. It was extremely bold, even in 1985 when *glasnost* and *perestroika* had already started, to clearly show a similarity between the totalitarian regimes of the Third Reich and of the Soviet Union, as well as between the Hitler Youth and Soviet Pioneers and Komsomol as organizations created for indoctrinating future generations.

Remembering his collaboration with Freibergs, Šapiro wrote:

> Many of the works that we produced together with Andris were about the theme of "life and subjugation over life". Most of our lives we worked in the Soviet Union. And life in this state brought into sharp relief the problem of oppression and life. We were confronted with it every day. And that shaped – even though it may sound lofty – internal resistance to subjugation [..]. For Andris and me this theme appeared in literally all of our works (Zieda 2018: 441).

Šapiro and Freibergs' collaborations during the era of Stagnation were the socially and politically boldest highlight of Latvian theater, accomplished through production structure and composition but especially through visual metaphors used to defy the myths of Socialist Realism about the harmonious path of the Soviet society towards communism.

Faceless Chorus, Immobilized Hero

In the early 1970s, director and playwright Pēteris Pētersons became a leading figure in Latvian theater, despite being vetoed and persecuted by the state. After Pētersons was relieved of his duties as the head of the Dailes Theater after staging *The Idiot*, head director of the Youth Theater Ādolfs Šapiro invited him to join his staff. There, in collaboration with Ilmārs Blumbergs (who was not only a scenographer but also a costume designer), Pētersons created the central event of his directing career – a poetic theater trilogy: *Spēlē, Spēlmani!* (Play, Player!, 1972, based on poetry by Aleksandrs Čaks), *Mistērija par Cilvēku* (Mystery of Man, 1974, based on Vladimir Mayakovsky's plays and poetry) and *Bastards* (Bastard, 1978, a play written by Pētersons himself). These plays can be defined as contemporary interpretations of the medieval mystery (Zole 2000: 287), where abstract, generalized content was expressed not only through acting, but also through visual metaphors created by stage design, costumes, and the actors' interaction with them.

Play, Player! already showed a sharp turn regarding the protagonist and their opposite. The Hero of *The Idiot* is the Messiah who comes to save humanity that is standing on theirknees, but now the Hero comes from amongst the people, and the

people as a whole, the Chorus as a nation, are his opponent. The Hero tries to accomplish the impossible, to ascend into heaven, or to climb up a pole at the marketplace, yet he falls to his death as the observing Chorus sings cheerfully. The key element to Ilmārs Blumbergs's scenography was this pole, placed in the middle of the interior and serving both as a dominant vertical feature and an obstacle. The Chorus, portrayed by actors of the Youth Theater, were still rather personalized in this performance, as the Four Meters of Poetry or Girls. However, together they created an anonymized opposition to the Hero.

The confrontation between the Chorus and the Hero is even more profound in *Mystery of Man*. This performance was based on Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry and life. The Hero, or the Man, was surrounded by a completely anonymous, faceless Chorus in an almost-empty white space, or universe, created by Ilmārs Blumbergs. "The Chorus is not only the opposite of the Man. Dressed in white capes and tall white face masks, the Chorus was initially a single being. It is a crowd that is aggressively silent and refuses the Man's invitation to converse. The Chorus is an environment from which individual characters emerge and sink back into. However, the masks in Pētersons's performance have a clear philosophical function as a sign of equality put on humans by the Coryphaeus, or Time" (Zole 2000: 307). A face lost, a person with no individuality demonstrated the artists' disappointment in their contemporaries.

The metaphor of transformation or losing one's face was fully applied in the final part of the trilogy, *Bastard*. In this play, Pētersons explored the theme of the transformation of a personality in order to apply a new "face" depending on the circumstances. Each Hero, emerging into the performance from an identically grey-clothed Chorus, could become a "centaur" or "werewolf" of sorts by combining the characteristics of Methodius (meaning Mephistopheles) and their own.

It must be noted that the 1970s was the period when Latvia was starting to develop pantomime, the plastic performative art form, at the center of which was the ensemble *Rīgas Pantomīma*. It was led by Roberts Ligers, an actor of Dailes Theater, and one of the protagonists was director and visual artist Modris Tenisons. *Rīgas Pantomīma* retained their amateur status – not because they would not have reached sufficient professional heights, but rather because this was a way for them to be free of censorship and interference from the Ministry of Culture and the Communist Party. The development of pantomime played an important part in the fact that visual metaphors now required from the actors an expression of movement and their interaction with the material environment or the scenography.

This interaction reached its peak in 1975 with the staging of Henrik Ibsen's dramatic poem *Brand* at the Dailes Theater. The performance was created as a fruitful collaboration among many artists – directors Arnolds Liniņš and Kārlis Auškāps,

scenographer Ilmārs Blumbergs, movement director Modris Tenisons, composer Raimonds Pauls. Modris Tenisons's choreography united the main actors with the crowd, which could rather be defined as a plastic chorus, and with Ilmārs Blumbergs's stage design. A low, inverted pyramid of wooden planks symbolized the protagonist's alter ego. Much like Brand's motto "All or nothing", it only had one supporting point and was unsteady and easily destabilized. It not only embodied the character, but directly affected the type, rhythm, and range of movement of the actors and the chorus. The simple construction had immense possibilities of expression.

Brand was more than a personality or a stage character – he concentrated the essence of the Stagnation period into a symbol. Brand was a hero in an age where personality was denied any opportunity for action: the balance could only be kept if no movement took place, and thought was the only weapon. The soundscape of the performance, as Lehmann would define it, was created by a recording of chamber choir *Ave Sol* performing music by Raimonds Pauls. Almost constant choir recitatives occasionally took over the characters' text as well, interrupting and questioning them. The singing chorus embodied the spiritual component of personality, which was in constant conflict with the pragmatic component, the plastic chorus. In the pitch-black darkness of the beginning of the performance, the murmur of chorus voices started rising, a flash of light appeared and struck the low swinging plane and a half-nude human figure resting on top of it. With a slow, barely perceivable movement, the person rose, stood up straight and collapsed again when the pyramid made a turn. Such was the appearance of Brand. The pyramid was only balanced twice – at the beginning when the protagonist lay still, and again when Agnes first stepped onto it. The rest of the time, it swung as Brand and Agnes stepped outside the center, and the united movement of the crowd, the anonymous plastic chorus dressed in brown hooded capes, made it spin and jerk, sometimes leaving an impression that the pyramid moved against the laws of gravity. It was so during Agnes's death scene, as the actress was climbing up from the bottom corner of the plane which was lowered to the ground, and yet her steps did not move the pyramid, since the person stepping was not a human anymore but rather a spirit that had reached absolution. The highly raised corner of the pyramid became a cross for the deceased Agnes's body. Then it was taken over by the plastic chorus, and a mourning procession began with rays of stage lights "igniting" torches – painfully twisted palms in the black mass of the chorus. In the finale, Brand was also crucified – his death was decided upon by the crowd rather than caused by an avalanche.

The complex structure of Ibsen's play and its philosophical layers were each given a different means of expression that came together to touch the audience's emotions, conscience, subconscious, and imagination. This collaboration of Liniņš,

Auškāps, Blumbergs, Tenisons, and Pauls would be a great source for an analysis by Lehmann in the context of the panorama of postdramatic theater. It could easily be a match to the opuses of Robert Wilson, Jan Lauwers, Heiner Goebbels, Tadeusz Kantor, and other masters of the contemporary directing.

Conclusion The period of political stagnation, or the so-called era of Stagnation of the 1970s–1980s in the USSR was a productive time for various art forms, especially for those actively using and exploring the language of subtexts – theater among them. Visual metaphors were the main provider of subtextual language. The necessity of deciphering this language turned spectators into co-creators of sorts. It is significant that in Western theater this was the period of the so-called "performative turn", one of the main features of which was a principally different level of involving the audience, turning spectators into actors.

Many processes and phenomena – visuality, dominance of scenography, active interaction with spectators, involvement of their experiences and beliefs – were similar on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The similarity of these processes is also evidenced by certain parallels in theoretical works – for instance, Viktor Berezkin's concept of dynamic scenography had conclusions that were similar to Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theater.

It must nevertheless be stressed that the visuality of performative arts as a crucial provider of meaning had a different significance in the West and in the Soviet area. In case of the latter, it used codes or subtext that spectators were able to decipher in order to create a parallel narrative through a collective understanding, which could not be tamed by ideological censorship and was able to diverge from the official myths of Socialist Realism. Meanwhile, in Western Europe the audience grasped the visual metaphors shown in the emblematic performances of the 1970s and combined them into a personally comprehensible narrative.

Visual metaphors as certain codes recognized and deciphered by the audience played a special part in this process of creating subtext narratives. Moreover, they were created not only through means of stage design but also oftentimes through a direct union of scenography and actors' body language. Such metaphorical codes, varied in the works of many artists, can be tracked through many historically significant theater productions.

An analysis of the groups of visual metaphors – Temple, Time/Power, the Immobile Hero – shows how these metaphors change their meaning from the Khruschev's Thaw to the beginning of the *perestroika*. The metaphor of Temple

transformed from nostalgia for lost spiritual values into the questioning of true and false values and their price; the metaphor of Time, or Power, transformed from a politically neutral recognition of the destructive, violent nature of power into an explicit reference to the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state, comparable to the Third Reich.

Even during years of the deep Stagnation, despite the Iron Curtain, lack of information, and the existence within a provinciality dictated by the political power, Latvian theater created productions which rose to the global level of avant-garde art of the time. Looking back, it is possible to analyze these productions in the context of the performative turn and the postdramatic theater.

Translated by Kristīna Guste

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