

Theatre as Action, Dramaturgy as *Streben*

Cultural Confrontations at Lithuania's National Drama Theatre

Bryce Lease



In March 2014, Jonas Vaitkus, the artistic director of the Lietuvos rusų dramos teatras (Lithuanian Russian Drama Theatre) in Vilnius, declined an invitation to include his recent stage adaptation of *Eugene Onegin* starring the Ukrainian actor Grigorijus Gladijus at the annual Baltijskij dom (Baltic Home) theatre festival in St. Petersburg, which brings together Russian-language drama from former Soviet states.¹ Vaitkus's decision, which received unanimous support from the theatre's ensemble, was outlined in an open letter that castigated the

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Figure 1. Bakchantès, with Kipras Chlebinskas as the god Dionysus, wreaking havoc on global economies as he dances in front of the ruined hypermarket Akropolis. National Drama Theatre, Vilnius, directed by Gintaras Varnas, 24 April 2013. (Photo by Dmitrijus Matvejevas)



Figure 2. *Three Muses* by sculptor Stanislovas Kuzma, which depicts the muses of drama (Calliope), comedy (Thalia), and tragedy (Melpomene), dominates the facade of the entrance to the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre. Vilnius, 2013. (Photo by Catherine O’Gorman)

organizer of the festival, Sergei Šubo, for signing the Russian Ministry of Culture’s list of artists who support Vladimir Putin’s aggressive political action in Ukraine in the spring of 2014. While Vaitkus makes it clear that Šubo has the right to attach his own name to such a list, he reprimands the organizer’s choice to sign on behalf of *Baltijskij dom*, which assigns complicity to every artist who participates in the festival. Vaitkus carefully points out his allegiance to the Lithuanian government’s position on the revolutionary developments in Ukraine, which they consider a sovereign state, and their refusal to recognize the legality of the referendum on Crimea and Russia’s subsequent annexation of the region.² Vaitkus concludes the letter: “We express our respect, our sympathy and our hope that in your country [Russia] a time will come when

the authorities prefer not to force you to choose between loyalty to the government and the basic principles of civilized human coexistence” (Vaitkus 2014).³

Yana Ross, one of the associate directors of Lietuvos nacionalinis dramos teatras, the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, has commented, “I show my support for the brave decisions of my colleagues in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, those few who agree that making coproductions and touring on state-funded Russian funds is ethically inappropriate.” While Ross recognizes that this action may harm mutual artistic relations, she questions how any artists can stand in solidarity with Ukraine and turn a blind eye to the source of their funding.

2. On his first visit to Crimea since Russia’s annexation in March 2014, Vladimir Putin marked the 1945 Soviet victory over the Nazis by telling crowds that they had shown loyalty to a “historical truth” in choosing to be part of Russia. The Lithuanian government is particularly opposed to such assertions of Russian imperialism that undermine the independence of post-Soviet states.

3. Vaitkus’s letter was published in full by *Delfi*, a major internet news portal in the Baltic States. In response, the Russian Drama Theatre received a vengeful letter from the Russian Ministry of Culture and in further retaliation the Russian Embassy canceled the company’s separate invitation to perform in Smolensk in April 2014. *Translations from Lithuanian throughout this article are by Alicia Gian.*

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Ross commends the eminent directors Krystian Lupa and Alvis Hermanis, both of whom have cut ties with Russian theatres and canceled tours, as well as Vaitkus, who “set the tone for the next generation of free artists to speak out” (Ross 2014).

Vaitkus’s statement is thoroughly imbricated in Lithuania’s troubling history of occupations, which continues to shape national identity in the country today. With the exception of Lithuania’s capital city of Vilnius, which was subsumed by Poland, the country enjoyed a brief period of sovereignty between the World Wars. Lithuania was then annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, occupied by Nazi Germany between 1941 and 1944, and then reclaimed by the Soviets at the conclusion of the WWII. The first of the Baltic States to declare independence from the Soviet Union on 11 March 1990, Lithuania endured a challenging period of emergence, dealing with blockades, energy shortages, and crippling inflation. When members of the Lietuvos TSR Aukščiausioji Taryba (the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, the main legislative institution of the Lithuanian SSR) signed the formal reestablishment of the Lithuanian state in 1991, Soviet military actions resulted in 13 civilian fatalities and 700 casualties. These bloody events, known as the “January Events,” precipitated a successful referendum on independence that confirmed Lithuania’s status as an autonomous nation on 9 February 1991.⁴

The first few years of the 1990s were defined by cultural dislocation and disequilibrium. State-funded theatres lost audiences to cinema, television, and, for the wealthy elite, a burgeoning restaurant culture and travel industry that quickly exploited previously closed borders. Theatre in Lithuania before independence was relentlessly political; audiences found crucial relevance in decoding the Aesopian language of directors whose stage semiotics often frustrated State censorship. In the early part of the 1990s, audiences no longer hampered by political subjugation stopped attending the theatre, which had lost its vital status as the locus of national identification, collective gathering, and critique of the Communist regime. In the years of transition between 1989 and 1992, the peaceable reception of theatre productions paled in comparison with the more direct action occurring in the public sphere. As the city streets became charged spaces for open civic protest, the bounded language of dissenting theatres grew less persuasive and alluring. Following Western models, many theatres changed their repertoires from politically engaged programs to more commercially viable, entertainment-oriented fare. Independence caused such a dramatic shift in the cultural landscape that it took several years for the professional theatres to develop an appropriate language to address the new reality. Indeed, many still refer to the 1990s as the period of “Black Capitalism,” when quick deals and black markets abounded, and the cultural values of Russia’s “new money” held sway.

Lithuanian directors who developed professionally in the USSR and were exclusively trained at either Moscow’s GITIS (State Institute of Theatre Arts; now Russian University of Theatre Arts) or the Leningrad State Institute of Theatre, Music, and Cinematography (now St. Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy), continued to believe in the social necessity of theatre’s didactic power despite the decline in audiences. Vaitkus tends to express his anxiety over this shift in cultural values in terms that are couched in either nationalistic or universalist-oriented rhetoric, which are still connected to discourses arising out of the experience of occupation and totalitarianism. This point of view is connected to Vaitkus’s background, primarily as artistic director of the Kaunas Academic Drama Theatre (now Nacionalinis Kauno dramos teatras, Kaunas State Drama Theatre) in the 1970s and 1980s, a venue that was notorious for its

4. What is most portentous about the January Events is that Mikhail Gorbachev’s justification of Soviet military action was framed as a necessary response to the mistreatment and lack of representation of ethnic Russians in this region. Human Rights Watch noted that unrest among ethnic Russians in the country was prompted by Soviet propaganda intended to provoke tensions (1991:36–37). This history ominously foreshadows Vladimir Putin’s rationalization for the invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine in spring 2014. There are widespread fears that once again Russia has prompted the very social unrest it is ostensibly attempting to rectify.

resistance to and defiance of Soviet censorship. In Kaunas, Vaitkus attempted to make a political stance while working hard to make sure his theatre was not shut down. This was accomplished through nuanced visual metaphors and ambivalent language.

Responses to public morality and shared or common values from younger directors—including the so-called “middle generation” who trained after independence and are now in their 40s and early 50s—have been far less conservative. While this generation also emphasizes artistic integrity and intellectual rigor, their notion of innovation is no longer invested in reifying the “essence” of the Lithuanian nation. New productions focus on the benefits and problems of migration, alternative sexualities, transnational flows, and ongoing legacies of xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Despite the initial decline in attendance, the theatre in Lithuania reemerged as a crucial social practice—perhaps second only to basketball—in the mid-1990s, and was not assessed solely on the basis of its artistic merits. The extent to which the theatre was able to reflect social values and align communities widely signified its cultural importance for contemporary audiences.

Audronis Liuga and the National Drama Theatre

After graduating in 1993 from the St. Petersburg Theatre Academy, Audronis Liuga worked in Vilnius as a critic for the cinema journal *Kinas* and for the Ministry of Culture, which led to his position as program coordinator for the film festival Kino pavasaris (Cinema Spring), and later a senior editor for the magazine *Lietuvos teatras* (Lithuanian Theatre). Given his unique background in criticism and production, Liuga then founded the Teatro ir kino informacijos ir edukacijos centras (Theatre and Cinema Information and Education Center), which was intended to engender infrastructural and artistic changes in Lithuanian cultural life, primarily through Liuga’s initiation in 1999 of the Naujosios dramos akcija (New Drama Action, NDA) initiative, an annual international festival for new plays, which included the publication of works by foreign authors in translation, some of which were produced as staged readings. To support playwrights who worked outside the established repertoire of commercially viable plays, Liuga opened an alternative space for international experimental dramaturgy in 2002, the Menu spaustuvė (Arts Printing House), in the rundown building that formerly housed the press for the communist paper *Pravda* (“truth” in Russian). Changes in government funding policies after the political transformation meant that the Arts Printing House had to be supported largely through international grants, as the Lithuanian government would only fund projects on an individual basis. Foregrounding the idea of “action” both in form and in content, Liuga intended to combat the social and spiritual inertia of the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s, Liuga worked for theatre director Eimuntas Nekrošius as his manager for international touring. Traveling across Europe in this capacity, Liuga expressed his fascination with a new generation of writers, including Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and David Harrower in the UK and Marius von Mayenburg and Dea Loher in Germany (Liuga 2013). Arguing that Lithuanian theatres needed new texts to deal with the ethical questions raised during this period of rapid changes in the cultural landscape, Liuga championed translations of the texts he had encountered abroad that flaunted cultural and religious taboos, transformed narrative structures, and offered the most persuasive and direct references to the new social reality. While the older generation of directors that had come of age in Communist USSR—such as Jonas Vaitkus, Eimuntas Nekrošius, and Rimas Tuminas—were interested in developing new aesthetic categories for the theatre that had profound resonance in the visual arts, they were not necessarily asking the most relevant questions for the younger generation pushing up behind them. Liuga commissioned translations and produced both staged readings and full productions of a diverse range of plays from different cultures and eras that went beyond traditional dramatic forms, such as new brutalism, in-yer-face, and postdramatic texts, including Thomas Bernhard’s *Minetti* (1976), Caryl Churchill’s *A Number* (2002), Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her*

Life (1997), Tankred Dorst's *Merlin or Wasted Land* (1981), Juha Jokela's *Fundamentalists* (2006), Dea Loher's *Klara's Relationships* (2000) and *Innocence* (2003), Dorota Masłowska's *Two Polish-Speaking Romanians* (2006), and Roland Schimmelpfennig's *Arabian Night* (2001).

The former artistic director of the National Drama Theatre, Egmontas Jansonas (2000–2005), did not support new Lithuanian writing, believing that younger writers tried, and inevitably failed, to emulate Western writers rather than producing responses to their own cultural experience. However, since Liuga started the New Drama Action, more plays have been published in Lithuanian than at any other time in the country's history.⁵ Liuga's primary intention has been to return the National to its former role in the late 20th century as a stage for artistic exploration rather than commercial venture reliant on musicals and Russian classics, which it had been under Adolfas Večerskis (2005–2011) before Liuga took over as artistic director.⁶ Approaching a tumultuous history and the problems of national identification after the decline of integrative effects of independence has been at the heart of Liuga's programming as the artistic director of the National Drama Theatre, a post he assumed in 2011. The decision to use the National as a site to debate, contest, and contemplate histories, legacies, and identities—and the attendant refusal to function as a nursery for nationalist education—has been supported by the notion of *streben* (striving towards) that Liuga discovered in the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It helped him formulate a philosophical grounding for a theatre that has an ethical drive to focus its creative energies in a particular direction. Similar to New Drama Action, Liuga sees his five-year tenure at the National Drama Theatre as a kind of “action,” placing emphasis on the vanguardism of process-oriented creative work that defies well-trodden formulas and is not solely focused on the final production.

Having been granted the charter to use the title National in 1999, the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre shed its former designation, Academic Theatre, which traditionally implied its status among the country's culturally elite institutions and promised intellectualism in its repertoire. While the new name was not intended to revoke this promise, it has allowed for a more popular repertory that catered to national tastes rather than national critique. Located on Gedimino prospektas, the grand avenue in the heart of the Old Town, the National's placement near Vilnius Cathedral, the center of Catholic spiritual life in Lithuania, immediately alerts visitors to the national significance of Catholicism. Interestingly, the theatre's history has another noteworthy chapter: housed in an impressive building from 1940 that was vividly reconstructed in 1983, the National also functioned at one point as a meeting hall for the Communist Party, one of many reminders of the fluid and complicated relationship in the country between politics and the arts.

Although in recent years theatres in Lithuania have rarely provoked protest demonstrations, since Liuga's appointment as director there have been at least two major public uproars. The most notorious was the 2012 decision to invite the Italian director Romeo Castellucci's production of *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* to the main stage. The controversial production was programmed by Audra Žukaitytė, managing director of the annual Sirenos

5. Following the 1864 January Uprising, Russian authorities banned the Lithuanian language in education and publishing, though Lithuanian continued to appear in publication in East Prussia and the United States. The ban was lifted in 1904; however, Lithuanian did not become the country's official language until the conclusion of WWI when the country gained short-lived independence. After WWII, as a state of the USSR, Russian took precedence as the country's official language. Soviet censorship seriously limited the number of plays written in the Communist era, and a lack of playwrighting culture and training in the immediate period of transition resulted in a meager and often derivative output.

6. Liuga's support of new writing in Lithuanian is directly linked to his initiative at the National Drama Theatre. Given the country's history of partitions and occupations, Egaras Klivis has argued that “hearing the [actor's] voice articulating one's native language [on stage] can be considered the primary driver of national theatre” (2006:53).

Festival, which hosts international performances as well as significant contemporary Lithuanian productions. Scenically, *On the Concept* foregrounds the destruction of its central image, the face of Christ by the Renaissance artist Antonello de Messina. Publicity drew scorn from the Catholic Church and protestors demonstrated against what was seen to be Castellucci's desecration of sacred iconography. Furthermore, this provoked discussion in the Lithuanian parliament, where ministers debated the constitutionality of terminating the production on the grounds that it publicly debased Catholicism, the national religion. The heart of these debates addressed the role of nationally funded cultural institutions in testing socially prescribed values and morals. Ultimately, Culture Minister Arūnas Gelūnas rejected calls for censorship, claiming they were objectionable in a democratic country and would have unintended long-term effects.

In response to the debates, Yana Ross staged a reenactment of the parliamentary procedure based on publicly available transcripts. Ross directed this one-off action as a "first act" to Castellucci's production and incorporated a VJ live sampling responses to the parliamentary debate in the form of blogs, YouTube videos, television and print journalism, and other forms of public commentary from the internet, thus recontextualizing the theatricality of government processes and facilitating an interrogation of authentic "national" discourse while directly engaging with and giving equal voice to both sides of the polemic.

Nurturing Playwrights

Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania has always had a very strong tradition of directors' theatre, with state-supported companies carefully nurturing the careers of a pantheon of auteurs who treated dramatic texts as raw material. In the 1990s, directors often chose to adapt classic texts selected largely from the Russian literary canon, which led to a marginalization of new playwrights, who had to persuade a state theatre to stage their work, often unsuccessfully. Fearful that directors more invested in their own approach than the author's intentions would distort their new plays, since 2000 some writers took to staging their own works. Such attempts were often met with unfavorable or disparaging reviews. Compounding this dilemma for playwrights is the fact that Lithuanian is spoken by only around 3.2 million people outside of the country: plays written in the language are rarely translated, and some writers, such as Marius Ivaškevičius, have publicly expressed their anxiety over being condemned to obscurity. Before taking over as artistic director of the National Drama Theatre, Liuga often publicly railed against the unchecked authority of the director. Alongside Ivaškevičius, Liuga promoted a more egalitarian approach to theatre making that would include a writer-in-residence along with a strong ensemble of actors. This would allow for dynamic new innovations in writing through workshops and improvisation. In my interview with him, Liuga remarked that it was not surprising how few new playwrights were emerging given the preeminent status of the director in Lithuanian theatre (2013). Whereas many former artistic directors gave directors free reign in their choice of text for the National's repertoire, Liuga carefully plans out the dramaturgical structure of the season. First selecting a number of themes and plays, he then offers directors a choice from this list. In this way, the program is built up with conscious connections drawn between productions in the theatre's expansive repertoire—up to 40 performances remain in production in any given season with around 10 new premieres announced every year.

One of the strongest pairings of writer and director Liuga arranged for the premiere of an original work was the director Oskaras Koršunovas and the writer Marius Ivaškevičius to produce *Išvarymas* (Expulsion), a play that tackles one of the country's most pressing topics since its accession to the EU in 2004: emigration on a mass scale. Ivaškevičius first came to prominence with *Madagaskaras* (2004), a play set in the years between 1912 and 1945 when Lithuanian intellectuals were conceiving an autonomous national identity in response to a tenuous period of independence. Bringing together significant figures from 20th-century Lithuanian history, such as geopolitician and explorer Kazys Pakštas, who theorized moving Lithuania to Madagascar in anticipation of future atrocities against the new and fragile nation, Ivaškevičius challenged

well-worn narratives of cultural nostalgia and collective memory. Ivaškevičius is aware of the potential threat to small nations that globalization presents, particularly those countries where citizens speak marginalized languages. Ivaškevičius also has concerns about parochialism, and made his first attempt to think through the conundrum of producing texts that could have mass European appeal with *Artimas Miestas* (Close City) in 2005. According to Jeff Johnson, Ivaškevičius made a conscious effort to impose a broader referential frame on his play than any particular Lithuanian situation could support by using the bridge that connects Sweden and Denmark as the central metaphor for the cultural tensions between the neighboring Scandinavian countries. Johnson suggests that this is the inevitable price a small nation state has to pay for integration into a larger social unit such as the EU (2007:53–54). Ivaškevičius marshaled the conflicts that shape the relationship between two West European nations to attract more international interest in his play than issues of his own marginalized country would draw.

In *Išvarymas*, Ivaškevičius explores the darker side of inter-EU migration. He spent several months in London conducting interviews with migrants while attending the international writer’s mentoring program at the Royal Court Theatre. Ivaškevičius explained that he did not wish to create a verbatim production nor attempt a mimetic representation of emigration, but rather used London as a metropolitan backdrop where characters grappled with intercultural tensions, growing prejudices, and an increasing trend to identify between, rather than with, nations. Koršunovas, who had long wanted to produce a work about emigration, was willing to collaborate on the project. The director observed that there is only a vague calculation of how many emigrants there are, and that

this situation is not analyzed in the political space, let alone the cultural and artistic scene. In art we don’t have a serious analysis of what is happening in Lithuania. [Emigration] implies not only the interests of the nation and state; it also implies the broken fates of people, and entire odysseys—will these people return or not? (in Oginskaitė 2011)

More expansive structures of social and familial networks have developed across the European Union, which has in part led to an increase in flows of migration from A8 countries over the past 10 years. Despite the pastoral support offered by such networks, the experiences of a new migrant can still be severely disorientating in the face of language and cultural barriers as well as unfair or unpredictable labor conditions. For younger generations, tales of emigration have certainly captured the cultural imagination. For instance, Zita Čepaitis’s “expat blogs” in novel form top the country’s bestseller lists. And in *Išvarymas*, Ivaškevičius’s live musicians match the energetic tempo of the playful exchange of language that moves between English and Lithuanian.



Figure 3. *Išvarymas*, 22 December 2011, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, directed by Oskaras Koršunovas. In the foreground, an elderly Benas (Vytautas Anužis) narrates his experience of migration. (Photo by Dmitrijus Matvejevas)

A sprawling cast of nearly 30 actors populates a dynamic and equivocal space hovering between Lithuania and the UK that has scenic indications of a British pub with a large screen showing football matches. Through the banter of casual encounters we hear tales of the pursuit of happiness in a foreign culture (London as the Promised Land) that often ends in isolation, crippling loneliness, or exploitation. While the play attracted some critical resistance, the overwhelming response from largely younger audiences has made it difficult to secure tickets. This is particularly significant given the almost prohibitive cost of admission.⁷ My main criticism of the play is its problematic and naïve assertion of traditional gender politics. Women who migrate begin as equals to their male counterparts: independent, full of hope, and resourceful. On arrival in London, the situation changes. Although migrant men are cheated and oppressed, they largely prove to be practical, imaginative, and capable of sustaining an autonomous existence in their new environment. Conversely, female migrants submit to forms of persecution that turn them into anarchists, strippers, or prostitutes whose bodies are subjected to terrible forms of humiliation that ultimately reveal them as passive victims desperately reliant on male intervention. In fact, most studies show that female migrants from A8 countries have a tendency to more quickly learn foreign languages, which has enabled women to benefit from higher levels of education and stable employment, and a willingness to engage in intercultural relationships has resulted in longer-term migration (see Burrell 2010; Helff, Korte and Pirker 2010; White 2010). What's more, many women have also profited from moving to cultures that radically differ from their home countries where they were limited by the constraints and expectations of traditional gender norms. While *Išvarymas* provides a stark portrayal of recent experiences of Lithuanian migration, this crucial aspect is not fully explored or represented.

The use of English in this production is significant. In the past, spectators in Vilnius's theatres tended to be culturally uniform with the exception of Lietuvos Rusų Dramos Teatras (Lithuanian Russian Drama Theatre). However, due to dwindling audiences, the National Drama Theatre has begun to include Lithuanian surtitles to attract non-Russian speakers. Vilnius's ethnically Russian population is much smaller than in other Baltic states and far less politically mobilized. As influence from Western Europe and North America has become more prevalent, there has been an increased use of English in Vilnius's theatres, further evidence of the decline of Russian as the capital's second language. While Russian theatre conventions such as realism, symbolism, and Meyerhold's constructivism remain major influences on actors and directors, recent contact with new theatrical means, primarily multimedia performance, documentary and verbatim theatre, and the inclusion of pop cultural references, is not only revising these long-held approaches but moving entirely beyond their restrictive margins.⁸

This is not only visible in director-driven auteur theatre, but also has been prevalent in recent trends in new dramaturgy. For example, emerging Lithuanian playwrights who favor epic forms of diegesis that foreground the role of the narrator and break with mimesis include Marius Ivaškevičius, Gabrielė Labanuskaitė, Gintaras Grajauskas, Justas Tertelis, and Teklė Kavtaradzė. These writers tend to create unreliable narrators, especially Labanuskaitė,

7. While productions that have been in repertoire for some years at the National, such as Koršunovas's 2000 adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, are priced at Lt35 (€10), *Išvarymas* is more than triple this at Lt110 (€32). More recent premieres are ticketed at €20–25, which is too expensive for many. The exorbitant prices have alienated audiences, resulting in the cancellation of three productions in November 2013. Liuga lowered ticket prices in early 2014 to meet audience expectations.

8. In this article, I address a number of the most contemporary examples of the productions that have significantly broken with traditions of realism. A number of these were presented as part of the Sirenos Theatre Festival in September 2014 across Vilnius including Yana Ross' *Mūsų klasė* (2013), Oskaras Koršunovas' *Žuvėdra* (2013), Gintaras Varnas' *Bakchantės* (2013), Vidas Baekis' *Fight Club* (2012), Jonas Vaitkus' *Egultė Pas Ivanovus* (2012), Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė's *Geros Dienos!* (2011), as well as the Russian director Konstantin Bogomolov's 2013 Lithuanian production of *Mano Tėvas—Agamemnonas* at the Vilnius State Small Theatre.

Kavtaradzė, and Tertelis, who make use of communication technology (video, Skype, mobile phones) to disrupt or call into question narrative realism. The relation between narrator and spectator is further distanced through the emphasis placed on theatrical discourse, particularly the experimentation with language and dramatic structure (Labanauskaitė 2014). Jurgita Staniškytė has also noted in the second decade of independence a move from abstract or symbolic portrayals of cultural memory to more individualized perspectives that are often reliant on autobiography (2013:129).

Koršunovas's premiere at the National in 1997 was a controversial production of Sigitas Parulski's provocative *P.S. Byla OK* that linked individual memory with canonical constructions of myth. This was quickly followed by Bernard-Marie Koltès's surreal portrait of the Italian serial killer, *Roberto Zucco*. Rimas Tuminas, then artistic director, leapt to the young director's defense against baffled critics. Koršunovas had moved more freely around the continent in his post-independence formative years—in contrast to Nekrošius, who had to be granted permission during the 1970s to '80s to travel outside of the Eastern Bloc by Soviet authorities. In the late 1990s, the director was seen to be straddling what was still considered a clearly bifurcated Europe. The next 10 years were defined as a period of creative fecundity that appealed to audiences across the generational spectrum. Koršunovas's productions are still credited with bringing audiences back to what had been increasingly vacant Lithuanian theatres. Older spectators disillusioned with post-Soviet theatre and younger audiences who had rejected the staid productions of their parents' contemporaries were equally enthralled with his stagings of Sophocles and Shakespeare. In December 2012, the premiere of *Išvarymas* was scheduled in repertory along with his hotly anticipated production of Justinas Marcinkevičius's poetic drama *Katedra* (Cathedral). These productions marked Koršunovas's return to the National after more than a decade since he split from the repertory system he found overly bureaucratic and creatively stifling to start his own company, OKT/Vilnius City Theatre.

Marcinkevičius's play, which details the reconstruction of Vilnius Cathedral in the neoclassical style by the 18th-century architect Laurynas Gucevičius, has become required reading in Lithuanian schools. The main themes center around the relationship between the artist and his religious faith in the context of the relationship between nationhood and organized religion, as well as between the artist and his benefactor, highlighting the politics of arts funding. Given that Koršunovas introduced Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) to Lithuanian audiences, still remembered for its staging of cultural taboos around drugs, homosexuality, and profane language, there was anxiety among conservative critics that the director would produce a blasphemous version of Marcinkevičius's canonical text. In fact, the production stuck so surprisingly close to the original that one reviewer noted that Koršunovas had "built" the Cathedral "as written" (Borkovskis 2012). Similar to recent descriptions of Polish director Grzegorz Jarzyna, who likewise was known as an *enfant terrible* in the 1990s after controversial productions that also included *Shopping and Fucking*, reviewers were keen to pronounce that with *Katedra* Koršunovas had finally matured as a director.

Nearly 40 years ago under Soviet occupation, *Katedra* was staged in Kaunas at the State Academic Drama Theatre. The play's narrative, which charts the 18th-century reconstruction of the destroyed cathedral—the unifying symbol for Lithuanian patriotism that was variously used as a storehouse and an art gallery in the Communist era—was indicative of a deeply felt longing for national autonomy in the 1970s. The play slipped past Communist censors because of its ostensible criticism of the Church, which on the surface is presented as an impure and tyrannical authority. In fact, Marcinkevičius wrote an allegory of Soviet Communism that offered a biting critique of the abuse of power and the compromised social role of the artist. Today, Liuga suggests, the play inspires the rehabilitation of the theatre itself as a site for communal social criticism. Koršunovas created the image of the cathedral through a proliferation of stage elements, including lights, projections, chains, and suspended objects, such as stones and lanterns. Counterpoising the ethereal and weightless (light, suspension) with the significant and



Figure 4. *Katedra*, 17 December 2012, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, directed by Oskaras Koršunovas. Laurynas Gucevičius (Marius Repšys), the 18th-century architect who reconstructed Vilnius cathedral in a neoclassical style, discusses the responsibility of the artist. (Photo by Dmitrijus Matvejevas)

ponderous (chains, boulders, the monumental size of the projections), the director confronted the exalted reputation of the dramatic text with the physical construction of the nation's most iconic building.

The chains, the most powerful stage element, have an ambiguous significance. While their suspended verticality may signify divinity and faith, the cumbersome materiality of the chains reinforces political and social domination. Thus the hierarchical structure of divine and political power and its resulting subjugation is suggested through this double vision.

Liuga noted that Christian symbols retain their potency

in Lithuania, and in many ways this abstract and evocative cathedral offered the most credible and candid reference to a divine presence on the National's main stage in many years (2013). Significantly, in Koršunovas's 2012 production at the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, the actor Marius Repšys, a favorite with audiences, played the architect Gucevičius in *Katedra*, one of the most heroic and morally "pure" characters in Lithuanian theatre. Concurrently, Repšys appeared in Koršunovas's production of *Išvarymas* on the same stage as a Lithuanian emigrant living in the UK who works in the black market in order to send money home to build a small house on the river. This doubling of national hero with an impoverished and ethically dubious migrant has produced a subtle but suggestive ghosting between the roles and the demands of particular historical eras. While in the latter play individuals must adapt to shifting identities forced upon them by economically motivated immigration, questions of religious integrity and the freedom of artistic creation are being asked on a national scale in the former.

Both *Išvarymas* and *Katedra* stand in stark contrast to the works presented in 2013 at Koršunovas's own OKT/Vilnius City Theatre: Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. OKT is in a converted house on a small cobblestoned side street in the Old Town. The playing area is confined to one diminutive room with a low ceiling and fluorescent lighting, reminiscent of a nondescript contemporary office. Although these intimate productions included self-consciously advertised theatrical devices, the focus was purely on the activity of the actors rather than scenic metaphors. The coexistence of these productions in the repertoires of these theatres in the 2013/14 season attests to both Koršunovas's flexibility and dynamism as a director and Lithuanian audiences' appetite for diverse theatre practices.

Destructive Communities

Liuga invited Vaitkus, who was artistic director of the National from 1989 to 1995, to mount Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, as part of the same 2012 season that offered Koršunovas's *Išvarymas* and *Katedra*. Known for monumental productions defined by colorful scenography, use of melodrama for comedic effect, and rejection of naturalistic conventions, the director has been one of the greatest innovators in Lithuanian theatre. Vaitkus also directs operas, which he invests with a theatrical approach, paying close attention to acting style and embodiment. His theatre pro-

ductions likewise benefit from his work in opera, similarly relying on epic soundtracks and a rhythmic musicality.

In 2012 Vaitkus mounted a musical adaptation of Alexander Vvedensky's *Christmas at the Ivanovs* (1938) at the Russian Drama Theatre; *Eglutė pas Ivanovus* won four Golden Crosses of the Stage, the main theatre award in Lithuania. Audiences at this theatre are predominantly Russian-speaking and celebrate Russian culture and cultural influence in Lithuania without necessarily identifying with Russian political domination or aggression. This playful critique of Communist-era musical pageantry featured a host of talking animals, pantomime dames,⁹ and Eurovision-esque song and dance routines.¹⁰ Moving from this romp to Ibsen makes it difficult to fit Vaitkus into any stable cultural frame. For his production of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, the 69-year-old director was once again concerned with national mythology and local history.

While at the beginning of the 1990s Lithuanian productions were dominated by the collapse of stoic father figures, more recent productions, including *Enemy of the People*, have shown a growing preoccupation with the negotiation of power dynamics between individuals and their communities. Two other recent examples at the National have been Rolandas Atkočiūnas's staging of Martin Sperr's *Medžioklės scenos* (Hunting Scenes) and Yana Ross's production of Gabrielė Labanauskaitė's *Raudonais batraiščiais* (Red Shoelaces). The latter depicts one man's murder of his homosexual brother as part of an initiation into a neo-Nazi organization. The critic Justina Katkevičiūtė noted that the themes of violence, indoctrination, and the increase in skinhead culture remain disturbingly relevant in contemporary Lithuania (2013). In both plays, the communities represented are dominated by slander, resentment, and alienation; individuals are pushed into performing unethical acts without reflection or circumspection.

Similarly, *Enemy of the People* revolves around the moral dilemma of Thomas Stockmann, a doctor in a small coastal town in Norway who discovers that the water at the local spa has been contaminated by waste and is making tourists mortally ill. As the town depends on the spa for its prosperity, residents disregard Stockmann's discovery. They ostracize and denounce the doctor in an effort to save the reputation and prosperity of their community. Vaitkus condensed the layered richness of Ibsen's text to focus on the theme of the family, particularly the conflict between Stockmann and his brother Peter, whose avarice and political ambition override his ethics. The director's use of multimedia attempted to implicate the audience in the action as cameramen followed the actors who left the confines of the main stage to move among spectators and into the theatre's lobby. Offstage scenes were projected onto a large center-stage screen, where audiences saw their own images reflected back, making them part of the narrative's normative and troubled "community," and, concurrently, generating a shared feeling of *communitas* among all in the theatre. As a result, the end of the play did not find closure through adherence to a particular and substantive cultural identity that obscures the exclusive demarcations in which it is grounded. Working with lighting designer Tadas Valeika and Finnish video artist Ville Hyvönen, the production rejected the naturalistic setting strongly associated with stagings of Ibsen in favor of a more abstract stage picture rearticulated through modern technology and contemporary costume. The impact of this multimedia version of the play was further heightened by the concurrence of local and municipal elections in Vilnius.

Liuga's next commission for the 2012/13 season at the National Drama Theatre was Gitanas Varnas's version of Euripides's *Bakchantės* (Bacchae). Varnas remains one of the most celebrated

9. A "pantomime dame" is a traditional character in British pantomime, originating from *travesti* modes of performance that feature male performers in female clothing. As "dames" men either perform in a blatantly camp style or overtly signal their masculinity in a display of "butch" mannerisms. Vaitkus uses excessive makeup, large wigs, colorful costumes, and parodic performances of gender in a comparable manner.

10. The Eurovision song contest tends to attract highly theatrical popular musical acts that employ bright and colorful costumes and aesthetics that hover between kitsch and camp (see Fricker and Gluhovic 2013).

directors of his generation, second only to Koršunovas. His production of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, staged at the Kaunas Academic Theatre with Jūratė Onaitytė in the title role, brought him major acclaim at the end of the 1990s. The production offered a fresh take on Ibsen's classic text that was praised for its strong scenic metaphor: a series of vertical poles through which Hedda had to traverse, reflecting the physical and emotional demands of her male-dominated social sphere.

Another Varnas production, *Merlin or Wasted Land*, championed "environmental theatre," which in Lithuania by and large refers to any performances that take place outside a conventional theatre space. Theatre scholar Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė (2005) has argued that this practice in the idiom of Lithuanian theatre-makers connotes the "unusual meeting point for performers and the audience" that is "outside the theatre building (from abandoned buildings no longer used for their original purpose, to closed or open-air spaces that are still operating but are not 'suitable' for theatre)" as well as the spaces within theatres not traditionally used for performance, such as the foyer, canteen, cloakroom, rehearsal room, or scene shop. Marcinkevičiūtė cites Richard Schechner's *Environmental Theatre* ([1973] 1994) as an influential study in Lithuania. She is particularly interested in the dynamic performer-spectator relationship that is triggered when the conventional division between the performance and audience space is discarded.

Varnas staged Tankred Dorst's *Merlin or Wasted Land* in 2004 in a fur factory, at the shipyards in Klaipėda, and at the birthplace of the Polish Solidarity movement in Gdańsk. While it was a site-specific production, Varnas also employed a number of strategies of environmental theatre as outlined by Schechner ([1973] 1994). In particular, transactions between performers and spectators were reinvigorated in the new spaces; the clear bifurcation of stage and audience was eroded, stimulating a more inclusive artistic project; and although some scenic materials were employed, the set was primarily the buildings' interiors, which were "explored and used, not disguised" (Schechner [1973] 1994:xxxiv).

In recent years, however, Varnas has moved away from this mode of performance, returning to the traditional proscenium stage. Nonetheless, a former student, Vidas Bareikis, now artistic director of the No Theatre Movement, continues to be influenced by Varnas's former explorations of environmental theatre. The manifesto of No Theatre is to overthrow traditional theatre practice in an effort to invigorate dialogue between performers and audiences (and there is no intentional relation to Japanese *noh* theatre) (see Dapšytė 2010). The opening and closing scenes of Bareikis's latest production, an adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club*, took place outside of the State Youth Theatre in Vilnius. The courtyard of the 18th-century building was covered in toilet paper; red and black flags fluttered in the wind while white paper streamers were thrown from open windows onto fire spitters below, all choreographed to recorded classical music.

In his *Bacchae*, Varnas played with gender identity, masculinity in particular, in a visual collage *mise-en-scène*. Varnas's productions offer multilayered representations of homosexuality, which for the most part is left off the stage in Catholic Lithuania. Also in 2012, he staged *Beat the Sunset* by Canadian playwright Michael MacLennan. The play was written as a response to widespread homophobia in Canada in the early 1990s, which Varnas recognizes as prevalent in Lithuania today.

Varnas's productions of contemporary playwrights drew larger audiences than his *Bacchae*, which attempted to offer a critique of modern consumerism through the impact of global economies on nature and wildlife. Despite a reputation for frank and humorous portrayals of alternative sexualities, Varnas rendered Dionysus as three campy men in green tracksuits and large frizzy wigs who pranced gleefully and sang snatches of operatic arias. Video projections of disturbing images such as seabirds choking on oil slicks and a camel sliding around a butcher's shop in a pool of its own blood further confused the director's message. Varnas's partner, the fashion designer Juozas Statkevičius, created an incoherent array of costumes that was his-

torically inconsistent, moving between medieval religious robes and the contemporary bright green tracksuits. Overall, this staging of a Greek classic was a massive disappointment from a director who has become one of the country's most respected as the most popular mentor at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. This has been perhaps the only major failure in Liuga's 2012/13 season, though its ambition attests to the theatre's dedication to creative risk and exploration.

Troubling Historiographies

Located on the periphery of Vilnius, the Tuskulėnai estate was transformed into a memorial complex and peace park in 2002. After independence, mass graves of Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance fighters and members of the Polish Home Army were uncovered on the grounds of this 19th-century manor house. Efforts to honor fallen Lithuanian heroes led to the decision to exhume the remains of those murdered by occupying Soviet forces between 1944 and 1947. In total, 724 bodies were exhumed, 50 of which could be identified. Not only were the remains of Lithuanian resistance fighters unearthed, forensic analysis of the bones offered unexpected results, suggesting that they were not ethnically uniform.¹¹ In some instances, the very fighters for Lithuanian independence valorized for their heroism were concomitant participants in the extermination of Jews and ethnic Poles as part of the Nazi final solution. Any program of memorialization scheduled at the site would therefore inadvertently commemorate perpetrators of the Holocaust. The complicated narrative that developed out of the archeological dig at Tuskulėnai reveals the level of complexity at work in the formation of a post-Communist Lithuanian identity and the competing demands of public discourses around suffering under Fascist and Communist regimes and as well as the Holocaust.

Given this context, it is not surprising that the most highly anticipated production of the 2013/14 season was Yana Ross's staging of *Mūsų klasė* (Our Class; original Polish title *Nasza klasa*) by Polish playwright Tadeusz Słobodzianek. Demonstrating the mode in which historical events materialize identity, the first half of the play depicts the true story of the Polish village of Jedwabne where, in 1941, all of the Jews were locked in a barn and burned to death. The latter half of the play narrates the subsequent years of oppressive Soviet-style Communism and the disappointing political transformation after 1989 (see Lease 2012). While the Holocaust is often discussed in Lithuania by public intellectuals and in novels, Liuga noted that the topic is rarely approached in the theatre. The last significant professional production to broach Jewish-Lithuanian relations was *Smile Upon Us, Lord* by Grigorijus Kanovičius, which Rimas Tuminas directed at the State Small Theatre of Vilnius in 1994.

Though *Our Class* was awarded the Nike Prize, Poland's equivalent of the Pulitzer, it has caused controversy among conservative nationalists. The Lithuanian premiere was preceded by a public forum organized by the Polish Institute in Vilnius, titled "Art in the Face of the Holocaust." The event also commemorated the 70th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto.¹² The relationship between historical trauma and the crisis of representation

11. As James Mark has observed, the identification of individuals was possible because the Lithuanian secret service had obtained KGB records listing the names of the majority of those executed in Vilnius between 1944–47. "Families whose lost relatives appeared on the list might then provide further photographic documentation and bodily samples which allowed the forensic scientists to use techniques such as skull-photo superimposition and DNA testing to identify individuals" (Mark 2010:107). See also Jankauskas 2005.

12. The Polish Embassy was particularly active in organizing events to commemorate this anniversary, and it is important to note that the Jews who inhabited the Vilnius ghetto were memorialized as Polish and not Lithuanian since Vilnius was a part of Poland during the Nazi occupation. Adam Szostkiewicz in his speech at the forum noted the importance of Poland's recognition of anti-Semitism on a national scale in recent years in an effort to accept a shared responsibility for the fate of Polish Jews. Szostkiewicz also stressed that this difficult but necessary process has yet to take place in Lithuania.



Figure 5. *Mūsų klasė (Our Class)*, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, Vilnius, directed by Yana Ross, 20 September 2013. The ensemble and orchestra in black balaclavas and red clown noses under a circus tent during the torture and interrogation of Jewish and Polish classmates. (Photo by Mikko Waltari)

was debated by the playwright, director, and cultural commentators as well as the German critic Thomas Irmer. The forum reinforced what Michael Rothberg has theorized as the three fundamental demands confronting the Holocaust makes on “attempts at comprehension and representation”: the need for documentation; reflection on the formal limits of representation; and the demand for the risky public circulation of discourses on events (2000:7). This was a first because anti-Semitism was not given particular attention after Lithuania’s independence from the USSR. As Yana Ross put it, “after the collapse of the Soviet Union there were problems much more pressing than dealing with the past” (2014).

Ross, who worked at the Berlin Volksbühne and the Finnish National Theatre, has an international background that has influenced her complex directorial approach. Born in Latvia and trained in GITIS in Moscow, Ross immigrated with her family to the US and attended the Yale School of Drama. When Ross completed her studies in 2006, theatre director Robert Woodruff, BAM’s Joe Melillo, and members of the New York-based avantgarde company Mabou Mines all advised her to move back to Europe (Ross 2014). First enticed to Vilnius by Koršunovas in 2007, Ross directed a production of Elfriede Jelinek’s *Bambiland* at the National Drama Theatre, the first time the Austrian Nobel Prize-winner’s work had been professionally mounted in Lithuania, placing critical emphasis on Lithuania’s participation in what the Bush administration termed the “Coalition of the Willing” for those countries that supported the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq.

For her next production, Ross was inspired to work on the connection between witnessing and historical narrative in relation to the Holocaust after speaking with the Russian theatre director Dmitri Tcherniakov about the approaching loss of the WWII generation. The narrative of *Our Class* was precisely the combination of trauma memory, witnessing, and testimony that Ross was interested in. In May 2013 I attended one of Ross’s early rehearsals and asked the cast whether they felt the play might provoke the same level of controversy that it did in Poland.

Most actors did not express anxiety or concern. “In Lithuania,” one responded, “we admit that we colluded with the Nazis. It is not a shameful secret. In Poland, there was always denial. They see themselves as victims or martyrs.”

Ross’s staging differed significantly from earlier major productions of *Our Class* at the Royal National Theatre in London in September 2009 (directed by Bijan Sheibani) and at the Teatr na Woli in Warsaw in November 2010 (directed by Ondrej Spišák) in its use of live music, tragic-comedic tone, carnival aesthetics, and expressionistic lighting. Circus tricks replaced acts of violence and brutality, offering the audience a Brechtian distance between Ross’s lively and mischievous directing and the explicitly tragic content. Employing a more abstract framework that did not specifically indicate a rural setting made it difficult to attribute blame to “ignorant” or “ill-bred” villagers, which Izabela Filipiak (2011) claimed some of Warsaw’s elite indicated after the Polish premiere. In an interview with the Russian journal *Teatr*, Ross recalled the controversy her production fanned among Lithuanian nationalists and some members of Vilnius’s Jewish community. Eschewing easy designations such as victim and perpetrator by moving the focus away from Jewish suffering, Ross focused on the relationship between neighbors in moments of historical crisis. While audience members might have been anticipating what Ross refers to as the “accepted stencil memorial to the Holocaust,” the production did not establish the Shoah as a moment of historical exceptionalism, but rather placed it beside recent atrocities such as the civil war currently being fought in Syria and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. In the public forum, one audience member complained about Ross’s treatment of the Jewish repatriation to Israel, which was rendered as a comic dance choreographed to the music of a projected video showing the Soviet-era cartoon *Chunga Changa*, in which “African” children sing their praises of a plentiful new country where life is trouble-free and effortless. (Interestingly, on the night of the premiere many audience members smiled and clapped along to the familiar melody.) The naïve optimism and the celebration of an abundant and fertile land officially sanctioned under Soviet Communism were thus conflated with emergent Israeli nationalism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While the spectator complained that this comedic dance paired with the cartoon made an anti-Semitic parallel between Jews and monkeys, Ross observed that the man had confused the black children in the cartoon with animals, thus revealing the latent racism at work in the objection.

Słobodzianek has consistently stressed that his play is not a documentary, nor does it make claims to historical accuracy. Employing archetypes of Polish Romantic drama and Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre of Death, the playwright was interested in revealing the ideological mechanisms obscured in everyday life that trigger contexts for suffering, atrocity, and revenge. Not willing to paper over the disjuncture between Polish and Lithuanian histories and taboos, Ross asked her cast to speak frankly about their understanding, impression, and thoughts on the social, economic, and political problems explored in the text, finding nuanced distinctions between Polish and Lithuanian collusion with Nazis and Soviets in the build up to the Second World War. Seventeen of the actors admitted to harboring anti-Semitic feelings.

Ross felt the play was crucial for a culture that frowns upon open communication and self-revelations, and spent months with the actors talking through family histories, memories of Communism and WWII, and inviting personal reminiscences. Fania Brancovskaja-Jocheles, a 91-year-old survivor of the Vilnius Ghetto, spent five hours with the cast without sitting down or taking a break from recalling her experiences. The younger members of the National’s ensemble performed the first part of the text, which focuses on Nazi-occupied Poland and the inauguration of Soviet-style Communism, while older actors too on the roles in the more recent post-1989 half of the play. The shifting of roles between younger and older actors evidenced the significant talent of an ensemble that works together with confidence and striking intimacy, while underscoring the passage of time. The movement from younger to older actors also represented the processes Ross employed in the rehearsal studio of discussing personal relationships. Privileging a sober intellectual theatre, Ross views actors as intelligent agents who

should not placate the audience but rather should strive to rouse spectators, to activate them as thinking citizens. The oversaturation of theatrical effects, in which a number of critics recognized the influence of German theatre, was a deliberate attempt to eschew catharsis and closure.

New Action

In and through theatre, Lithuanians before 1991 fought against censorship and occupation, constructed viable cultural bonds, and affirmed social cohesion. Today, the social and political functions of theatre have radically changed. Celebrating its 75th season in 2015, the National has reconfigured its role in Lithuania from advocate of nationalist values to a forum for critically addressing national issues. Justina Katkevičiūtė (2013) noted that Liuga's repertoire employs a pedagogical function, which requires spectators to develop a critical attitude towards society and national culture. Using plays such as *Katedra*, *Išvaymas*, and *Mūsų klasė* to debate the limitations and homogeneity of Lithuanian cultural identity, Liuga has attempted to situate questions of "who we are" in relation to contested histories and pervasive social and religious taboos. "Lithuania needs a new reflection on its past myths," Liuga observed (2013). The questions raised by the plays produced at the National in 2013/14 are: How does history shape Lithuania's present? How does the treatment of history define current values? What do Lithuanians want to remember and what would they prefer to forget? As part of Liuga's initiative to respond to some of these concerns, young artists from Lithuania and Latvia have come together for a project named "January 13," which employs historical documents and witness accounts to examine the bloody events of 1991 when Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Vilnius, killing 13 civilians. There is also a move to introduce foreign directors to Lithuanian audiences. Krystian Lupa and Piotr Skiba have been invited from Poland, as well as Piotr Gruszczyński, a well-known critic and dramaturg for Krzysztof Warlikowski's recently established Nowy Teatr. The National had a distinctly Scandinavian flavor in 2013/14 with dance theatres arriving from Norway (*Vël*, zero visibility corp.) and Denmark (*Meilės dainos*, Dansk Danseteater), and a commissioned piece from Finnish director Saara Turunen, *Sudaužytos širdies istorija* (Broken Heart Story), for the main stage.

Although the New Drama Action initiative officially came to an end in 2012, Liuga views his five-year tenure at the National as a continuation of his notion of "action," the concrete effort of intellectuals and artists to engage with shifting values, ethics, ideals, and social practices. After 14 successful seasons of New Drama Action, Liuga does not lament the NDA festival's passing, but rather highlights its dissolution as an indication of its major impact. State theatres that once balked at presenting homegrown work are beginning to open their doors to new playwrights and diverse forms of performance. Indeed, repertoires across Vilnius are exemplary for their inclusion of new European writing and aesthetics that are no longer marginalized by more traditional theatrical fare. Lithuanian theatres lost some of their audience after independence in 1991 lulled many into complacency. That trend may be changing, however, as Lithuanian theatre makers return to producing more socio-politically relevant work in 2014 when events in Ukraine are prompting new fears of the re-emergence of old tensions around the very real threat of Russian imperialism.

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