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Her research interests revolve around the history and theory of Lithuanian and foreign dramaturgy.

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She is currently working on a monograph on contemporary dramaturgy.

**‘What You Say Matters to Me’: The Relevance of Dramaturgy in Theatre for the Contemporary Audience**

I will approach the question of why the audience struggles to hear or understand the actors’ speech, a concern quite pertinent today, from a different angle: to what extent does it matter to the audience what the actors are saying on stage? When a person talks about what hurts them, they will do everything to ensure they are heard. Therefore, the message that a skilled actor conveys from the stage must reach not only the audience’s ears but also resonate with their thoughts and feelings. William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, in his monologue to Hecuba, contemplates the potential and the desirability of affecting the audience: ‘[…] What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have? He would drown the stage with tears / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech, / Make mad the guilty and appeal the free, / Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed / The very faculties of eyes and ears […]’

Shakespeare points out that a theatre audience comprises a diverse array of individuals – the guilty, the innocent, the foolish etc. Shakespare tells us that in order for the audience to hear, for their ‘very faculties of eyes and ears’ to be ‘amazed’, it takes a talented playwright who has ‘the motive and the cue for passion’. Only by delving into themes and issues that are profoundly significant for the the author (playwright, director) and the audience, can the words and sentiments of the classics (such as Hecuba from the Antiquity), and especially of contemporary dramas, be heard, comprehended and felt.

Looking at the history of Lithuanian theatre during the Soviet era, we may recall the moment when the word ***Lie-tu-va*** (Lithuania), spoken very softly by Mažvydas, was nevertheless heard by the audience, who repeated it silently in their minds together with the actor. It took more than a decade after the performance directed by Povilas Gaidis at the Klaipėda Drama Theatre in 1976, before the Sąjūdis (Reform Movement of Lithuania) emerged, the audience dared to utter the word aloud, and then it spilled beyond the confines of the theatre halls into the collective chants of thousands in rallies. It was extremely important for many people. Even today, we can trace where the actor’s word has led us.

In Gintaras Varnas’s production based on Dea Loher’s play Innocents (2003, staged in Lithuania in 2005), when the philosopher Ela delivers a lengthy monologue regarding the depreciation of the humanities in the contemporary world, I, as a representative of the humanities, understand and hear what the actor is saying, because it is a poignant topic for me. However, the person sitting next to me may be a complete stranger to the issues plaguing the humanities, or may not have thought much about them, and may perceive Ela as an eccentric or even mentally challenged individual. In such case, the words she speaks are unlikely to resonate with such a spectator.

In this presentation, I will discuss a few cases where traumatic experiences, and societally marginalised or otherwise sensitive topics are portrayed in plays, suggesting that the repertoire of contemporary theatre is very diverse and often directly relevant only to a specific audience capable of truly hearing and understanding the words spoken by the actor and the message conveyed through the performance. Certainly, such theatre productions aim to foster empathy in the audience and promote an understanding of the ‘other’, the ‘different’, all while raising public awareness. However, what is often identified as alien to society in the context of theatre should become familiar to the spectator not after leaving the theatre, but during the play itself. This presents not only an artistic but also an analytical challenge for the playwright, the director, and the entire creative team. It is crucial to contemplate the message to be conveyed to the viewer and the manner in which it should be delivered, so that the audience accepts the performance not just as the work of another, whom we are expected to understand and sympathise with, but as an experience that is personally important to them.