The question about the contribution of citizens to the society’s wealth presupposes the problem of the artist’s position in a given social order and the value of artistic contribution in the broadest sense of the word. How does the artist contribute to the material and / or moral progress of society? Should political or social critique of the existing societal status quo be treated as an obligatory action, the duty of an artist? The difficulties in defining the notion of being political for artistic practices in contemporary democratic societies go together with the changing concepts of being an artist – with quickly transforming shapes of fragmentary identities and easily exchangeable positions (from (trans)national to (trans)ideological). Paradoxically, it is quite easy to describe the function of political art in totalitarian societies, which is to oppose the regime, to show the alternatives, and to consolidate the community, but it is much more difficult to do so under the conditions offered by democracy. This dilemma is faced by majority of post-totalitarian societies, and the examples of theatre in the Baltic States testify to it as well. At present democracies of the Baltic States artistic practices seem to have “all the rights to oppose”. However, contemporary art encounters continuous indifference on the part of political elite and the masses alike when, in fact, what artists really expect from them is any, even negative, reaction to their artistic endeavours. This results in increasing hermetization, nostalgia and abundance of self-reflexive strategies in the landscape of contemporary Baltic art. These processes can be illustrated by the developments in contemporary Lithuanian theatre during the last decades.

This period in Lithuania was marked by discussions about the place of theatre in a post-totalitarian society. Most of these debates have focused on a specific area of concern: the inability of Lithuanian theatre to define its role in the transitional reality and to create adequate means of expression or at least to modify the old ones. Under the conditions of Soviet occupation Lithuanian theatre had formed a metaphoric

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poetics of Aesopian language that allowed for criticism of ideological enemy “between
the lines” and the creation of an invisible community between performers and specta-
tors. In the seventies and nineties the works of such directors as Jonas Vaitkus, Jonas
Jurašas or Modris Tenison formed a tradition of radical, active and provocative theatre
that ceased to exist after entering the milieu of democratic society. Paradoxically, the
lack of ideological and creative freedom in the Soviet period had served as a stimulus
for the creation of a political and artistic alternative. However, Lithuanian theatre
directors have discovered that it is extremely difficult to find a new model of relations
with reality under conditions of freedom offered by independence.

To cite Michael Walzer, the fight for democracy unites experts (in this case, art-
ists) and common people, while the ambiguity of the success of this fight induces
the split. Indeed, the situation in Lithuanian theatre after the fall of the regime can
be described as a widening of the gap between theatre and society. After the shift in
the socio-political situation Lithuanian theatre turned away from an everyday reality
toward a purely creative imagination and symbolic theatricality. Critics claim that
the imagination of directors has overcome the language of the real. At the end of the
ten twentieth century, Lithuanian theatre lost its interest in things happening beyond the
theatre boundaries; it developed an internal monologue reflecting upon itself. While
staging classical plays or contemporary drama, directors transfer the protagonist’s
conflict with external reality into his / her inner world. The dialogue with society
or even the creative dialogue with other artists has been gradually disappearing from
the Lithuanian theatre stage. According to Oskaras Koršunovas, the director who
represents the transitional generation of Lithuanian theatre, “undoubtedly, after 1990
Lithuanian theatre lost the monopoly of truth; it stopped being the exceptional place
of spiritual resistance; ethical Aesopian language was transformed into the purely aes-
thetic (…) Theatre has become antisocial art.” Theatre artists were unable to establish
the points of connection with the new social order or, as a matter of fact, even to
construct critical dialogue with the past.

In 2002 Lithuanian theatre director Oskaras Koršunovas chose to explore the ter-
ritories of Lithuanian political mentality with the help of a canonical play, Sophocles’
King Oedipus. He decided to contribute to the debates about contemporary society
with the help of the eternal and ever-present Oedipus complex. In his earlier perfor-
mances, Koršunovas was trying to establish the image of his generation as not being
able to cope with the Oedipal nightmares of unconscious belonging to the totalitar-
ian system (Soviet regime) and is forced to execute the perpetual patricide, which
in turn becomes an empty ritual unable to provide any salvation – the past always

4 For a more detailed description of this performance see http://www.okt.lt (accessed 12 January 2010).
reappears as the Fathers’ ghost and acquires various shapes of power\(^5\). Sophocles’ *King Oedipus* in the interpretation of Koršunovas becomes the manifestation of the exposure (or even deconstruction) of political power which haunts every aspect of human psyche and life, but always remains invisible. In this performance Koršunovas used the actions of social life and contemporary social dramas as the underlying themes, frames and rhythms of *King Oedipus*. This staging of Sophocles’ play made explicit allusions to the contemporary Lithuanian political scene, in particular, the image of the mayor of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius as the shadow figure behind Oedipus, “the mayor” of Thebes. Thus, the idea to project the tragedy of King Oedipus on the contemporary social context, to connect it with the contemporary social dramas of the postindustrial *culture of success managers* seems to suggest that Oedipal nightmares are continually replayed. The performance has demonstrated the transition from the ideological (political) subject to the fragmented fragile individual – at the beginning Oedipus (Dainius Gavenonis) is presented as a unified subject; we see him as a powerful, unhesitating, quick-tempered, imperious and even schematic modern political leader. However, at the end of the performance, already aware of his real identity and his fate, Oedipus becomes a postmodern split subject with a myriad of faces. This fragmentation is visually represented by the masks made of photos picturing Oedipus’ face and worn by the members of the chorus. The social hierarchies and the political power games are possible only in the situation of “unawareness”; to become aware in this performance of *King Oedipus* means to lose the core of power. At the end of the performance we see blind Oedipus searching hopelessly for something in a sandpit. His blindness has been interpreted by many theatre critics as a metaphor of the artist who is unable to bear the truth about himself and the consequences of his inactions\(^6\).

The strategies employed in this performance can be interpreted as an example of metaphorical discussion about politics, encompassing the traditions of visual resistance of the Soviet period, but at the same time open to new complex forms of artistic contribution that investigate the depths of operations of political power. However, in order to fully grasp the political potential of this performance one has to employ quite a complex interpretational matrix, therefore the political-metaphorical layer of such performances may not be activated in the mind of the general public. The political power of *King Oedipus* is relocated from the stage to the minds of spectators – it becomes the politics of perception and at the same time risks to remain invisible.

Most critics agree that the significant turn toward visual theatricality that occurred in Lithuanian theatre during the last decades had a considerable impact on the

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\(^5\) For a more detailed analysis of this aspect of the earlier performances by O. Koršunovas see E. Klivis. Totalitarizmo vaizdiniai šiuolaikiniame Lietuvos teatre // *Šiuolaikiniai Lietuvos teatro procesai*, 2003, Vilnius, Efrrata, p. 73–79.

formation of the gap between the theatre and society which has been constantly increasing. One can figure out at least several reasons for the apolitical approach of Lithuanian contemporary theatre and its non-critical attitude toward the world outside the playhouse. One of the obvious reasons is the notorious nature of the term *social / political theatre* in the post-Soviet space. Used as a propaganda tool *political theatre* meant *collaboration*, meanwhile the real critique was expressed through the hidden language of visual metaphors. In the minds of Lithuanian artists the Soviet regime had engraved the conviction that being political meant “getting your hands dirty”. The modern urge for the autonomy of art became a double urgency for Lithuanian artists during the regime since it meant the ability to create art without moral consequences, or without getting your hands dirty. However, the most important reason was a latent uncertainty as to what it meant to be critical in the contemporary democratic context. It became obvious that the very concept of a political or critical position must change.

Under the totalitarian rule, the function of critical and politically active theatre was to oppose the manipulative powers of the regime and to demonstrate social alternatives, whereas the post-industrial society requires employing more subtle strategies. As Hal Foster puts it, postmodern political art differs from the historical avant-garde or modern political art in that it does not oppose any ideology but simply investigates processes and apparatuses which control different forms of representation. In this view, post-totalitarian political art is not able to rely simply on the representation of the program, a critique or a desired utopia – it must interrogate the means of representation as structures of authority. Understanding that it can not place itself outside the object of its own critique, post-modernist political art acts as a collaborator and a critic at the same time and seems to be both employing and deconstructing the language of the power. This kind of *political theatre* is more ambivalent and contradictory; it aims at both subverting and establishing ideology at the same time. However, quite often it is not easy to recognize such an ambiguous strategy as political. Moreover, this ambiguity is not usually acceptable for every artist as it requires constant self-revision. In the case of Lithuanian theatre, this position is usually more acceptable for the artists who are inclined to the tactical thinking (in terms of tactics vs. strategies of Michel de Certeau). Tactics, not strategies are the most suitable for the “critique from within” when the position of “outsider” or “direct opposition” seems impossible to achieve. However, the ability to manoeuvre in the enemy’s territory and to adjust one’s ways of “moving” to the quickly changing situation while sustaining the critical view directed not only at the other but also at oneself somehow seems too schizophrenic for the modern

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strategists of the “old school”. And it comes as no surprise that the best examples of the tactical directing can be found in the works of theater directors that belong to the transitional or younger generation.

Referring to the notions introduced by de Certeau, we can define the director-strategist as the one who occupies the privileged position above the territories of his research (if we assume that directing is indeed research into reality) – he keeps the distance and seems dissociated from the realities he investigates. Meanwhile, the tactic is always in the position where he is directly dependant on the object of his analysis and must constantly review and revise his ways of operating. To schematize de Certeau, tactics are the modes of action or knowledge that are acquired in the process, they are not stable, objective or given. It is clear that one can relate these notions to the modern and the postmodern positions.

The strategic mentality thrives in monologue. “The outcome of the strategic mindset is a multitude of isolated visions that do not communicate with each other but observe one another from a safe, indifferent and strategic distance”. Meanwhile the tactical cogitation is always in the presence of unavoidable dialogue with the other. To some extent, these features of different mindsets can be used to explain the lack of dialogue between directorial visions created by the older generation of Lithuanian theatre directors who are more inclined to the modes of strategic thinking as well as the willingness of the younger generation to participate in the artistic polemics – e.g. in the directorial dialogue between the different interpretations of Shakespearean Hamlet presented by Eimuntas Nekrošius in 1997 and by Oskaras Koršunovas in 2008, staged as a counter-reaction to the former interpretation.

Another feature of a strategic way of thinking is its inability to engage in self-critique or self-revision. Self-critique, according to philosopher Nerijus Milerius, is an ability to revise one’s position. The possibility of altering his position is unachievable for the strategist since for him to rethink or to question the core of his attitude means the “betrayal of his ideals”. The ironic self-revision or parody of one’s own artistic imagery is a very rare phenomenon on Lithuanian stage. The attempts of a self-critical revaluation of director’s language can be found in the performances of Nikolai Gogol’s The Nose by Nekrošius (1991) or the Presniakov brothers’ Playing the Victim, directed by Koršunovas (2005). These examples demonstrate that in Lithu-

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10 For a more detailed discussions of the polemics between two directorial interpretations of “Hamlet” see, for example, A. Liuga, Akistata su kitkuo // 7 Meno dienos, 2008-09-26, p. 7.
11 N. Milerius, Lietuvos filosofijos topografinis žemėlapis, p. 157–158.
anian theatre there is a ground for bold artistic corrections and tactical self-revisions that form the nucleus of postmodern critical attitudes in theatre.

As a movement towards the tactical directing one can interpret the recent performances “Lietuvos diena” by “Cezario grupė” and director Cezaris Graužinis (2007) and „Poliklinika“, created by four actors (Paulius Tamolė, Jonas Versecas, Agnė Ramanauskaitė, Tautvilas Gurevičius) and director Agnius Jankevičius (2008). Both performances started from the “zero point” in terms of traditional theatre making as the script of both was created during the rehearsals. The starting point was the willingness of the creators of the performances to address the topical issues of everyday life – from political realities and the image of Lithuania abroad in “Lietuvos diena” to the presentation of four schematic types of young Lithuanians that constitute contemporary social fabric in “Poliklinika”. The directors of both performances searched for the directorial vision together with the actors and had no preconceived notion of the narrative structure of their work. The articles in newspapers, the street slang, the stereotypical notions of constituents of “Lithuanian-ness”, the fragments of mass culture’s imagery, and the voices from the online communities and the creators’ attitudes towards these phenomena of the present-day reality constitute the core of these performances. The collective blue-print of the performance was meant to undergo transformations “on the go”, being enriched with the experiences of the creators which related to the main “tactics” of producing the performance via the investigation of quotidian reality. Although the actual performances encountered difficulties in terms of finding adequate acting techniques to the “authentic” language of the real, both examples can be seen as building blocks of the notion of tactical directing on the Lithuanian theatre stage.

Another example of the tactical attempt to engage in the critical analysis of the relations between art and society can be found in the performance by the Estonian theatre group NO99 How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare (2009), directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper13. The performance explores the fundamental disruption of communication between artist and society, between cultural elites and mass audiences as well as between artists themselves. The performance starts as homage to Joseph Beuys’ happening under the same title which later develops into the performative investigation of various issues that revolve around societal (communicative) aspects of art: from the discussions of the contribution that an artist can bring to society to the direct questioning of the cultural politics of the Estonian state. The actors onstage are engaged in artistic experimentation that does not always seem to be successful or meaningful even to them. The patterns of stage experiments refer to well known examples from the history of conceptual art – from Joseph Beuys to Christo or Oleg Kulik. This intertextual homage to the history of creative experimentation

13 For a more detailed description on this performance see http://www.NO99.ee (accessed 12 January 2010).
is being constantly interrupted by the appearance of the actress playing the Estonian Minister of Culture Laine Jänes, whose name Jänes translates from Estonian as “hare”. All the lines spoken by the minister originate from speeches and writings by Laine Jänes. The stiffness of her political speeches contrasts sharply with the desperate efforts of the actors to physically perform some exercises on the stage with the implication of both the authentic and symbolic “sweat”; this scene clearly demonstrates fundamental miscommunication between the two parties.

The relations between artist and his / her environment are displayed very boldly in the performance: they are illustrated not only through the figure of the minister but also through the monologues that represent the voices of the general public. Thus the question about the value of experimental artistic practices - “Why do I have to support the art that I don’t understand?” – is posed from the perspective of people belonging to different layers of society, from the “common-tax-paying-folk” to the artisans who participate in the production of “tales to stupefy” type of entertainment. The minister’s position in the performance is aligned with the general folk; moreover, she seems to be ignorant of the field she is responsible for and is neither able nor willing to understand it outside the frame of political or financial gain/loss. A particularly uncanny embodiment of this position is presented in the mise-en-scène where the minister participates in a “pissing in a dipper” competition, where she feels much more comfortable than in the company of artists. Due to political agendas, sports and popular entertainment seems to be the legitimate pillars of Estonian culture, whereas artistic contributions to the society are being constantly questioned. Indeed, how does one explain conceptual pictures to Jänes?

The scenic confrontations and straightforward portrayal of the politician onstage in How to Explain Pictures… at times seem uncanny and border with vulgarity. The mind that has for a long time been exposed to metaphorical rhetoric of theatrical sights is not easily attracted by this kind of social and political commentaries. However, this is exactly the bold and direct investigation of the conditions in which contemporary artist is forced to operate that showcases the break with the Soviet tradition of symbolic resistance. The Estonian performance demonstrates that there is a place for direct questioning of the political environment, which can be performed with brave and personal self-revision and self-reflexion, that does not have to be hermetic. I would like to think about it as a case of tactical politics – an open and multidimensional communication with the object of artistic analysis and fearless (self)questioning as a reaction to the demands of the unique situation of the present day.
Straipsnyje analizuojami politinio angažuotumo aspektai šiuolaikiniame teatre. Jeigu totalitarinėje visuomenėje kritinio ar politiškai angažuoto teatro funkcija buvo aiškiai apibrėžta – demonstruoti socialines ar politines alternatyvas, provokuoti sociopolitinę kaitą, steigti bendruomenę, tai šiuolaikinėje demokratiniuje sanklodoje teatras sunkiai mezga santykius su pakitusia realybė ar formuoja kritinę poziciją vartotojų visuomenės atžvilgiu. Straipsnyje apibrėžiama nauja taktinės režisūros samprata – tai viena iš strategijų, kuria remdamasis šiuolaikinis teatras gali sėkmingai veikti politiniame lauke. Ši samprata formuojama pasitelkus prancūzų filosofo ir semiotiko Michelio de Certeau knygoje „Kasdieninio gyvenimo praktikos“ suformuluota taktikos sąvoka. Taikant strategijos ir taktikos sampratas, apibrėžiančias du skirtingus žinojimo (mąstymo) tipus (juos galima tapatinti su modernia ir postmodernia pasaulėžiūra), straipsnyje bandoma apibrėžti šiuolaikiniame teatre vyraujančius režisūrinės vaizduotės tipus ir režisūros būdus, analizuojami taktinės režisūros pavyzdžiai šiuolaikiniame Lietuvos ir Estijos teatre.