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INTRA-ACTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE: THE CREATION OF  
PERFORMANCES AND THE AUDIENCE ADDRESS

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Thank you

to my supervisor, to my lecturers, to my colleagues, to my mom and to my friends for advising me, for discussing with me, for supporting me and for believing in me.

Without this intra-activity between all of you and me  
this thesis would have not been possible.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which intra-activity within contemporary theatre performances contributes to the creation (or coming into existence) of these performances and their audience address. The first two chapters of this thesis serve as a theoretical framework, which is created on the basis of the theory from an influential agential realist thinker Karen Barad and her account on intra-actions (and the notions of active matter, agency, intra-active causality, relata, spacetime mattering and others). Barad's ideas are complemented by the theory of theatre, which is suggested by such scholars as Hans-Thies Lehmann (and his accounts on dramatic and postdramatic theatre, parataxis and de-hierarchization of theatrical means); Maaike Bleeker (and her conclusions on active matter and landscape stage); Susan Leigh Foster, Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer (and their account on sensory audience address); and others. In addition to that, the theoretical part of the thesis is supplemented by examples of the performances, which correspond to the ideas suggested by the referred theorists.

The third part of this paper presents a comparative analysis of two case studies, namely the performances *Headroom* by Suzan Boogaerdt and Bianca van der Schoot (2018) and *Lokis* by Łukasz Twarkowski (2017). These performances are analyzed with regards to their correspondence with the theory of intra-activity and intra-activity in contemporary theatre, which is provided in the chapters one and two, as well as with regards to their differences and similarities to one another. Particular attention in the analysis of the case studies is drawn to their structure, the importance of active matter and the distribution of agency within them, as well as their sensory audience address. In this way it is explained how the performances *Headroom* and *Lokis* come into being through intra-activity and what audience address they create. The latter knowledge can be seen as one of the few attempts of seeing contemporary theatre performances through the lens of the theory of intra-activity as well as a reference point for further research.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Where are we going?”*

*“I don’t know, but I like it.”*

The latter phrase was one of the most memorable pieces of a dialog that I could remember after seeing the performance *Lokis* (Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, 2017). The performance felt very different from the other theatre pieces that I have been seeing before, because it was loud and intense, hectic and fragmental, yet it still somehow managed to make perfect sense for me, even though I could not express it in words. Thus the phrase, provided above, summed up my experience during the performance – I didn’t know exactly what it was, but I enjoyed it. Interestingly, when reading public comments about *Lokis*, I found out that the majority of the spectators either liked it very much or didn’t like it at all. After a while, I saw the performance *Headroom* (Theater Rotterdam, 2018). It was, again, a very different performance, compared to what I have been seeing before. *Headroom* was slow and silent, yet somehow immersive and hypnotizing. There was no spoken or written text in the performance, thus it was hard to follow and comprehend it, but, as well as in the case of *Lokis*, *Headroom* made sense. After seeing it, we discussed it with my classmates, and again, there was no in-between opinion about the performance – the viewers either loved it or hated it (or at least this was the case of the viewers that I had the opportunity to talk to). At this point, as an audience member, I started to see some similarities between the two performances. As a student of contemporary theatre, dance and dramaturgy, I started to wonder: *where are these performances actually going?* Or to put it in a less poetic phrasing, what is it that these performances do? Why are the viewers so affected and always have strong opinions after seeing these pieces? What is it that the performances invite their audiences to feel, experience and comprehend?

The first clue for finding the answers to the latter questions was an inspirational article, called “Thinking That Matters: Towards a Post-Anthropocentric Approach to Performance Design” by Maaïke Bleeker. In this paper the author sees the performance *End* by Kris Verdonck from the perspective of new materialism and she claims, to put it in a very simplified phrasing, that the performance is not created through the attempt of representing a singular coherent meaning, but

instead it is created through the relations or intra-actions of its composition, which is an embodiment of the process of thinking (Bleeker 2017, 125-135). This article was very interesting to me because it suggested a new perspective for looking at contemporary theatre performances – not through what they communicate, but through what is happening within them, how are they coming into existence. In addition to that, one of the key concepts that Bleeker uses in her paper to support her arguments is the concept of intra-activity, suggested by Karen Barad. Even though Barad is not writing about theatrical performances, as noted in the article, Bleeker believes that Barad’s account on intra-actions and agential realism can be helpful for analyzing “... the formation of all kinds of phenomena ...” (Bleeker 2017, 127), since it “...has important implications for our understanding of how matter itself comes to matter” (Bleeker 2017, 127), or, in other words, how something comes into existence. Following these ideas from Bleeker, I decided to take the concept of intra-activity as the main reference point of the theoretical framework in this Master thesis.

In order to attain a better understanding of Karen Barad’s work, I think it is important to briefly discuss the fields of her academic interests. As indicated by Adam Kleinman, who was interviewing Barad, “she holds a PhD in theoretical particle physics and has held a tenured appointment in a physics department. So it would be fair to say that Barad thinks about, and with, the atom” (Kleinman, 34). Moreover, through her competence of seeing the world through the lens of quantum physics, Barad manages to propose theories of the world’s becoming (or in other words, she explains how different phenomena function, what they consist of and how they become what they are), which respond not only to the questions of physics, but also refer to the processes that are studied by social sciences and humanities. Thus, not surprisingly, Barad’s contribution to academic discussions doesn’t end with physics. As noted by Kleinmann, “... she is currently a professor of feminist studies, philosophy, and the history of consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz. There, she is engaged in various interdisciplinary endeavors ...” (Kleinman, 34). Barad is particularly known for her theory on agential realism, which is extensively discussed in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, as well as in her influential article “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”. In this paper I will use both pieces of the academic literature, mentioned above, in order to summarize the main

concepts proposed by Barad. In this way I hope to explain her account on agential realism, and in particular, her account on the theory of intra-activity.

It is important to note here that so far there are not that many authors who have been referring to the theory of intra-activity while analyzing contemporary art or contemporary theatre in particular. However, the example of Bleeker's article demonstrates that not only some theatre scholars do use the theory suggested by Barad to support their arguments, but also, that doing so provides them with possibilities of making nuanced and useful observations. Yet, I have not managed to find any academic papers that are explicitly discussing the audience address, which is created through the intra-activity within theatre performances. However, I believe it is a very important and interesting topic to elaborate on. I can support the latter belief with the ideas from Julia Kristeva, who has been also referred to in Bleeker's article, and who is not writing about theatre per se, but talks about the creation of an aesthetic experience of art pieces in general. According to Estelle Barret, who refers to Kristeva's ideas in her article "Materiality, Affect, and the Aesthetic Image", Kristeva implies that artworks are the results of the relations (intra-actions) between the material processes inside and around the artwork and the biological, physiological and emotional processes of the artists, due to which the artworks gain shape and symbolism, which were not accessible before these relations (intra-actions) have occurred. Kristeva also implies that these relations (intra-actions) within an artwork also affect the process of conceiving it (Barret, 63-68), which then can also affect the artworks (and especially theatre performances that only happen with an audience/in front of an audience), as only through somebody conceiving it, an artwork gains its form and meaning. Therefore it can be said that the audience address is a very important part of the intra-activity within artworks, and not only for the viewers, but also for the art pieces themselves. Following the latter idea I can say that this Master thesis will be important not only because it will contribute to the discussion of intra-activity in the context of contemporary theatre, which is not a widely studied topic yet, but also it will discuss the audience address, created through the intra-activity in contemporary theatre performances, which has not been an explicitly addressed subject in the academic literature at all.

This thesis aims to answer the question of how do intra-actions within performances contribute to their creation and therefore how is the audience addressed. In order to answer this question, the

following questions will be addressed: How the notion of intra-action, suggested by Karen Barad, is defined by different authors and how can this definition be applied to the field of theatre? How is intra-activity contributing to the creation of the case study performances? What audience address is created through the intra-activity in the case study performances? The methodology of this Master thesis consists of three parts and therefore this paper will consist of three chapters. In the first one I will present a literature research that will be explaining the main concepts of intra-activity suggested by Barad. This will be a purely theoretical chapter and consist of Barad's ideas as well as interpretations of them by other scholars. In the second chapter I will discuss theories from the field of theatre and explain how they can be related to Barad's theory of intra-activity. In that way I will connect the two theories and develop a framework, which will be later used for the analysis of the case studies. In the third part of this paper I will present a comparative analysis of my case studies, which are the performances mentioned above. Through this analysis I will be able to see how the theory of intra-activity resonates with what's actually happening within the performances as well as by comparing them, based on their similarities or their differences, I will be able to conclude the observations on the forms of audience address created through intra-activity in contemporary theatre performances. All chapters will be divided into subchapters in order to maintain clarity when explaining ideas from different theories. More detailed explanations on the content of the chapters will be separately provided at the beginning of each chapter.



## 1. KAREN BARAD'S ACCOUNT ON AGENTIAL REALISM AND INTRA-ACTIONS

In this chapter I will introduce the basic ideas on the notion of intra-actions, described by Karen Barad in her academic papers and also described by other scholars from different fields of study, including Adam Kleinman, Nick J Fox and Pam Alldred, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin. In order to convey the framework of Barad's ideas I will first introduce the definition of intra-action and explain the concept of agential realism. I will do that by comparing agential realist account to representationalist worldview due to the fact that Barad herself uses this comparison for the sake of clarity of her ideas. In addition to that, by comparing agential realism to representationalism I will create the grounds for comparing different forms of (contemporary) theatre in further chapters of this paper. Moreover, in this chapter I will discuss the notions of agential causality, active matter, agency, material, spatial and time structures in order to provide more detailed explanations on Barad's theory. These explanations will demonstrate how Barad's view suggests new/different (in comparison to representationalist worldview) understandings of some widely used notions (like agency, matter, etc.) and that thus will enable me to suggest a new/different understanding of these notions in the context of contemporary theatre.

### 1.1. The Ways in Which Phenomena Are Defined and Redefined through Intra-actions

*Intra-action* is a term suggested by a new materialist theorist Karen Barad and refers to the idea of separate entities (yet not independent) having a causal relation to one another and being equally important for a certain phenomenon. In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* the author builds the ground for the concept of intra-action on the theoretical framework of *agential realism* which is based on the theories of quantum physics and social sciences, and relies on the ideas from such authors as quantum physicist Niels Bohr, philosophers Judith Butler, Paul-Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour and others. Barad's account on agential realism questions seemingly self-evident processes of the world and blurs the boundaries of socially (and scientifically) accepted dichotomies between nature and culture, animate and inanimate, human and matter, global and local, presence and absence and etc. As the theorist puts it in the interview "Intra-actions" by Adam Kleinman, "agential realism does not start with a set of given or fixed differences, but rather makes inquiries into how differences

are made and remade, stabilized and destabilized, as well as their materializing effects and constitutive exclusions” (Barad in Kleinman 77). In other words, agential realism opposes the worldview in which reality is given or constituted from clearly determined entities (or dichotomies mentioned above), and refers to the ongoing relation between matter, discourse and meaning. In that sense, agential realism challenges representationalist view of the world in which social and scientific developments are made upon the fixed laws of nature and serve as the correspondent, representation, reflection or interpretation of the natural world of preexisting things.<sup>1</sup> Instead, agential realism advocates the view of world’s performativity in which matter, discourse and meaning are intertwined (or intra-acting) and therefore the world’s becoming is not a matter of creating a perfect representation of nature, but rather the nature of the world is created through the processes of different forces (natural, artificial, functional, dysfunctional, conscious, unconscious and etc.) co-existing, working and developing together.

According to Barad, the world does not consist of things that exist independently on their own (*things-in-themselves*), nor do they represent pre-existing phenomena (*things-behind-phenomena*), but rather the world is made up of phenomena intra-acting with each other and due to these intra-actions the phenomena are causing the development and materialization of themselves and one another (*things-in-phenomena*).<sup>2</sup> In other words, only through causal intra-actions phenomena become what they are and both define and redefine their boundaries. As Barad concludes in her article “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”: “It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful” (Barad 2003, 815). An example to illustrate Barad’s words can be her description of measuring something with an apparatus. The author believes that the measurements occur not because of the fact that an object under study has specific pre-existing qualities, but due to the parameters of the

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<sup>1</sup> In her article “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”, Barad explains how, in her own words, “language has been granted too much power” (Barad 2003, 801). When comparing the concept of language to the concept of discourse, the author states that performative discursive practices challenge representationalist view in which language is believed to be able to mirror the world of preexisting things. Barad believes that performative understanding of discursive practices moves away from the questions of mirroring and correspondence to the questions of materiality and agency. I summarized and applied the latter idea, as well as other ideas from Barad’s papers, to make the conclusions for this paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> All three terms in brackets were used by Karen Barad in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Barad 2006, 140).

apparatus and the characteristics of the observer. Thus the object under study is attributed with the qualities that the apparatus shows and that the observer can recognize. In other words, the object gains the qualities due to intra-actions between the apparatus, the observer and the object itself.<sup>3</sup> This thus supports the non-representationalist view because it states that the world is not merely an interaction between the observer and the observed, but rather it implies that matter of the world and the embodied practices (such as observing, interpreting, etc.) define each other through intra-activity and thus constitute to the world's becoming. Furthermore, while following Barad's ideas, it could be said that a phenomenon per se, the meaning, the value and the features of it can only be understood through, what Barad calls, the *dynamics of intra-activity* (2006, 208). As Nick J Fox and Pam Alldred indicate in their article "New Materialism", "intra-actions within a phenomenon constitute an 'agential reality' that necessarily includes both object and observer, as well as both sides of nature/culture and word/world dualisms" (Fox & Alldred 7). The latter insight beautifully sums up the necessity of acknowledgement of the relation between matter and certain parts of a phenomenon (object and observer), when addressing causal intra-actions in the discourse of agential realism.

It is important to note that even though Barad challenges representationalist understanding of the world that is constructed of independent entities, she does not neglect the idea of individuality – the theorist states that "... "individuals" do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. That is, intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of "individuals," rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. "Individuals" do not not exist, but are not individually determinate" (Barad in Kleinman 77). That means that parts of phenomena become individual through the process of causational intra-activity but can never be understood as independently existing objects or subjects. In her papers, Barad talks about *agential separability* instead of pre-given separability and claims that entities within phenomena may develop possibilities of determinism due to agential separability of intra-actions. More specifically, the theorist uses the term *agential cut* to describe the process of defining the boundaries of different

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<sup>3</sup> Barad claims that "the physical apparatus marks the conceptual subject-object distinction: the physical and conceptual apparatuses form a nondualistic whole. That is, descriptive concepts obtain their meaning by reference to a particular physical apparatus, which in turn marks the placement of a constructed cut between the object and the agencies of observation" (Barad 2006, 196). More elaborated explanation on the relations between the observed object, the apparatus and the observer can be found in Barad's book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*.

entities within a phenomenon. In the interview with Adam Kleinman she suggests that "... intra-actions enact "agential separability"— the condition of exteriority-within-phenomena. So it is not that there are no separations or differentiations, but that they only exist within relations" (Barad in Kleinman 77). Hence, agential cuts determine the differences between individual entities within a phenomena and establish the course of their further intra-activity. (For example, in the process of measuring something with an apparatus, agential cut could be the process of conceiving – in the mind of the observer – since after this process an object under study gains a certain quality). Moreover, Barad argues that *relata* – something that a phenomenon is related to – follows the relations or intra-actions between phenomena and not the other way around. Thus, phenomena are related to something (like word, symbol or meaning) due to their intra-actions rather than their intra-actions are influenced by a pre-existing *relata*. In contrast to the notion of interaction, which refers to the relation between independent entities with preexisting *relata*, the concept of intra-action, according to Barad, defines a process during which forms and meanings can come into being because they are a part of that process.

Another important point, worth drawing attention to, is Barad's use of the term causality in the context of intra-activity is not to be understood as an action-response/cause-effect relationship of different entities between and within phenomena. That means that an action of one entity between/within phenomena does not lead to a response from another entity between/within phenomena; their relationship does not provoke a linear sequence of logically initiated events. Instead, Barad states that she is reconstructing the traditional understanding of causality by implying that intra-active causality occurs when one or more entities of phenomena create possibilities for other entities of phenomena to get affected in one way or another. These entities are not independent or determined because they only gain their qualities when being a part of phenomena; and also they have equal opportunities of getting or not getting affected. Yet the constant emergence of new possibilities that contribute to the formation of responsibility of reconfiguring the world is what Barad defines as causality in the discourse of intra-activity. In that sense, causal intra-actions employ a wide range of possibilities at any point of the intra-activity, as well as they may propose actual effects of entities between/within phenomena to one another. For example, language can be taken as an example of the traditional notion of causality because the words that come first in sentences determine what words will be used after as a form of

response to the previous words (For example, if a noun ‘I’ is used, then the only conjugation of the verb ‘be’ which can follow in the present sense is ‘am’). In that sense, language is formed on the basis of pre-defined grammatical structure. On the contrary, discourse could be seen as an example of intra-active causality because in a discourse anything that makes sense or has a connection to the topic can be said (For example, if the discourse of theatre is discussed, the topics of art, technology, history, society, etc. can be brought up). Discourses have no restrictions on what can be said and in what order. That means that in a discourse there is no pre-defined structure and the topics may *emerge from a vast field of possibilities* (Barad 2003, 819) and thus the causality occurs because of possibilities rather than because of actions taken in the past.

### 1.2.Active Matter and Its Agency within Intra-actions

The notion of intra-action is common in the context of a philosophical theory called new materialism – “a term ascribed to a range of contemporary perspectives in the arts, humanities and social sciences that have in common a theoretical and practical ‘turn to matter’” (Fox & Alldred 1). Barad is widely known for her contribution to the development of the theory of new materialism and, as mentioned before, for introducing the term intra-action. As well as other new materialist thinkers, Barad sheds light upon the notion of matter and refers to it as to an active co-participant of intra-actions. The author claims that: “on an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity” (Barad 2003, 822). In this sense, matter is not an object or a pre-given thing from the nature, neither is it a passive entity of an intra-action, nor a groundwork for the development of theories and ideas. Matter, as already pointed out while talking about individual entities of intra-actions, is not an independent unit of the world, but rather it defines its boundaries due to the dynamics of intra-activity. Matter is not dumb or powerless and can be both animate and inanimate; it does not require external signification (such as recognition from apparatuses or human beings) because, as indicated by Barad in the interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers.” (Barad in Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2013, 59). The latter idea does not mean that matter is autonomous to exist on its own but it rather suggests that matter is an equally important participant of phenomena and it determines its intra-active

becoming, rather than being just a side object/subject or environmental detail of phenomena. In other words, matter comes to matter through intra-actions by developing itself within a certain field of possibilities and by having a relation with other matter. Phenomenon, according to Barad, is the smallest entity of the process of matter coming to matter, or, in other words, the smallest entity of intra-activity.

Intra-activity within phenomena, and especially the acknowledgement of its matter, brings in new insights on the notion of agency. In representationalist view, agency is commonly understood as something attributed to someone (most often to animate human beings) (Barad 2003, 826). For example, if a piece of pre-given nature (matter) is understood to be fixed and stable, then a human being, who investigates it or represents it, has the power to make decisions on how the investigation/representation is to be done and therefore has agency. However, Barad's account on agency opposes the latter view. In her words: "agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). Agency is a matter of making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity (including enfoldings and other topological reconfigurings)." (Barad 2006, 214). Thus, according to Barad, agency is the flow of different and ongoing stimulus or causes that appear in the process of intra-activity, which later builds the ground for new intra-actions. In that sense, agency does not belong to humans or objects but appears in their relation. Hence, in agential realism's account, agency, as well as causality, emerges within a field of possibilities in phenomena, rather than it is definite or fixed ascription of something. In Barad's words: "... agency is about response-ability, about the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to power imbalances. Agency is about possibilities for worldly re-configurings." (Barad in Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2013, 55). It is important to note that since in agential realism's account matter is no longer seen as mute and powerless, that means that matter may as well have agential features. Therefore, agential realism does not support the human centered representationalist view of the world but instead shifts to the understanding of the world which is constituted of intra-acting entities, as well as advocates post-anthropocentric view where both human and non-human/animate and inanimate entities are of an equal importance.

Intra-activity in which all entities are equally important, sheds light upon the non-hierarchical structure of intra-actions. As mentioned before, in Barad's agential realist account, co-participants of intra-actions do not have pre-existing features, boundaries or relations. Furthermore than that, entities of intra-actions are not restricted by, in Barad's view, seemingly self-evident concepts of space and time. Barad uses the term *spacetime mattering* to describe a process during which matter comes to matter in the contexts of space and time due to intra-actions. In other words, something becomes meaningful or gains a shape within phenomena only through intra-actions which locally affect matter, space and time involved. Barad argues that intra-actions can be distributed among multiple spaces and times, since they are not universally given. Moreover, the theorist claims that the sequential understanding of past, present and future is just a matter of traditional convention of causality. As an opposition to that, the theorist suggests that past, present and future are intertwined and only gain their determinism through intra-actions. In her own words: "The "past" was never simply there to begin with, and the "future" is not what will unfold, but "past" and "future" are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world's ongoing intra-activity." (Barad in Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2013, 66). Barad claims that the past, as well as the future, might be changed (especially with the help of memory and interpretations because through them the past is recreated), but the traces of their effects remain. For example, paintings do not need to develop in time to exist. However, they consist of the past and the present – if the moment of creating the painting did not happen, there would be no painting in the present. The past and the future of paintings change every time an action in the present is made – for example, if somebody looks at a painting, many possibilities for interpreting it and evaluating techniques of the painter open up and in that way the past and the future may be reconfigured. Hence, intra-actions do not possess a determined space and time, but create possibilities for non-hierarchical, fragmental, temporal, repetitive, and ongoing material, spatial and time structures to emerge.

## 2. INTRA-ACTIONS AS A LENS FOR LOOKING AT CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

In this chapter I will suggest a few different ways in which contemporary theatre can be analyzed with the help of the theory of intra-activity. This will be done by segmenting Barad's theory of intra-actions into key concepts and introducing several approaches to related topics from different theatre scholars. It is important to note here that only a few authors, who are writing about

contemporary theatre, have been relying on Barad's ideas in their papers so far, thus the connections between the theories will be partly made on their expertise and partly on my own research. First of all, I will concentrate on the concepts of matter and agency and compare the definition of them given by Barad and such theatre scholars as Hans-Thies Lehmann, Peter Wright, Maaïke Bleeker and Pedro Manuel. That will help me to answer the question of what the notions of (intra-active) agency and active matter mean in the context of contemporary theatre and how are they different from the same notions in dramatic theatre (this is helpful in order to be more clear and specific). Secondly, I will discuss the resemblance of the structure of intra-activity and the structure of contemporary theatre performances by relying to the ideas from Barad, Lehmann and Bleeker. That will help me to explain how contemporary theatre pieces come into being through intra-activity. Lastly, I will talk about the audience address, created through intra-activity within contemporary theatre performances, which is a very rarely addressed topic in any kind of academic literature. I will support my insights by the ideas from such scholars as Bleeker, Carl Lavery, Susan Leigh Foster, Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer. All theory in this chapter will be supported and explained by the examples of the performances that I have attended myself. In this way I will create a set of theories/tools which will provide the theoretical framework for analyzing two case study performances in the third chapter of this paper.

### 2.1. Matter and Agency in Contemporary Theatre

Since Barad claims that her understanding challenges representationalist world view, a parallel to her thinking can be drawn to the theory of theatre by referring to the ideas from Hans-Thies Lehmann in his influential book *Postdramatic Theatre*, where he says that postdramatic theatre often refuses representation as well. It is important to note that Lehmann never relies on the theory of new materialism or intra-actions and does not use such terms as matter, agential realism and etc. However, he acknowledges that in dramatic theatre all inanimate objects on stage and different means of expression, like music and dance (which in agential realist account could be called matter), was commonly understood (and sometimes still is) as a backdrop of text or linear narrative. As Lehmann implies: "Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text. In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama. Even where music and dance were added or where they predominated, the 'text',



in the sense of at least the imagination of a comprehensible narrative and/or mental totality, was determining.” (Lehmann 2006, 21). In that sense, dramatic theatre positions most of its inanimate matter (staging, music, dance, etc.) as passive and mute, only serving a pre-given function of representing something other than itself and creating an environment for a narrative to develop. Thus, it can be said that dramatic theatre follows what Barad calls representationalist worldview because it is based on pre-existing structures that are oriented towards the representation of text. However, in his article “From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy” Lehmann explains the shift from logocentric theatre to visual theatre/new theatre (which he later calls postdramatic theatre) and claims that in this theatre “the text is no longer the center. Where it appears as such, we often find attempts to alienate it, to twist it and distort it...” (Lehmann 1997, 57). Later the author adds that “contemporary theatre, leaving behind the absolute dominance of the text, does not by any means abandon poetry, thoughtfulness or glamour of speech, but brings back into focus the de-semanticizing potential of body and visually as such” (Lehmann 1997, 60). That is, matter is no longer a mere backdrop of a narrative; and even if a narrative is being created throughout a performance, matter can be manifesting the potentials of its presence and in this way, to use Barad’s terms, be a very important co-participant of intra-activity within a performance. Therefore it can be said that postdramatic theatre (in contrast to dramatic theatre) corresponds to Barad’s agential realist account, because it does not concentrate on creating representation and supporting pre-given meanings, but draws the attention to the potentiality and intra-activity of other matter on stage.

This attention to the potentiality created by the intra-activity of different matter on stage corresponds with Barad’s ideas on intra-active agency, where the agency occurs through a field of opportunities and is not a possession that someone/something has. However, in the context of theatre (especially in dramatic theatre), as well as in representationalist view of the world, as claimed by Barad, agency is primarily attributed to human characteristics and described as a capacity of having intentions, making decisions and stimulating changes. As Peter Wright states in his article “Agency, Intersubjectivity and Drama Education”, “theories of agency have long been implicit in drama education and applied theatre where the focus is on the performative, action and engagement. What the notion of agency foregrounds is the individual, choice, freedom and intentionality; it speaks to being purposeful and having and taking control in one’s life” (Wright

111). Later the author adds: “agency can be understood to be an attribute of all living things and involves the capacity to effect change” (Wright 112). That means that animate co-participants of performances, that may have intentions for making changes and possessing a power over the course of events or the creation of meaning, are most likely to be conceived as having agency. However, some authors draw the attention to the importance of active inanimate matter and non-human agency in different contemporary theatre performances.<sup>4</sup> For example, when analyzing the performance *End* by Kris Verdonck in the article “Thinking That Matters: Towards a Post-Anthropocentric Approach to Performance Design” Maaïke Bleeker implies that agency in this piece is distributed between human and non-human agents, because even though humans play an important role in the performance, their role is co-dependent to the role of non-human agents since human and non-human act in response to one another (Bleeker 2017, 128). In other words, the performance emerges from the individual responses and new possibilities created through them and not from the pre-given power structures. The latter idea contradicts the dramatic and representationalist view on agency but corresponds with Barad’s ideas on agency within intra-activity. Another example to illustrate this understanding of agency could be the performance *Cuckoo* by Jaha Koo (2017). In this piece three rice cookers are displayed on stage, two of them can talk and sing. While Jaha Koo is sharing his sentimental story of moving to Europe, the cookers are interrupting or complementing him and in this way they become active characters of the piece. Thus, even though the rice cookers might have been programmed by humans, the human on stage has to act in response to them. Therefore, this example shows how, in correspondence to the theory of intra-activity, that agency can be distributed between all matter (human and non-human), because different components of the piece have equal possibilities to participate in the creation of a performance.

Pedro Manuel contributes to the discussion on non-human agency when he talks about performances where characters are either non-existing or not of the primary importance in a theatre piece. In his PhD dissertation *Theatre Without Actors - Rehearsing New Modes of Co-presence* Manuel builds part of his theory on Barad’s account of intra-activity and claims that “performances

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<sup>4</sup> Not many authors have written on the subject of non-human agency in contemporary theatre. Yet, the authors that have been writing papers on this and related topics include Maaïke Bleeker (already mentioned in the text), Carl Lavery, Peter Eckersall & Helena Grehan & Edward Scheer, Rebecca Schneider, and others.

without performers produce modes of co-presence in which humans and non-humans are entangled, and which can be seen as the products of networked relations between agents within an ecosystem of subjects, means and matters” (Manuel 182). Thus, as well as suggested by Bleeker in the analysis of *End*, Manuel also acknowledges that agency is distributed between different matter in performances without characters as human and non-human entities are entangled. Hence, following the ideas from Manuel, it can be said that in such performances human agency is not at (a primal) play because animate and inanimate agencies are of an equal importance, they co-exist together and intra-act with each other, rather than dominate over one another. Moreover, the modes of co-presence that the author refers to are only created through the intra-activity (or networked relations to use Manuel’s words) of different matter and not through the interactivity of entities that possess pre-given agential capacities, which correlates with Barad’s idea that *agency is a matter of intra-activity*. It is important to note here, however, that seeing performances through the lens of intra-activity, does not mean that characters or human agencies are neglected. On the contrary, characters and human agency can be seen as a part of intra-actions, which incorporate all matter that is present during a performance. An example to illustrate the latter idea could be the performance *Black Sun* by Łukasz Twarkowski (2017). In this piece the viewers are led to a dark space by the members of the theatre staff and then asked to lay down on the ground. When all audience members are lying on the ground, the ceiling and some metal constructions below it get little light and at this point the viewers can start seeing abstract shapes. A robotic female voice starts talking, the music starts playing and the metal constructions start moving up and down. The agencies in this performance are very intertwined. The audience is led by the theatre staff and later are surrounded by each other, thus human agency (including the agency of the viewers) is at play. However, they cannot see anyone and are in constant encounter with inanimate entities - moving structures, robotic voice, music, darkness. Thus both, human and non-human, agencies are very important in this piece, they co-exist together and constantly redistribute over the piece and in this way they create the performance itself.

## 2.2. Intra-active Structure in Contemporary Theatre

When performances are not lead by characters or their interactions in the context of a storyline, the structure of these performances is more likely to be a sequence of events that is created as a

composition of agencies of different matter (human and non-human), rather than a composition which serves a function of creating a narrative or a storyline. In other words, performances without characters may not follow a traditional dramatic theatre structure, which in Lehmann's words is hierarchical and causes "...the subjection of all theatrical means to the text..." (Lehmann 2006, 56) as well as guarantees that all theatrical means are coherent to one another. And even if there are (intuitive) characters in a contemporary theatre piece, the structure of it may still be different from the one common for dramatic theatre because due to the intra-activity of different means of expression within a performance a greater amount of attention can be brought to such entities of a performance as light, sound, undefined characters/bodies, objects and etc. As Lehmann implies, when there is no dramatic action, all entities of a performance become more autonomous on their own and create a discontinuous theatre space in which all theatre means are synthesized or parallel. In this way a *de-hierarchization* of theatrical means occurs (Lehmann 2006, 79). Thus performances do not happen as a result of pre-given structure that unfolds in a theatrical time and space but occurs only through the intra-activity between all entities that are present during a performance (including time and space). That correlates with Barad's ideas on non-hierarchical structure of intra-activity in which different entities are not pre-given or seeking cohesion, but are intra-acting with each other and through that they are gaining their individuality and creating a field of opportunities for new intra-actions.

The latter ideas from Lehmann and Barad could be also connected to the concept of *parataxis/non-hierarchy* in postdramatic theatre, suggested by Lehmann. The word parataxis refers to the placing of clauses side by side, in a way in which they are not subordinated by one another (English Oxford Living Dictionary). In other words, parataxis in postdramatic theatre is an opposition to hierarchy in dramatic theatre. As Lehmann implies: "The de-hierarchization of theatrical means is a universal principle of postdramatic theatre. This non-hierarchical structure blatantly contradicts tradition, which has preferred a hypotactical way of connection that governs the super and subordination of elements, in order to avoid confusion and to produce harmony and comprehensibility. In the parataxis of postdramatic theatre the elements are not linked in unambiguous ways" (Lehmann 2006, 86). That means that even when different entities of postdramatic theatre have a certain sequence and order in time, they are usually composed together in such a way in which they can function one next to another (and not one because of another) and have the same (or almost the

same/shifting) importance for a performance. Hence, there is a greater potential for intra-actions to occur between music, light, objects and people and thus to influence each-other and the course of the performance in direct and indirect ways. This view resonates with ideas from Barad, because it acknowledges the causal relation between different theatrical means of expression (and not pre-defined interactions between them) as well as recognizes matter as an important co-participant of the theatrical intra-actions.

A similar account to Lehmann's approach on parataxis/non-hierarchy is suggested by Maaïke Bleeker in her book *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking*. Bleeker refers to ideas from Elinor Fuchs and describes a post-dramatic stage as a landscape stage, which establishes "... the collapse of boundaries between human and world, inside and outside, foreground and background ..." (Fuchs in Bleeker 2008, 77). That means that different entities of a performance do not have strictly determined boundaries and that thus correlates with the theory of intra-activity, which challenges the worldview that is based on the existence of different dichotomies. Lehmann himself also talks about theatre as a landscape in his article "From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy" and suggests very similar conclusion. As he explains: "the new ways of text can produce a textual landscape that is closely connected to visual dramaturgy, the intrusion of the real, and the reduction of the fictional cosmos" (Lehmann 1997, 59). Thus theatrical (textual) landscape provides opportunities for the text to intra-act with visuality, for the real (as Lehmann calls it) to intra-act with the fictional and etc. In this way, not only the boundaries between pre-set entities are being subverted, but also the creation of a perfect theatrical representation is being rejected. Moreover, in her article Bleeker claims that the landscape stage refers to what is happening in the here and now, instead of representing something other than itself. The author adds: "this 'here and now-ness' is further stressed by strategies of deconstruction that aim at breaking open the coherent world represented on stage in order to show what is really there: actors, objects and a theatrical machinery" (Bleeker 2008, 65). A good example to illustrate this idea could be the performance *Fragments of Sky* by Iris van Peppen. In the performance there are many objects on stage, like small balls, bigger gym balls, pillows, cotton pieces, fabric pieces, musical instruments and 9 human figures. As the human bodies move across the stage, other objects start moving too. For example, if a person moves, then maybe a small ball is touched and thus starts moving too, while a pillow or a cotton piece remains to be not moving, because no one or nothing

was moving it. At times moving objects influence the movements of the performers. *Fragments of Sky* does not create a narrative of a fictive world on stage based on pre-existing relations, but manifests the relations between moving bodies, objects, sounds and light that are *really* happening in the here and now, which correlates with Lehmann's and Bleeker's ideas on landscape stage. Hence, the structure of this performance is not hierarchical, but rather intra-active, since the piece is coming into existence through the constant creation of opportunities for new relations between different matter to develop.

### 2.3. Intra-actions and Audience address in Contemporary Theatre

The non-hierarchical structure within performances, which resonates with the non-hierarchical nature of intra-actions, invites the audience to develop a new kind of sensitivity for different traits and features of contemporary theatre pieces. Instead of addressing the question of what was intended to communicate through a performance, a non-hierarchical structure concentrates on what is happening within a performance, what possibilities are created and how the relations or intra-actions are made. In other words, the spectator is not expected to comprehend a story or a pre-given message but is rather encouraged to actively follow the developments of the performance and gain a sensory experience. This idea can be complemented by Lehmann's insights on audience address of postdramatic performances that have a non-hierarchical structure. The author claims that "... the spectator of postdramatic theatre is not prompted to process the perceived instantaneously but to postpone the production of meaning (semiosis) and to store the sensory impressions with 'evenly hovering attention' " (Lehmann 2006, 87). That means that the audience is provided with a lot of different information and stimuluses, and it is for the spectators to decide what they want to do with this information and these stimuluses. In other words, a non-hierarchical structure of performances empowers the viewers with the responsibility of making decisions on how much do they want to be involved (and *if* they want to be involved at all) in the production of meaning (semiosis) and sensory cognition. As Bleeker concludes when talking about spectatorship in postmodern theatre, "... new strategies of staging leave space for subjective aspects of vision. Instead of directing attention in such a way as to support the suggestion that we are looking at a world existing independent of us, seers, strategies of staging now stress the relationship between performance and audience and invite more active involvement" (Bleeker 2008, 65-66). Thus the

viewers are not mere witnesses of a piece, but free, subjective and active co-creators, because only through their direct or indirect active personal engagement (or agential cuts to refer to Barad's terms), a performance may become what it is – meaningful or meaningless, emotionally awakening or stagnating and etc. This view correlates with Barad's observations on intra-activity because it draws attention to the agency of the audience members (or the observer in Barad's examples).

The acknowledgment of active animate and inanimate matter with agential capabilities and its shared responsibility over the development of the course of a performance, created through intra-actions, invites the audience to experience, what Bleeker calls, the 'here and now-ness' of the events within performances (Bleeker 2008, 65). Since active matter is not representing anything other than itself and not referring to pre-existing relations, the viewers are confronted with its agency unfolding in the here and now, rather than referring to imaginary events from the past/future. In that sense, the spectators are invited to notice and draw a specific attention to matter, instead of overlooking it in order to make coherent conclusions about a performance. Thus the audience is not able to build their experience on precognitions or relations, but is encouraged to find new meanings and gain subjective experiences that are created through concrete intra-actions within a performance. In addition to that, through acknowledging the presence of all matter and its intra-actions within a performance, the viewers are also invited to notice their own presence, since the world of the performance is not distant and different, but happens right before the audience. A similar idea is expressed by Carl Lavery in his article "Introduction: performance and ecology – what can theatre do?" where he claims that theatre pieces which, in the scholar's words, challenge human intentionality, may bring the awareness to the understanding that people are always implicated in systems that are not always controllable or predictable, even if they are created or supervised by human beings (Lavery 3-4). This encourages the audience to sensibly experience the things that are happening here and now as well as it invites the viewers to feel that a theatre piece is not an autonomous work that the spectators watch from a distance. Instead, the audience is invited to comprehend a performance as an immersive practice in the 'here and now-ness', which directly and indirectly involves everyone and everything in a certain *spacetime-mattering*.

This immersion of an audience to a contemporary theatre piece corresponds to Barad's theory of intra-activity, because it does not acknowledge the existence of autonomous entities that are not

participating in the intra-activity of the performance. In other words, not even the audience members are considered to be independently existing on their own (*things-in-themselves* to use Barad's terms), since they are directly influenced by the intra-actions of the performance. This direct influence also manifest itself through audience's sensory address. When talking specifically about dance, Susan Leigh Foster explains that by seeing human bodies on stage, the audience members empathize with the feelings and states of being of these bodies. The author refers to John Martin's assumptions on kinesthesia and says: "Martin argues that the viewer, on witnessing the dancing body, is inspired to feel equivalent kinesthetic sensations. This process, which he calls 'inner mimicry,' is grounded in a fundamental physical reactivity to all events: we pucker when we witness someone tasting a lemon, and when they yawn or cry we feel similar impulses" (Foster, 48). In other words, Foster claims that the process of watching performances and human bodies in them can as well affect the bodies of the viewers. It is important to add here that not only the existence of human bodies on stage can provoke responses in the spectators' bodies, as this effect can also be achieved by the intra-activity of such active matter as light, sound, vibrations and etc. An example to illustrate the latter idea can be the conclusion made by Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer in their book *New Media Dramaturgy: Performance, Media and New-Materialism*. The authors analyze the effects of intensive lights, sound and other matter that was used in the performance *Box* by Kris Verdonck and claim that the piece "is an aggressive work in that participants can neither refuse nor moderate these experiences of sound and light, which seem to bypass eyes and ears, instead vibrating inside the body, shaking limbs and resonating in the viscera" (Eckersall & Grehan & Scheer, 67). In that sense, in this piece not only the perception, but also the bodily cognition of the viewers is being triggered. A very similar audience address can be noted the performance *Something (Out Of Nothing)*, also by Kris Verdonck. The spectators are given earplugs before the performance. The piece is very slow and rather silent, but it ends with a portion of very intense and loud sounds. Thus suddenly the viewers are being immersed in the performance itself – the intensity and the volume of the sound does not allow the spectators to ignore or escape the sound in any way and thus the sound *stays inside the bodies* of the audience members. Also, if they use the earplugs, their physical body is directly affected. Hence in a sense, the audience members become redefined/changed by the performance's intra-activity and lose the ability to exist as autonomous entities (or as someone who did not see the performance).



### 3. INTRA-ACTIONS WITHIN THE PERFORMANCES *HEADROOM* AND *LOKIS*

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Barad claims that a phenomenon is the smallest entity of intra-activity. Following this idea it could be said that in order to analyze the concept of intra-actions in a certain context (which has not been addressed by Barad herself), one ought to analyze several different phenomena and discuss their resemblances and differences in order to conclude what intra-activity means in that particular context. That is why in this chapter I will be analyzing two different performances (that have been briefly mentioned in the introduction of this paper), which will be held as case studies or phenomena under study in this paper. I have seen both of these performances myself, as well as I have discussed them with my study colleagues and also I have read several reviews on them from different authors. Thus the analysis of the case studies/phenomena will be based on the theory of intra-activity by Barad as well as its connections to the theory of theatre that are discussed in the chapters one and two. In addition to that, the analysis will consist of some ideas expressed in the reviews of the performances, as well as my personal insights and the experience of being an audience member in these performances.

My first case study/phenomenon is the performance *Headroom* by Suzan Boogaerdt and Bianca van der Schoot (2018). The description of the performance claims that “there is no such thing as reality” (Theater Rotterdam). Therefore what is really clear about *Headroom* soon after it starts is that it does not aim to represent a coherent picture of reality. On the contrary, as it is said in one of the performance’s descriptions, “*Headroom* is a visual performance that examines our need for one coherent story” (OperaDagen Rotterdam).<sup>5</sup> And indeed the piece consists of a lot of visual images that are not connected through a narrative, but composed around “... an insistent sound composition by Wessel Schrik” (Theater Rotterdam). Before the beginning of the piece the viewers enter a traditional dramatic theatre space with predesigned stage and an area for the viewers. Stage is full of domestic, easily recognizable objects, for instance, chairs, tables, flowers, ladder, etc., while a transparent net is separating the stage and the rest of the venue. The performance starts when the audience is seated and the lights in the venue go off. There is music and sounds (Indonesian gamelan music, humans breathing, increasing beat, etc.), but nothing to see, because

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<sup>5</sup> The original text is written in Dutch. Translated online. Full quote goes like this: “Headroom is een beeldende voorstelling die onze behoefte naar één coherent verhaal onderzoekt”.

the darkness is kept for quite a few moments. After that a set of previously seen objects appears on stage in a white square of light, which is located in the middle of the stage floor. The set of objects disappears when the lights go off again and another interruption of darkness and sound occurs. Later a new set of objects can be seen in the middle of the stage, during another bit of lightness on stage. Sometimes these set of objects repeat parts of each other – they sometimes have the same objects or the same stage design. Alienated human figures also appear in some of the sets alongside the objects. *Headroom* is a rather slow and calm performance with no text or storyline and with a composition in which different sets of different objects appear on stage in the bits of lightness after the interruptions of bits of darkness and sound.

My second case study/phenomenon is the performance *Lokis* by Łukasz Twarkowski (2017). As described in the programme of Festival Theaterformen (Germany) in which *Lokis* was an opening performance, this piece is a “psychothriller with trance potential” (Festival Theaterformen). That is due to the fact that *Lokis* combines emotionally strong text-based and audiovisual contents. The performance begins when the actors come off the stage and start introducing their roles in the piece. They also explain the effects of sound on the viewer’s emotions and cognition and later present a remote controller of the sounds, which is able to play several simple sounds and mix them together in various combinations. The audience is invited to try to use the controller and see how their sound combination can affect other viewers. Later the performers seem to enter their characters as the story of the Vitas Luckus (a controversial 20<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian photographer) is being developed. However, after a few minutes this story is disrupted by another story – a reenactment of tragic events that took place in Vilnius in 2003 between a French singer Bernard Cantat and his fiancé actress Marie Trintignant. Again, after a while this story is being disrupted by some fragmental references to the fantasy novella *Lokis* by Prosper Mérimée (19<sup>th</sup> century). Thus at first there seems to be narratives and characters to follow in *Lokis*, but later they become very repetitive and so intertwined with each other that it is hard to distinguish them from one another. In addition to that, there are quite a few different objects on stage (the screen, flowers, lights, sculptures, model of a house, etc.) that also contribute to the disruption of one coherent narrative in this performance. For example, at times the performance’s flow is rearranged by the lights and the sound intensifying significantly. *Lokis* is a very loud and expressive performance with text and different storylines in contrast to the silent and non-verbal *Headroom*.

### 3.1. Intra-active Structure of *Headroom* and *Lokis*

As discussed in the previous chapters, intra-actions suggest certain forms of structures within phenomena that can also be recognized in contemporary theatre pieces. Very clearly noticeable elements that give structure (at least from the first glance) for *Headroom* are the repetitive bits of lightness and darkness. The lightness creates space for the objects and human figures to appear on stage, while the darkness removes them and creates opportunities for new set of objects to appear. That already correlates with the theory of intra-activity because it is not that the lightness and the darkness interact with each other in order to create a coherence, but instead they create opportunities for intra-activity between different entities of the performance. They also create a pattern of the flow of the events within the performance – the sets of objects are slowly changing one after the other, the piece becomes very repetitive and rhythmic. Not much is changing throughout the duration of the performance, only the intensity of music/sounds and the sets of objects are always different, but the pace of their change and the rhythm of the whole piece is more or less the same. That provides the audience with a sense of a strict structure within the performance, yet it is not clear what this structure is based on and thus the spectators are confronted with a structure that on the one hand is graspable and is not graspable on the other hand. The latter, in Lehmann's words, *provokes spectator's imagination* (Lehmann 2006, 90) as they are invited to actively engage and think along with the performance, and only through their comprehension the structure of *Headroom* can become determined (thus the audience members' comprehension could be seen as an agential cut in this intra-activity). That correlates with the theory of intra-activity, since the boundaries of the notion of structure in *Headroom* is being questioned and only through intra-activity of different matter (including the audience members) they can be defined and redefined.

It is important to note here that even though the bits of lightness and darkness create an impression of structure, they do not work autonomously or intentionally and thus do not possess power over other entities within *Headroom*. Moreover, since there is no storyline to follow in *Headroom*, the relations between the objects on stage, the sounds and the moments of darkness and lightness are not subordinated by an overall narrative and therefore do not play a role of a backdrop. In that sense, the objects and the human figures on stage are not being manipulated by a structure or a

narrative of the piece and thus are not creating hierarchical relations to one another. Instead, they are at the core of the performance and have as much importance as every other entity within the piece. That correlates with Bleeker's ideas on stage as a landscape. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the author claims that a landscape stage underlines the *here and nowness* of the performance because it draws the attention to what is happening on stage among equally important entities of a piece, rather than concentrating on what is being represented by this happening. And indeed, in *Headroom*, only when combined together in non-hierarchical ways and intra-acting with each other, different entities of the performance create a space for one another to be showcased as non-representational and equally important parts of the performance. Moreover, even though all sets of objects in the piece can be seen as individual art pieces, only when placed in the same landscape they determine and complement each other and in this way highlight each other's differences. The latter correlates with Barad's ideas on individuality within intra-activity, because, as the theorist believes, the entities of a phenomenon can have individual traits, but these traits only become visible and determined in the context of intra-activity within this phenomenon (performance in this case). In that way the audience is invited to actively follow every little change in the performance and in this way concentrate on what is happening here and now. Thus it can be said that *Headroom* emerges not from pre-given meanings, means of expression or structure, but from intra-acting elements of the performance, which are all of the same importance and create possibilities for different sensations, meanings, impulses and etc. to emerge in the here and now.

When talking about the objects on stage and the overall spatial structure of *Headroom*, it can be said that the sets of objects that are placed on stage before the performance refer to such relations as casual, known and domestic environments, while the net that is separating the stage from the audience and the setup of the entire theatre space resembles with the setting of a dramatic theatre performance, where the audience has a distant position. In that way, the viewers are invited to start thinking about what they see on stage in *Headroom* and what their knowledge on what they see is (either they think about the objects on stage or the theatre setting). Thus it can be said that in this way the performance proposes a possible expectation for a representationalist approach to a theatre piece, where reality is already given and concrete, all its entities are determined (including the audience and their role) and matter on stage is referring to something else than itself. However, when the sets of objects start to repetitively appear and reappear on stage, the possible relations or

any references to representationalism are lost. That is because the sets of objects do not employ any logical, functional or storytelling intentionality, they are not referring to something other than themselves and are not related in obvious ways. In Lehmann's words, *de-hierarchization* of theatrical means occurs, because since *Headroom* has no dramatic action, all entities within the performance become more independent and create a *discontinuous theatre space*, in which different entities of the piece may redefine their features (for example, the net can now seem not as an object that is separating the audience from the stage, but yet as another co-participant of the intra-activity, during which the images on stage are being created, since they would look completely different without the net). In that way action-response relationships between different entities within *Headroom* are not being established, but rather, many opportunities for creating new relations and connotations are being created through their relations, which corresponds with Barad's ideas on intra-active causality that occurs through the field of possibilities.

In comparison to *Headroom*, *Lokis* has much more hectic forms of structure. It is oriented around the three stories, which are described at the beginning of this chapter, as well as the presence of the objects and the human bodies on and off stage. *Lokis* does not employ a clear structuring element (in contrast to *Headroom*). Instead, the stories in the performance have different durations, they are repeated for different amount of times and they interrupt each other at different points of the piece (for example, the story about Vitas Luckus is only introduced at the beginning of the performance, while the story about Bernard Cantat and Marie Trintignant and the references to the novella *Lokis* are being repetitively presented for several times throughout the performance). In addition to that, the flow of the events in the performance is occasionally interrupted (or complimented) by seemingly dysfunctional movements of the objects and the human figures (such as plants moving on their own or all performers suddenly starting to dance synchronically). Therefore, it is hard to grasp an overall general narrative in *Lokis*, yet the intra-activity within the piece creates possibilities for three completely different storylines to resonate to one another in various ways and to address the importance of different elements (objects, light, music, etc.) within themselves and within the whole performance. That, as well as in the case of *Headroom*, correlates to Barad's notion of causality because the intra-actions are based on creating opportunities and not based on action-response relations. In that sense, the possible relations and traces of representationalism, which could be created through having three different storylines, are being

neglected by the intra-activity between different entities of the performance, during which the autonomy of individual entities as well as linear logical connections between them are reduced. Thus it can be said that while the structure of *Lokis* is more text and dramatic action based than the structure of *Headroom*, it is still non-linear, because the intra-actions of different entities in the here and now are very important in this piece. However, while in *Headroom* the viewers are invited to activate their imagination in response to little action, in *Lokis* the spectators are being overwhelmed by many things that are happening at the same time and thus invited to actively hover their attention and make choices of what they want to see and comprehend.

As well as in *Headroom*, there are no hierarchical relations between different entities within the performance *Lokis*. Even though there is some text and dramatic action in the piece, they do not overshadow the importance of the objects, the human figures, the light and the sounds. On the contrary – when the stories seem to gain a big importance during the performance, the other entities start to interrupt the stories and gain even bigger importance for a short period of time, until they are interrupted as well. Moreover, *Lokis* brings together three different stories from different periods in time (19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> century), also it refers to several different spaces at the same time (when the performers present their roles at the beginning of the performance, they refer to dramatic theatre space; when a story is being presented, the performance refers to the space of that story; when a storyline is being interrupted, the performance refers to the here and now and etc). Thus it can be said that different entities of *Lokis* are composed parallel or side by side to one another because they are occurring more or less at the same time, and not in response to any linear sequences of events of the performance. That correlates with Lehmann's ideas on *parataxis* in postdramatic theatre, since the author implies that in the *parataxis* of postdramatic theatre different elements of performances *are not linked in unambiguous ways*, to use the scholar's terms. These unambiguous links in *Lokis* manifest themselves through constant shift/change of the importance of different entities within the piece, as well as constant emergence of new entities, which have their times and spaces inseparably intertwined (directly and indirectly). The latter idea correlates with Barad's ideas on *spacetime mattering* in the process of intra-activity, as it acknowledges the importance of all entities, including space and time, as well as neglects the understandings of a linear time (with pre-determined past, present and future) and singular space (only one space at a time). Thus, it can be said that *Lokis*, as well as *Headroom*, emerges from the intra-activity of its

different entities and a field of opportunities that emerges from these intra-actions, rather than from pre-given forms and structures (even though it has a little more pre-given material than *Headroom*, namely the relations of the three main stories).

### 3.2. Active Matter and Distribution of Agency in *Headroom* and *Lokis*

As mentioned in the previous subchapters, *Headroom* has no narrative and (thus) it also has no characters. The human figures appear as a part of certain sets of objects, they are mute and rather static – they don't talk and usually don't move at all; or if they move, they do that in very slow and odd ways. For example, during one bit of lightness, a human figure is slowly undoing the buttons of her/his shirt. Later the lights go off and when they are turned back on again, the same human figure is buttoning the shirt up. The intentionality or functionality of these movements are not clear. Thus the human figures, or animate matter in *Headroom*, do not possess any linear or logical patterns of behavior and are not interacting (here I am referring to Barad's understanding of interactions) with their environment (including animate and inanimate matter), they are not representing anything, they do not express any conscious decision making capabilities and their characteristics do not change in response to a linear sequence of events or individual developments. Rather, animate matter in *Headroom* is intra-acting with other matter within the piece by being very object-like and thus by being an equally important part of the performance (and therefore not superior over other matter). That is, animate matter in the piece does not hold a superior agency in terms of having power over other matter. In other words, the agency in *Headroom* is not ascribed to animate entities, such as humans or characters that are represented by humans, which would be the case of the distribution of agency in dramatic theatre, as noted by Lehmann and Wright. Instead, as suggested by Manuel when talking about theatre with no characters, in *Headroom* human and non-human agencies are intertwined and co-exist together, they create a co-presence in which agency is distributed among all elements of the piece and appears only due to their intra-activity (which then also correlates with ideas on intra-activity from Barad). That means that animate and non-animate matter in *Headroom* have the same agential capabilities.

When talking about *Headroom's* inanimate matter, such as light, sound and objects on stage, it is important to note that it is the first thing that the viewers see/experience when they enter the theatre

venue, therefore it could be said that inanimate matter suggests the roles/positions within the encounter/intra-activity between different entities of the performance and the audience. For example, as already discussed in the previous subchapter, the exposition of domestic objects on stage at the beginning of the piece may suggest possible relations and thus the agency of inanimate matter manifests itself through creating possibilities for the audience to relate certain meanings to the performance. In addition to that, the repetition of objects on stage and the fact that some sets of objects refer to or repeat some fragments from other sets of objects that were presented on stage before, create possibilities for the audience to develop their own narrative of *Headroom*. Moreover, the setting in which the stage is separated from the audience's space with a transparent net, on the one hand, invites the viewers to recognize that they are the viewers and are that they are not directly involved in the piece, since they have specially designed space for themselves; and on the other hand, it suggests that in a sense the spectators can become involved in the piece, since the net is transparent and the viewers can see through it and in this way they are able to peek at the world of the performance. In that sense, the presence of the net and the setting of the stage create possibilities for the viewers to have different entry points when watching the performance. Thus it can be said that active inanimate matter, as well as active animate matter in *Headroom* doesn't hold the agency in terms of making decisions and having intentionality but rather it contains intra-active agency which emerges through constant creation of opportunities. Thus the agency in the performance is distributed among all its entities and cannot be ascribed to anyone or anything, or to use Barad's way of putting it, agency in *Headroom* is not something that someone or something has.

In contrast to *Headroom*, *Lokis* employs fragments of three different stories/narratives and thus has characters (at least to some extent). However, the human figures in *Lokis* are not only there to serve the function of representation – even though there is some text-based action and the characters seem to have some intentionality within three different storylines, the constant repetition and disruption of a linear dramatic action prevents the characters from acting in response to one another or the sequence of previous events. For example, as already mentioned before, the reenactment of the encounter between Bernard Cantat and Marie Trintignant is repeated for several times during the performance. The characters involved in this storyline have their needs, motivation and intentions and thus with their actions they influence the flow of events within this



storyline. However, when the reenactment is being repeated, the characters do not act in response to the fact that this whole sequence has been already presented. Thus even though the characters seem to have the biggest agential capability within the storyline, their actions or states of being are not reasonable and thus have no actual influence on the flow of the events within a particular storyline or the whole performance. In that sense, the existence of characters in *Lokis* is not superior in comparison to the existence of other active matter in the piece. Hence it can be said that the storylines and the characters within the performance do not ascribe the agency to active animate matter in *Lokis*, but rather they create opportunities for constant redistribution of agency between different entities (animate and inanimate) of the piece through intra-activity. The latter idea resonates with Lehmann's observation that leaving the absolute dominance of the text (and text through characters) brings into focus the agency of other matter within contemporary theatre pieces. Thus, as well as in *Headroom*, in *Lokis* agency is not something that someone or something has, but it rather resonates to the theory of intra-activity and occurs as a field of opportunities within the performance.

When referring to inanimate matter in *Lokis*, it is very reasonable to talk about the screen that is placed above the stage, since it is one of the most noticeable entities of inanimate matter in the performance due to its big dimensions and central position. Sometimes the screen works as a light source, sometimes it shows the live stream videos of what is happening on stage, sometimes it shows images or short texts (words). In that sense, the activity of the screen is not necessarily always connected to the content of the storylines thus the screen does not serve illustrative or representational purposes. As it is beautifully summed up by Donatas Puslys in the review of *Lokis*, "...the screen plays the screen..." (Puslys). In addition to the screen, other objects on stage also play themselves, to refer to Puslys' words. For example, the plants are moving around the stage by themselves, regardless the action on stage; and during the break of the performance (the performance consists of two parts) the plants are moving around in the waiting hall by themselves as well. Thus inanimate matter in *Lokis* is not powerless and does not need external signification/recognition, as well as it is not directly influenced by any animate matter, which correlates to Barad's ideas on agency within intra-activity. In addition to that, active inanimate matter in *Lokis* keeps on interrupting the flow of events within the piece and in this way it also participates in the constant redistribution of agency that was mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Moreover, the presence of inanimate matter in the piece at times even overshadows the presence of animate matter. For example, a woman is lying down behind the walls of the stage constructions, she doesn't speak or move. The cameras are repetitively filming her from different angles and perspectives (it is not clear who or what is controlling the cameras), the screen is showing her and the stage constructions are covering her, so it's hard for the viewers to see the actual body of the woman. In this case, inanimate matter seems to be in charge of how the woman will be presented and thus seems to be having more intentional agential capability than animate matter. Thus not only the redistribution of agency is occurring, but also different entities of active matter in *Lokis* create opportunities for each other to determine their form, function and state of being (because the women's body could be presented in a completely different way without the screen and the cameras, as well as the latter matter would not seem to have their own intentionality if they were not portraying this particular woman's body). That as well corresponds with Barad's account on intra-activity, in which agency is occurring through a flow of different ongoing stimulus, which create the grounds for new possibilities for all entities of intra-activity.

### 3.3. Audience's Sensory Address Created Through Intra-actions in *Headroom* and *Lokis*

Since *Headroom* and *Lokis* are both not primarily driven by a narrative, dramatic action or characteristic developments, as already discussed in the previous subchapters, a very important form of addressing the audience in these performances is the address to sensory cognition of the viewers, which is approached through intra-activity of different entities within these pieces. As concluded by Foster, seeing human bodies on stage provokes the viewers to empathize with these bodies and their possible bodily sensations. The latter idea can be helpful when analyzing the performance *Headroom*, where the existence of human bodies on stage creates a very intimate relation between the performance's animate matter and the audience. As Karin Veraart notes in her review of *Headroom*: "while ... human figures loom up in the rooms, you suddenly think you recognize something in a fragment, a flash from a classic film, a detail of a painting" (Veraart).<sup>6</sup> Therefore the human figures on stage, as the author suggests, invites the audience to find

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<sup>6</sup> The original text by Karin Veraart is written in Dutch. Translated online. Full quote goes like this: "terwijl de beelden elkaar afwisselen en er ook menselijke figuren in de kamers opdoemen, denk je in een fragment opeens iets te herkennen, een flits uit een filmklassieker, een detail van een schilderij" (Veraart).

familiarities and similarities between their pre-existing knowledge and the image of the people on stage. Thus in a sense, the human figures in *Headroom* create an impression of familiarity of something known, something from the everyday life (especially due to the fact that they make easily recognizable everyday movements. Also, at times the performers start to make movements that seem to be hurting them physically and this may relate to the spectators' experiences of being injured/seeing other injured people). However, the oddness of their movements, as well as the effect of the thin plastic masks, remove the traces of any possible emotions, alienate the performers, make them look less human-like and more object-like. Thus the viewers are seeing something that they can recognize and can't recognize at the same time - humans and non-humans, animate and inanimate. In that way *Headroom* invites the audience to question dichotomies between animate and inanimate, human and matter, which corresponds with ideas from Barad's agential realist account. Through the latter questioning of dichotomies, an uncanny/awkward atmosphere is being created in *Headroom*, which occurs not through logocentric or representative developments of the piece, but through evoking intimate feelings of the audience members, which are connected to their personal images of a human body.

The uncanny/awkward atmosphere in *Headroom* is being intensified through the intra-activity of other entities of the performance as well (not only through the existence of human figures) – such inanimate matter as the sound and the light contribute to the creation of the audience address in which the viewers' sensory cognition is being stimulated. The soundtrack of the piece, which is made of instrumental and bodily sounds that are intra-acting with each other, creates the impression that the action, which is happening on stage, is taking place within the spectators' bodies as well. As summed up by Laura Roling in her review of *Headroom*, "... it sounds like the audience is in the head of a man. His breathing, his saliva, his heartbeat - everything can be heard and forms an uncomfortable soundtrack for the appearing and disappearing images" (Roling).<sup>7</sup> Thus the audience is invited to relate their own bodily sensations to the intra-acting sound and images of the performance. In that way this particular composition of different sounds (and images) does not only contribute to the intensification of the viewer's experience, but also

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<sup>7</sup> The original text by Laura Roling is written in Dutch. Translated online. Full quote goes like this: "de begeleidende geluidscapcompositie van Wessel Schrik is sterk opgebouwd: na de ouverture klinkt het alsof het publiek zich in het hoofd van een man bevindt. Zijn ademhaling, zijn speeksel, zijn hartslag – alles is te horen en vormt een ongemakkelijke soundtrack voor de verschijnende en verdwijnende beelden." (Roling).

indirectly immerses the audience members into the performance as if they were as important part of it as every other matter. Moreover, the light and the darkness, as well as their constant intra-activity, invites the spectators to constantly shift their attention from one sense to another (in the lightness bit, vision is most easily accessible; while in the darkness bit, hearing takes over). In that way the viewers are given the opportunity to consciously draw their attention to their different senses. While the spectators can choose to use this opportunity or not, they cannot ignore the constant change between the bits of darkness and light. In that sense, the performance immerses the audience in these changes and as well as in the case of sound, it approaches the viewers as a part of the piece. Thus it can be said that the audience members in *Headroom* can be seen as co-participants of intra-activity within the performance as well, which correlates with Barad's ideas when she states that in intra-activity there can be no outside observer, as the observer is a part of intra-activity.

In *Lokis*, as well as in *Headroom*, the presence of the human bodies is very important in terms of creating audience's sensory address. First of all, the cameras are using a lot of close up angles for filming performers' bodies during the performance. In that way, as already mentioned before, even if the spectators cannot see the performers on stage when other matter is blocking them, they can still see the bodies (or different parts of them) of the performers from very close. Every little movement, expression or the absence of them in the bodies of the artists become very much visible and the viewers can see something that they could not (would not be supposed to) see otherwise. In that sense, the viewers may feel close to the human figures on stage. However, the constant change or intra-activity between the means of expression, different storylines and active inanimate matter (such as cameras, which film the close ups of the human body in a fragmental sequences and in that sense distort the body) alienate the artists' body and create a distance between them and the audience. Thus the audience can feel that the human figures of the performance are very close and very far from them at the same time. In that way the spectators of *Lokis*, similarly to the spectators of *Headroom*, are invited to question the boundaries between the notions of distant and familiar, human and non-human. In addition to that, the camera sometimes uses such an angle, which represents the environment through someone else's body (as if one could see what camera/person behind the camera sees). Also, when not in character, the bodies on stage in *Lokis* are making rather random movements (for example, dancing on their own, crawling, devouring,

etc.) and therefore can sometimes resonate with the feelings that occur during a change of the normal state of mind (that includes being extremely passionate or ignorant; raging or ecstatic/intoxicated and etc.), which the audience members can recognize. In that way, again, similarly to the case of *Headroom*, the audience in *Lokis* is invited to relate their own experience to the experience of the human beings that they can see on stage and therefore some bodily sensations may be evoked.

The intra-activity within *Lokis*, which can affect the audience's sensory cognition, as well as the intra-activity within *Headroom*, includes such entities as light, sound and also smoke. The fact that the audience is explicitly introduced to certain sounds at the beginning of the piece when the sound controller is being introduced, suggests that the viewers of *Lokis* are not only invited to experiment with the power of making sounds, but they are also being indirectly manipulated by these sounds as the initial idea of this bit of the performance is to provoke different emotions. The sounds used later in the piece include human and animal screams as well as the sounds of different objects on stage. They are complimented by colorful, intensive and strobe lights and a thick smoke. Thus the viewers are immersed in the constant intensive intra-actions of different matter which can directly affect their vision, hearing, smelling and environmental cognition. As summed up by Kamilė Pirštelytė in the review of *Lokis*, "flashing 'festival' lights, as if in ritual ceremonies, illuminate dancing figures that seem to be in a trance, while screams and cries are blending with the narrators' voices" (Pirštelytė). Thus not only the audience's emotions and senses are being triggered by the intra-activity of different matter within the piece, but also the spectators are being overwhelmed by the intensity of this intra-activity and thus their sensitivity can either grow bigger or they can start feeling apathy. Either way, the audience cannot escape this intense intra-activity, or to use Eckersall's, Grehan's and Scheer's words, the *participants can neither refuse nor moderate these experiences*, which affect not only the mind, but also the bodies of the viewers. Thus, as well as in *Headroom*, the viewers in *Lokis* are immersed into the performance through their sensory cognition and therefore become an equal part of the performance's intra-activity, which, as has been mentioned above, correlates with Barad's ideas on intra-actions, since all matter of the performance/phenomenon, including the audience, participates in the performance's intra-activity.

## CONCLUSIONS

*There is no such thing as reality* – this sentence, as mentioned in the text, was used in the description of the performance *Headroom*. Yet, in a sense, it also correlates with Karen Barad's agential realist account on intra-activity, as it does not support the idea of a pre-given reality, consisting of preexisting entities (which refers to representationalist view of the world), but instead suggests that phenomena become determined only through the process of intra-activity between different entities. Even though Barad herself does not make connections from her theory to the theory of contemporary theatre, her ideas might be used as a lens of seeing contemporary theatre performances. That is because in her papers Barad uses such terms as active matter and agency, which refer to the idea that all entities (both, animate and inanimate) are equally important parts of phenomena and have the same agential capabilities, since agency is not ascribed to someone or something. A resemblance to the latter idea, even if not always addressed in the context of intra-activity, can be found in the papers of such theatre scholars as Hans-Thies Lehmann, Maaïke Bleeker and Pedro Manuel. These authors acknowledge that the importance of such matter as the objects on stage, the light and the sounds can have the same importance and agential capabilities as text or characters in contemporary theatre performances (which opposes the notions of matter and agency in representationalist worldview and dramatic theatre). In addition to that, Barad claims that intra-active causality does not employ action-response relationship between different entities of phenomena and thus does not establish a hierarchical structure, since causality (as well as agency) occurs through a field of possibilities. The latter idea correlates with insights from Lehmann and Bleeker, when they talk about non-hierarchical/landscape theatre performances, which happen not as a result of pre-given structure, but occur through creating possibilities for intra-actions between the music, the light, the objects, the people on stage and other active matter. This acknowledgement of active animate and inanimate matter, intra-active agency and non-hierarchical structure within contemporary theatre performances create a certain audience address. Lehmann and Bleeker argue that in these kind of performances the audience members gain more responsibility over their own experience during a performance; also Bleeker and Carl Lavery suggest that the viewers are invited to draw their attention to all matter on stage, which is present in the here and now; while Susan Leigh Foster, Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer

indicate that intra-activity of theatre pieces may directly affect the audience's sensory cognition and sometimes even their physical bodies.

The comparative analysis of the case studies have shown that there is a resemblance between the theory of intra-activity (in contemporary theatre) and the ways in which the performances *Headroom* and *Lokis* come into existence. Both performances do not possess a hierarchical structure, since they have no linear narrative which could overshadow other matter. The pieces emerge not from pre-given and pre-determined meanings or means of expression, but rather from the field of possibilities for intra-activity to occur between different matter, which refers to Barad's theory. That is, while *Headroom* has no dramatic action and thus creates a discontinuous theatre space in which all entities have opportunities to redefine their boundaries, *Lokis*, in which there is some dramatic action, fragmentally connects storylines from different times, spaces and contexts and in this way enables possibilities for several spaces, times and contexts to co-exist together. Moreover, the agency in *Headroom* and in *Lokis* is not ascribed to someone or something and thus human agency does not overshadow the agency of all other matter. On the contrary, the agencies of animate and inanimate matter are equally important for the intra-activity within these performances and thus they question the boundaries between the notions of human and non-human, animate and inanimate. The latter correlates with Barad's theory, as she believes that all entities are equally important and not pre-determined in the process of intra-activity. While in *Headroom* agency is equally distributed between all entities of the piece, in *Lokis*, due to the existence of the fragments of dramatic action, different entities maintain a constant distribution and redistribution of agency among different matter of the performance.

I believe that the most important finding of this thesis is the idea that intra-activity within contemporary theatre performances, and in particular within the performances *Headroom* and *Lokis*, increases the sensitivity of the spectators towards the process of perceiving a theatre piece. The non-linear, non-hierarchic or hectic structures of the performances invite the audience to actively engage with the performances and make decisions of what they want to see/experience/comprehend. In that way the audience members gain more responsibility over their attendance at the performance. In addition to that, the existence of active matter (animate and inanimate) in the performances *Headroom* and *Lokis* brings the attention to what is really

happening within the performances (rather than what is expected to be represented) and in that way a co-presence of different entities of the piece occurs, which incorporates the presence of the audience as well. Not only the performances become changed/determined through the spectators' perception, but also the audience members change/redefine themselves, as they are immersed into these performances through the sensory address. That is, the sensory address invites the viewers to relate their own bodily experiences to the experiences of the human figures on stage. Also, through intra-activity of different matter, the audience members are being put in the position where they cannot escape or neglect their intensively triggered senses. All these conclusions show how in the performances *Headroom* and *Lokis* the audience members are approached as an equal and a very important part of intra-activity and thus the spectators' experiences are intensified.

It is important to note, that the latter conclusions have been based on the analysis of only two case studies. Moreover, this thesis was investigating both questions: how do intra-actions contribute to *the creation of performances* and how do intra-actions contribute to the creation of *audience address*. Therefore much of this paper was primarily oriented towards the testing of the theories of intra-activity in the context of contemporary theatre (in order to answer the first question). However, I believe that the finding of the intensified audience experiences created through intra-activity in contemporary theatre is a rather new observation and thus could be elaborated much more in other papers. Hence, I would say that the conclusions of this thesis might be a starting point for a further research.



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