

The Travelling of Dramatic Texts and Memory Patterns

The Case of Estonian Memory Theatre

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses Estonian memory theatre in the 1970s–90s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the framework of transnational/transcultural influences. Dwelling on Jeanette R. Malkin's definition of memory theatre as a theatre that both imitates the flow of memories and initiates the process of remembrance, and relying on the concepts of transnational and transcultural memory, I analyze the dramatic texts of Estonian playwrights Rein Saluri and Madis Kõiv, likewise the works of female stage director Merle Karusoo. I focus on the phenomenon of travelling memory, introduced by scholar of literature and culture, Astrid Erll, and engage a comparative approach to the texts and stage interpretations. Through the media of texts and mnemonic forms in motion and on the basis of particular case studies, I examine how stories/narratives, memory patterns, and mnemonic practices have crossed cultural borderlines and been performed on different (Estonian, Finnish, Estonian-Russian, Austrian) stages, and how they have primarily launched hidden or blurred memories.

KEYWORDS

Transnational/transcultural/travelling memory, memory narratives and practices, memory forms/patterns, Estonian memory theatre, Rein Saluri, Merle Karusoo.

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The context of transnational/transcultural influences in the Nordic/Baltic region offers an inspiring and refreshing aspect for focussing on the 1970s–90s and at the beginning of twenty-first century Estonian memory theatre, which has aimed to treat and work through individual as well as collective/national traumatic experiences of the past. I am going to treat the phenomenon of travelling memory by examining dramatic texts as well as memory (mnemonic) forms or patterns in motion. The corresponding examples are mainly given from the works of two representatives of Estonian memory theatre: playwright Rein Saluri (b. 1939) and female stage director Merle Karusoo (b. 1944), but in a few cases I also refer to the plays by Madis Kõiv (1929–2014). From a comparative viewpoint, I will observe the stage interpretations of their dramatic texts in Estonia, including one production at the Russian Theatre in Tallinn, and particular productions abroad in Finland and Austria.

Contacts and exchanges between different cultures have been typical to the performing arts, including theatre, throughout history; these encounters have been revived via the staging of texts by foreign authors or the transfer/adaptation of stage devices and conventions. The history of Estonian drama and theatre offers similar proof of borrowings, mainly from German as well as Russian tradition, be it the repertoire or acting style. I aim to reverse the viewpoint and observe dramatic texts by Estonian authors performing in the context of other cultures.

Present-day theatre and performance studies often proceed from the perspective of different theoretical concepts of cultural studies whereas the relationship between theatrical art and memory culture has emerged meaningfully. How could the notions “transcultural” and “transnational”, or even more closely “transcultural/transnational memory” be engaged when approaching memory theatre? The distinguishing connection between theatre and memory, as well as theatre and memory studies, has been claimed by at least two remarkable scholars: Marvin Carlson regards theatre as a “memory machine” and states that within the art of theatre an “aspect of memory operates in a manner distinct from, or at least in a more central way than in, the other arts, so much so that I would argue that it is one of the characteristic features of

theatre”¹, and Milija Gluhovic specifies theatre and performance studies among the rest as an exemplary site for academic memory research.² The mentioned substantial linkage contributes to the multidisciplinary of memory studies,³ including research on mediated memory.

Notions and Conceptions: Transcultural, Transnational, Travelling Memory in Relation to Memory Theatre

Relying on the concept of “transculturality” proposed by German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, and regarding the turn to “transcultural studies” in different disciplines (history, sociology, comparative literature, art history), likewise for the purpose of transcending the borders of cultural memory studies, scholar of literature and culture Astrid Erll has suggested and introduced the notion “transcultural memory”. According to Erll, “transcultural” is in its own way an umbrella term “for what in other academic contexts might be described with concepts of the transnational, diasporic, hybrid, syncretistic, postcolonial, translocal, creolized, global, or cosmopolitan,” and consequently, “transcultural memory” rather appears as “a certain *research perspective*, a focus of attention, which is directed towards mnemonic processes unfolding *across* and *beyond* cultures.”⁴

Along with “transcultural memory”, Erll has also introduced the concept of “travelling memory”, and distinguishes five dimensions of movement: 1) individuals as carriers of memory; 2) media as in many respects a key dimension of memory’s “travels”, and here she points out the corresponding examples “from orality to writing to print, film and Internet”⁵; 3) contents of (cultural) memory, largely consisting in shared images and narratives; 4) mnemonic practices (rituals, memorials, etc.), and 5) mnemonic forms. Mnemonic forms are characterized as “the condensed Figures (symbols, icons or schemata) of remembering that enable repetition and are often themselves powerful carriers of meaning. (...) “much of travelling memory is first of all enabled through the condensation of complex and confusing traces of the past into succinct mnemonic forms.”⁶

According to Ann Rigney, scholar of culture and comparative literature, the term “transnational memory” that has emerged in memory studies during the second decade of the twenty-first century as part of the critique of methodological nationalism in the humanities and social sciences in turn refers to an approach that investigates the movements and entanglements of collective memory across and outside the borders of nation-states, and more than “transcultural memory”

1 Carlson 2001, 6–7.

2 Gluhovic 2013, 16.

3 “The multidisciplinary of memory studies has generated great methodological richness and virtually unparalleled possibilities of probing new combinations between seemingly distant approaches,” as Astrid Erll has argued (Erll 2011, 9).

4 Erll 2011, 9.

5 Erll 2011, 12. I would argue that in this section theatre and the performing arts should definitely be incorporated. See also Epner 2007, 181; Kruuspere 2017.

6 Erll 2011, 12–13.

examines the circulation and transformation of stories in relation to social action.⁷

Theatre scholar Jeanette R. Malkin's definition of memory theatre in her *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* as a theatre that imitates conflicted, repressed, erased memories [of a shared past], and initiates process of remembrance,⁸ leads one also to study Rein Saluri's, Madis Kõiv's, and Merle Karusoo's works. Malkin's specification of the texts, exhibiting thematic attention to remembered and/or repressed pasts, and the so-called memoried structures which include practices of repetition, conflation and regression, recurrent scenes, involuntary voice and echoing, overlap and simultaneity,⁹ act as a convenient approach, too. However, translations and stage interpretations abroad, the texts' acting in different cultural contexts, and experiencing different interpretations and reception pose different questions that might potentially also be connected to "transcultural memory" or "transnational memory".

According to Malkin memory theatre aims at intervening in the politics of memory, e.g. in order to reopen and rethink taboo discourses.¹⁰ I would rather place examples of Estonian memory theatre into the context of memory culture, although in the case of Merle Karusoo obvious relations to politics of memory could be observed.¹¹

In the case of Estonian memory theatre, a question could be posed of how mnemonic contents (e.g. stories, images) have been translated into another local pattern, like in the case of Rein Saluri's play *Departure (Minek)* under title *Lähtö* (Finnish National Theatre, 1988), or Madis Kõiv's play *Return to the Father (Tagasitulek isa juurde)* under the title *Takaisin kotiin (Back to Home)*, Joensuu City Theatre in Finland, 1997), or how Merle Karusoo's stage monologues as aesthetic stage forms and practices have been adapted to another (theatrical) culture.

As to condensed symbols or travelling narratives and images, (remembering of) the Holocaust has been called a dominating transnational mnemonic symbol. The history of the three Baltic countries in the twentieth century reminds one of probable equivalents, such as the massive Fleeing to the West in 1944 and the March Deportation in 1949,¹² both explicitly represented in Estonian memory theatre since the 1980s. Drama in general, "more than any other literary form seems to be associated in all cultures with the retelling again and again of stories that bear a particular religious, social, or political significance for their public."¹³ As to the recycling of specific narratives and specific characters in drama and

7 Rigney 2016.

8 Malkin 1999, 8.

9 Malkin 1999, 1.

10 Malkin 1999, 3.

11 Here, I rely on Estonian scholar of literature and memory, Eneken Laanes, who has defined the politics of memory as a political phenomenon, in the cause of which the formation of collective identity is affected politically via the creation of images of memory; whereas memory culture as a more pluralist notion embraces attendance to a past on different levels, in different forms, and through different media (Laanes 2009, 54).

12 In these years nearly 75 000–80 000 Estonians fled from their homeland and 21 000 were deported respectively.

13 Carlson 2001, 8.

theatre,¹⁴ one could notice comparable aspects with travelling images and narratives, likewise mnemonic forms and practices.¹⁵ From among narratives and images of cultural memory the loss of one's home and an image of a lost Father can be seen in several works by all three above-mentioned Estonian authors. The motif of homecoming (of a prodigal son) appears in both Saluri's and Kõiv's plays, the motif of the lost home is characteristic to all three of them. Analyzing the memory theatre works of Harold Pinter, Heiner Müller, Tadeusz Kantor and Andrzej Wajda, in his *Performing European Memories* Milija Gluhovic has emphasized the fact that all these artists themselves, with one exception, were (primary) witnesses or survivors of historical trauma.¹⁶ The same can be said about Kõiv, Saluri, and Karusoo, and the aforementioned fact has been reflected namely in their common figure of the lost Father, for instance. Thus, a more or less autobiographical undertone is also characteristic to their works, but at the same time the lost Father allegorically reflects an ultimate need for personal as well as national identity and being fatherless equates to being homeless. On the other hand, the image of sickness or even disability, referring mostly to deep individual or collective traumas, is ambiguously represented in Kõiv's and Karusoo's works. "My goal is not so much to associate the impact of trauma registered in the works of artists I analyse with particular conceptualisations of trauma (...), but to demonstrate that their plays and performances can be regarded as engendering specific languages of trauma that proceed from its lived experience," Milija Gluhovic states.¹⁷ Eneken Laanes has categorized trauma as a mnemonic form, and argued that at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s Estonian memory culture at first remained relatively untouched by the paradigm of trauma and the vocabulary of both injustice and resistance gave place to that of psychological traumas only in the mid 2000s.¹⁸ I argue that in the context of Estonian memory theatre it took place already in the 1990s, and namely in the works of Kõiv and Karusoo, whereas Saluri has rather expressed resistance that appears in his works distinctively on a ludic and verbal level. Literary critic Marianne Hirsch has claimed that the phenomenon of post-memory, remarking younger generations' identification with the victims or witnesses of trauma from a temporal distance, entails reaching across lines of difference up to the experience of others to whom one is not related by blood, up to a kind of connective memory work that could also engender "transnational interconnections and intersections in a global space of remembrance".¹⁹

Rein Saluri's *Departure* on Various Stages: Tragedy versus Tragic Farce

In the 1990s the interpretations of the national past on the Estonian stage started to vary more and shift to a tragicomic or dream-like point of view. Rein Saluri's *Departure* (1988) depicts the last two hours given to an Estonian rural family

14 Carlson 2001, 17.

15 Erll 2011.

16 Gluhovic 2013, 20.

17 Gluhovic 2013, 13.

18 Laanes 2017, 243–244.

19 Hirsch 2012, 247.

to pack their things before being deported to Siberia by the Soviet authorities. The play signified one of the first attempts to look back at the common national tragedy from a tragicomic aspect, with an absurd or slightly alienated mood, as if withdrawing from earlier one-dimensional national pathos.

The mass deportations of Estonians to Siberia took place twice in the 1940s: in June 1941²⁰ and in March 1949. However, people were also deported in the meantime, e.g. Saluri himself as a child was deported in autumn 1946 together with his family. One line of his play's opening stage directions reads as follows: "It is a fine autumn noon."²¹ In spite of that a few critics still "located" the plot of the play into March, probably because this date, 25 March 1949 has been so deeply and painfully fixed in the collective subconscious and memory of all Baltic nations as a (trans)national mnemonic symbol. A similar effect came forth in connection with a screenplay by Saluri *Awakening* (Äratuus) which depicts an imagined day and night of deportation.²² The figure of the lost Father appears even twice in *Departure*: the father of the family has been arrested ("eliminated") earlier, before the depicted events, and his father, the old master of the farm, has died recently. The preparation for his funeral has been interrupted by the sudden arrival of the deportation men, the situation's tension and deep ethical conflict embedded here – general human traditions *versus* foreign Soviet ideology and violence – acquire a tragic and even absurd tonality.

The first night of *Departure* took place in the same year, 1988, at two Estonian theatres (Tallinn Drama Theatre by Mikk Mikiver, Pärnu Endla Theatre by Priit Pedajas); besides that, it was premiered the very same year at two theatres abroad, in Lithuania, at Šiauliai Theatre under the title *Paskutinės dvi valandos* (*Two Last Hours*), by Priit Pedajas, and at the Finnish National Theatre under the title *Lähtö*, by Estonian writer and stage director Mati Unt.²³ Two Estonian as well as Lithuanian stage interpretations stressed the national historical tragedy: Mikiver's version exploited a laconic and even static directing style, including long pauses and static stage episodes,²⁴ the more effective stage version at Pärnu theatre by Pedajas included slow rhythm, elegiac music, simple and powerful scenic images and created a rather mythical-epical atmosphere.²⁵

20 12 000 Estonian were deported then.

21 Saluri 1989, 7; Saluri 1990, 3.

22 Since Saluri's works are frequently loaded with mythical or archetypal connotations, *Awakening*, directed by Jüri Sillart (1989), also served as an inter-textual work of art by mixing documentary events, visual Estonian landscapes, Biblical allusions, and the poetics of national mythology etc. In the critical reception of the film, questions about "historical truth" or "truthful reconstruction of history" arose once again, to which Saluri responded in a resigned mood by calling such reactions "the terror of memoirs, the terror of history" (Saluri 1999, 60).

23 In 1994 the Finnish translation by Eva Lille (Saluri 1988) was also staged at Seinäjoki amateur theatre by Estonian actor Epp Saar-Tõniste. The public readings of the translation into English by Krista Kaer (Saluri 1990) took place in New York (Arts Club Theatre, 1990) and in England (Hammersmith, at Plains Plough Interchange Studios, Writers Festival Lyric, 1991). Estonian born scholar of literature and theatre, Mardi Valgemäe, has argued that Saluri's play could well create public resonance even in the United States (Valgemäe *Aja Kiri* 58/1990, 9).

24 Pii *Sirp ja Vasar* 14.10.1988.

25 *Visnap Teater. Muusika. Kino* 1/1989, 34; Karro *Rahva Hääl* 15.5.1988.

Pedajas himself emphasized traits of a pure tragedy in Saluri's play²⁶ and, according to only a few reviews published in Estonian newspapers, he seemed to reduplicate conceptually his Pärnu interpretation at Lithuanian Šiauliai theatre.²⁷ The Finnish production by Mati Unt laid stress on general human aspects. *Departure*, at the National Theatre, was accepted as a play about Estonian history, but some indirect parallels with the Finnish historical-political context also appeared in the critical reception, including references to those people who had to leave their homes in Carelia during World War II. (The very same historical fact was alluded to in the reviews of the production of Madis Kõiv's *Return to the Father* by Paavo Liski in Joensuu 1997.)

The features of tragedy were likewise stressed in Finnish reviews.²⁸ In his intensive dynamic production, with its rhythm of continuous contrasts, Unt amplified the tragicomic and symbolic irrationality of the situation. The notion "nightmare" appeared in the reviews more than once. Thus, it was probably the most congenial interpretation to the playwright's original intention, and an Estonian critic even argued that the Finnish stage version of *Departure* destroyed the holy feeling of devotion, typical of Estonian "historical memory theatre" so far.²⁹

Biblical allusions typical of Saluri's plays are expressed in this particular work mainly by parallels with Judas in the character of Georg Rass, a Soviet special commissary, an Estonian who is so eager to deport his own countrymen. Literally the name Georg Rass means "race/stock" of "farmers".³⁰ In Pärnu, Rass (Jaan Rekkor) was ambivalent and symbolically loaded, revealing the character's inner insecurity and even sense of guilt. In the Finnish production, the character of Rass, played by Pekka Autiovuori in a very expressive manner aroused the most contradictory critical opinions: his acting was praised for its rich nuances,³¹ but at the same time questioned as an exaggerated caricature, even resembling a parody of Hitler.³² An Estonian critic considered the role of Judas to be permanently beyond Rass's power, although in Autiovuori's interpretation Rass himself tries to play it with a hysterical sense of duty.³³

In the Finnish production, a mysterious infernal motif occurred in the scene of the *danse macabre*, when the Soviet Officer (Jukka Puotila) and Estonian Schoolteacher (Terhi Panula) waltzed around the coffin of the old master in the centre of the farmyard. A dreamlike and diabolic atmosphere was amplified even more by the use of a red light, which was very typical of Unt's personal

26 Pedajas *Teater. Muusika. Kino* 9/1988, 5.

27 *Tonts Sirp ja Vasar* 20.5.1988.

28 Morning *Helsingin Sanomat* 9.10.1988.

29 Vellerand *Teater. Muusika. Kino* 9/1989, 70.

30 Using so-called individual stock names, Saluri has created an explicit inter-textual web between his various prose and drama texts. The family name Rass ("race") is haunting in different modifications in lots of his works (e.g. a short story "5.3.53" (1988, the title marks Jossif Stalin's date of death) or the above-mentioned screenplay *Awakening*), and has been interpreted as a warning of the mentality of racism (Oja *Reede* 22.10.1989).

31 *Eteläpää Uusi Suomi* 9.10.1988.

32 Lehtonen *Kansan Uutiset* 25.10.1988.

33 Vellerand *Teater. Muusika. Kino* 9/1989, 71.

“handwriting” as a stage director. The dance of death with some erotic implications could also be interpreted as a dance of power. In the Finnish reviews, Jukka Puotila’s acting was most highly praised for successfully fulfilling the director’s intensions of varying realism and the grotesque.³⁴

Saluri as a playwright combines intellectual, ironic, and tragic undertones, and although in *Departure* his aim was to express a more worldwide point of view, the local historical context still played a more or less significant role in all of the 1988 stage versions, even on the Finnish stage. In the version by Pedajas in Pärnu, *Departure* acquired a rather epic and mythical mood, whereas Unt and the Finnish actors emphasized the ritual elements, adding a more global dimension to the text, and in that sense the Finnish interpretation might be called truly transcultural.

Merle Karusoo’s Monologues: Memory Patterns in Movement

Estonian female stage director Merle Karusoo is known for her socially sensitive artistic viewpoint which has been expressed in her “life stories theatre”.³⁵ She has treated painful socio-political issues in her documentary productions since the 1980s, mainly in the stage form of monologues, whereby theatrical monologues could be taken as a direct appeal to the audience and society at large.³⁶ Quite a few of Karusoo’s productions have been based on dramatic texts written by herself or created in cooperation with actors as an example of collective creation, using verbatim theatre techniques. I have initially called her work “memory theatre” in an Estonian context,³⁷ since Karusoo has initiated the process of remembrance and has tried to overcome collective national and individual traumas by working them through on stage. She firmly believes that untold (previously forbidden) stories, including life stories, become fatally “toxic”.³⁸

Karusoo’s texts and performances are usually composed in the form of a montage of single monologues; by intertwining them, they create a dynamic entity which is structured by certain topics, events, and images; some symbols or metaphors, e.g. sick children (also a symbol of a sick nation), fatherlessness, fear, etc. frequently occur. Contemporary theatre critics have paid significantly more attention to her productions’ audience reactions, and responses than usual; a dialogue with spectators is essential to memory theatre in general. Karusoo offers the possibility to identify with the stories told, on the basis of contact points between private and social experiences, generating “the synergy” between autobiographic narratives and social structures of collective memory”.³⁹

Observing Karusoo’s sociological documentary “life stories theatre” on foreign stages and/or in foreign languages an adjustment is needed: out of two

34 Morning *Helsingin Sanomat* 9.10.1988.

35 Karusoo herself has used the term “sociological theatre” (*Karusoo Teater. Muusika. Kino* 2/2000).

36 Pavis 1998, 219.

37 Kruuspere 2002, Kruuspere 2009.

38 Karusoo, Saro, Lepsoo 2014, 139.

39 Epner 2010, 109, 123.

bilingual productions and other two in foreign language, three were performed in the general context of Estonian theatre. The bilingual production, *Save Our Souls* (2000), marked the first time Karusoo turned to Russian life stories. She continued with the issues of non-Estonian self-evaluation and identity, likewise the possibilities of integrating them into contemporary Estonian society in the bilingual *Essay 2005 (Küpsuskirjand 2005)* and *Today We Won't Play (Сегодня не играем*, both 2006). The latter premiered at the Russian Theatre in Tallinn as a diploma production of eight young Russian actors, all born in Estonia and recently graduated from the Moscow Art Theatre School from the so-called Estonian course.

The performance was based on the participants' (the former theatre school students') diaries⁴⁰ and typically for Karusoo, life story interviews. At first, the young actors, under their real names, attempted to answer the question "Who am I?"⁴¹ and "map" verbally their family trees and ancestors' journeys throughout historical time and space. Meaningfully, not only their Russian, but also Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Finnish, Carelian, and German family roots and stories unfolded. An occasionally occurring episode connected with Siberia (here in the context of penal servitude) created a comparison with the same mnemonic form in the Estonian life stories.

The performance presented a conventional flow of monologues, combined with bodily self-expression (e.g. dances) and other theatrical means much more so than in Karusoo's earlier "life stories theatre", which had tended towards a rather more static approach. The most sudden and impressive, ambivalent and paradoxical scenic metaphor in *Today We Won't Play* was the actors' common singing of the Estonian national anthem in Estonian, while the rest of the performance was in Russian: "You have given me birth and raised me up" ("Sa oled mind ju sünnitand ja üles kasvatand...").⁴²

Referring to the local Russian-speaking minority's uncertainty about the future, *Today We Won't Play* revealed, among other things, the young actors' family members' irresolution in 1991, when Estonia regained independence and the Soviet Union collapsed: questions like "hence ... we have been left here ...?" and "what will happen to us now?" arose like a painful chorus. It was accompanied by the actors' common emotional outburst on stage: we should not be accused of the historical, i.e. the Soviet past. The young participants also expressed love for their Estonian homeland and its nature, and on the other hand their self-critical attitude towards some traits of the "Russian soul" (mentality).

40 Hence, the issue of professional identity had indeed a prominent role in the performance (Epner 2010, 120), but the topic of an artist's self-knowledge had been characteristic of Karusoo's works for decades.

41 A social integration project *Who am I? (Kes ma olen?)*, a somewhat sociological study in the form of theatre, was carried out by Karusoo and her assistants in 1999–2003. It was mainly addressed to Russian speaking children and youths, helping to make them aware of their background and identity.

42 In Karusoo's works some kind of "official" text or a musical piece (including anthem) has often been connected with the performed monologues, as a contrast to individual speech and a carrier of semantic features.

The status and identity of the Russian Theatre (founded in 1948) in the Estonian cultural landscape is an interesting and diverse topic which definitely deserves a more thorough academic approach, because, for quite a long period, it inclined towards a kind of isolation. In the sense of stage aesthetics on the Estonian stage, Karusoo's memory theatre had already become a part of tradition, but in the context of the Russian Theatre in Estonia, the art form of *Today We Won't Play*, which was unfamiliar, was met with relative scepticism or even astonishment by local Russian critics.⁴³ Estonian critics praised the performance for synthesizing the life story project and elements of integration as well as for its openness, sincerity, and effectiveness from a political aspect.⁴⁴ It was claimed that the Russian school of acting, striving for an exact scenic expression, principally matched Karusoo's style successfully, especially from the aspect of energy on stage.⁴⁵ Thus, *Today We Won't Play* marked the crossing of ideological as well as cultural-aesthetical borderlines within Estonia's theatre landscape, albeit along different national theatre cultures.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Karusoo has focused on different risk groups in society, including Russian speaking children who grow up with frail or even without any contact with Estonian culture, children who have had to live in orphanages, etc. The issue and image of the orphanage emerged also in her *From Vienna to Moscow. Orphanage no 6 (Von Wien nach Moskau – Das Kinderheim No 6)* that was created in cooperation with nine young Austrian actors and premiered at *Wiener Festwochen* festival in 2004 in German.

The text was once again composed as a collage of single monologues, which were primarily based on life story interviews carried out by Karusoo herself in Austria, Vienna, in Switzerland, and Russia (Ivanovo), but she also used documentary materials. *Orphanage no 6* depicted the hectic fate of the around 120 Austrian children, whose parents, mostly the members of the Defence League, had been killed or arrested during the Austrian Civil War which had lasted only four days in February 1934, and where social democrats had experienced and admitted a defeat against Austrian fascists. Those children had been taken to the Soviet Union, an orphanage in Moscow (and attended the German speaking Karl Leibknecht School), but afterwards, along with the Stalinist repressions and in wartime, were scattered all over Russia. This historical event and the Austrian children's bearing off had been nearly forgotten and so far publicly denied in Austrian society.⁴⁶ In 2004, when 70 years had passed by since the 1934 Civil War, in the framework of *Wiener Festwochen* festival several minor projects were organized in memory of it,

43 Repson *Postimees* (in Russian) 1.6.2006, Agranovskaja Молодёжь Эстонии. Суббота 3.6.2006.

44 Visnap *Sirp* 9.6.2006; Allik *Postimees* 1.6.2006.

45 *Today We Won't Play* proved that "life stories theatre" in the form of monologues might be convincing not only on a verbal level, but also, based on the density of scenic events (Kolk *Teater. Muusika. Kino* 7/2006, 50–51), a more dynamic theatrical form (Allik *Postimees* 1.6.2006).

46 Although two books had been published in Austria on the events of the 1934 Civil War and the subsequent repressions, both approaches offered a political viewpoint, not regarding the aspect of lives of individuals, as Karusoo admitted (Visnap *Sirp* 2.7.2004).

and Karusoo's *Orphanage no 6* was one of them. The festival organizers were familiar with some of her works, and she was specially invited to participate, i.e. there was an interest in her creative method, which one can call her individual/artistic memory/mnemonic practice as well. Nine life stories (including one based on the letter of a man who had died in 2001) were used in *Orphanage no 6*. Almost all of the the former orphanage children whose stories had been used came to the first-night,⁴⁷ and their reaction while giving the interviews as well as watching the performance was: "We have/had been forgotten". In that sense Karusoo once again gave back the banned or disowned life stories to several people; in this case in a different language and cultural context. The critical responses were generally positive, among the rest the simplicity of Karusoo's method was mentioned.⁴⁸

Lots of these children who were brought up and educated in the Soviet Union under its communist ideology, actually lost their native language and national identity. Karusoo has confirmed that one of the most influential risk factors can be mixing different cultures violently, especially when a proper cultural basis is lacking; and thus always the worst features of the "strange culture" tend to be acquired.⁴⁹

Concluding Remarks

In the last decades, the paradigm of memory has opened up to transcultural and transnational concepts and constellations: mnemonic processes have unfolded across and beyond different cultures. Dwelling mainly on the concept of "travelling memory", I argue that theatre and performing art should be more intensively incorporated in memory studies as a significant artistic media of memory. Regarding other dimensions of "travelling memory" in the context of Estonian memory theatre (texts and productions), individual carriers of memory can be seen as essential to Merle Karusoo's "life stories theatre". As to the contents of (cultural) memory embodied in shared images and narratives, one could see the ongoing (re)actualizing, (re)interpretation and renewal of such images and narratives like the loss of one's home(land), etc. It can be seen in the different stage interpretations of Rein Saluri's play *Departure*, including the mythical-archetypical connotations of its Finnish production, for instance; but similarly in the life stories interpreted by Merle Karusoo, in actualizing and amplifying the voices that were forgotten or "silenced" for a long time beyond different cultures. Theatrical art in general can be inherently linked to such mnemonic practices like rituals, and memory theatre moreover is capable of intensifying the feelings and experiences of stage and audience in creating a kind of "congregation". Merle Karusoo's life story interviews can be taken as an original subdivision of mnemonic practices. I would also argue that Estonian memory theatre can be associated with the "travelling" of such a mnemonic form as trauma and, in the case of both Saluri and Karusoo, can also offer a possible way of healing.

47 Altogether, a couple of open rehearsals and five performances were given.

48 Jandl *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 10.6.2004.

49 Visnap *Sirp* 2.7.2004.

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