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## IN QUEST OF NEW (SLOVAK) DRAMATURGY

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**Abstract:** The study elucidates some examples of the so-called new dramaturgy in Slovak theatre. It points out that as early as the 1980s, many features of the modern understanding of the role of a dramaturg and dramaturgy could also be found in a number of productions of Slovak theatres. It highlights that inspiration was drawn from Czech alternative theatre and from the Moscow Taganka Theatre. The study maps out the work of stage director Blaho Uhlár, prominent representative of author collective theatre. By using several examples, new features of Slovak theatre in the 21st century theatre dramaturgy are demonstrated (for instance, the comeback of story, the narration about man, moral values), which have certain points in common with contemporary Russian documentary theatre. The study is an introduction to a series of studies on new dramaturgy in the 21st century Slovak theatre.

**Key words:** new dramaturgy, author collective theatre, Blaho Uhlár, Sláva Daubnerová

In the second decade of the new millennium words like dramaturg, dramaturgy, new dramaturgy again raised the awareness of Slovak drama theorists and theatre practitioners.<sup>1</sup> The reason behind that was not just the role of a dramaturg as an active creator/co-creator of a production, his role in the theatre or in the creation of a concrete production/project, or his position of an internal opponent to other creative professionals who take an active part in a project. Increasingly, the director has been assuming the role of a dramaturg. For an outsider, it is difficult to identify the driving force behind the change in the theatrical aesthetics of a concrete ensemble in well-functioning theatres that engage more young people: is it the dramaturg, the stage director or the stage designer? Who is the one to encourage creative professionals to establishing closer contacts between the performer and the audience, to effacing the conventional borderline between the stage and the auditorium?<sup>2</sup> In one-generation ensembles or in single-poetics ensembles (e.g. one author theatres, such as Divadlo GUnaGU or Radošina Naive Theatre) the answer to the above questions is easier also

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<sup>1</sup> The French theatre theoretician Patrice Pavis published several studies on dramaturgy and postdramaturgy, in which he elaborates on the new methods of the reconstruction of dramaturgy and on the dramaturg and gives several examples of modern dramaturgy: *Devised Theatre*, *Educational Dramaturgy*, *Dramaturgy of the Author*, *Postnarrative Dramaturgy*, *Visual Dramaturgy*, *Dance Dramaturgy*, or *Dramaturgy of the Spectator*, whereby he poses a question whether this is postdramaturgical dramaturgy. He also raises a question regarding performative dramaturgy. For more refer to PAVIS, Patrice. *Dramaturgy and Postdramaturgy*. In *Nová dramaturgia, nový dramaturg II. New Dramaturgy, New Dramaturg II*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav/The Theatre Institute, 2015, pp. 19 – 25.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that with but very few exceptions, Slovak theatres do not use alternative theatre spaces in flexible configurations as designed in new buildings. Instead, stages are used conventionally as a smaller space.

largely to the fact that the impulses would be typically given by the author or the stage director. In collective creation spontaneous impulses are given by the entire production team. These theatres do not have the position of a dramaturg.

A postdramaturgy wave swept over Slovakia in the 1990s. Aside from showing little or no respect for anything that was produced under real socialism (i.e. prior to November 1989), new dramaturgy began to seek new themes through personal or social frustration of an individual/a generation transformed into individualism and through the atomisation of an idea or story.

At the outset of our deliberation which will draw on examples from the past, there is a need to separate classical theatres, which are either multi-ensemble or stand-alone theatres, from smaller theatres/theatre troupes. The former operate in their own buildings which need capital investments, with an auditorium (auditoriums) having a bigger seating capacity<sup>3</sup> that must be populated. Productions intended for bigger auditoriums can only rarely be moved to other buildings. Travelling to more remote locations to reach the audiences is costly. Proceeds from guest performances do not cover all the costs. The concept of a market economy gradually implemented by the State in culture is ruthless. Smaller theatre companies that usually run domestic projects, with a minimum number of foreign projects, are well familiar with the situation. These theatre companies, or, ad hoc theatre troupes, are not expected to fulfil the social or educational role of big theatres whose purpose is laid down in their charters of incorporation. The big theatres group seeks different possibilities to win over a broad range of audiences, while employing all kind of genres; smaller theatre companies have their own "stable audiences". Given the fact that there is a shortage of funding, theatre professionals would often point at each other and complain about others receiving more money than what they get themselves either directly (from SND) or from regional governments<sup>4</sup>. No wonder that it is these so-called independent theatres and culture centres that are more critical of this form of funding of other theatre types. It is hard to act as an independent arbiter if there are no data at hand of a reliable sociological survey on the role and mission of a theatrical culture, of concrete theatres and their impact upon society. In order to stay impartial, we would have to base ourselves on a qualitative analysis of production supported by grants. Repertory state theatres and theatres founded by self-governing regions and municipalities annually report to their founders, they are subject to the scrutiny of the general public and are obliged by law to publish their annual reports. Independent theatres do not have such an obligation with regard to the public at large. Their financial statements with a brief description are reported to an agency/Art Support Fund.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, the drama auditorium in the new building of The Slovak National Theatre has a seating capacity of 649, SND Studio in three possible versions holds between 149 and 160 seats, and opera and ballet auditorium has a seating capacity of 861. The historical SND building holds 550 seats. The new building of Divadlo J. Záborského in Prešov is also oversized and the big auditorium has a seating capacity of 654 and its smaller studio auditorium holds 240 seats. For comparison, the National House of the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin has a seating capacity of 240 and the smaller studio auditorium holds 184 seats.

<sup>4</sup> Opera, music theatre and ballet have been intentionally excluded from our deliberation. This is a domain left to experts on the area who, in addition to art production, are also knowledgeable of marketing. Quality opera production should be promoted by the State also due to the fact that in Slovakia, a transparent system of financial support by the business community has not yet been launched.

Increasingly, especially younger theatre professionals and critics, have been accentuating the new role of a dramaturg who collaborates closely with the author of a dramatic text and seeks new forms of work with the audiences irrespective of the theatre type. They underpin his creative activity in seeking new means that frequently concern the form rather than the contents (essence) of the narrative. Oftentimes, the one-time discovered and known facts resurface while the new role of a dramaturg is being identified. The only difference is in the use of a new and different terminology. The same holds for acting space. For instance, site specific performance in the meaning of alternative unconventional theatre space for which theatre productions were devised in the past<sup>5</sup>, is nothing innovative. Even under real socialism (before November 1989), Slovak theatres did not only give performances in conventional space solely intended for theatre operation. The little history of Slovak theatre, against the backdrop of the big history of Czecho-Slovak or European theatre, may be of little interest to Europeans. However, in Slovak ambience, when contemporary trends are named, things that are already known and referred to using an old language closer to German terminology, should not be viewed as innovative.

In this fashion, inaccurate information are transmitted from an individual memory to collective memory. The opinion of a young generation is based on the historically young memory. Back in the 1990s, the position of a dramaturg vanished from Slovak theatres and in drama companies conceptual dramaturgy was on the decline. Political, societal and especially economic changes after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989 ushered in, alongside political and individual freedom, serious financial problems connected with the retrenchments of government subsidies for the arts and also with economic changes, i.e. with the boosting of private ownership. Several private theatre companies were established in addition to state or city theatres; they, too, applied for grants through the culture ministry. The post of a dramaturg was found superfluous by some theatres, while other theatres assumed that guest stage directors would have a dramaturg on their creative teams, or, there would be a directing dramaturg in the position of a stage director, who was not keen to work with a creative partner. This was a time of societal and artistic quest especially in bigger theatre companies. Diverse new and smaller theatre groupings reached their apex. After the Velvet Revolution theatres turned into discussion fora and replaced public space, i.e. town squares, in the winter time, which was especially true for smaller towns and communities. The audience returned hesitantly to the theatre in search of theatre, curious to see what theatre professionals had in stock for them.

Paradoxically, in a situation when new themes in the theatre were sought, sweeping economic changes and convertibility of Czechoslovak crown contributed to a change in the operation of theatres, which were free to purchase copyright for the staging of musicals of international renown. Epic stage design, state-of-the-art technology, a boom of musical actors-singers attracted masses of delighted audiences. Alongside the well-established American musical, Slovak musical opuses were produced. Theatre directors and producers quickly realised where money could be

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the interpretation of the concept of *Mise en scène liée à in lieu donné* (English: site specific performance, German: Ortsgebundene Inszenierung). In PAVIS, Patrice. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris : DUNOD, 1996, p. 2015 [In Slovak: PAVIS, Patrice. *Divadelný slovník*. Translated by Soňa Šimková, Elena Flašková. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 204].

saved. Live orchestra was frequently replaced by a music recording and singing was facilitated via micro ports. In several theatres, the new trend increasingly used by big theatres excluded the position of a concept dramaturg from the drama creative process (for instance, in Nová scéna Theatre Bratislava).

### **The appearance of a distinct author theatre and a new acting space**

In Slovakia in the last three decades of the 20th century, the dramaturg was not only assigned the role of a literary agent in developing a dramaturgic plan or a programme booklet. Frequently, he was an author and sparked concrete productions in both conventional theatre space comprising the stage and the auditorium as well as in an alternative theatre space. Let us mention the collaboration of long standing between the dramaturg Darina Kárová and stage director Jozef Bednárík in Nitra theatre, especially the performances of their Poddivadlo [The Subtheatre], which operated by Krajské divadlo [Regional Theatre] Nitra (currently, Divadlo Andreja Bagara Nitra [Andrej Bagar Theatre Nitra]). Originally, the theatre started off in the basement of their theatre which was converted to club premises. Later on, the theatre moved to the Museum of Homeland Study located below Nitra Castle, which currently houses the priest seminary of St. Gorazd. The theatre staged the dramatizations of stories by Dovzhenko, Bunin, Maupassant and others. Oftentimes, the productions would commence out in the street, continue on a staircase, in hallways and in small rooms where a close contact between the actor and the spectator was established. After all, the performances of the well-known Divadlo na provázku [Theatre on a String] in Brno, currently Divadlo Husa na provázku [Goose on a String Theatre]), followed this format. The creative tandem composed of Slovak stage director Peter Scherhaufer and dramaturg Petr Oslzlý, together with the Slovak stage designer Ján Zavarský, collaborated not only on national productions. They, too, were co-creators of a joint project *CESTY (křižovatky – jízdní řády – setkání)* [ROADS (Crossroads – Timetables – Encounter)] and alongside Divadlo na provázku other theatres joined in: Divadlo na okraji [Theatre on the Edge], Ha-divadlo [Ha-Theatre] and Studio Y (1984). It was not a conventional production, each theatre company used different procedures of author collective creation. However, the concept was developed jointly by dramaturgs and stage directors of the participating theatre companies and they were also co-authors of texts. Stage designer Zavarský was also on the creative team. In the late 1980s, the touring theatre project *Mir Caracane – Karavana Mir* (spring 1989), was their most significant project involving international collaboration. Aside from their theatre, eight other alternative foreign theatre companies were invited to take part in the project.<sup>6</sup> Divadlo Husa na provázku [Goose on a String Theatre] was the only theatre in Czechoslovakia which in parallel with theatre productions staged open air productions, ran visual art happenings, theatre encounters of borderline theatrical (paratheatrical) nature and borderline scenic

<sup>6</sup> The theatre performed in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Prague, West Berlin, Copenhagen, Basel, Lausanne, Blois and the tour ended up in Paris. For more information about the activity of the theatre refer to OSLZLÝ, Petr et al. *Divadlo Husa na provázku 1968/71 – 1998. Kniha v pohybu I...* Brno : Centrum experimentálního divadla, 1999.

forms.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, they were a source of inspiration especially to younger theatre makers.

This open, irregular dramaturgy was indirectly applied by Peter Scherhauser in Slovakia in his stage reading project *Kemu ce treba* '91<sup>8</sup> in Divadlo Jonáša Záborského [Jonáš Záborský Theatre] in Prešov, Eastern Slovakia, in 1991.<sup>9</sup> Prešov theatre makers performed seven parts of the project in various spaces of a new theatre building and one part of the project was performed on a square in front of the theatre. For instance, the first project part offered nine mini plays that were based on the literary texts of East Slovakian authors. They were simultaneously and repetitively performed in small cubicles for smaller groups of spectators who eventually saw all the stories<sup>10</sup>; other parts were played in a rehearsal room, on the big or the small stage. *Kemu ce treba* '91 project presented intriguing themes dedicated, for instance, to the acclaimed pop art artist and film-maker Andy Warhol or to Slovak immigrants in Northern America. Through gypsy songs, fairy tales and legends a joyful, playful, sad and melancholic story of this ethnic group unfolded before the audience. With respect to the content, all parts were related to the historical events and issues of Eastern Slovakia. One part was dedicated to the reflection on recent political events, as narrated by Vasil Biľak, one-time prominent functionary of the communist party and ideologist of the so-called normalisation process after 1969.

The contribution of the project was not only in the presentation of new spaces and in familiarisation with them but also in the use of the creative approaches of Divadlo na provázku, starting from the scenic design concept applied to non-theatre smaller spaces and to open air space, through minimalist work with the props and a grand fire truck, down to a firework and other equipment and smoke shells, which was reminiscent of a big performance. It was an opportunity for actors to try out an acting style very different from what they had been used to. On the one hand, the actors got physically closer to their audience, on the other, they almost got lost in the big open square.

The implementation of Prešov project *Kemu ce treba* '91 contained several elements of Pavis' (post)dramaturgy examples. Texts were developed on the go. Under the guidance of stage director Peter Scherhauser, dramaturgs and in-house stage designers, together with actors, familiarised themselves with the interior of the theatre and learnt to work/perform in public. There was only a handful of repeat performances due to operational reasons, as the new theatre building housed two ensembles: drama and popular dance and musical ensemble. However, the theatre presented several parts of the project at theatre festivals in Bratislava and in Nitra. The project implemented in Eastern Slovakia, drawing upon the knowledge of European theatre, demonstrated that by combining a powerful theme with new dramatic forms the theatre could reach out to its audiences and expand the creativity of theatre professionals.

A textbook example of new dramaturgy of the early 1990s was another project launched by Peter Scherhauser in this theatre entitled *Kde leží naša bieda*, with the

<sup>7</sup> Refer to SCHERHAUSER, Peter. Od scénografie v nepravidelnom divadelnom priestore k projektu variabilného divadelného komplexu. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 1999, Vol. 47, Issue 4, p. 346 and further.

<sup>8</sup> The title is in Slovak dialect, standard Slovak title would be *Kto ňa potrebuje* [Who Needs You].

<sup>9</sup> The premiere of the first part of the project was held in March and the last part was performed in December 1991.

<sup>10</sup> In the past two decades, the trend has been increasingly used not only in Slovakia but also, for instance, in the performances of traditional Moscow Art Theatre *The Tale of What We Can and What We Cannot*.

subtitle *Rozprávkový environment* (1996) [Where Our Misery Lies, with the subtitle Fairy Tale Environment]. It was about an unconventional actual wandering of young audiences and actors through several spaces in the new theatre building, where they looked for the cause of (Slovak) misery.<sup>11</sup> Three directors and dramaturg Alžbeta Verešpejová as script writers collaborated on a project of mini stories that unfolded in cubicles arranged on a big stage and behind the stage or out in the corridors and elsewhere. The actor ensemble practiced new acting techniques and dramaturg Alžbeta Verešpejová probed into a new kind of collaboration in a creative team that worked on a children's project.

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Ever since the 1950s, theatre in Slovakia has had ample experience with production intended for the young audience. While not deliberately mentioning diverse forms of puppet theatre productions (notably in Bratislava and in Banská Bystrica), it should be noted that also the specialised theatre for children and youth Divadlo pre deti a mládež in Trnava [Theatre for Children and Youth] (renamed to Divadlo Jána Palárika [Ján Palárik Theatre]), which was founded at a time of fierce normalisation (1974), was tasked with putting on plays for all children and youth age categories. A theatre that used to put on classical productions in its early theatre seasons, which were oftentimes naive when it comes to their production and theme quality, evolved into a one-generation theatre with captivating dramaturgy, direction, creativity of actors, and author music. Blaho Uhlár and Juraj Nvota, the founding fathers of the theatre, utilised playfulness, anti-illusiveness, figurativeness that converged on a confrontational clash with the political direction of society. It is to be regretted that there are no film recordings available of some productions of Trnava theatre, not only for the sake of preserving the history of Slovak theatre, but also for serving as an evidence of numerous elements of their productions (theme, composition through decomposition, production means of expression and others), corresponding to the so-called 21st century new dramaturgy.

Several productions staged by Trnava theatre carried the elements of new dramaturgy. Through clowniades they reflected on consumer frustration and on the up-bringing of children (*Princezná Maru* [Princess Maru], 1979, renewed in 1982), and also on the rejection of manipulation (*Noc zázrakov* [A Night of Miracles], 1982) and on other themes. The grotesque/pantomime/clowniade *Charlie* (1979) won international acclaim. Through the metaphor of film studios, a fragile story of a man in love unfolding against the backdrop of the world of a chaste young person and of the world of evil, a crooked mirror to society is shown. The above three plays had a common denominator: the scripts to them were developed during rehearsals. While working on his two author clowniades, Blaho Uhlár did not need to collaborate with a dramaturg and Juraj Nvota collaborated with dramaturg Mirka Čibenková on *Charlie*. Uhlár was a big fan of The Taganka Theatre in Moscow and he was also intrigued by the productions of Czech alternative theatres. In Trnava, he showed his propensity for author or collective theatre. Interestingly, theatre illusionist Yuri Lyubimov who had worked for

<sup>11</sup> The title *Kde leží naša bieda* [Where All Our Misery Lies] was derived by producers from the book by Ľudovít Štúr (Martin : Matica slovenská, 1848), which contains political articles and speeches delivered by Ľudovít Štúr in Hungarian Parliament.



many years as artistic director and before his forced emigration<sup>12</sup> the only director of The Taganka Theatre<sup>13</sup>, had never collaborated with a dramaturg. This internationally acclaimed theatre did not have the post of a dramaturg. Lyubimov as director was oftentimes the sole author of dramatization. In conjunction with “new dramaturgy” the dramaturg’s role vis-à-vis the spectator tends to be accentuated, therefore, it should be noted that with but a few exceptions Lyubimov attended each performance. From the back of a small auditorium he would watch the performance and give signals to actors with a flashlight.<sup>14</sup> When direction of a concrete performance or production was discussed in an interview for a Czech magazine, he candidly admitted that: “I have been standing all the time in the auditorium for the past twenty-five years. (...) Before that, I used to have a special flashlight with three different colours that I kept from the war. When I flickered white light, it meant that the rhythm was lost and the performance rolled on mechanically. Green light meant that everything went fine; I used it rarely. Well, and red light meant that the performance went so badly that I was about to leave the auditorium.”<sup>15</sup> With the passage of time, his conduct during performances could be understood as part of a unique performance within a repertory title.

During a master class in Bratislava, at 2016 Nová dráma festival [New Drama Festival], the prominent Russian playwright and director Ivan Vyrpayev strictly opposed director theatre which freely worked with author texts. In his opinion, each original play had its form and idea and if directors were urged to re-write author texts, they should be halted. Instead, they should write their own texts.<sup>16</sup> This is an interesting, be arguable opinion, especially with respect to classical authors (Chekhov, Ibsen, Shakespeare). The contemporary gifted Russian theatre director Timofei Kulyabin mounted a production of Chekhov’s *Tri sestry* [Three Sisters] without words, using sign language and distinct acting devices. Individual scenes and scenic images are played simultaneously. In parallel, Chekhov’s original text is shown using subtitle editor. This is an example of director theatre, particularly demanding on actors who had to learn sign language, whereby the author signature was preserved.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to that, the text of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*<sup>18</sup> was dramatically abridged by Kulyabin. Onegin was transformed into a modern affluent avant-gardist and representative of the post-modernism of new drama. It was this very production of *Hamlet* that split Russian theatre critics to those open to new forms of classical plays that present contemporary image of a hero who acts in a “non-heroic” way and to those theatre

<sup>12</sup> While engaged in direction abroad, Yuri Petrovich Lyubimov was stripped of his citizenship by the Soviet government in 1984. He returned to Moscow in 1988, and his citizenship was given back to him the following year.

<sup>13</sup> At a time when his popularity was at its apex, its official name was Moskovsky Teatr Dramy i Komedii na Taganke [Moscow Theatre of Drama and Comedy on Taganka Square].

<sup>14</sup> A number of (Czecho)Slovak theatre professionals had an opportunity to watch live Lyubimov giving signals to actors. After 1990, his reactions with the flashlight were not so harsh but the spectator frequently witnessed his commenting cries from behind the back row of the theatre auditorium in the old Taganka building.

<sup>15</sup> SMOLÁKOVÁ, Vlasta – LJUBIMOV, Jurij Petrovič. Vystačím si s vlastným obličejem. Rozhovor s Jurijem Petrovičem Ljubimovom. In *Svět a divadlo*, 1991, Vol. 2, Issue 4, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Vyrpayev’s presentation Drama is a dying art form is available in Nová dráma/New Drama Festival 9 – 13 May 2016 Bratislava. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav/Theatre Institute, 2016, pp. 4 – 7.

<sup>17</sup> First night in September 2015, Theatre Krasnyj fabel, Novosibirsk. Theatre-goers from Central Europe could attend the performance during Wiener Festwochen 2016.

<sup>18</sup> For more about the productions refer to PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. European Theatre Context. Linking Bratislava to Moscow and to the Urals. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2015, Vol. 63, Special Issue, pp. 22 – 44.

makers who reject such an image of classical texts. Let us use an example of Slovak director theatre, which heavily relies on actors, the tetralogy of Molière's plays staged by Slovenské komorné divadlo [Slovak Chamber Theatre] in Martin. Four successful productions by Roman Polák were an outcome of an extensive modification of Molière's plays – *Don Juan* (2001), *Striptíz Molière* ([Striptease Molière] based on *Tartuffe*, 2002), *Úbohý lakomec* (2003) [The Miserable Miser] and *Mizantrop* (2010) [The Misanthrope], and in two cases, Molière could no longer be stated to be their author.

Lyubimov was also a representative of director theatre and he had no problem admitting it. He, too, would frequently incorporate other author texts in his production scripts, whereby they were also structured differently. He thought highly of the word, scenic minimalism and of minimalistic acting. When it comes to the content and the metaphor, the word played an important role in his productions.<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, Slovak directors shared the same line of thinking. They staged plays on (no)freedom, on the inner world of an individual stuck behind the iron curtain, on his desires, dreams, beauty where, alongside scenic metaphor, the word was given a prominent role, be it in a classical text or in the production script which in a film (clip) form introduced the hero and his struggle for truth. It was Blaho Uhlár to have extensively used editing method and image decomposition in his scripts composed of the creation of poets and of their correspondence which were a clear evidence of their inner struggle and the struggle with ideology and red tape. This is patent in *Verzia (Téma – A. Blok)*, 1977 [Version (Theme – A. Blok)], followed by *Laco Novomeský (Život a dielo)*, 1984 [The Life and Work of Laco Novomeský], and most profoundly in the production entitled *Téma Majakovskij*, 1987 [Theme Mayakovsky]. Unlike postdramaturgy, negating the story and the hero, these scripts and productions were noted for distinctive heroes and their protagonists.

### The phenomenon of Blaho Uhlár in new dramaturgy

The quest for a new dramaturgy, so different from what the ruling party and various officials formally promoted, was not launched in Slovak theatre after November 1989. Neither did new dramaturgy emerge in the early years of “dramaturgic freedom”, which was a time marked by seeking “new” themes, means, forms, with oftentimes missing purpose of narrative and with themes hidden behind external means of expression. The quest for the new forms of artist testimony of theatre makers, of the state of society, became more visible in Slovak theatre in the mid-1980s. In order to get a better understanding of this belated process, let us bring some facts to the reader's attention. Professional theatres<sup>20</sup> were heavily de-

<sup>19</sup> Lyubimov did not need a dramaturg in the true meaning of the term. In Russian programme booklets the term *zaveduyushchiy literaturnoy chastyu* (literary manager) is used, which corresponds to the post of a dramaturg. The Russian term dramaturg is used in the meaning of dramatist and dramaturgy in the meaning of drama literature.

<sup>20</sup> As early as 1978, the then new law on theatre activity stipulated that “the State looks after theatre activity and its planned development. The bodies of state administration shall ensure the running of theatre activity in accordance with the interests and needs of socialist society”. The law distinguished between theatre artists who carry out their artist activity on the basis of an employment relationship with the theatre or with and agency, and theatre amateurs who “in their free time carry out theatre activity for free in amateur ensembles”. According to the law, the ministry of culture was tasked with identifying categories of theatre artists and with laying down “prerequisites of their professional competence”. Refer to Act No. 39/1978





Blaho Uhlár: *Kvinteto* [The Quintet]. The Theatre for Children and Youth in Trnava, premiered on 20 December 1985. On the left Vladimír Oktavec (Sláčikár) [Fiddler], Erik Jamrich (Dirigent) [Conductor], Jaroslav Filip (Klavirista) [Pianist], Anna Šišková (Spevážka) [Singer]. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Scenography Ján Zavarský. Photo by Bohuš Král. The archives of Ján Palárik Theatre.

pendent on their founders. The functionaries of district and even central bodies of the communist party intervened in the founding of theatres, oftentimes following their individual taste or ideas. There were cases of the preparation of new productions coming to a halt during the rehearsal stage or after it was finished. Theatres were reluctant to take risks, as attempts to put on productions with a critical focus on the State policy or with clearly politicising features had personal repercussions. Therefore, the majority of talented stage directors employed by Slovak theatres strived to use as many metaphoric elements as possible by producing classical, or “innocent looking” contemporary plays. This was at a time when a word or a line about the State (for instance, about the kingdom in Shakespeare’s plays), the bribery of officials and about ridiculous red tape (Gogol’s texts) resulted in unpleasant conflicts with bureaucrats to whom theatre professionals were obliged to submit original texts of plays as a proof of not having added anything to the text. Dramaturgic plans were approved in advance, before the theatre season was even started. Each original title had to go through a review procedure conducted by an official and by a chosen official drama critic. Despite the difficulties, numerous productions meeting stringent quality criteria were put on, which nowadays constitute the “golden stock” of Slovak theatre largely thanks to the fact that theatre profession-

Coll., in <http://www.noveaspi.sk/products/lawText/1/33778/1/2>, and other related ordinances of the ministry of culture applicable up until 1990–1991.



Blaho Uhlár and collective: *Predposledná večera* [The Last-But-One-Supper]. The Theatre for Children and Youth in Trnava, premiered on 3 June 1989. On the left Vladimír Oktavec, Gita Šefčovičová, Ladislav Kerata. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Set disagn, costumes Miloš Omyl Karásek. Photo by Táňa Hojčová. The archives of of Ján Palárik Theatre.

als became masters of every word and line they used. They worked with the most subtle nuances of gestures, phrasing of sentences, intonation, in liaison with stage design and costumes. They got the message across to their audiences.

Against this background, Blaho Uhlár introduced a completely different type of theatre. It was not the text that constituted the primary element of the production, but rather a collective creative process of seeking means of expression to get a common idea across. The text was only formalised at the end of the rehearsal process. The apex of this kind of theatre was the founding of Divadlo Stoka [Stoka Theatre] (1991). As early as the 1980s, Uhlár had shown propensity for author collective improvised theatre. In his home Trnava theatre, performance *Kvinteto* [The Quintet, 1985] was a breakthrough project, followed by *Kde je sever* [Where is North, 1987] and *Predposledná večera* [The Last-But-One-Supper, 1989]. Ever since 1987, he has been collaborating with Divadelný ochotnícky súbor na Kopánke in Trnava [Amateur Theatre Company on Kopánka], better known as DISK. A year later, on the stage of the traditional *Ukrajinské národné divadlo* [Ukrainian National Theatre]<sup>21</sup> in Prešov (today, *Divadlo Alexandra Duchnoviča* [Alexander Duchnovič Theatre]), he put on

<sup>21</sup> At that time, the theatre performed in Ukrainian language. The majority of actors were graduates of Kiev theatre institute, which trained its students in line with the traditional Russian drama school of K.S. Stanislavski, which, as it turned out, was an advantage. Today, it is the only theatre in the world to give performances in Ruthenian language.



Collective: *Impasse (Sentimental Journey)*. Stoka Theatre, premiered on 22 June 1991. Jozef Chmel. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Stage-designer Miloš Karásek. The archives of the Stoka Theatre.

four productions which tied into his author collective creation: *Sens nonsens*, 1988, followed by *Ocot* [Vinegar], in collaboration with creative artist Miloš Karásek (likewise in 1988), *Záha* (*Opus rutenium* [Heartburn, 1990], and a production for children *Nono!* [Don't Do That!] (1991). Working together with Uhlár meant a significant advancement for the theatre which until then had been staging productions that followed the principles of socialist realism most of the time.

Author theatre was among the production methods applied in Trnava theatre. In some of them, the notion of "the play" was not used and it was replaced by the concept of "the syllabi" or "the text". When more extensive modifications are required, it is customary to refer to the source text, which serves as the basis for a creative procedure applied throughout the rehearsal process, as the production text. Often-times, in author improvisational theatre, the final form lacks a continuous story line and it does not have an arch that links up the beginning and end. It is a reflection of knowledge, opinions, feelings of authors, a mirror of their personal narrative regarding a particular theme. In conjunction with Uhlár's author collective projects put on as productions, the concept of "the play" was not applied to "the syllabi" or "impro-

vised text" either. The Croatian theatre critic and historian Sanja Nikčević brings to attention the statement by Tankred Dorst at The 4th European Theatre Forum 1996 – Writing for the Theatre Today. According to him, "Today, the author does not write a play, but a text"<sup>22</sup>. Nikčević states that the concept of "the play" as "an autonomously completed author work" has been replaced by such terms as "text", "motive", "script", "libretto", or, simply, "words".<sup>23</sup> In principle, all these terms capture the new dramaturgy of Slovak author theatre of the 1980s, 1990s, and even of today.<sup>24</sup>

However, just like in author's case, for Uhlár, too, the theme, the idea, stands at the beginning of everything, i.e. what the production should be about or, where should it lead to. Uhlár has always based himself on personal experiences (this also applies to his clowniades for children). There have been far too many no-nos in the theatre: bans, orders, curtailing creative freedom in the choice of themes and means. The theme of *Kvinteto* [The Quintet] is about three orchestra players and a female singer, who disagree with the production of an incomprehensible musical piece and rebel against the conductor. For the actors, the theme epitomised their understanding of no freedom. Much as it may have appeared to be about rejecting a nonsensical postmodern musical piece by an ungifted artist<sup>25</sup> at a time when the synopsis to this author project was approved in 1985, the final production form clearly demonstrated that the creative team came up with a grand metaphor of the rejection of the bondage of freedom in an individual's creative pursuit. They are punished by the conductor who incarcerates them in a rehearsal room. The players and the singer, by playing (whistling on) improvised musical instruments (beer bottles), produce unique variations of sad, cheerful and serious jazz musical piece. The soundproof room, in which the musicians are detained during the lingering regime and in which they gradually grow old, is reminiscent of a recording studio. Percussion instruments, *Kultúra* newspaper, conductor's jacket with an epaulette on the left shoulder as a premonition of the crumbling regime, were an outcry of no freedom, a clear message of the suppression of individual opinions (and of the arts). The production in a small theatre space put on the stage by employing the method of musical, movement, gesture and mimic improvisation was a compelling example of new dramaturgy.

In *Kvinteto* [The Quintet], actors worked with a script-libretto and subsequently, the scene chart was a product of collective improvisation and only then it was formalised. In *Kvinteto*, Uhlár collaborated with stage designer Ján Zavarský, followed by Miloš Karásek, the latter becoming his closest collaborator in working with decomposition images. At the outset, names of protagonists overlapped with the names of actors, to facilitate their identification with the action and thinking of "their" characters. However, personal narratives had broader societal implications. Dramatic images of distorted interpersonal relationships escalated in subsequent Uhlár's projects commensurately to the aggravating public disillusionment and its manifestation, be it in *Kde je sever* [Where is North] as an image of two generations covering the theme

<sup>22</sup> NIKČEVIĆ, Sanja. *Nová európska dráma alebo veľký podvod*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Jána Jankoviča, 2007, p. 17. Translation J. Jankovič from the original *Nova europska drama ili velika obmana* (Zagreb 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Oftentimes, these concepts may pose a problem in terminology or accuracy when translated to and from different languages.

<sup>25</sup> Since the late 1970s, a number of cacophonous and musically shallow pieces by authors of little talent were composed and the audiences left concert halls in great numbers.



Collective: *Dyp inaf (Heavy Mental)*. Stoka Theatre, premiered on 6 December 1991. Vladimír Zboroň, Jozef Chmel. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Stage-designer Miloš Karásek. The archives of the Stoka Theatre.

of “man, his values and goals”, or *Predposledná večera* [The Last-But-One-Supper], or projects launched by DISK in Trnava. A little less than two years before the events of November 1989, the confidence of theatre makers in change had been very strong. The musicians are set free from the locked room by a young conductor (*Kvinteto* [The Quintet]). In a confrontation between two generations only the young ones are bold enough to abandon a conformist society, whereby their way to (individual) freedom through an open door was there all the time (*Kde je sever* [Where is North] – the title is metaphoric, alluding to the correct direction of choice). The random images of scene charts seemed to have lacked coherence and negated traditional plot structure and yet, they were able to create a legible semantic narrative structure (red tape, fear, the mirror of the belief system turned upside down in *Sens nonsens*).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In the second theatre manifesto published in the programme booklet to *Ocot* [Vinegar] (1988), Uhlár gave the following characteristics of decomposition:

“Decomposition means:

negation of the traditional structure of the plot and

additive dramatic structure in which occasionally chosen and

organized events

emphasize their discontinuity, individual independence, and their

absolute equality as events

the depiction of the world by non-narrative form,

which negates the beginning and end of the work

and permanently proves the non-dramatic.”





Ivana Gibová, Blaho Uhlár: *Bordeline*. Based on the novel by Ivana Gibová. Stoka Theatre, premiered on 17 October 2015. Peter Tilajčík. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý. The archives of the Stoka Theatre.

While in the above examples, Uhlár and his creative team outlined a way of reaching the freedom of positive thinking, their *Predposledná večera* [The Last-But-One-Supper]<sup>27</sup> with the subtitle *Óda na obmedzenú suverenitu s obmedzeným dosahom. Venované svetlej pamiatke neznámeho štátnika* [An ode to limited sovereignty with a limited impact. In loving memory of an unknown statesman], referred to by its devisers as the genre of “polythematic plusquamdecomposition”, unlike their earlier projects, surprised the audience by its morbid humour, starting from the invitation (having the form of an obituary), through stage design, masks, down to the spoofing images of the state of society and of individuals reminiscent of mutual devouring or killing. Drama theorist Nadežda Lindovská pointed out that “the morbid hedonism of *Predposledná večera* prompts to making parallels with the motives of the works of Francis Rabelais and with the famous Bakhtin’s study on medieval and renaissance folk culture”<sup>28</sup>.

Refer to <http://www.stoka.sk/uhtar/slovdivmanif.html>. The English translation has been borrowed from Cambridge journal: QUINN, Michael L. Uncertain Slovakia: Blaho Uhlár, STOKA and Vres. In *Theatre Survey*, 1995, Vol. 36, pp. 97 – 110. Quinn’s paper in English and Slovak is available at <http://www.stoka.sk/quinn1.html>.

<sup>27</sup> The opening night was on 30 June 1989, new titles were staged after November 1989.

<sup>28</sup> LINDOVSKÁ, Nadežda. Improvizovaný princíp v slovenskom divadle druhej polovice osemdesiatych rokov a tvorba režiséra Blahoslava Uhlára. In *Otvorené divadlo v uzavretej spoločnosti*. Zostavil Vladimír Štefko. Bratislava : TÁLIA-press, 1996, p. 210.





Collective: *Intim*. Stoka Theatre, premiered on 21 December 2015. Shot from the production. Direction Blaho Uhlár. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý. The archives of the Stoka Theatre.

In the first two theatre manifestos Blaho Uhlár and Miloš Karásek rejected the author, subjectivism, postmodernism and they both subscribed to the creative professional's super-subjective view.<sup>29</sup> In his study from the mid-1990s, the American drama theorist Michael Quinn pinpointed that the term "decomposition", which sounds like a reference to Jacques Derrida, was first used in Czechoslovak dramatic theory (Jan Mukařovský). He also noted that "in the manifestos Uhlár seems eager to reduce his world of ideological false consciousness to a simpler level of cosmologically neutral physical events - much in keeping with the influence of Vienna School philosophy on Slovak thought"<sup>30</sup>.

Uhlár, metaphorically speaking, has been tearing down all dramatic conventions imaginable. This was most prominent in the early years of Divadlo Stoka, which applied a collective improvisation decomposition method. Let us recall some important projects of the theatre that also intrigued foreign theatre-goers, such as *Kolaps* (*Kto je kto*) [Collapse (Who is Who)], *Dyp inaf* (*Heavy Mental*), *Vres* (*Optimistická*) [Heath (Optimistic)], *Impasse* (*Sentimental Journey*), *Nox* (*Kto uhádne meno berného úradníka*) [Nox (Who Will Guess the Name of the Tax Collector?)]. The colloquial language of Stoka (stoka means sewer) contained numerous abusive words. Theatre profession-

<sup>29</sup> The texts of the first and the second Slovak theatre manifestos have been available in Slovak language on the website since the mid-1990s. Refer to <http://www.stoka.sk/uhlar/slovdivmanif.html>.

<sup>30</sup> For more refer to QUINN, Michael L. Uncertain Slovakia: Blaho Uhlár, STOKA and Vres. In *Theatre Survey*, 1995, Vol. 36, pp. 97 – 110, and also <http://www.stoka.sk/quinn1.html>.

als used it to ridicule empty thoughts, phrases and stereotypes that lingered in new society throughout the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> However, not only economic hardships and problems with space were the cause of the activity of Divadlo Stoka coming to a halt. The theme was exhausted, the vocabulary and other means were repetitive. A number of Uhlár's collaborators left the theatre and began to collaborate with other creative professionals. In the meantime, other ensembles took up collective improvisation, such as, for instance, SkRAT.<sup>32</sup> A constant use of vulgar words (not just in smaller theatres) mirrors authenticity and spontaneity of speech as well as the content of selected themes which reflect personal feelings and attitudes of theatre makers. A typical example of the dramaturgy of current themes noted for (black) humour of author theatre of one author is Divadelné združenie GUnaGU [GUnaGU Theatre].

### **The theatre of the document and of the images of recent past**

New dramaturgy is not only about productions/presentations of small theatres with individual or collective author production, which like in a crooked mirror reflect the feelings, knowledge of creative professionals and their perception of society whose component part is also politics. New dramaturgy of the 21st century is also about new themes, the comeback of the story, the narration about a time period and man in recent past (e.g. in the 1950s), or today. New dramaturgy is also about the comeback of poetry expressed through image, movement, and the shortcuts in scenic design.

In Slovakia, too, the way to the dramaturgy of a new millennium led through documentary theatre. A handful of verbatim theatre performances were replaced by plays, dramatizations, scripts and productions based on authentic material. For instance, the production dedicated to the first Slovak president of the Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945) Jozef Tiso, who was sentenced to death after the war, may be listed among such productions in Slovak theatre. The script of the play with a simple title *Tiso* (Divadlo Aréna [Arena Theatre]) by stage director Rastislav Ballek was based on selected written and audio historical documents. Performer Sláva Daubnerová used a similar principle in her performance dedicated to the first Slovak professional actress Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, with the actress' initials *M.H.L.* giving the name to the performance. Unlike neighbouring states, the number of such texts in Slovakia is very limited. While in Europe there is a prevalence of documentary texts from the secret police archives, in Russia, documentary drama is based on the diaries from labour camps (knowns as GULAGs, for instance, *Vyatlag*, Kirov Drama Laboratory, Teatr doc. Moscow and others), on the recollections of individuals or on newspaper documents detailing the fates of individual members of a terrorist group that plotted

<sup>31</sup> Several studies have been dedicated to individual projects and production methods of Divadlo Stoka. Four studies by Juraj Šebesta are rich in information. They were written for the Czech journal *Svět a divadlo* and were published in parts in 2006. A lot of studies have also been developed by Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková. Several, studies, interviews, testimonies are available online at <http://www.stoka.sk/tlac.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> The name (abbreviation) of Divadlo SkRAT relates to two meanings. The first one refers to an undesirable connection of two incompatible thought processes. The second one, with graphic presentation as "SkRAT", refers to the Slovak verb "srat" when the small letter "k" is dropped and it has the meaning of fiddling with a filthy thing that makes you dirty. (Leaving out the diacritical mark above "T" is a token of modern day communication). The founders of the theatre association clearly stated their attitude toward the world in the name of their theatre.



Talgat Batalov, Nikolai Berman: *Mumu*. Novokuznetsk Drama Theatre, premiered on January 2015. Shot from the production. Direction Talgat Batalov. Photo by Sergey Kosolapov. The archives of Novokuznetsk Drama Theatre.

the assassination of the Russian tsar in the latter half of the 19th century (*A Life for the Tsar*, Teatro Di Capua, St. Petersburg). Slovak theatre does not reflect upon the current political situation through performances or happenings. The only rare exception is a rather shaky happening to Gorila cause<sup>33</sup> that ended up with a recommendation to the audiences on how to avoid paying income tax. In Russia, several documentary projects have been developed in recent years capturing current social themes or criticising current politicians (for instance, *Mumu* documentary text of a real literature class devoted to the analysis of a Turgenev's story employing commentaries from the Internet and television reporting, Novokuznetsk Drama Theatre), or plays on the violent homicides on streets (for instance, *Antibodies*, Baltic House Theatre-Festival), on schemed trials (actors reproduce police recordings, the feelings of survivors and what they thought of the judicial system, etc.). Oftentimes, when putting on public productions, the authors must cope with various obstacles which are reminiscent of censorship and bullying in recent past.

In Slovak theatre plays-scripts prevailed. Their authors based themselves on documents, narration and fiction (the most distinct example is a play by Viliam Klimáček *Dr. Gustáv Husák* with a subtitle *Väzeň prezidentov – prezident väzňov* [The

<sup>33</sup> Gorila cause is a political scandal in Slovakia, which started in December 2011, when a secret document on extensive corruption leaked and allegedly, numerous politicians were involved in it. It has not been conclusively investigated.



Andrew Sovlachkov: *Antitela* [Antibodies]. Baltic House Theatre, St. Petersburg, premiered on 12 December 2011. Shot from the production. Direction Michael Patlasov. Photo by Yana Pirozkova. The archives of the Baltic House.

Prisoner of Presidents, the President of Prisoners]) – (Divadlo Aréna).<sup>34</sup> Its authors, including dramaturgs and directors, covet for the renaissance of a hero in the meaning of a central character of the story, for the comeback of dramatic characters and their inner schisms and for a conflict with society. Therefore, numerous texts of documentary drama, semi-documentary drama and plays based on actual events portray the stories of ordinary people against the backdrop of broader historical connections.

Bigger regularly-operated theatres would have one or even several dramaturgs. This fact is reflected in a systematic work with authors and in the concept of a theatre season. Slovak authors herald their comeback to the theatre through plays, dramatizations or texts written on demand. In Slovak classical literature numerous themes on the potential or apathy of man can be found, there are a number of toadies and rebellious characters (the works by Martin Kukučín, Timrava, Svetozár Hurban Vajanský and others). Contemporary dramaturgy, through the dramatizations of Slovak prose, offers metaphoric images of our contemporaries, of their peculiar thinking and of their unique deliberations about the present and the past (works by Rudolf Šloboda staged by Divadlo Astorka Korzo '90). It, too, captures the ruthless world of the

<sup>34</sup> For more on documentary theatre refer to PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. Dva svety dokumentárneho divadla. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2011, Vol. 59, Issue 2, pp. 130 – 144. The text has been published in English. For more refer to PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. Two Worlds of Documentary Theatre. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2013, Vol. 61, Special Issue, pp. 72 – 86.

1990s, dominated by mafia and secret criminal organisations (*The Rivers of Babylon* by Peter Pišťánek, the drama company of The Slovak National Theatre). New dramaturgy also includes the productions marking the 60th anniversary of the deportation of Jews to concentration camps (1942) as a memento of a war crime and a reminder of the characters of men who helped other men survive (*Rabínka* [The Woman Rabbi] by Anna Grusková<sup>35</sup>, the drama company of SND or *Holokaust* [Holocaust]<sup>36</sup> by Viliam Klimáček, Divadlo Aréna Bratislava). Slovak theatre also puts on the dramatizations of prose by authors who immigrated from Czecho-Slovakia after 1968. By taking a critical distance, these dramatisations offer a view of political and social situation after 1945 through the stories of individuals whose families were affected by schemed trials against the “enemy”. After 1948, such trials, alongside democratically thinking people, affected communists as well (the dramatisation of an autobiographical novel *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Back Then in Bratislava] by Žo Langerová, Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin [The Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin]). Langerová’s novel portrays the hardships of a spouse of an imprisoned communist and mother of two children. Her narration is filled with utter mistrust in the system in which her incarcerated husband continues to believe. A kinder side of the persecution of writers and translators was revealed in the recollections of Ján Rozner *Sedem dní do pohrebu*, [Seven Days to the Funeral],<sup>37</sup> also staged in Martin.

Ever since the early years of the 21st century, new dramaturgy has been rich in themes and diverse genres, free from all kind of “isms”. It is encouraging to see that authors and theatre makers are now able to view Slovak history and Slovaks, their teasing, evasion and oftentimes denial of values and law, through the prism of grotesque phrases and images. Let us mention sitcom project in five parts [www.narodny.cintorin](http://www.narodny.cintorin.sk) (Slovenské komorné divadlo, Martin), which provides a mirror to our contemporaries by having Slovak national awakeners rise up from their graves on the national cemetery.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside well-established author theatres (Stoka, SkRAT and others) that have been operating for more than two decades, there are also community theatres in Slovakia which apply, among others, art therapy or drama therapy techniques. Among the best-known pioneer theatres is Divadlo z Pasáže of Viera Dubačová [The Theatre from the Passage], and also troupes composed of vagrants or of persons with impaired eyesight, LGBT community and others. Of the minority theatres/theatre ensembles social theatre has grown in popularity thanks to its strong social themes. The outcome of their creative process, of a workshop, are, aside from classical performances, various happenings, residential stays for home and foreign theatre makers. The most prominent representative of such a centre is Divadlo Pôtoň [Pôtoň Theatre], which collaborates with experts across several disciplines

<sup>35</sup> The play is based on the book by Katarína Hradská *Gizi Fleischmannová. Návrat nežiaduci* and on other facts. Grusková has also developed a variation of Gizi Fleischmann for radio and film.

<sup>36</sup> The subtitle of the play is *Príbeh, na ktorý by Slovensko najradšej zabudlo. Vyvolané spomienkami Hildy Hraboveckej a ďalších, ktorí sa vrátili z pekla* [A story which Slovakia would want to forget. The recollections of Hilda Hrabovecká and others who returned from hell].

<sup>37</sup> The author of both dramatizations is Peter Pavlac.

<sup>38</sup> For more about the productions refer to PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. Čriečky z divadelného obrazu súčasnej slovenskej dramatiky. Vyrovnávanie sa s minulosťou. [Fragments from the image of contemporary Slovak drama. Coming to grips with the past]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2014, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 141 – 160.





Žo Langerová – Peter Pavlac: *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Back Then in Bratislava]. The Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin, premiered on 6 November 2015. Direction Patrik Lančarič. Photo by Branislav Konečný. The archives of the Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin.

(sociology, ethnography, history). Their themes focus on poverty, national identity; the theatre also organises conferences on dramatic training and it also runs a cinema. It is based in a small community of Bátovce, with a little over a thousand inhabitants. The theatre is the best proof that community centres that pursue more extensive cultural and social ambitions can operate outside national centres; the precondition are dedicated people. Divadlo Pôtoň is linked with the names of Michal Ditte and Iveta Ditte-Jurčová.

### **The contribution of the themes and means of expression of the young generation**

The situation of a young theatre culture operating in a disproportionate economic environment, almost entirely dependent on state aid, cannot be compared to the situation in advanced countries in which the private sector renders a more extensive support to culture. However, thanks to various European grants, the range of theatre and cultural and educational activities in Slovak theatre has expanded. The relationship between dramaturgy and original creations has also changed. In the 1980s, theatre dramaturgies were predominated by original titles of plays that were completed or tried out by other Slovak theatres. In the 1990s, theatres staged plays written on demand, or plays written by an in-house creative workshop. The repertory was more diverse, titles were not that repetitive, which was also due to the founding of new smaller theatres with their unique poetics and authors. In the first decade of the 21st century, the situation changed. In response to the demand of big-





*Solo lamentoso.* Author, direction, set and costume design Sláva Daubnerová. Performed by Sláva Daubnerová, premiered on 18 December 2015. Photo by Jakub Gulyás. Sláva Daubnerová archives.

ger theatres authors wrote plays with a concrete theme (for instance, Viliam Klimáček and other authors write for Divadlo Aréna). Typically, the dramaturgy of the drama company of The Slovak National Theatre would approach authors two or three years ahead of the future theatre season and make an order for new texts reflecting their envisaged thematic focus. In parallel with theatre companies that used the word, the metaphor, or scenic sign, there were also several dance theatres established. A number of them have been increasingly applying the elements of artistic performances in their projects. The most prominent representative of these trends is performer Sláva Daubnerová, founder of independent P.A.T. Theatre. Her projects have been very well received by the audiences. The dramaturgy of her performances is based on the stories of strong personalities and on powerful events. The performer's focus is on the real fates of concrete women who are portrayed using solo movement, light, new media, music and minimalistic text. The text and in places also movement and light reach the spectator's subconsciousness in the meaning of Derrida's positive deconstruction of change in the rationality order in which we live. Her monodramatic compositions live intensely in the conscience of the spectator who creates reenactments of performances (feedback) within the meaning of the theory of the American theoretician of performance studies Richard Schechner. Sláva Daubnerová's productions do not pose the question of the borderline between documentary theatre and performance within the meaning of the theatre of visual arts (Patrice Pavis). Against their backdrop the spectator waits in suspense for the development of the story, such as in *Untitled* dedicated to the American photographer Francesca Woodman, or in *M.H.L.* about the first Slovak professional director and actress Magda Husáková-



Alena Lejková: *Morálka 2000+* (Morals 2000+). Part *Construct your life*. The Slovak National Theatre Drama ensemble, premiered on 2 and 3 April 2016. On the left Ľuboš Kostelný (Peter), Adela Mojžišová (Jana), Zuzana Fialová (Eva). Scenography Juraj Poliak. Direction Alena Lejková. Photo by Milo Fabian. The SND Drama ensemble archives.

Lokvencová<sup>39</sup>. Her project *Solo Lamentoso* (2015) is a response to the so-called singing house in the town of Štúrovo which has been given a broad mass-media coverage. For fourteen years, a female citizen of Štúrovo used to annoy her neighbours, who lived in the same street, by playing excessively loud music. This was her reaction to the barking of dogs in the neighbourhood. Daubnerová unfolds the sad and tragic story of neighbourly relations, as narrated by the owner of the “singing house”, Eva N. The desperate discontentment and suffering of Eva N. outgrows into anger and hatred which is also reflected in her Internet blogs. By combining music, movement, accompanying words of the protagonist, excerpts of authentic television shots, Sláva Daubnerová expresses man’s solitude. A dearth of understanding of her neighbours in their lowness is portrayed metaphorically, through small mock-ups of houses encircling the real and isolated world of Eva No., hidden inside her house. The aria of revenge of the Queen of the Night from Mozart’s *Čarovná flauta* [The Magic Flute], in the finale replacing the aria of Manrico from Verdi’s *Trubadúr* (*Il trovatore*) rendered by Plácido Domingo, which she repeatedly played for many years (deliberately in low-quality recording), is a painful allusion to human life.

In numerous texts of young authors the themes of isolation, incapacity to communicate and a lack of understanding in modern technologically advanced society are brought to the fore. Of such nature are three mini plays staged by the drama com-

<sup>39</sup> For more about the production – performance refer to PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. Theatrical Documentary of Performance Art. In *Human Affairs : Postdisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences Quarterly*, 2013, Vol. 23, Issue 1, pp. 81 – 90.



Ján Luterán – Miro Dacho: *Desatoro – Pamätaj, že máš svätiť sviatočné dni* [The Ten Commandments – Thou shalt honour the holy sabbath]. The Slovak National Theatre Drama ensemble, premiered on 31 May 2014. Daniel Fišer (Technik 1) [First Stagehand], Jana Oľhová (Herečka) [Actress]. Direction Ján Luterán. Scenography and costumes Tom Ciller, Annamária Juhásová. Photo by Milo Fabian. The SND Drama ensemble archives.

pany of SND, under a common title *Morálka 2000+* [Morals 2000+]. Young authors and directors divulged moral issues related to unstoppable technological advancement. The first text puts forward the complexity of granting consent to use frozen embryos after the collapse of a relationship and, in fact, it has real effects on present-day society. Two other themes, i.e. ensuring longevity by observing certain limiting conditions and the effects of gene application to help resolve human weaknesses (pain, for instance) relate to the future, which is not too distant. The difference in the realities of these themes has shown the difference between the authors and their capacity to express inner dramatic conflict through a dialogue.

*Morálka 2000+* (2016) tied into an interesting project, which is unique within the context of The Slovak National Theatre entitled *Desatoro* [The Ten Commandments] (2014). It is composed of ten mini plays/stories based on the ten commandments, which were again presented by young authors and directors in various spaces of the theatre (Studio SND, rehearsal room, storeroom, the lift, and elsewhere). The national theatre created a touring theatre project twenty years after Prešov project had been launched by stage director Peter Scherhauser, which is described in greater detail in the first part of our study. The spectator may find it tedious to have to wander for so long through the huge building, but he/she will be presented a bright image of modern world, as reflected in the ten commandments. Real mini stories are based on individual commandments, which cannot hear but prompt to contemplation. In his study devoted to the project, drama theorist Miroslav Ballay makes reference to a Polish TV



Anton Korenčí – Juraj Bielik: *Desatoro – Nepokradneš* [The Ten Commandments – You shall not steal]. The Slovak National Theatre Drama ensemble, premiered on 31 May 2014. On the left Dominika Kavaschová (Kavasch), Alexander Bárta (Bárta), Ľuboš Kostelný (Kostelný). Direction Anton Korenčí/Juraj Bielik. Scenography and costumes Tom Ciller, Annamária Juhássová. Photo by Robert Tappert. The SND Drama ensemble archives.

series in ten parts *Dekalóg* [Decalogue] (1989 – 1990), and he quotes the Polish film theorist Marek Haltof who made a statement that the Polish *Dekalóg*, which had been produced prior to 1989, “...presents a pessimistic image of a rough world, in which man is confronted with challenging moral choices by which he defies the pressure of a political situation and the economic pressure”<sup>40</sup>. Making a parallel with today, Slovak *Desatoro* by dramaturgs Daniel Mailing (he also took part in the dramaturgy of *Morálka 2000+*) and Míriam Kičiňová does not present such a pessimistic picture in the minds of many spectators. Despite that, it is a powerful narrative leading to “a continuous timeliness of this moral and legal canon, the pillar of the Western European culture”<sup>41</sup>. It, too, is a valuable contribution to new dramaturgy.

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**Translated by Mária Švecová**

<sup>40</sup> BALLAY, Miroslav. Reflexia hodnotovej krízy v inscenácii *Desatoro*. In MAŤAŠÍK, Andrej (ed.). *Divadlo v období hodnotovej krízy*. Conference proceedings of the 11th international teatrology conference organised within DNES A TU [TODAY AND HERE] cycle organised by the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Academy of Arts, Banská Bystrica, 28 and 29 November 2014. Banská Bystrica : Fakulta dramatických umení Akadémie umení, 2015, p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.