
ENGAGED NON-FICTION THEATRE AND A PLAYFUL FÉERIE IN TICHŮ A SPOL.

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Abstract: The authoress maps out five years of the activity of Divadlo TICHŮ a spol. (Theatre Silence and Co.), which was started as an association of theatre practitioners. The paper describes a multi-level platform which includes a permanent theatre scene TICHŮ a spol., a platform of independent guest theatres, the theatre of handicapped creative professionals, songster and literary scene and other visual and film activities, as well as organising public debates on important social issues. The paper also characterises the drama poetics of TICHŮ a spol., which its theatre professionals, under the guidance of the founder and dramaturge Viki Janoušková, refer to as “thinking theatre”. The paper contains analyses of five productions of TICHŮ a spol.

Keywords: TICHŮ a spol., engaged theatre, documentary theatre, chamber theatre, fairy-tale féerie

Artistic and poetic profiling of the theatre

TICHŮ a spol. (Silence and Co.) is an association of creative professionals which was incepted in Staromestský klub 10x10 (Old Town Club 10x10), Školská Street, Bratislava, in 2010. It is a multi-level platform including the permanent theatre scene TICHŮ a spol., a platform of independent guest theatres, songster and literary scene that organises exhibitions of fine arts or film projections. In addition to its artistic activity, the club that pools theatre and other activities is also active in organising informal discussions with distinct personalities of Slovak social life. They cover diverse issues, such as one's self-definition, the belief system of modern man, opportunities and limitations of various kind, the construction of “Self” in a world of contradictions. Although the dialogue between theatre and other forms of arts and public debates initiated by theatre professionals on the values of modern society and culture are considered natural, in reality, such artistic programme is very unique in Slovakia.

The founding members of TICHŮ a spol., including the dramaturge and artistic director Viki Janoušková, theatre and radio director Robo Horňák and literary author, songster and theatre professional Miloš Janoušek, have introduced a new dramaturgic intent to the intimate setting of the former Local Cultural Centre in Školská Street (former Divadlo a.ha [Theatre a.ha])¹: theatre as an abode of culture, of exacting

¹ A multi-functional space of the former Local Cultural Centre in Školská Street, known as Staromestský klub 10x10 (Old Town Club 10x10), was known for nineteen years as Divadlo a.ha (Theatre a.ha), started by siblings Štefan Korenčí (director) and Viki Janoušková (dramaturge and co-founder of TICHŮ a spol.). The theatre is most frequently referred to as chamber theatre, intimate theatre or a theatre of the symbiosis of elements that gives prominence to the actor. Ever since it was started in 1991, Divadlo a.ha has been an alternative to the then Bratislava theatres and theatres outside the capital, largely by the genre of chamber

creative challenges, a venue of interartistic and intercultural dialogue and a place for the mediation of authentic personal philosophy and the stances of creative professionals who are connected by a common experience and common world outlook. This approach is referred to as "thinking theatre". In this sense, "the companions of silence" are considered outsiders in Slovakia, they are a rare phenomenon, similarly to art genres that are on the edge of the interest of other creative professionals, which are faithfully and enthusiastically refined by them.

Had Viki Janoušková not left the theatre in 2002 for eight years, nothing of this may have ever happened. In the intervening period, she devoted her time to other areas which had an enduring effect on her as *homo ludens*². It was especially her experience with the radio interviews with scientists in which current affairs were analysed and radio dramaturgy which guided her to a novel and different understanding of the purpose of theatre and the essence of creation as self-fulfilment and public discourse with the audience. She pooled creative professionals who identified themselves with a notional theatre manifesto "of the theatre as a way of life and a constructive dialogue on contemporary values", covering each and every element of production, starting with direction, through acting, down to set design (visual concept of a theatre production) and incidental music.

The operation of TICHŮ a spol. across several strands of activity is based on a concrete and well-thought concept known at the time of its inception. The founders were inspired by Viola Theatre in Prague, which started off as a poetic wine cellar in the 1960s, and became known as an island of creative freedom of young theatre professionals and audiences. Viola "was a meeting place of decent people, a haven of refinement and morals. It, too, was heedful of the idea and author production quality. The intent of Viola was to cultivate artistically challenging programmes and performances (...). The dramaturgical span of Viola ranged from stage reading and chamber theatre to cabarets".³

The creative professionals of Divadlo TICHŮ a spol. have been following the outlined direction from the outset, while applying the experiences from different areas outside the theatre. The space in Staromestský klub 10x10 is a permanent scene to the non-fiction theatre inspired by the style of radio drama, poetry theatre, playful féeries with sci-fi elements, blues and folk music scene (the original series of *Stopy vedú do ticha* [Traces lead to silence] meetings was started in TICHŮ a spol.), The Publishers' Club (the very first meeting of *Fragmenty z Fragmentu* [The Fragments of a Fragment]) dedicated to intellectual literature and the presentation of smaller publishing

theatre and by its unique sense of the symbiosis of individual production elements and a high degree of intimacy of dramatic form and narrative. If we have read in the media and professional articles that Divadlo TICHŮ a spol. has picked up, in the best sense of the word, the tradition of Divadlo a.ha, then it should be added that it even surpasses it by a holistic understanding of the status and the role of theatre and theatre (or other) professionals in society and in artistic context. Later on, Divadlo a.ha underwent a transformation, it changed location and name and currently is known as Divadlo Malá scéna STU (STU Small Stage Theatre). Its artistic director is Štefan Korenčí and his son Anton Korenčí works as dramaturge and director.

² *Homo ludens* is a concept which, in the context of the paper, refers to Man who develops his/her capacity and potential through play, to creator who discovers his/her abilities through theatre and thanks to the knowledge gained, he/she continues to grow. Playfulness is based on the freedom of choice and action, it builds on an individual's own way of thinking and maturing through experience.

³ VIKLICKÁ, Miluše. Divadlo Viola. [online]. Available at: <http://www.divadloviola.cz/index.php?p=txt&ID=2>. [cit. 3. July 2015].



Viki Janoušková – Hana Ponická: *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes]. Alena Horňáková (Hana), Tomáš Vravník (Muž) [Man]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 16 April 2011. Direction creative team. Photo of the theatre archives.

houses, The Dramatist Club with focus on contemporary drama (the club facilitated the setting up of an Internet database of contemporary Slovak theatre plays and authors for dramatists, dramaturge and directors), or a modern platform of talk shows with interesting guests entitled *Nahlas v Tichu* [Aloud in Silence] (from 2012/2013 season onwards). Last but not least, the concept of theatre as a form of art therapy, breaking the barriers of fear and of difference and the cultivation of mutual sensitivity are solidly enshrined in the philosophy of Divadlo TICHŮ a spol. To be specific, it has launched a project of joint creation with the clients of Prima Social Services Establishment within the framework of *Stopy snov* [The Dream Traces] theatre grouping and the organising of an all-year-round festival of independent theatres outside Bratislava known as *Uhol pohľadu* [Angle of View] (launched in 2010/2011 season). It is also an umbrella for the 6th edition of the unique *Arteterapia* [Art Therapy] international festival, with a thematic focus *Bezmocní mocným* [The Helpless to the Powerful] (the therapy of society through the power of the theatre to speak out against wrongdoings that are happening all the time) and also *Zrakáč* theatre ensemble, which serves as an umbrella for the creation of theatre practitioners with impaired sight.

Several initiatives and the dramaturgic profiling of TICHŮ a spol. meet at a central point of a broadly conceived drama art in which literature, music, creative dialogue, engaged human, art and civil stances play an indispensable role and, above all, a vision of a theatre which is not a fleeting pastime or one-hour (be emotionally stimulating and safe) relaxation activity.

The theatre programme of TICHŮ a spol., its concrete dramatic form bearing distinctive features of the original poetics of its authors, may be summarised as follows:

1. Through dramatic creation, to become involved in a discourse on the state of modern man and the world (theatrically conceived values versus the modern world belief system). The theatre ought to be a place for the solution of problems we experience "here and now", it ought to capture the time we live now. A theatrical or dramatic character, the setting and the story embody an opportunity to establish a new world order and ethics (as opposed to the chaos of a decomposed inner integrity, restraint or persisting totalitarian practice in a post-totalitarian society), or are an embodiment of the found power not to give up on our inner conviction. Characters are the bearers of our belief in freedom, justice, humanity, and positive attitude. Let us not forget the perception of dramatic creation as a commitment (rather than just an opportunity), that is, through author creation, to name our understanding of the role of the theatre in arts and in society.
2. Focus on genres that are not frequently staged and on chamber theatre genres, such as non-fiction theatre (documentary theatre), poetic theatre, grotesque theatre *féerie* or fantasy theatre (sci-fi).
3. The creation of its own theatre language in which individual elements correspond to each other and communicate, with a particular focus on symbiosis, intimacy and artless expression (production gesture). This theatre language puts to use theatre means of expression and styles close to other art forms, such as radio feature, oral history method, puppet theatre, clowniade, conjuring or stage reading. Direction which collaborates closely with the visual and musical components of a production gives ample space to actor's art and his/her creative and playful approach to the theme performed so that the production conveys a theatrical metaphor of our everyday reality of living. Theatrical performance is understood as a discourse with the audience to whom no answers are foisted. The ambition is to motivate the spectator to active thinking that leads the audience to finding answers to questions about who we are, what we are like, what we want, where we go and what our belief system is. Theatre ought to be a way of thinking about one's self, about ourselves and about our time.
4. Through its production not only create an alternative to other professional theatres but, above all, to complement theatre and production space with missing elements; to use genres, forms and themes for the mapping out of and filling in the blank spots on our theatrical and cultural scene.

While contemporary local and foreign theatre professionals opt for new media and technology as a means of enriching theatrical language, the theatre professionals of TICHŮ a spol. go the opposite direction and focus on the actor's live material (the soul and the body, or psychology and physicality) and his/her character-building qualities that stem from ordinary human or collective (cultural) experience. Their stage black box introduces Man-actor to space and the setting. Space and the setting have a parallel effect on the actor/actress, they determine the quality of thoughts and emotions shared and mediated by him/her, to eventually have the event become part of experiencing a fragile resonance of which Man-viewer is a component part. Simply said, from Man to Man, joint experiencing the theatre as a place of play (in which life is encrypted – the proverbial *theatrum mundi*), and also of awakening, purification, miracles, or way to personal knowing – a form of experience gained through

theatre. The spectator is not just litmus paper to TICHŮ a spol. theatre makers but also a partner with whom they want and wish to communicate, to find the spillovers of understanding, common topics and beliefs for which it is still worthwhile to think and feel (i.e. to live) theatre.

Non-fiction theatre and theatre as a document of an era, the authenticity of humanity

Before the close of 2014/2015 theatrical season, the repertoire listed six own productions of the theatre through which creative professionals systematically fulfil their intent and firmly disseminate their theatrical message. The range of genres developed from a theatre inspired by documentary style, through poetic theatre and grotesque féerie, down to chamber theatre of a more classical kind, loosely inspired by real events. With the exception of the play *Ostrov* [The Island] by a trio of foreign authors, this is an author theatre which draws inspiration from national sources for which dramatic texts or theatre scripts have been written by Viki Janoušková. Grotesque féeries have been written jointly with Miloš Janoušek. The central theme interconnecting all productions is Man who is courageous enough to overcome his/her fear which robs him/her of his/her inner freedom, Man who, in accordance with his/her moral principles, carries out a gesture of defiance of power that curbs his/her integrity and humanity, erodes him/her psychically, emotionally, morally, professionally, politically and thwarts his/her world outlook and creativity. It is Man who fights himself/herself to better understand his/her role at a given time and place, to defend himself/herself before the court of his/her own conscience or the generations to come for whom he/she paved the way, even though unaware. Making a decision or carrying out an act which is inevitable at the given moment, because it is motivated by a sense of truth and justice, is not just a matter of possibility but, above all, a matter of commitment.

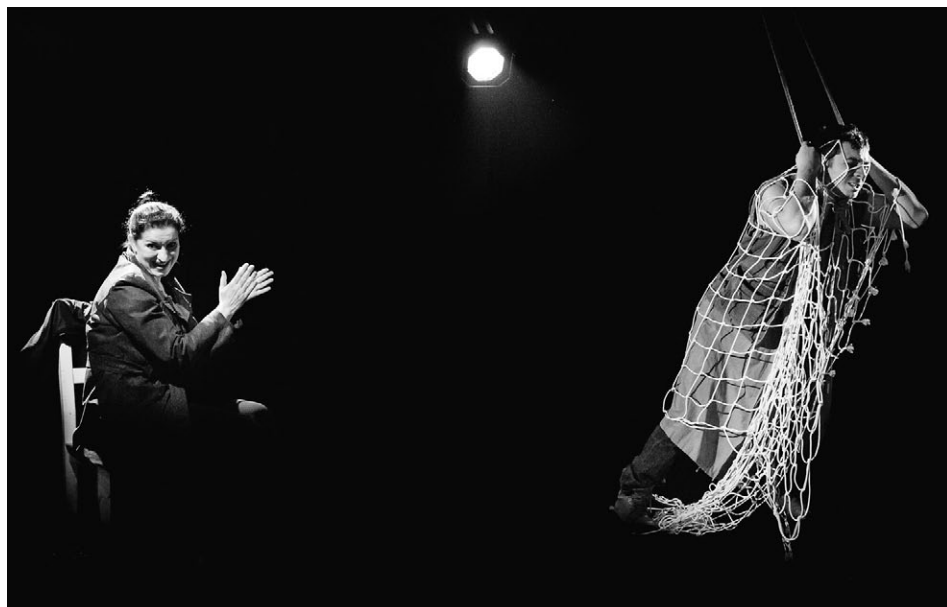
Documentary theatre, based on *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes] (direction by creative team, 2011), the memoirs of the writer Hana Ponická, introduces the spectator to the normalisation era and the signing of Charta 77 (Charter 77) and a subsequent politically enforced anti-movement and, above all, to the still current problem of fear of power authority. The events take place against the backdrop of personal maturing of the writer who arrives at a breakthrough decision to step out of the pack and to go public with her stance. Where is the borderline between someone who stays loyal to his/her "boss or other influential person"? and someone who suffers in silence and nurtures totalitarian practices that are still alive?



Viki Janoušková – Hana Ponická: *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes]. Alena Horňáková (Hana). Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 16 April 2011. Direction creative team. Photo of the theatre archives.

Shall I be obsequious toward the regime and dominance which reject dialogue and at the same time be able to create freely or, shall I rather protect my peace, happiness and family by practicing sycophancy? Production devisers remind the general public in Slovakia of an almost forgotten role of writers, theatre professionals, artists and opinion leaders, i.e. the role of taking a clear position on what goes on instead of criticising and complaining, the role of inspiring positive change even if you have to step out of your comfort zone. Hana Ponická (with Alena Horňáková in the lead role) gradually overcomes her anguish, fear, feeling of nothingness and helplessness; she refuses to be further crushed and to share the guilt for everything that had distorted the country and its literary creation. She refused to be an individual without a face who, in the quietude of Lukavice mill, “only” writes children’s fairy tale books and keeps filling in her diary with reminiscences, private notes, covertly opposing the ban on the creation of her colleagues. She could not subdue humanity in her, Christian ethics and a sense of democracy. She assumed societal role, in addition to her wife and mother’s role. She overcame an obstacle which prevented her from being a decent human being in the given time. Even today, being decent is not easy. One is worried by shame on behalf of someone else, by the impossibility (or inability) to overcome one’s own shadow. One is tormented by doubts if his/her cause is just, if he/she does not hurt his/her beloved ones. Apparently, Hana Ponická was aware of the negative implications of publicly refusing censorship practice in literature. However, the adaptation of the autobiographical novel *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes] staged by TÍCHO a spol. creative team brings the borderline of a decision-making individual closer to society and the future. It does not offer a heroic deed, but rather an ordinary, common responsibility for a time that an individual co-creates and lives. What I shall do and how I shall or should be doing things so as not to feel ashamed of myself someday, entangled in remorse.

Similarly to the above, *Izrafel alebo Cúvanie do pamäti* [Israphel or, Moving Back in Memory] with the designation “divadlo bá-snenia” (loosely translated as “the theatre of poeticising dreaming” – direction Róbert Horňák, 2011), ushered in the creation and stances of a trio of Slovak poets: Ján Ondruš, Miloš Janoušek and Ján Kolenič, who live in three seemingly different settings of time and space, are challenged with seemingly three different socio-political and generation experiences, with three seemingly different world outlooks, writing in three seemingly different poetic languages. By moving back in their memories and poems and by moving back in time, we get to know their fate, feelings, views and, through their rare gift of responsiveness, learn about their persistent naming of that which is eternal and important. We become familiar with Man’s eternal coming to terms with time, obstacles, wounds, and with his/her quest for freedom and acquiescence in one’s self. Hopelessness, loneliness, desire, passion, dreams and day-dreaming switch for a mesmeric speed, sometimes, for a surprising defiance of the spirit opposing the rules that shackle the soul. Actors Michal Jánoš as Starý (The Old One), Dano Heriban as Stredný (The Middle One) and Pavol Plevčík as Najmladší (The Youngest One) find a common rhythm (of music and poems) when they talk about the world (the outer and the inner ones) through their creation and thanks to it they set themselves free. Is it about love, peace, the world of beautiful dreams, about one’s own fate? Is it about killing oneself and others in a certain historical time or situation? Is it about being a victim or bringing sacrifice? These are questions of paramount importance to someone musing over his/



Viki Janoušková (from texts by Ján Ondruš, Miloš Janoušek, Ivan Kolenič): *Izrafel alebo Cúvanie do pamäti* [Israphel, or Moving Back in Memory]. Judita Hansman (Žena) [Woman], Pavol Plevčík (Najmladší) [The Youngest One]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 20 November 2011. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

her life who is reluctant to just swim through life engulfed in a grey perception filter. He/she is too sensitive to remain indifferent to the reality. The characters are united in their attitude of defiance of negative phenomena, in personal pain and in sense of beauty. Ever since our childhood up to a place where our prayers are sent, we have been accompanied by various obstacles in our way of life and, regrettably, in our way of thinking.

The character of Žena [The Woman] (Judita Hansman) is interesting in this sense. She is Israphel, the patron of creative individuals whom the angel wants to humanise and by imposing obstacles, to help them cross the river. The second production of TICHŮ a spol. is typical in that it understands the capacity to perceive various obstacles as a gift that helps overcome difficulties. Everything we can experience ought to be accepted, as experience can make us stronger. What counts is whether we can maintain the face of the good, despite our negative experience, whether the bad things from the past induce in us constructive instead of destructive thoughts and action. It is too early to give up, it is too early to die, it is too early to hoist the white flag of command that destroys singularity and freedom. "I am slipping in the face, I am putting it on, I am wearing it for the cause of truth which it will veil, I'll let it go ahead, I am shaking it off and I am arriving after it, once it's done," the oldest poet is saying. Accidentally, burning questions emerge from the magic space of poeticising dreaming: What is the real face of the truth of our world and what kind of face of the truth shall we give back to the world?

Two years on, the production *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River] (direction Vie-



Viki Janoušková (from texts by Ján Ondruš, Miloš Janoušek, Ivan Kolenič): *Izrafel alebo Cúvanie do pamäti* [Israphel, or Moving Back in Memory]. Daniel Heriban (Stredný) [The Middle One], Pavol Plevčík (Najmladší) [The Youngest One], Michal Jánoš (Starý) [The Old One]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 20 November 2011. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

ra Dubačová, 2013), dedicated to the writer and director Leopold Lahola and to the world that flows through us (of which we are unaware), introduced the personality, creation and philosophy of the Slovak writer and film director Leopold Arje Friedmann to the chamber stage of the Divadlo TICHŮ a spol. Using the words of his friend Juraj Špitzer, he was “as gifted as a monkey”⁴. Lahola was a talented dramatist and philosopher and, above all, a man of high morals whose soul was hurt by the time in which he lived. He, too, was endowed with a rare moral strength and reverence for life. The production is a remarkable analogy between the folk tale *Lomidrevo*⁵ by Pavol Dobšínský and Lahola’s life (with Michal Ďuriš in the lead role). In the production, Lahola was haunted by the river, it followed him wherever he went, it chased him like a dog, it flowed through him like life whose purpose is justified by every breath, every thought and by every deed of ours. Life made him do things he never wanted to. He never wanted to be a hero and fight another human being. Despite that he was compelled to struggle with a tragic fate that opened “a hole to hell” for him, as if he were created from wounds which kept hunting him down over and over again. He

⁴ For more details see JANOUŠKOVÁ, Viki. *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River, theatre script]. Manuscript, unpagued.

⁵ “Lomidrevo fared forth, to see for himself how people lived and afterwards he decided to return home to look after his old mother and never do any harm to people”. In JANOUŠKOVÁ, Viki. *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River, theatre script]. Manuscript, unpagued.



Viki Janoušková (with quotations by Lahola, Špitzer, Dobšinský, Rozner, Kalinová, Szatmáry). *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River]. Michal Ďuriš (Leopold), Judita Hansman (Žena) [Woman]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 17 February 2013. Direction Viera Dubačová. Photo of the theatre archives.

had to cope with the death of his mother and of his Jewish relatives who ended up in a concentration camp, a forced labour camp in Nováky. He had to come to terms with World War II when he, fighting as a guerrilla, had to kill (the only way to survive was to put himself in place of those he killed), and with a decision to leave the country, with essentially his only prospect of becoming a loser, a homeless vagrant without his mother tongue which was his only language of creation. He stayed alive and accepted his fate without renouncing his personality, without losing his face “in which every move of the soul is indelibly imprinted”. *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River] is not just about Lahola’s pilgrimage, about a thorny life of a writer and director. It, too, is about a friendship that forgives the failures marked by different political regimes, which shall not be ruined by time or through separation. The production is about a deep belief in human ethics which shall not be shattered by human cruelty. The contradictions of our time are reflected in individuals’ contradictions. The way to salvation is creativity and honesty. No human being has the power to reverse the course of history or of the world. But human beings can preserve their dignity and not pay with cowardice in exchange for comfort, safeguard the only unstained place in our souls – a haven of thoughts of a home, where we spent our childhood, a haven where a smile is born and fostered, sense of humanity which must be renewed over and over again. As the main character puts it: “A good thought will be preserved and transformed in Man. No one knows when, how and to what it will change. Ashes act as a fertiliser even when they are the only remains of burnt down thoughts...”



Viki Janoušková (with quotations by Lahola, Špitzer, Dobšínský, Rozner, Kalinová, Szatmáry). *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River]. Judita Hansman (Žena) [Woman], Ivan Martinka (Priateľ) [Friend], Michal Ďuriš (Leopold). Divadlo TÍCHO a spol., premiered on 17 February 2013. Direction Viera Dubáčová. Photo of the theatre archives.

There is a purpose behind pooling this production trio into a single block. It is obvious that the productions are connected by their writers and by literature which is a component part of a dramatic piece. However, there is something more important that bonds them together – the authenticity of destinies, the quality of thoughts born amidst different time periods, under various political establishments and in challenging situations and, above all, a quest for an answer to the question who am I and what message my life and creation will convey.

These productions have another thing in common, namely, a very similar composition method. Drama texts are composed of the quotations from the creation of these authors who became characters of played stories and of the quotations of other authors. The thought conciseness of the whole, the metaphoricality enchanted in words, sentences and in the quietude amongst us act as a bonding agent. For instance, *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes] also contains, alongside the memories of Hana Ponická, radio quotations and recordings of her children Katarína Jusková and Juraj Žárý, the statements by the psychologist Imrich Ruisel, the politician Ján Budaj, the political analyst Miroslav Kusý or by the publisher Oleg Pastier. *Israphel...* is also composed of the references to E. A. Poe, alongside the poems and texts by Ján Ondruš, Miloš Janoušek and by Ivan Kolenič. And, thirdly, *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River] links up the quotations by Leopold Lahola, Pavel Dobšínský, Juraj Špitzer, Ján Rozner, Agneša Kalinová and by Zuzana Szatmáry. Diverse quotation material is unified by the dramaturge and author of theatrical texts Viki Janoušková.



Miloš Janoušek – Viki Janoušková: *Dějů vu. Jana Lieskovská* (Maaty). Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 23 September 2012. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

She allows the development and time line to move freely – the present is parallel to the past and the past is an answer to the present. Individual stories move thoughtfully from the past to the present, they emerge from the “space of silence” here and now. The instance the past and the present intersect, there emerges a person (character) whose childhood was spared along with the process of the current experiencing of life (sometimes, distance is present as the character has the ability to remain detached, just like the dead). The character becomes a new type of hero, as it has the gift to express his/her opinion and to confront life/time face to face. What is especially intriguing is that in the text and also in the production (acting and direction) we often are confronted with child’s play as a liberating act, with the theatre as therapy for the soul and, eventually, with the theatre as an expression of an attitude toward one’s own creation. To that end, monologues as a support means in drama and production structure are used. Monologues are the windows to the soul, they herald the coming of a new time. Let us give an example: Hana Ponická’s voice emerging from silence at the end of the production laughingly says that she is ready to accept anything she is yet to go through in life, the voice of a woman in *Israphel...* poses a mysterious question whether we believe in dreams. Leopold Lahola confesses that he has no pity for that of which nothing has been left, because new thoughts may very well be hidden in another human being.

The size of a stage smaller than 10x10 metres is always a challenge for set designers. How can an intimate zone be set up in a small space so that intimacy and



Miloš Janoušek – Viki Janoušková: *Déjà vu*. Pavol Plevčík (Arf), Jana Lieskovská (Maaty). Divadlo TÍCHO a spol., premiered on 23 September 2012. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

chamber atmosphere are not only given by the size of the stage? In *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes], the set designer Pavol Andraško designed an acting space which divided the audiences into two halves. The audiences mirrored each other through action on the stage in the middle (through the situation and the actor). A simple trolley on wheels and a suitcase conveyed an image of a way, a train and of life. Dividing the acting space to the right and the left parts suggested private and public zones of characters – using simple and functional spatial arrangement the audience's attention was directed toward the actor and subsequently, toward the inner world of the spectator. Similarly, in *Israphel...* P. Andraško used sober black and white colours. The space with a piano and with white "limping" chairs sunken in memories and layers of narration emerged from strong light coming from a mysterious distance. The poets, on a cross-shaped scene, symbolically faced up to their fates and creation. In *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River], Dušan Krnáč used a simple screen, in addition to grey colours, on which the play of light and shadow was projected alongside photographs. Colours allusive of the grimness of the times, the props (suitcases, musical instruments), costumes, more civil than epic, bring back the magic of theatre and imagination.

Theatre TÍCHO a spol. observed the spirit of simple and functional set design (Jakub Branický) in the staging of the play by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona *Ostrov* [The Island] (direction Róbert Horňák, 2013). Two men (Vlado – Vladimír Jedľovský and Dano – Dano Heriban) were wrongfully imprisoned on an island. Here they started rehearsing *Antigona* by Sophocles. Theatre is the only way of



Míloš Janoušek – Viki Janoušková: *Déjà vu*. Jana Lieskovská (Maaty), Pavol Plevčík (Arf). Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 23 September 2012. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

getting away from a Sisyphean task of moving sand from one place to another on the island. “Theatre as a sanctuary for the soul”, an opportunity to mimic the proverbial theatrum mundi, as seen from their perspective, evokes a feeling of the existence of an inner island of freedom and honour that our world seems to be missing. Drama therapy solidifies the friendship of prisoners, it turns into a shared vision, a desire to tell the truth and to preserve inner conviction. It is not a pastime activity, a provocation toward others. It is an inevitable gesture of a being that suffers from injustice and from the heartlessness of the world. At the same time, the state shown in the production is a state close to our recent past and, regrettably, to our present. There are still practices of power in existence, the dictate of fear and unfounded harm to the soul. Silence prevails over dialogue. Past times and political order have firmly established prison in each and every one, and so, our imprisonment continues. A nonsensical state gives rise to nonsensical action, providing we overlook our unalienable right to a meaningful existence. However, even a symbolic revolt gushing from the depth of our conviction may bring us to a state of freedom. *Ostrov* [The Island], as performed by TICHŮ a spol., was not only about seeking an answer to the question which law supersedes the other – the law of God or the law of Humanity. The production also posed the questions about the value of human voice, the value of a gesture that is futile at first glimpse. However, everything counts, not only achievements but also attempts to reach targets. One ought not to remain compassionately passive, fearful or give up the struggle against injustice and moral hypocrisy. Sometimes, even the most oppressed Man continuously exposed to violence, physical or psychological terror shall,



Miloš Janoušek – Viki Janoušková: *Zaplavenie* [The Inundation]. Ivan Martinka (Ioaquino), Michal Jánoš (Felipe), Pavol Plevčík (On) [He]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 4 October 2014. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

ironically, be the winner of a free spirit and thinking. In principle, the production reminds us of the Concept of Transgressive Man according to which Man, in advocating the higher values of life, defies the forces which destroy these values. This theme also reverberated through *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes], the first production by TICHŮ a spol. It also complements one of the central themes of this grouping of creative professionals, i.e. the role of creativity/theatre in life.

The theatre of a playful *féerie* and fantasy drama

The productions of two grotesque *féeries* *Dějů vu* (direction Róbert Horňák, 2012) and *Zaplavenie* [The Inundation] (direction Róbert Horňák, 2014), had gone in a somewhat different direction, although the thematic line (as characterised above) was preserved.

Féerie is a theatrical genre almost unknown to Slovak theatre scene. It is staged erratically and thanks to the recent productions by TICHŮ a spol. it has become more popular. A fantasy fairy tale is based on a rich visual language and is challenging for set designers and actors. However, these were not fairy tales intended for children, but rather philosophically and form-wise exacting productions for adult audiences. The genre conveyed the idea of preserving the joy of child's play and of the miracles which are doable on the stage as well as in the reality we experience.

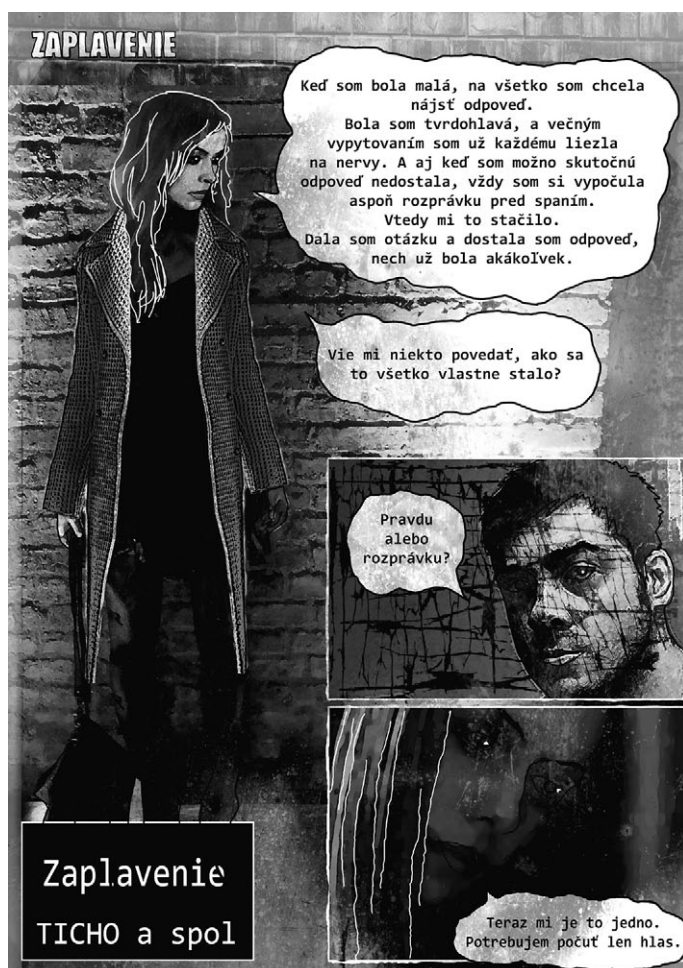
Both plays are inspired by the creation of Miloš Janoušek, which is typical by an overlap of the real world and fantasy/science fiction. Oftentimes, his creation builds



Miloš Janoušek – Viki Janoušková: *Zaplavenie* [The Inundation]. Pavol Plevčík (On) [He], Michal Jánoš (Jeff), Ivan Martinka (Archie), Jana Lieskovská (Ona) [She]. Divadlo TICHŮ a spol., premiered on 4 October 2014. Direction Róbert Horňák. Photo of the theatre archives.

on the laws of “quasi-places” and “quasi-time”, the flow of time with its own rules, or even on the elements of pataphysics. The dramaturge Viki Janoušková selected these elements, she enriched and arranged them so as to create a compact narration line: she created dramatically intriguing characters acting in notoriously known situations. Their problems are our problems, the theories on the functioning and extinction of the world create a mere framework to better understand the present and the choice the characters offer to our future. Both texts and productions are genuinely theatrical. They are full of playfulness, metaphoricity, charms, hope, catharsis and of amazing characters capable of creating amazing things and amazing moments.

In *Déjà vu*, the dramaturge Viki Janoušková, in tandem with the director Róbert Horňák, posed questions what would happen if we were able to reasonably use our time on Earth and to understand other people, regardless of the differences that exist among us. An intimate story of a rather odd married couple, Arf and Maaty, tells the spectator about a difficult process of partnership, family and of individual purgation. It also guides us through a process by which it can be accomplished. It tells us about the way by which Man returns to his/her fate and belief in his/her singular capacities, about the acceptance of other people despite their imperfections, differences and departure from our own ideas, which makes our lives disintegrated. The production is a guide to healing through theatre, purging the soul from grief and coping with the retreat into communication solitude. Is the opening up of the shell of our limiting and unsolved past problems and our opening up to new life the real solution? The characters of Arf (Pavol Plevčík) and Maaty (Jana Lieskovská) are fettered by fear and un-



Miloš Janoušek –
Viki Janoušková:
Zaplavenie
[The Inundation]
(comics). Divadlo TICHO
a spol., premiered on
4 October 2014.
Direction Róbert Hornák.
Photo of the theatre
archives.

solved traumatic past. They can no longer think and act freely. They fear what comes, because they lost what made them so special in the past – a gift to materialise ideas and desires, a gift to distil time, so as to store in their memories one happy moment after the other and never lose them again. On the contrary, to constantly keep these moments alive. They became so immersed in themselves that they had given up their essence which used to make them mutually happy. It was a gift to understand one another through feeling, without having to utter a word. Can an excess of materialised happiness end up in misery? What happens if too big a desire or a “good” desire materialises, however, on false grounds? If that is the case, what are the ways out? For the characters of husband and wife, the points of departure are mutual conversation and play – in the theatre where playing has a purgatory effect. It is through dialogue and playful fantasy that the characters gradually change from old and meek beings to young individuals, filled with humaneness and compassion. One could even think that by reanimating the belief in one’s own strength and the beauty of uniqueness, by

opening up to fantasy and playfulness, hope can be repurchased and through it, lost happiness brought back to life again, alongside our trust in better times in which past mistakes will not be repeated.

In *Zaplavenie* [The Inundation], an individual, who is expected to make life-changing decisions, is left standing on the threshold of sceptical present times and an unknown future, while the producers focus on the issue of the universally professed values of humanity which are put to the test of historical time. Time is the vital element here. Sometimes, it is important to capture the uniqueness of a single moment, other times, centuries will not suffice to make Man assume a stance toward the values that could and should positively shape his/her life. The production comes up with an interesting hypothesis of Armageddon (the revolt of secular values against spiritual ones) and Apocalypse (the extinction and rebirth of the world), on the threshold of a new millennium, i.e. the world as it once was, as it is, and as it could be, the world of what we could, can and may achieve. Two angels (Jana Lieskovská and Pavol Plevčík), through the milestones of humanity, clarify and formulate Man's relationship to the spiritual world (beliefs), they argue about Man's (justifiable) right to, an often egotistic, though understandable, realisation of his/her motives. They map out the use of evolutionary attributes and the right to a free human action in favour or disfavour of a symbiosis between Man and his/her code of ethics (or social responsibility). The producers challenge the spectator with weighty questions that have no clear answers. The spectator is prompted to take initiative and action, to review the exclamation marks that keep coming to him/her as warnings that pave human history and our own personal timeline throughout history.

Imagine what it would be like to absorb human knowledge and the experience of the past, while knowing their future consequences. What kind of men would we be, what things would matter most to us, how would we treat each other, how would we approach our belief system, how would we enforce our egotistic motives, and how would we behave toward posterity? How would we approach the laws of God and of humanity? What matters most to us and how many more omens are there yet to come to stop acting against ourselves and to take constructive action? How many more miserable and dismal stories are to be told to have the implementation of positive values become a component part of our genetic makeup? Freedom has also ushered in chaos, doing the right things the wrong way or, doing the wrong things the wrong way. However, the world of Arf and Maaty, corresponding to the world of TICHŮ a spol. devisers, cannot function on the basis of the laws of force, power, chaotic freedom; it could function on the basis of other laws/professed beliefs, which would renounce fatal temptation to commit evil in its diverse forms.

The genre of grotesque féerie is challenging for both set designers and actors. In addition, the set designer or a musician is oftentimes expected to conjure a miracle on the stage with a small budget. Jakub Branický is a set designer who is responsive to the needs of direction and actors. In collaboration with the director Róber Horňák he created productions which in an ingenious way draw on the rich elements of visual theatre and puppet theatre. It is not customary for theatrical producers to avoid excessive embellishments or illustrativeness on Slovak theatre stages. However, the scenic design and visual concept of the last two productions are based on the metaphorical and sign system of a theatre heedful of the use of all visual elements, starting with props, through multifunctional scene, down to theatrical makeup, masks,

and costumes. Fantasy and wit are also present in the musical component. A typical feature of this genre is effacing the boundaries between theatrical genres which turns *féerie* into a theatrical genre for adult audience.

Engaged and aloud from TICHŮ a spol.

As for acting and actor's art, TICHŮ a spol. productions oftentimes receive a highly positive feedback. The actors would, quite unexpectedly, abandon character types they usually embody on their home stage. And this is not only about accepting offered acting opportunities which are conditioned by the genre or by an interesting dramatic character. We are inclined to believe that in this case it is especially drama poetics that connects all stakeholders, despite the fact that TICHŮ a spol. does not dispose of a stable drama ensemble. In fact, this enabled the theatre to use selective collaboration and in addition to theatre language and initial enthusiasm, the dramaturge, directors and other collaborators gradually found common beliefs, a system of creation of a free and playful spirit which is in alignment with the theme to be staged and identical understanding of the world. Through each rehearsal and performance rerun, actors pass on a message that we still have a second chance to restore humanity. Is there any greater and life changing challenge to be posed by contemporary theatre in these tough times?

It can be stated that TICHŮ a spol. is a grouping of creative professionals who prefer engaged theatre or an engaged theatre approach to creation and the audience (society). However, engagement is not only about posing current issues of concern that mirror the current socio-political events. It is not about the questions that arise from the analysis of burning and socially relevant issues and seeking solutions to them. It is not that much about offering a counterbalance to other (tabloid, entertainment, trendy) forms of theatricality. The poetics of TICHŮ a spol. is interesting by a bridge between the past and the present. A retrospective view, taken by our contemporary, enables us to see and impact the future. The message is clear: sometimes, we need to step back, to be able to see potential future in the present. Mementos of unconstructive, even detrimental, models of the past (totalitarian practices, the limitations posed by political regimes, blinded inhuman stances and action) which notoriously occur "here and now" (and it makes no difference whether they concern an individual or all humankind) are a warning before their dangerous implications. Engagement (even if dormant) is a reminder of forgotten negative phenomena of a period of relative peace. Over the first five years of existence, TICHŮ a spol. has been trying to assert that theatre is bound to formulate its understanding of the world and motivate people to enforcing positive values and to use constructive thinking about the issues of our everyday living, while not forgetting our fragile and vulnerable inner world.

Conclusion

The association of creative professionals TICHŮ a spol., by its productions and diverse associated activities, fills in the blank spaces on the cultural map of Slovakia. TICHŮ a spol. operates as a multi-level artistic platform under the guidance of the founding member and dramaturge Viki Janoušková, with theatrical activity at its centre. The poetics of the drama production of TICHŮ a spol. stems from the concept

of “thinking theatre”, i.e. seeking constructive solutions to problems we live with here and now and understanding theatre as a way of life. In a compact form, theatrical producers deal with the unifying theme of Man who overcomes fear and takes action motivated by sense of truth and justice. Thematically, the producers frequently go back to the past regime, to the post-war Czechoslovak Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, to totalitarian practices (intimidation, dictate of power, artificial curbing the freedom), which are patent even nowadays. Their inspiration for this kind of productions are banned authors, rebellious and little known poets or a dramatic story based on true events. A good example of that are productions *Dych Lukavických zápiskov* [The Breath of Lukavice Notes] dedicated to the writer Hana Ponická who refused to be an accomplice of a time that banned free creation, *Izrafel alebo Cúvanie do pamäti* [Israphel or, Moving Back in Memory] as a theatre of poetry of a trio of poets Ján Ondruš, Miloš Janoušek and Ján Kolenič, *Všade tá rieka* [The Ubiquitous River] about Leopold Lahola and his philosophy of inevitable restoration of humanity and also *Ostrov* [The Island] with a theme of a theatre that offers shelter to the soul and free spirit. A counterbalance to the genre of non-fiction theatre is the genre of playful féerie (productions *Déjà vu* and *Zaplavenie* [The Inundation]), in which the devisers formulate a hypothesis what it would be like if humankind were able to learn from past events and if men were able to purge themselves through play or theatre. The engagement of TICHŮ a spol. lies in a constructive dialogue about issues that affect us and in the tacit reminder of the negative phenomena we have forgotten in a time of relative peace.

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