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## TWO WORLDS OF DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

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**Abstract:** Based on examples from contemporary Slovak drama to the year 2011, the author describes three fundamental groups of documentary drama. The first group of plays has its dramatic imagery created from highly authentic source material, which might include non-fiction works. The second of the three groups includes plays based on a collection of documentary texts and source materials, e.g. newspaper articles and interviews with witnesses assembled into a certain story. The third group consists of texts which revive the past through the prism of individual or collective memory, preferring their own viewpoint or memories. Russian documentary drama, including verbatim theatre, stands apart as a separate group. The most famous projects connect the present with a particular event depicted by interviews and articles; another group consists of dramatic productions which comment on and assess the past through documentary materials (film materials, speeches and songs) in direct confrontation with the contemporary world. Many of them have acquired a strong political undertone.

The 21st century has brought a new concept to our geographical area – documentary theatre. In many discussions it is observed that this kind of theatre has spread lately particularly in Germany, but it also exists in England, the Czech Republic and other European countries, not excluding Slovakia. Documentary theatre is also a distinct category in Russia.

Generally, it can be said that documentary theatre has its roots in historical drama, as is also pointed out by Patrice Pavis.<sup>1</sup> Following his definition, some authors of this type of theatre emphasise that it is “a theatre which does not rely on fiction, a theatre whose preparation [...] starts with a sort of survey, a survey of the situation – current or historical. To put it in a nutshell: a theatre which is not fiction.”<sup>2</sup> The French theatre scholar defines documentary theatre as “the opposite of theatre of pure fiction, which it deems too idealistic and apolitical, and rejects the manipulation of events by in turn manipulating documents for partisan ends. It often employs the form of a trial or inquiry in order to quote proceedings.”<sup>3</sup> He admits that “it often combines documents with fiction” and names several examples of plays, among others, Rolf Hochhuth’s *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Deputy*, 1963) and other texts published after the 1960s.

Pavis indirectly draws attention to the fact that there is a wide range of documentary drama and theatre when he writes that producers/authors can arrange the mate-

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<sup>1</sup> PAVIS, Patrice. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 110. ISBN 0-8020-8163-0.

<sup>2</sup> KLIMÁČEK, Viliam – HUBINÁK, Juraj. *Kodek I.: Dokumentárne divadlo na Slovensku. Realita alebo fikcia?* In *Kod – konkrétne o divadle*, 2010, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 27-28. ISSN 1337-1800.

<sup>3</sup> PAVIS, p. 110.

rial according to their own idea and aim (“socioeconomic model”). German theatre studies deal with the topic at greater length. One of the required or recommended books is Weiss’s *Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater (Notes on the Documentary Theatre, 1968)* and his other works, some of them also published on DVD.

Documentary theatre and documentary film draw on the same principles. Documentary film depicts facts and real-life events in the most authentic and truthful way possible (Slavomír Rosenberg), and this general rule also applies to documentary theatre. The difference is that while film records events photographically, theatre renders them through actors or others involved in the interpretation of the work. In theory, “the so-called pure document does not accept any modifications [of reality] – the viewpoint of an eyewitness is dominant. In practice, a certain level of modification of reality is acceptable, e.g. a reconstruction of events while the credibility of the interpretation of facts is also important” (Rosenberg).<sup>4</sup> In the theatre for supporters of “pure” documentary, presented by non-actors (preferably by direct participants), no fiction resulting in a performance is acceptable. Strictly speaking, no aesthetic requirements should be imposed on this kind of drama/theatre (a text and its spatial illustration), e.g. a performance with homeless people narrating their stories and expressing their feelings. It is not easy, as the director and the actor (if it is not a real person speaking about themselves or their experiences) are already interpreting a certain reality, which acquires a new meaning in their interpretations (including certain information in the script and mimetic instruments).

### Documentary vs. fiction?

In documentary theatre, the audience should feel the author’s/producer’s/actor’s identification with the idea and the message of the play. This identification determines the extent of work with documents – whether the producers (including the author) want to stick to all documented facts or just a part of them, whether they are inspired by their personal or other verified or unverified sources, whether they also work with fiction in some parts, or whether fiction is the basis and they implement various kinds of documentary materials and thus create an image of a personality or an era (past or present). Contemporary documentary theatre in Slovakia and Russia will be dealt with in more detail based on selected examples from both of these countries. Russian documentary theatre is also made available for theatre experts in other countries during the important Moscow Golden Mask Festival in the Russian Case programme (also for participants from abroad).

### Slovakia

If we want to adhere strictly to the method of verbatim theatre, developed in the Royal Court Theatre of London and standing apart from other types of documentary drama, we can hardly find a credible example among Slovak theatrical projects. According to the output of a workshop prepared by members of the London-based theatre which took place in Moscow’s Teatr.doc, the proponents of verbatim

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<sup>4</sup> [www.eschool.sk/subory/poznamky-1/.../DEJINY-KURZ.doc](http://www.eschool.sk/subory/poznamky-1/.../DEJINY-KURZ.doc)



Nina Belenitskaya: *Pavlik – moy Bog (Pavlik Is My God)*. Joseph Beuys Theatre, *Documentary House "Pervoye kino"*, Teatr.doc, 2009. Director: Yevgeniy Grigoryev, Leonid Telezhinskiy (Pavlik), Margarita Kutovaya (Tanya). Archive of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

theatre primarily choose topics with a strong social impact. The scriptwriter finds a target group for the chosen topic and records their testimonies. The final form of the text, constructed from the testimonies which are not interrupted by the interviewer's questions and are used without any edits on the stylistic level, thus often includes many substandard or vulgar words. The use of unedited material gave rise to the name "verbatim", as the text is a verbatim copy of source material. In Slovakia, the plays which are the closest to this type of drama include performances with homeless people, e.g. some projects by Divadlo bez domova (Homeless Theatre)<sup>5</sup> which depicted the testimonies of street-dwellers. The theatre worked on these projects in conjunction with the Theatre Institute with financial support from the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. Let us mention a play which closely, though not strictly, follows the principles of verbatim theatre. It is the play *Spoved'* (*A Confession*; Malá scéna Theatre STU, 2011) inspired by the fates of five homeless people who act and narrate their own stories on stage, preserving their deficiencies in proper expression, stylistics, rhythm, on-stage movement, etc.

If we accept Pavis's description of documentary drama, we can categorise the plays which can be considered adherent to the principles of documentary drama in Slovakia into three groups:

(1) The creation of dramatic imagery from the most authentic materials available: the group of plays which utilise this technique includes the play *Tiso* written by Rastislav Ballek and produced by Divadlo Aréna (Arena Theatre, 2005), and Sláva Daubnerová's *M.H.L.* (2010). Scripts like the ones for the aforementioned plays can incorporate non-fiction works.

(2) Plays that have been based on a collection of documentary texts and historical materials, e.g. newspaper articles (whose credibility, however, cannot always be verified), oral history, and personal experience. The model and the dramatic production can contain a typical story approached by producers in a modern way, carrying within itself some elements of the Aristotelian structure of drama. Viliam Klimáček's *Dr.*

<sup>5</sup> The method of working on the theatrical projects of this ensemble is not a verbatim one. Instead, the aim is performance and creatively working with marginalised groups in society. For more, see: <http://www.divadlobezdomova.sk/divadlobezdomova/WELCOME.html>.

*Gustáv Husák* with the subtitle *Väzeň prezidentov – prezident väzňov* (*Dr Gustáv Husák: the prisoner of presidents – the president of prisoners*, 2006) is an example of such a play. The play *Ginsberg v Bratislave: Beat Generation 1965* (*Ginsberg in Bratislava: Beat Generation 1965*), written by Klimáček in 2008, is described by himself as a “semi-documentary play” on the Beat author’s visit to Bratislava. It represents a mixture of oral history and a story reconstructed from documents from the archives of the former secret police (*Štátna bezpečnosť*, also known as *ŠtB*). A number of books documenting Dr Jozef Tiso have been published and supplemented by historical research papers, and a comprehensive collective monograph co-authored and edited by Nadežda Lindovská in 2008 has been written on Husák’s wife, Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, who was the first female professional theatre director in Slovakia (*Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. Prvá dáma slovenskej réžie; Magda Husáková-Lokvencová: the first lady of Slovak drama direction*). However, in the case of Gustáv Husák himself, there were no collections of processed historical materials (in all their inconsistency) until 2013, and collective and individual memory contradicts itself and even clashes.<sup>6</sup> This is why this theme is a difficult one for theatrical adaptation, especially if the author does not object to the play’s classification as a documentary drama.

(3) A special group consists of texts which revive the past, especially through the prism of individuals’ memories. Even though the author/scriptwriter attempts to create a common narrative arc, each memory remains the testimony of an individual’s story, narrated from their own viewpoint and based on their historical experience. The plays comment on the historical and political milestones of the past, e.g. *Horúce leto 68* (*The Hot Summer of ’68*), performed by Toronto Slovak Theatre (*Torontské slovenské divadlo*) in 2009. The play was written by Klimáček according to the testimonies of eye-witnesses who left Slovakia after the August 1968 intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies against the contemporary attempts at democratisation. Some plays do not travel so far back in time and rather focus on the events after the November 1989 demonstrations known as the Velvet Revolution (primarily a Czech



Nina Belenitskaya: *Pavlik Is My God*. Joseph Beuys Theatre, *Documentary House “Pervoye kino”*, Teatr.doc, 2009. Director: Yevgeniy Grigoryev, Margarita Kutovaya (Tanya), Leonid Telezhinskiy (Pavlik). Archive of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

<sup>6</sup> Until 2011 no scholarly monograph had been written on Gustáv Husák. However, in 2013 a collective monograph on Husák by Slovak and Czech historians called *Gustáv Husák: moc politiky - politik moci* (*Gustáv Husák: the power of politics – a politician of power*) was published.

term, the Slovak variant being the Gentle Revolution – Nežná revolúcia), which ultimately led to the fall of communism and the advent of democratic government in Czechoslovakia. An example of such a play is *Nežná* (*Gentle*; directed by Michal Ditte, Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin/Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin, 2009), a confrontation of the past and the present represented by the clash of individuals' expectations and the reality 20 years after the revolution. *Petržalské príbehy* (*The Tales of Petržalka*) by the playwright Ján Šimko represents a fusion of "public" and "private" histories of Petržalka, a district of the Slovak capital of Bratislava known for its massive development of pre-fabricated concrete panel houses during the 1970s. The stories are set in the present through multi-generational testimonies and are an interpretation of selected individual memories standing against a particular face of reality.

### 1.

Let us now stop at the first group and discuss the process of creation of at least one specific play. When writing the script of his monodrama, Rastislav Ballek used Jozef Tiso's speeches and other materials from the period and based the play on the concept of Tiso's confession in prison. Ballek contrasted Tiso's remarks on humility, love of God and one's neighbour with the very same Tiso's defence of his thoughts and deeds in the first Slovak State (1939–45) when the "well-being" of Slovaks was his highest interest. From today's viewpoint, one may find cruelty and roughness in the reasoning behind the decision to deport the Slovak Jews and behind the conviction that the decision was in line with the principles of Christian love which demanded that ethnic Slovaks eliminate everything that threatened their life, including their ancient Jewish enemy.<sup>7</sup> There is a danger that when dealing with such controversial periods of history and its personalities, the dramatic portrayal of only a certain part of their life (or just a single life event) may lead to an unwanted simplification of the historical depiction of these individuals and their influence on society.

Unlike novels, however, drama cannot cover all various personalities and historical events in their socio-political context. In the depiction of reality, a figurative portrayal with some fictitious elements is a necessity, especially when dealing with older topics (which may be political, social or civil). As has already been mentioned, every interpretation made by a non-witness of the event is a move to a documentary and a certain interpretation of fiction. Drama is not film, which can depict a selected moment from a different camera angle or using a different film cut. However, this is perfectly possible with the so-called film journals. Examples of such works are to be found among Martin Slivka's documentaries, e.g. *Ochádza človek* (*The Man Is Leaving*, 1968), a documentary on rural Bulgarian customs and rites connected with death. It is in this documentary where "Slivka showed a deep understanding of how one should create an authentic expressive situation which coincides with a reflection of essential life values."<sup>8</sup> Despite having portrayed an authentic situation, the film carries certain traces of "theatricality". As the author and stage director, Ballek supported the contradiction present in Tiso's speeches with a minimal usage of scenic elements. The contradiction was then augmented by strong scenes of live choral singing with a real conductor on stage. His presence was used to show the underlying concept of

<sup>7</sup> For more detail see BALLEK, Rastislav. *Tiso*. Manuscript, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.csfd.cz/film/235693-odchadza-ctovek>.



Nina Belenitskaya: *Pavlik Is My God*. Joseph Beuys Theatre, Documentary House "Pervoye kino", Teatr.doc, 2009. Director: Yevgeniy Grigoryev, Leonid Telezhinskiy (Pavlik). Archive of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

a "nation's conductor", which was brought to the scene from the book and from other authentic records (a radio recording).

Compared to film, drama ventures further. A dramatic performance is unrepeatable (a difference in fixation), yet it repeats itself (different funerals). The view of a historic event or personality depends on how we combine particular elements (documentary materials, scene, costumes and music), and thus *Tiso* also elicits a different response from audiences (especially from elderly people) and from historians.

Taking into account the fact that there is not much known about Magda Husáková-Lokvencová (1916–1966), except the fact that she was the first wife of Gustáv Husák, the former president of communist Czechoslovakia, and that her name is associated with Ctibor Filčík, a prominent Slovak actor, the staging by Sláva Daubnerová does not bring about diverse reactions from the audience. The author and actor in one person uses contemporary materials depicting the uneasy period of Husáková-Lokvencová's professional and personal life, also talking about changes in society and politics. As has been mentioned, Daubnerová uses information and citations from the book *Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. Prvá dáma slovenskej divadelnej réžie* (*Magda Husáková-Lokvencová: the first lady of Slovak theatre directing*), but like other scriptwriters, Daubnerová also supplements the visual image with archival radio recordings, respecting the facts and using minimal artistic fiction. Many materials from this period are not yet available (e.g. Husáková-Lokvencová's correspondence), although they would certainly bring light and a different perspective on her portrayal, and especially on the surroundings in which she lived and worked. In a discussion that

took place during the 2010 Divadelná Nitra (Theatrical Nitra) international drama festival, some participants raised a question whether the close relatives of the portrayed personalities are “obliged” to make available all materials in order to make their portrayal as realistic as possible. This problem, however, falls within the competence of ethics and historiography and into a broader semantic and historical context than the scope of this work.

## 2.

It is precisely the play on the personality of Gustáv Husák<sup>9</sup> that serves as an example of utilising background materials only for the narrow intention of the scriptwriter. In the play *Dr Gustáv Husák: the prisoner of presidents – the president of prisoners*, the author Viliam Klimáček focused on Husák as a convinced communist who defended the ideas and the principles of communist ideology throughout all his life. Klimáček was interested in facts and events, and not in Husák’s path to political conviction. The broader context, mapped by Daubnerová in the dramatic profile of Husák’s wife (the group of intelligentsia associated with the DAV periodical, the young left-oriented Slovak intellectuals, the state of society and politics after the 1948 communist coup d’état and the pressure of Czech communists), has disappeared in this play by Viliam Klimáček.

Whilst in *Tiso Ballek* shows the way and the development of an individual and his actions within a broader social context, Klimáček does not depict how Husák came to his political opinion or to the practice of choosing the lesser evil. Instead, the author depicts a lone man and lets a broad spectrum of other influential people disappear, even though these people often played a key role or had an impact on many events. The staging team turned Husák into a likeable and, near the end, unimportant “monster” of the era by ridiculing pioneer scarves and songs glorifying the working class and its life. This, on one hand, may be interesting and amusing, but looking from the perspective of historical events and their inner structure, it is superficial. The production somehow resembles a project that portrays fragments of the life and work of a Slovak writer Dominik Tatarka *Dojímate ma veľmi... (I’m very moved...: script – Iveta Škripková, Bábkové divadlo na Rázcestí v Banskej Bystrici/Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads in Banská Bystrica, 1992)*, which, in the period of post-1989 social and political changes, showed the life and thoughts of the important author in the context of his life events by an interesting mixture of puppet theatre and live acting. Three years after the Velvet Revolution, the staging team in Banská Bystrica had a different aim than seeking an answer to the question of why Tatarka had stopped believing in the ideas of communism, and especially why he had been at first enchanted by them so much that he had put faith in them. It is somewhere here that we have to look into the documented stories of (political) personalities for answers to the question of how the (initial) faith came to existence in their lives, the way to its condemnation and the path to a new one. In the end, many of the communists, expelled from the party after expressing negative sentiments against the 1968 invasion of Warsaw Pact armies into Czechoslovakia, had been active in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the 1950s when their friends were imprisoned or sentenced to capital punishment.

<sup>9</sup> In 1995 Slovak Television made the film *Balada o dr. Gustávovi Husákovi (A Ballad about Dr Gustáv Husák)* based on a script by Andrej Ferko.



Nina Belenitskaya: *Pavlik Is My God*. Joseph Beuys Theatre, Documentary House "Pervoye kino", Teatr. doc, 2009. Director: Yevgeniy Grigoryev, Margarita Kutovaya (Tanya), Leonid Telezhinskiy (Pavlik). Archive of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

Therefore, a documentary aiming to answer these questions has to be much more complex than just a simple depiction of publicly known events (Husák's New Year speeches or his addresses to the participants in party assemblies).

The play about Husák was written for Aréna Theatre in Bratislava, which has systematically focused on politics since the mid-2000s. Using documents and memories, the very same author created, this time for a different theatre (GUnaGU), a more subtle portrayal of Allen Ginsberg, who was considered an anti-capitalist but also an anti-Marxist poet. Klimáček, according to a well-fitting comment by Nadežda Lindovská, "declares himself a follower of artistic reconstruction of past events and atmosphere, supported by Ginsberg's poems, and his reconstruction [of Ginsberg's stay in Bratislava] could be defined as a metaphorically factual one, connecting fiction and real facts."<sup>10</sup> Klimáček partly utilised the method of verbatim theatre, i.e. that he left in the testimonies of people (witnesses) on the given topic, intertwined with a fictitious story of youth at that time in which the reality of the era is mirrored; with time having passed, that reality seems almost grotesque. A short black-and-white film which captures Ginsberg's Bratislava visit and which was used in the play supports the documentary character of the project, which is not only a reminder of the complicated times but also a tribute to those who, through music and poetry, could express freedom of thinking and emotions, regardless of the country they lived in.

<sup>10</sup> LINDOVSKÁ, Nadežda. *Bratislava 1965 – 2008: prípad Ginsberg*. In <http://www.theatre.sk/isrecenzie/327/333/BRATISLAVA-1965---2008-PRIPAD-GINSBERG/?cntnt01origid=333/>.



A scenic composition. Yelena Gremina: *Chas Vesyemandzat (One Hour Eighteen Minutes)*. Teatr. doc Moscow, 2010. Director: Mikhail Ugarov. Anna Kotova in the production. Photo: Mikhail Guterman. Archives of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

### 3.

The topic of freedom is most thoroughly studied in the last type – the group of plays in which authors draw on the memory of an individual, giving it preference to collective memory. They incorporate the testimonies of witnesses whose feelings and experiences either cannot be verified or can only be verified with great difficulty. The authors/stage directors work with less credible documents and rely more on oral history, a special method of studying past events. Oral history then becomes a springboard for the further research of historians, ethnologists, anthropologists and sociologists. The focus is put more on the level of an individual, often called a “small history”, than on objectivising information or factors, but it is the personal history that offers interesting ideas for a story. Individuals’ testimonies have a documentary value, which is necessary to work further, develop and verify. The choice of interviewees and further processing of the materials is a factor important for documentary drama. If, like in the case of *The*

*Hot Summer of '68*, their stories are edited dramatically by the author on a stage in a new country (Canada) and are played by people who experienced them and carry their own small histories for decades, it is possible to accept the subjective level of a particular individual or individuals interpreted this way in a concrete story.

The productions of *Gentle* (Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin) or *Tales of Petržalka* can be understood differently. In both cases there is a question of choice of suitable interviewees. In film clips with interviewees in the city of Martin, one can see a pseudo-random choice that focuses more on the younger generation than a broader sociological sample. This can be also seen on clothing and the ability of verbal and stylistic expression and its content. In the portrayals of stories of people living in Petržalka, the largest concrete-panel housing project in Central Europe (which has, when compared to other densely populated parts of Bratislava, quite a lot of greenery nowadays), one can feel the aim of the stage directors, i.e. to show the negative influence of this type of urbanism, which destroyed the past features of the right bank of the Danube. The staging team worked with real facts (such as the quality of primary schools, too few possibilities for spending leisure time, anonymity and easier access to drugs) and created a social context within a certain political context of the past and present. They were not able to grasp the sociological aspect of a broader analysis of social relations: among others, the question of whether the interviewees’ (young drug addicts’) parents are locals from Bratislava, or if they belong to the group of work-

ers who came from other parts of the country and were in need of housing. There is also the question how many of the parents had a university education (according to a survey carried out in the 1990s, Petržalka had the highest number of university-educated inhabitants in Bratislava) and other problems which were left unnoticed. By their choice of the social sample (older people as well as youth), their topic and their ability to sparkle interest, the authors managed to get closer to verbatim theatre. In the end, according to Ján Šimko, "theatre can uncover the mechanisms and politicisation of memories."<sup>11</sup>

### Russia

And this – the revelation of the mechanism of politicisation of memory (past and present) – is the point in Russia, even though the situation with revealing these memories is much more difficult and complex. Moscow's Teatr.doc, founded in 2002, is one of the Russian theatres which elaborated the method of strict verbatim, i.e. preserving to the greatest extent the original utterances without the incorporation of the author's texts into the recorded material. The process chosen for a great proportion of projects includes not only the reproduction of the recorded (written) statements of the interviewed people in front of the audience, but also its usage in controlled discussion with the audience in such a way that actors render the lives of the (introduced) dramatic characters. The recorded interviews with chosen people (about a given topic) are analysed by actors separately, who then come to a rehearsal with their own suggestions about the stage (dramatic) characters of their individual roles. Actors try to get to know their characters through their statements and adopt their way of thinking. This is how the play is written and how its stage form emerges. These methods also help actors keep a natural expression rather than appear stylised.

According to the creators themselves, questions are important (how they are formulated, what kind of answer they require and what message the answer conveys). They work in various ways. Interviews are either done by the author of the future play, or he along with the actors receives materials from interviews when they are finished. The main task is, in addition to a responsible preparation of the questions, to restrict the actor's ideas about the interpretation of what the people say and to view the interview as a scientist views a protected species or reserve.<sup>12</sup>

In the last 10 years, the theatre has gone a long journey from the seminar with Stephen Daldry from The Royal Court Theatre, who emphasised that at the beginning of the process of creating verbatim theatre, the author "knows neither the topic, nor the characters. He examines the subject, has to rely on the fact that the creative process will lead him to a topic, characters, a theme and a structure of the utterance." The English instructor reminded the guests that if "at the beginning of work the creator/actor/author chooses a topic, he stops listening. He starts with nothing and the result can also be none. However, he must trust himself and those he interviews."<sup>13</sup>

During the last 10 years, Teatr.doc has realised many projects of the verbatim or

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<sup>11</sup> ŠIMKO, Ján – HUBINÁK, Juraj. Kodek I. Dokumentárne divadlo na Slovensku. Realita alebo fikcia? In *Kod - konkrétne o divadle*, 2010, Vol.4, No. 2, p. 29. ISSN 1337-1800.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see <http://www.teatrdoc.ru/stat.php?page=verbatim>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

documentary theatre type about different topics – crimes of passion (interviews with imprisoned women), first loves, relationships with parents, a young murderer, soldiers fighting in Chechnya and the homeless. In an opinion poll conducted by the Russian *Teatr* journal,<sup>14</sup> well-known celebrities from different areas of Russian culture were supposed to answer the question whether they went to theatre and which of the theatre productions that they had seen recently they had found most interesting. Most of them expressed a negative attitude to the insincerity of the current theatre, to old and uninteresting topics. Some of them said they appreciated the projects they had seen in *Teatr.doc* and *Praktika* theatres together with the visual experiments of Dmitry Krymov.<sup>15</sup>

This theatre also gives room to other documentary theatre projects. Two interesting topics, two productions, which were created by two different methods, will be dealt with.

The first production is the play *Pavlik – moy Bog* (*Pavlik Is My God*, 2009) by the Joseph Beuys Theatre (Joseph Beuys Theatre)<sup>16</sup> in cooperation with the *Documentary House "Pervoye kino"* and *Teatr.doc*. The documentary theatre was based on a play by Nina Belenitskaya with a simple plot. The play is about a girl whose parents are divorced. The father does not pay maintenance, stating that he is unemployed. However, he has an additional income and he lives a good life. The court did not investigate the reality but believed the unemployment certificate and ruled in the father's favour, so he did not have to pay anything to the children from his former marriage. The girl has a little sister and they have nothing to live off. Therefore, the girl wants to kill her father, but she is not able to do so. She thinks about reporting his unofficial income, but she does not know how and where she should do it. Indirectly, she seeks the advice of Pavlik Morozov (officially Pavel Trofimovich Morozov), who managed to do a similar thing in 1931 and became a national hero. In the difficult times of collectivisation and the New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union, he managed to confront the kulaks<sup>17</sup> and report his own father, who was affiliated with them. The 13-year-old boy acted as a witness against his father, who was sentenced to 10 years in a gulag camp (he was released after 3 years for good behaviour but did not return to his family and moved to another part of Russia). A year later, Pavel and his brother were found murdered in a forest behind the village. Their uncle and another member of their family were found guilty and executed by shooting, and the boys' grandparents, who were in their eighties, were sent to prison where they died. The Stalinist regime made Pavlik a role model for pioneers. Squares, schools and parks were named after him, and several monuments dedicated to him were erected. Sergei Eisenstein started to shoot a film which was not finished because the communist party found

<sup>14</sup> This scientific and professional journal started to be published in 1930. In the 1990s it was published irregularly, and in 2010 its regular publication was resumed to once every two months. ISSN 0131-6885.

<sup>15</sup> For more information see "Na Wilsona poydu, a tak – nyet". In *Anketa. Teatr*, 2011, No. 2 (3), pp. 173-176. [Volume unspecified].

<sup>16</sup> The theatre subscribes to the works of the German sculptor, painter, art theorist, philosopher, and performer Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), who was shot down over Crimea during the war and was saved by the Cossacks. They treated him with fat and felt, which affected his works. He is the author of different performances.

<sup>17</sup> The kulaks were a category of relatively affluent farmers in the later Russian Empire, Soviet Russia and early Soviet Union.

A scenic composition.  
 Yelena Gremina: *One  
 Hour Eighteen Minutes*.  
 Teatr.doc Moscow, 2010.  
 Director: Mikhail Ugarov.  
 A shot of the production.  
 Photo: Mikhail Guterman.  
 Archives of the Golden  
 Mask Moscow Festival.



it formalistic and a part of the finished material burnt down during the war. In the 1950s an opera by Mikhail Karasyov was performed about him. The cult of Pavlik persisted until the 1990s, although in 1988, a book by the historian Yuri Druzhnikov entitled *Donoschik 001 (Informer 001: The Myth of Pavlik Morozov)*<sup>18</sup> was published as a samizdat in London, in which he explained that Pavlik had been murdered by two workers of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). The court did not prove anything to the convicted people. The judge read quotations from Stalin and Molotov.<sup>19</sup> In 1999, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation refused to rehabilitate Morozov's executed relatives. Moreover, nobody disapproved of the actions of Pavlik Morozov publicly in the new era after perestroika. It is symptomatic that Yuri Druzhnikov's whole book was published in Russia as late as 2006 and it raised much public interest.

This was an explanation for those who do not know the genesis of Pavlik Morozov's cult. The author of the theatre play gives room to Pavlik Morozov, who listens to the girl Tanya, but he does not advise her to report her father. In fact, he tells her to do the exact opposite – to forgive him – as though he regretted his own deed. The girl listens to the advice of “her god” because she was not taught to believe in any other and the play concludes with a happy ending.

However, Yevgeniy Grigoryev's production goes beyond the story and reveals available information and materials about Morozov. The author and the director col-

<sup>18</sup> The book was praised by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The author was going to have charges pressed against him, but this did not happen because during the downfall of the USSR other issues were important.

<sup>19</sup> See [http://www.abhoc.com/arc\\_vr/2010\\_11/588/](http://www.abhoc.com/arc_vr/2010_11/588/) and other materials on Russian websites.



A scenic composition. Yelena Gremina: *One Hour Eighteen Minutes*. Teatr.doc Moscow, 2010. Director: Mikhail Ugarov, Diana Rachimova. Photo: Mikhail Guterman. Archives of the Golden Mask Moscow Festival.

lected authentic material in the village of Gerasimovka, located 2,000 km from Moscow. The first part of the journey to Yekaterinburg takes 4 hours by plane; the second part, 360 km to the town of Tavda, takes 10 hours by train and the last part, about 40 kilometres along a muddy road, takes more than the whole flight. They come on the day when the locals are honouring their Pavlik. In the past, pioneer vows were taken next to Pavlik's memorial and people wrote different wishes on pieces of paper believing that Pavlik would make them true – that he is a god. Today, annual orthodox memorial services commemorating their hero are held at the memorial. The village, without any asphalt roads, will not let anyone “take their Pavlik away” as he attracted many domestic tourists. Two years later, Grigo-

ryev came back to the village again and took documentary shots with a special technique of six cameras.

In the stage production, Belenitskaya's fictional character Pavlik Morozov rises from his coffin and initially reacts as a motionless monument (an analogy between the sculpture and the girl's father), from which he materialises into a real human. He listens to the girl, and as opposed to her father, he analyses the past and the present with her – from authentic film shots of famine in the 1930s (a reminder of the circumstances which made Pavlik report his father), through a short excerpt from Eisenstein's unfinished film to the current image of the village, which is Pavlik's birthplace. Cows still walk the streets there, and the women working in kolkhozes (collective farms) sing revolutionary songs, as if this was happening a few decades ago. The panoramic projection, which is divided into 6 screens and cameras in a small cellar room for not more than 50 visitors, attacks the audience and makes them think about the past individually. Pavlik himself admits that he was never a pioneer (according to the available materials, there was no pioneer organisation in the small school in Gerasimovka in 1931), even though he was made a “pioneer hero”. He slowly reconsiders his deed and tries to talk Tanya out of her intention to report her father. He tells her about history and the manipulation of society by “heroic” deeds and eventually returns to his coffin. At the end, Tanya is able to simulate a phone call to her father (he does not answer the phone), in which she says calmly that she has changed her view, she actually does not need him and she will leave him alone. She has grown up. At the end, the visitors put their wishes into a big jar. The audience will never know whether they are their personal wishes, just like the visitors in Gerasimovka, or questions or wishes towards society. Maybe one of the wishes will become the basis of another verbatim project.

The discussion following the performance is full of new facts about the character of Morozov, today's views about him, and the idol he became. For many visitors, it

A scenic composition.  
 Yelena Gremina: *One Hour Eighteen Minutes*.  
 Teatr.doc Moscow, 2010.  
 Director: Mikhail Ugarov.  
 On the left Alexej Žiriakov  
 as Judge A. Krivoručkov.  
 Photo: Mikhail Guterman.  
 Archives of the Golden  
 Mask Moscow Festiva



constitutes a form of therapy. The elderly are shattered by the new information and the re-opening of history. Official Russian history, however, will remain unchanged. Both the topics of heroism (which actually never was heroism) and teaching children to spy on and report their parents make room for new topics – the number of divorced families, the lax attitude of the public, courts, the black economy and faith (in what and in whom?).

An opposite method was used to create Teatr.doc's project *Chas Vosyemantzat* (*One Hour Eighteen Minutes*). It is a reconstruction of the death of the 37-year-old lawyer Sergey Magnitsky, who died in custody while waiting for his trial. For instance, in the production about the Beslan massacre in 2004 (The Beslan school hostage crisis), the director juxtaposes two opposing parties, both of which claim their "own" truth, and according to their knowledge and historical experience the audience assume that it is either anti-Russian (in Moscow) or pro-Putin (in France).<sup>20</sup> However, the director Mikhail Ugarov did not build up the production as a confrontation of 2 opposing parties but rather as an explicit accusation of a system that makes it possible for a man to sit in prison for a year in unacceptable conditions, and to be dying for 1 hour and 18 minutes on the ground with bound arms and legs without help, although they knew that he is seriously ill. The production starts with an interview that Ekho Radio did with Magnitsky's mother, who demands a proper trial with the judges and the doctors that did not help her son. Teatr.doc simulates the trial on the stage. The lines match those uttered by the individuals during the session of the supervisory committee that dealt with this case. Their verdict was: innocent.

The theatre production, or trial, in the cellar of the theatre raises a question whether "a human who puts on the suit of a prosecutor, the coat of a doctor or the gown of a judge ceases to be a human."<sup>21</sup> The staging team keep the real first and last names of

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.afisha.ru/performance/81325/review/334021/>.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see <http://www.teatrdoc.ru/plays.php?id=113>.

the characters, quote the records of the committee, the diary of Magnitsky, which he wrote in prison, and letters from him to his mother. They came to the conclusion that what had happened to him was not a coincidence. It had been the fault of a system that makes it possible for seriously ill people to die in prison of tuberculosis or hepatitis: a system where courts are connected with bribery, where you have to pay for every glass of water in the cell. The director Ugarov writes on the website of the theatre that those that are being “judged” “can come to the theatre and see themselves. They judge others, but they themselves are being judged in the theatre.”<sup>22</sup> The statements of the judges, the doctors, and the guards are shocking – as though they were not human, as though we did not live in the 21st century. The staging team are brave to uncover a certain hierarchy in the court and prison system, and they also present negative characteristics of people (even their proneness to violence and torture) and indifference of man towards his fellow man.

The critic Yelena Kovalskaya compares the glass of water that the judge Krivoruchko refused to give to Magnitsky suffering stomach-ache to the deed of the old woman from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, who saved herself by handing over an onion, while Krivoruchko was sentenced by the staging team to scoop hot water with his bare hands.<sup>23</sup>

Although many visitors knew the brief story of Magnitsky from newspapers, the project is still shocking. In the discussion following the performance, also during Russian Case 2011 in the presence of many international guests, the visitors gave their thanks to the theatre members for their courage. They also learnt that the authorities, to whom this topic relates, keep silent; that in Russia, you can criticise the president but not the prime minister.<sup>24</sup>

Where verbatim theatre, or documentary theatre in Russia, is heading or whether it can demand the responsible take action is unknown. For the time being, it takes over the role of society – uncovering facts, truths and asking questions. It goes beyond other social topics.

*Translated by Martin Kolenič and Martin Majzlik*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.afisha.ru/performance/81325/review/334021/>.

<sup>24</sup> The proof for this statement is the recent ban on performing a play about Putin and Medvedev written by Vladimir Golyshev. The topic of the play is the role of the two strongest men in the state in the scandal of Luzhkov’s dismissal from the position of the first man of Moscow. The play was prepared by the Young Spectator’s Theatre in Rostov-on-Don. For more information see <http://svpressa.ru/culture/article/43396/> and other sites.