
THE SACRAL IN A PRAGMATIC WORLD

ANNA A. HLAVÁČOVÁ

Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Abstract: This paper examines the development of theatrical forms connected to liturgical spaces and the liturgical year in a comparison with Polish theatre from the 2nd half of the 80ties till now. However, the focus of the study is on the outdoor *Passio* produced on the Main Square and created on the initiative of the Coronation Bratislava association in 2004 – a performance that can be characterized as fragmented, analytical and sculptural, with every motion representing a certain idea or movement of the heart.

Key words: Sacral, passion, religious freedom, church, theatre, Gregorian chant, slow gesture

In her speech following the acceptance of the 1987 European Theatre Prize, Ariane Mnouchkine said the following:

Mais l'Europe de la Communauté européenne n'est pas toute l'Europe et ce soir je pense à l'autre Europe, que nous appelons de l'Est, comme pour la rendre plus lointaine. Je pense à tous les artistes qui travaillent dans les églises en Pologne, dans les cantines en Hongrie, dans les garages en Tchécoslovaquie, partout dans l'ombre, sans aide, dans les plus grandes difficultés, et qui, dans leurs pays, maintiennent vive la flamme du théâtre, de la poésie et de la vérité.¹

Though it is a quarter of a century old, it is a good speech; the pathos fits the occasion. I am mentioning it because the speech is unknown here, even though it is interesting in Central Europe and views it as a cultural unit. However, in my paper I would like to focus on the places used to characterise the individual countries: Hungarian canteens, Polish churches and Czechoslovak garages. I do not know much about the first ones, Polish churches are an apt choice and in the case of the garages, it is a fusion of the Czech and Slovak alternative to say the least. Maybe it is only a metaphor connected to the greater degree of industrial development of Czechoslovakia in comparison with other countries in the Central European region – represented by the success of Czechoslovakia's Škoda cars.²

¹ "But the Europe of the European Union is not all of Europe. Today, I'm also thinking of a different Europe – the one we call Eastern, as if we were trying to distance ourselves from it. I'm thinking of all the artists who work in Polish churches, Hungarian canteens and Czechoslovak garages, in the shadows, without help. They fight all kinds of hardships, and make sure the flame of theatre, poetry and truth in their countries never goes out." In: MNOUCHKINE, Ariane: Remise des prix Europe pour le théâtre. Discours prononcé le 9 août 1987 à Taormina. L'art du présent. Entretiens avec Fabienne Pascaud, Paris: Plon. 2004. page 219. ISBN 2-259-19897-X.

² A small digression: In 1990, when I came for my internship to Théâtre du Soleil with the Polish actor Piotr Sewerynski, only the two of us addressed the others using "vous", which they found very surprising

Although garages have maintained a prominent position in the beginnings of music bands all over the world, I suppose the periphery of culture in Slovakia in the second half of the 1980s was maintained by some cultural centres and certain Christian churches. That is, of course, if we do not count what made its way into schools and onto theatre stages during perestroika. The fact that the cultural situation in Slovakia resembled the Polish situation more than the Czech one has its roots in the distant past. Yet Slovak culture manifested itself in the sphere of art less radically than Polish culture and thus it was less attractive for a broader cultural public at home and abroad.

It is necessary to keep in mind that the church had better conditions in Poland. Monasteries were not being destroyed and the activity of religious orders was official.³ Therefore, the activities of Christian communities were not reduced only to liturgical functions. While Polish churches were used for film projections not allowed elsewhere, the secret projections in Slovak churches were limited to Biblical topics. The Polish situation – life “above martial law” (ponad stan wojenny⁴) – is best expressed by the tango of the two cardinals⁵ in Tadeusz Kantor’s play in *Cricot 2*.

Despite being dissatisfied with the official theatrical culture, maybe the Slovak audience was not completely ready for such daring expression as that of Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski or the *Scena Plastyczna* at the Catholic University of Lublin (Polish Catholics even had their own university during socialism!) Although that might not be completely true.

I recall the theatre festival in Nitra in 1999 and the staging of *Historia o Miłosiernej, czyli Testament psa* (*The Story of the Merciful, or the Dog’s Testament*)⁶ by the Polish director Piotr Cieplak (born 1960) and the Teatr Rozmaności theatre troupe from Warsaw, which took place above the stage – the actors were hanging above the audience’s heads and when depicting the Last Supper as haggling between Christ and Satan, Mary was asked by the sinners to intervene, which she did in the end. This image was easy to understand for the audience, but those who were not regular festival goers had never had the opportunity to encounter anything similar in the works of Slovak theatres even after the artistic freedom of expression came.

in such an environment. Moreover, despite all of our admiration for the passionate work and theatrical truth of the troupe, we had differing opinions. But we were welcome there, since we came from the lands where freedom was being fought for. Piotr Sewerynski had a way of acting which allowed his partner to shine. That was primarily thanks to an exceptionally developed tradition of theatrical education. In such great competition, Ariane often had to remind him to fight for himself. And as if that was not enough, all that non-leftist way of addressing! And then a time came when nobody thought of Czechoslovak garages any longer, but people redirected their thoughts towards the gods of theatre and Greek tragedy. However strange it may sound, we were all of the same faith when the ancient tragedy was staged. Theatre makers will understand.

³ This is why Slovak clerics crossed the High Tatras to reach Polish monasteries. See: <http://www.iap.pl/?id=wiadomosci&nrwiad=340196>.

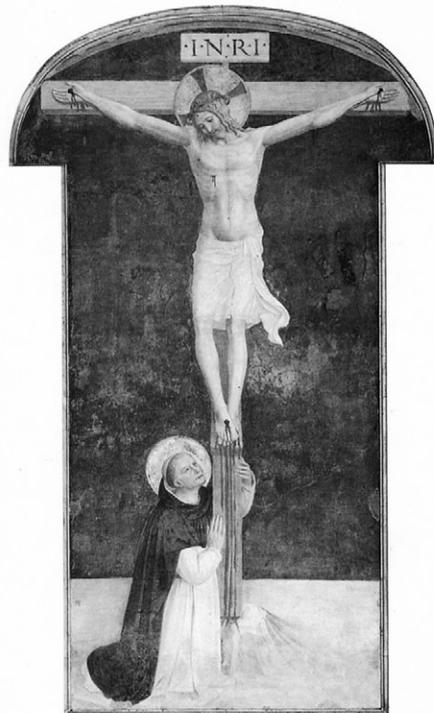
⁴ In response to the millions of Poles joining the Solidarity trade union in December 1981, General Jaruzelski and his junta (Wojskowa rada ocalenia narodowego, WRON) took power and declared martial law (stan wojenny) in accordance with the country’s defence law. Kantor’s staging of *Wiepole*, *Wiepole* reminds one of boys marching in the First World War, while at the same time it seems to foresee the state of martial law.

⁵ The characters of the cardinals appeared on stage again in the play *Nigdy tu już nie powrócę* (*I Shall Never Return*, 1990).

⁶ The original name of the play is *Auto da Compadecida* (1955). Its author is Ariano Suassuna, a Brazilian playwright and theatre scholar.

There are also such radical productions as *Sul concetto di volto nel Figlio di Dio* (*On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*)⁷ by Romeo Castellucci, which was also presented in May 2013 at the Wiener Festwochen Festival. Of course, in this case it is a conceptual festival form – more an exception than a repertoire trend. Castellucci's concept is based on bringing the questions of God's existence into theatre. Naturally, this is not the first time in the history of theatre that such a thing has happened, but nowadays it is rather seldom that certain topics make their way into theatre. Thus from a purely ideological viewpoint his concept could be perceived as late Baroque.

However, the primary scope of interest of this paper is the traditional space-time of the sacral, i.e. theatrical phenomena related to the liturgical environment, the liturgical year or both. Despite the incomparable formal boldness of Polish theatre makers, we have an important thing in common with Polish culture – a similar religious background. A nuance in this background is what separates us – but it is a question I will leave alone for the moment since it concerns the more distant past.⁸



Fra Angelico: *The Crucifixion*

⁷ A description of *Sul concetto di volto nel Figlio di Dio*: A man with the devotion of an adult son repeatedly changes the diapers of his father, who is in an advanced state of senile dementia. In the background – a white room which gradually gets dirtier and dirtier – there is a huge painting of Christ's face by Antonello da Messina. In the second act, the character of the son is embodied by a 12-year-old boy with a ball. This retrospective shows the son's desperation over his father's condition – the father he was attached to as a boy. The emotion turns into anger – the boy throws a hand grenade into the painting and his whole classroom follows him in the act. Grenades are being thrown and they glow in the dark as if they were turning into stars. The painting is not damaged – Christ endures everything until the children grow tired and sit down to gaze at the painting. The spectator longs for catharsis – he feels the urge to rebel and throw a grenade of his own, but he cannot, so he starts crying due to the overload of emotion. Then the old man waters the painting from his side. But just like the son, the father is not able to do anything against God – although the face disappears, the sentence "I am your shepherd" appears instead of it. It reminds of the psalm "The Lord is my Shepherd". A moment of doubt comes when the negative "not" appears in the sentence. Yet the word says the same as the face with certainty – it confirms the permanent presence of God in one's soul. It does that in two ways – when the New Testament layer (the painting of the face) reveals an Old Testament layer underneath (the psalmist's words). Castellucci's message is clear – God is with us even in times of great poverty and misery. However, inaccurate interpretations of this play can create the distorting impression that it is an iconoclastic play.

⁸ See my papers "Godunovské úvahy" and "Dimitrij...ďalší" in the quarterly *Slovenské divadlo*, 2012.

The trinitarians

The sensitivity for the immanent theatricality of church rituals is also well depicted in Marián Geišberg's song "Slečinka Thália" ("Miss Thalia"): "Popíjaj naďalej vínečko pri stole, divadlo zostane naďalej v kostole." ("Keep on drinking your wine at the table, the theatre will stay in the temple.")

I do not know if theatre will stay only in churches forever, but I will describe how I found it there. It was the late 1980s, a time when I started writing my diploma thesis on E. G. Craig. Although Craig abandoned his theatre practice very early, until the end of his life he kept saying, "I will stage the Passion play if you want." I wondered about this statement for a long time, and then I encountered a staging of the Passion play.

The initiative of my countrymen and fellow wanderers in time – a group of students from Bratislava producing *The St John Passion* – was not generational theatre but rather a return to the abandoned. Since the church was not allowed to organise cultural events, only temple space was acceptable, and even that only during the Holy Week, when the staging replaced the singing of *The St John Passion* on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Paradoxically, thanks to the restrictions of the totalitarian regime, we as spectators witnessed something similar to when in the Middle Ages responsorial singing and the spirit of Gregorian music gave birth to mystery plays performed in temples.

The Baroque Trinitarian Church⁹ in the centre of Bratislava with an illusive ceiling painting by the Italian scenographer Antonio Galli da Bibiena became the setting for two parallel plots: the singers of passions scattered around (the Baroque pulpit, the ambon and the side altar) and a silent plastic rendition of the plot with minimal movement on stage. The modern dance expression in connection with the Gregorian chant was especially fascinating. The dancers were Otto Adamec, Marta Poláková, Anna Sedlačková and Martina Sedláková. When the passage about Christ's death came, the whole audience knelt down. Not all performers were practising Christians and only a few of them realised that this happened precisely where liturgy prescribed it. They were astonished by the audience's reaction – the force of their feedback was incredible. The spontaneous kneeling was a sign that the dance interpretation of the Gospel had an impact on the audience, including the elderly ladies who had probably never been to the theatre. The performance definitely resonated with the audience even though it did not receive any applause.

This performance was created thanks to the initiative of Pavol Smolík, a recent graduate in musicology, who had attended Professor Ján Albrecht's audio lectures.¹⁰ As a beginning director of operas and an able organiser, he knew how to make use of

⁹ The Trinitarian Church, or the Church of Saint John of Matha and Saint Felix of Valois, also known as Trinity Church is often incorrectly called Holy Trinity Church and thus confused with the Church of the Holy Trinity near Bratislava Castle. Its concave facade architecturally indicates a large circle in the area in front of the church – it can be considered a kind of Baroque invitation.

¹⁰ When the ideological criteria in culture weakened, musical dramaturgy developed in parallel with theatrical dramaturgy. As early as the late 1980s Ján Albrecht, the son of the church choir leader in Bratislava, resolved to reintroduce the Lent musical tradition of presenting Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* in St Martin's Cathedral. His initiative was later continued by Miloš Valent. In the 1990s Valent established the tradition of Lent musical performances of Bach's *Passions* in the Evangelical Church.

the space. His conception utilised the Baroque interior of the Trinitarian Church and brought the disused pulpit back to life – the well-known space was re-imagined. The performance was accompanied by the singing of the Cantus teacher choir and was performed in the church in 1988, 1989 and 1990 and in St Martin's Cathedral in 1992.

The intervals between the performances and changing locations caused modifications to the production. The arrangements in space with the Gregorian chant were replaced by a dance version with music by Arvo Pärt and Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský, whose music was later replaced by an original composition by Peter Zagar. In 1992 the dance choreography changed as well. Marta Poláková's *Adato* was replaced by Alena Záhoráková's *Alfa* and the protagonist Otto Adamec was replaced by Ľuboš Kľučár, a more Byzantine type.

I must also mention the enthusiastic cooperation of otherwise work-shy stagehands from the Reduta studio at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, who brought the portable parts of the scene, since this moment also reflects the quasi-dissident nature of the whole project – at least when speaking about the shows performed in the 1980s. I do not know how versions of this staging would work today, but for those who took part back then it opened completely new horizons and significantly influenced the artistic career of some of the dancers and choreographers.

The longevity of the project proves that the year 1989 was not a turning point for dramaturgy of this type. The topic did not lose its relevance, even though it is much harder to secure its realisation in the new conditions since the stage and lights are rented. Not to mention the difficulty of finding indoor venues since former cultural centres have begun to let their premises to sellers. That is also one of the paradoxes of freedom.

New impulses and platforms

Despite all the difficulties, I would describe the 1990s as joyful since they made the realisation of numerous artistic events and experiments possible. Looking back, there are two things I consider vital – the search for the expression of the sacral and developing the often forgotten part of folklore – the art movement which has become known as “world music”.

The fact is that as a result of the agrarian character of Slovakia and the relatively late urbanisation of its population, theatre only appealed to a small part of Slovaks.



De Profundis, St John's Chapel in the Franciscan Church in Bratislava, 1992

The effort to change that and make theatre more accessible is supplemented by the effort of theatre makers to get closer to their potential audience – to places where they are usually found. The aim is to find their way into the open public space, inhabited by attractionists, event organisers, directors of historical battles, historical swordsmen, people in LARP armour¹¹ and those who re-enact battle scenes and coronations. Not considering the varying artistic quality of these events, most of them are positive from a sociological point of view: they animate the public space and help people gain historical awareness and connect to a specific environment.

Unlike many foreign festivals (among the closest ones, let us mention the two-month Wiener Festwochen Festival which aims to influence the cultural life of the city), ours are usually events for experts. This problem might have deeper historical roots – during socialism, the social function of theatre was overly emphasised. For example, a theatre festival was organised in Ostrava, yet it cannot be said that its existence influenced the cultural life of the miners who worked in the city. Although festivals today make their way to traditional festival venues such as historical towns and bath towns, at festivals created by theatre makers we often witness the resignation of organisers to make their festivals more accessible to a wider audience. Of course, I am speaking about reality rather than officially declared aims.

In this sense, the annual event organised by the Korunovačná Bratislava (Coronation City Bratislava) civic club¹² surpasses the others. It reminds us of our history in the period of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. However, the expensive admission to events in St Martin's Cathedral has caused the social stratification of the audience. It is certain that the cathedral is only large enough for some of those interested, but the alternative – large-scale projections in the major squares in the Old Town – is often of low quality (with regard to the direction and bad placement of the projections in direct sunlight). Thus most of the participants only attend the street promenade, while the theatrical production and its meaning remain inaccessible.

The competition of city districts (such as palio and the accompanying horse race betting at the Palio di Siena) has no tradition in Slovakia. Troupes of swordsmen and falconers are often used in the animations of old castles. This is more of a revival than a tradition – activities are usually based on general, but not quite incorrect premises such as “if there is a castle here, it must have been inhabited by a lord and knights.”

So far, nothing similar to the Orléans Joan of Arc Festival in France has come into existence. This week-long festival also has a certain inner stratification,¹³ but its dramaturgical programme is adequately varied, thanks to which the festival sets the pace of the whole city and is a significant stimulus for tourism while it is taking place. In addition to the promenade, reconstructions and film projections concerning the

¹¹ LARP (an acronym - live action role-playing game) is the term used for a specific type of game in which every player is assigned with the role of a character. Unlike in theatre, LARP players do not play for the audience's sake but for the sake of themselves and their teammates. They use light weapons made of glass fiber, plumbing pipes and foam latex, spray painted silver or covered with silver tape.

¹² <http://www.korunovacsneslavnosti.sk/>.

¹³ The stratification is caused by the effort to comply with the different age and interest criteria of the audience, so that everybody finds something of interest. Although some performances require an admission fee to be paid, the price of which is not high, the financial situation of the guest does not play a significant role, avoiding social stratification. The initiative of the local government, sponsors and French cultural policies help equalise the differences between viewers, in accordance with the motto “quality art for all” (as promoted by Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire movement) and can be inspiring for us.

topic of the Maid of Orléans, women successful in traditionally male professions are awarded with prizes.

The character of Joan of Arc is commemorated by a ceremonial religious service and a series of performances. Interestingly, in 2012 the premiere of the play *Jeanne d'Arc* written by the prominent Japanese expert in Noh theatre Haruo Nishino¹⁴ took place in Orléans. Nishino's *Jeanne d'Arc* is a Noh play inspired by Claudel and Japanese tradition.¹⁵ The author of the play does not focus on the conflict of European nations but concentrates on Joan's heroic sacrifice. The play about Joan of Arc brings an image of the French countryside at the turn of spring and summer to the poetic universe of Noh theatre. Using a character of both samurai and knightly qualities – Joan of Arc – it makes room for a dialogue between cultures.

Yet inspiration can be found nearer – in Brno, for example. The play *Kvítky svatého Františka* (*The Little Flowers of St Francis*) is an example of a response to the lack of a civilised “laugh culture”, religious theatre and knowledge of the old texts of European culture.

From the viewpoint of filling the aforementioned voids, it is only logical that Malé divadlo kjogénu (the Little Kyōgen Theatre) in Brno enjoys the long-term support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the City of Brno, while a play about Francis was supported by the respective city district and by the Capuchin monastery, which directly initiated it.

The cooperation between the theatre and the monastery originated on the occasion of the *Noc kostolov* (The Night of Churches)¹⁶ event, the purpose of which is to accentuate the topos by making it accessible in an unusual time. During such events, sacral architecture also shows itself from angles which were hidden from ordinary people at the time of its creation. Through different perspectives unavailable during religious ceremonies, we have an opportunity to realise that this space was really



Cum Angelis – a *mise-en-scène* according to the central detail of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel, St John's Chapel in the Franciscan Church in Bratislava, 1996

¹⁴ NISHINO, Haruo: *Jeanne d'Arc. Nô moderne*. Trans. Alain Briot. The manuscript of an unpublished play from the author's archive. The play was performed in 2012 in Orléans, Paris and Aix-en-Provence, and in 2013 in Kumamoto (on the island Kyushu) and is to be staged in 2014 in the National Noh Theatre in Tokyo.

¹⁵ Similar productions are called *Shinsaku Noh* – i.e. new Noh plays, the purpose of which is to expand the current repertoire of the ancient theatrical tradition, canonised in the era of the samurai – the Edo period.

¹⁶ An Austrian initiative from 2005 under the title *Lange Nacht der Kirchen* has expanded since 2009 to the other German-speaking countries, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and was recently adopted by Finland and the Hungarian city of Sopron. See: www.nockostolov.sk.

built with the future in mind – in the same sense as Grotowski evoked the workmanship of Gothic statues elaborated even on their rear side (oriented towards the wall) during his last lecture in the Odéon Theatre in Paris.

The production of *The Little Flowers of St Francis* premiered in October 2010 and since it is an exterior performance, it is played before and at the end of summer. It takes place in the beautiful gardens at the Church of the Discovery of the Holy Cross in Brno. Behind several rows of hedges, the shapes of the illuminated Brno Cathedral can be seen.

If religious theatre once was a form of the *Biblia pauperum*, thanks to which the audience had a chance to listen to texts about the life of saints, today the public readings of such texts are based on the correct presupposition that we do not know them. Examples include *The Little Flowers of St Francis*, *The Life of Blessed Francis* (also known as *First Life*) by Thomas of Celano, *Legenda Versificata*, a legend about St Francis in verse written by Henry de Avranches, *The Legend of the Three Companions* and *The Anonymous of Perugia*.

However, from a formal point of view, texts using the future tense only have a little dramatic potential. How did the director Tomáš Pavčík overcome this problem? He decides to keep the models the way they are – he does not dramatise them, but he supplements them with musical and mimetic scenes. His *mise-en-scène* comes from wide sources of inspiration – we come across individual solutions and appropriate applications of existing dramatic solutions. There are elements of silent slapstick, such as when movement on stage is accompanied by illustrating sounds by the performing band (e.g. kicking). Yet the main role the musicians and singers play is the role of the choir, which sings the hymn *O Francesco povero* in Czech.

The *mise-en-scène* gives a vivid chronological picture of Francis' life, and we get to observe the character's development – the protagonist's inner rebirth. The scenes have an expressive style similar to the Italian folk comedy – the burlesque beginning gives a hint that the more of a *bon viveur* Francis becomes, the bigger the pathos of his conversion will be. The director manages to keep the plot dramatic by showing how not even the first Franciscans understood their founder (a contemplation of perfect happiness).

A remarkable fact is the inspiration of theatre makers from Brno by medieval Japanese theatre, which the Little Kyōgen Theatre in Brno turned to in the search for a civilised “laughing culture” and kind-hearted humour, the heart-warming nature of which had been a model of genre purity for them already 10 years earlier. For instance, Francis' pilgrimage to the Pope, who is supposed to take a stand regarding the creation of the new order, ends with the sentence: “A vida, zatím co si zpíváme, dorazili sme do Říma.” (“Oh, look. While we were singing, we reached Rome.”) In this line, we can identify the traditional Noh *tsukizerifu*, lines announcing arrival, which enable the depiction of walking and journeys usually leading to the imperial city of Kyoto, to a riverbank, a shore, the foot of a mountain or any other *utamakura* (glorified places).¹⁷ Why should such elements not be used? After all, it is theatrical, humorous and reusable.

¹⁷ Uta makura – an expression composed from the words “song” and “pillow” which is a medieval predecessor of site-specific theatre.



Passio – an inscription from bamboo sticks and the unfolding of the linen, Main Square, Bratislava, 2004

However, as far as the definitive appearance and the character of dynamism are concerned, the production of *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* belongs to contemporary European theatre. It is characterised by a type of dramatism with a clear epic inspiration, in which the attention of the audience is maintained by alternating between a serious and humorous atmosphere, as well as a varying pace.¹⁸ In contrast to such constructions, medieval Japanese theatre follows a “single-arch” model – it gradually amplifies the chosen tone while accelerating the course of events at the same time. In this sense, *Noh* is comparable with ancient tragedy and the Passion play and *Kyōgen* with Italian comedy.

This example from Brno is inspirational. Although Slovakia takes part in international events such as *Noc kostolov* (The Night of Churches, since 2011) and *Noc múzeí* (The Night of Museums, since 2008) as well, significant differences between Czech and Slovak culture manifest themselves not so much in the support for one-off events, but rather in the support for quality live theatrical performances which require longer preparation and rehearsals.

Anavim

The two plays *De Profundis* (1992) and *Cum Angelis* (1994–95) would fit the dramaturgy of *Noc kostolov*, but at the time of their introduction no such event existed.¹⁹ Looking back, it seems as if they had anticipated its establishment. 20 years have

¹⁸ HLAVÁČOVÁ, Anna A.: Medzi oratóriom a kjógenom. *Slovenské divadlo*, 2011, Vol. 59, No.4, pp. 404–6.

¹⁹ Considering the ephemeral nature of theatre, which is even greater due to the described circumstances, we have always tried to capture our work on film as well (Igor Sivák).

passed, so it is probably safe to say aloud that the statues in *De Profundis* were made from the remains of the sculpture of Klement Gottwald which used to be located on the square, now known as *Námestie slobody* (Freedom Square) – the same statue whose hands were painted with red oil paint in the winter of 1989 as a sign of protest against communism and which was then blown up using an oversized explosive charge – ideology against ideology.

The youngest generation of visual artists back then (recent graduates from the art vocational schools) did not find their place in such a paradigm and the example of transformation of the ugly to the beautiful was very symptomatic for them. Freedom Square has been dilapidating to this very day, but apart from the statues exhibited in the chapel, its central monument has been turned into statues and benches for the park belonging to the hospital near the manor house in *Prievoz*.

The origin of the dancers and sculptors' collaboration can be traced back to the artistic group *Inak* (Otherwise).²⁰ While *Inak* was established for art exhibitions and became a broad and open society, *Anavim* only united a small group of dancers and came into existence thanks to the collaboration of *Viliam Loviška* and *Marcela Lovišková*, *Andrej Rudavský* and the stone sculpture students from vocational art schools.

It was necessary to create something motionally simple – fitting a slow dance expression – to accompany the statues installed in the Gothic *St John's Chapel* of the *Franciscan Church* in *Bratislava*. The most important stimulus was provided by the choice of a specific space which reflects sound multiple times, thus determining the rhythm of the vocal presentation. A matter mentioned less often than acoustics is the fact that the Gothic framework significantly determines the pace and character of movement and gesture. To confront the stone and the body, *Anna Sedláčková* and *Luboš Kľučár* created the dance performances *De Profundis* (27, 28 and 29 October 1992), set to the music of *Arvo Pärt*, and *Cum Angelis* (June–August 1995), set to *Pavol Malovec's* original composition for a chamber orchestra and African water drums. *Malovec's* composition was realised under the conductor *Anton Popovič*.²¹

In addition to the stone statues by *Viliam Loviška* and *Andrej Rudavský*, the staging of *De Profundis* also worked with candles, water and clay, in which some of the statues were installed. It was performed around *All Saints' Day*, when the crypts and the small burial chapel, built according to the model of the *Sainte-Chapelle* in *Paris*,²² are open.

²⁰ The exhibition organised by *Inak*, the *Veni* concert and the dance performance by *Marta Poláková's* group *Adato* – all of these events took place in one night – a night which marked the coming of a single artistic generation. Looking at the date of the event, 16 November 1989, we can assume that this artistic initiative dissolved as a result of the hectic events of the following days.

²¹ The staging of *De Profundis* was supported by the forum of Slovak theatre makers *Medzičas* ("Intermission"), and one of its founding members, *Anna Grusková*, also wrote the only review. The Christian TV channels *Lux* and *Noe* did not exist back then; the Christian radio station *Lumen* was only in *Banská Bystrica*. However, a documentary that aired on *STV*, the public TV channel in Slovakia, captured the performance *Cum Angelis*, and its director *Igor Sivák* made professional recordings of both performances (available in the *Theatre Institute's* archive) with the help of cameramen *Martin Gazík* and *Vojtech Balog*. These recordings enable future scholars to make a critical reflection upon the artistic qualities of the events.

²² In 1995, the diplomat *Sidney Peyroles*, the current managing director of *Académie de France à Rome* (*Villa Medici*), expressed his interest in moving the performance *De Profundis* to *Sainte-Chapelle* in *Paris*, which is the model for *St John's Chapel*. But that would require the statues be transported and insured and rights for the music be acquired. There was nobody among the project's creators who was willing to organise such a transferral, since the organisational duties would force them to sacrifice some of their creative interests.

The space for the production of *Cum Angelis*²³ was set by two rows of peculiar polychrome and gilded stone heads of angels by Viliam Loviška, in which fragments of old stone sculptures were used. Deeper in the chapel, close to the spot where a disused altar table stood,²⁴ a marble statue of the Lamb of God extending out of the grid of matzoh bread was located. The performance loosely addressed the topic of making the invisible visible and was connected with the two autumn feasts – The Feast of the Guardian Angels and The Feast of the Archangels. The title is based on an allusion to the liturgical expression “Cum Angelis et Omnibus Sanctis” (“With the angels and all saints”). It was shortened (omitting the confusing “omnibus”) since the topic of the deceased was also addressed by the previous project *De Profundis*. The Baroque part of the space reserved for the audience also included an exhibition of abstract sculptures by Marcela Lovišková.

Both projects taught dance artists to define the human body in relation to statues and work under severe limitations (flip through a book using no hands, work with one hand only, etc.). The later work of the group started to abandon the staging principles verging on installations. It was based on integrating the sculptural principle into movement – by deriving the staging form from the face mask similarly to the Japanese Noh (*Naša pani kňahne*, 2000 – a Noh play based on a Slovak ballad with the same name). The sculptural principle was utilised in the composition of the Pietà in an outdoor production of the Passion play (*Passio*, 2004), where the main method was not reduction but accumulation.

Anavim, which is Hebrew for “for the poor”,²⁵ has a name alluding to Brook’s concept of poor theatre. Similarly, the name of the musical group Veni is, in fact, a shortened form of *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. These mysterious names were not only supposed to express the authors’ idealism but also hide it. The formation of these groups of art university students dates back to the mid-1980s.

The performances were always free – not only because of noble intentions but also because the 1990s were a time when people started checking whether performances generate even the smallest revenue. That would mean having to rent spaces or make the projects’ accounting more complicated. So although Anavim kept its experimental nature, its audience was drawn to it by its affordability and also the choice of a specific space.

From a dramaturgical point of view, the point was to expand the topic of Passion plays, the performance of which was forbidden during socialism. In the context of thematically related projects in the country, affected by film naturalism, it was an art project (expressively affected by the Perestroika *Derevo* and *Scena plastyczna* at the Catholic University of Lublin). In retrospect, the analogy to the aesthetics of Klim (Vladimir Klimenko, born 1952) is surprising – more precisely, the fascination by the Whirling Dervishes, on which Klim based the whole staging of *The Persians* in Podval in Moscow. However, both “chapel projects” can be

²³ The performance *De Profundis* was also presented in Humenné in a reduced form and *Cum Angelis* was also presented in Vienna and Kiev.

²⁴ The copy of an older stone work made of poured concrete, which was created as part of the strange practices of the group, which restored this cultural heritage monument in the 1980s.

²⁵ *Besora anavim* – a joyful message to the poor, gospel for the poor. Anavim is also an acronym of the founders’ first names.



Passio – the final composition of the Pietà, where the bamboo sticks replace swords. Main Square, Bratislava, 2004

viewed as studies of outdoor Passion plays staged a decade later on Hlavné námestie (The Main Square).

The beginning of the 1990s was connected with the opening of the Slovak-Austrian border, and so as part of getting to know the neighbours, it also brought organised trips to the village of Sankt Margarethen in Burgenland, which holds open-air Passion plays every five years.

In *Passionspiele St. Margarethen* (*Sankt Margarethen Passion Plays*), the topic of Easter helps make use of the time of year with good weather and holiday. A beautiful old quarry holds a sculpture symposium (*Symposion Europäischer Bildhauer*), established in 1959 by the prominent Austrian sculptor Karl Prantl (1923–2010).²⁶ It is a wonderful venue which brilliantly joins nature and culture. The Passion plays organised by the village dwellers are, however, assailed by the aesthetics of blockbuster films – probably the only thing the organisers know. Worse still, the stagings of these “films” lack brilliant actors and the option to cut and zoom. Whole groups of characters get lost in the vast space. The slow movement of actual sheep from one spot to another destroys the audience’s concentration and excitement. I do not know how distant the past to which the tradition in Sankt Margarethen reaches is,²⁷ but since the 1990s it has formed a type of tourism aimed at a specific type of audience. The risks the organisers are taking are not great – the spectators will only express their dissatisfaction by

²⁶ The sculpta’s son, the choreographer Sebastian Prantl (born 1960), is one of the few Austrian stage artists who have also been inspirational for the Slovak scene. See: www.tanzatelierwien.at, <http://www.impulstanz.com>.

²⁷ Promotion materials give the year 1926.

not coming back in four years – something that is probably not even expected from most of the audience.

I am mentioning this unintentional amateurism not only because a number of Slovak theatre goers have encountered it as well,²⁸ but also because it is too often that we witness a similar approach. This cannot always be attributed to the Austrian inspiration, but quite certainly it has the same blockbuster aesthetic points of departure.

An example of such approach in Slovakia is the *Trnava Passion Play*. Its similarity with that of Sankt Margarethen is, however, purely aesthetic as in Slovakia we have not yet encountered the spiritual emptiness of the Austrian counterpart. The magic of freedom of expression in public spaces still has an effect today. The Passion play is incorporated into the liturgical calendar, one can see the zeal of lightly clothed actors in cold weather and often also that of the heroically freezing audience, who are warmed only by the procession-like character of the performance – a big asset in comparison with the static execution of the auditorium in Sankt Margarethen. Other assets of the *Trnava Passion Play* include the undoubtedly large turnout, the free entry (which wipes out social differences), the support of both the city council and sponsors and the regularity with which this event, growing into a cultural tradition of “the Slovak Rome”, is held. Despite the fact that the strong points mentioned above are mostly inartistic, the founded tradition forms a prerequisite for a more worthy rendition of the theme.

The naturalism of Mel Gibson’s 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which screened in multiplex cinemas, created space for a different approach. The Passion theme, which may raise objections under some circumstances, was suddenly found pleasing thanks to its softer and more symbolic execution. The production *Passio* resonated in Bratislava’s cultural life of 2004 together with an important exhibition entitled *Gotika* (*Gothic*; Slovak National Gallery, 21 November 2003–21 March 2004) under the curatorship of Dušan Baran.²⁹ The exhibition gave the general public a unique opportunity to see the wooden figural sculpture of Christ from the municipality of Hronský Beňadik, whose movable arms prove that it was used in processions during Easter rites.³⁰

The outdoor Bratislava passion play

Unlike Christmas, Easter continues to be reflected in a minor way in Slovak city culture or media even after 1989. The emphasis on pagan traditions, which are part of Christian Easter holidays, comes across as anachronistic and confusing, especially so if transplanted from rural culture to urban culture. Passion plays provide a solution

²⁸ In the 1990s travel agencies organised bus trips for Slovaks who wanted to attend these Austrian Passion plays.

²⁹ The poster for the production features a piece from the exhibition, which indicates that the organisers of both events share similar aesthetic views.

³⁰ The Department of Restoration at VŠVU (the Academy of Fine Arts and Design) considered adding to this figure a copy of the cart which was originally part of the sculpture and located in Esztergom, and adding a copy of the figure to the cart in Esztergom to not only support reconciliation between both nations but also with the secret hope that at some point in the future it would be possible to re-enact the plays in Hronský Beňadik. Dr Danuta Učniková backed such a solution while Dr Dušan Baran supported a puristic attitude. Both standpoints are logical in their own way. As is usual in similar disputes, the solution which required no action won.



**Peter Brook: *Mahabharata*.
A dying hero among the
arrows**

to this confusion: they present a key event of history and at the same time they are the main dramatic text of Christian culture. While mystery plays were initiated by the clergy, an impulse for Passion plays came from city officials and guilds. Even small communities used to have a theatre play staged at least once a year. Moreover, since entry was free, social differences were wiped out and an atmosphere of social peace, which is needed even today, was created.

The production *Passio* (9 April 2004 at 9:00 pm)³¹ was created at the initiative of the Korunovačná Bratislava association represented by Miroslav Vetrík and financed by the City District of Bratislava – Staré Mesto. From a socio-cultural perspective this portrayal of a Biblical theme was also supposed to have a local commemorative function: in Bratislava Good Friday coincides with the commemoration of the Candle

³¹ Cast: Daniel Raček (Christ), Martin Žák (Peter), Peter Groll (Caiaphas), Juraj Čačaný (Pilate), Peter Šavel (Judas), Andrej Kostanjevec (John), Milan Tomaškovič (Soldier), Monika Caunerová (Angel), Anna Sedláčková (Mary, mother of Jesus), Lucia Kašiarová (Mary Magdalene), Zuzana Očenášová (Mary of Clopas) and Jana Grumelová (Veronica). Gregorian Chant: Marek Cepko (Evangelist) and Radovan Hasík (Christ). Marek Marko (Reader for all other voices). Works by Arvo Pärt used: *Tabula Rasa*, *Passio*, *Silouans Song* and *Cantus for Benjamin Britten*. Production design: Jana Sedláčková. Choreography: Anna Sedláčková. Lights: Pavol Hudák, Director: Anna A. Hlaváčová.

Demonstration.³² Commemorating such events brings people closer together, so it was really an urban theatre – even when outside the building of the City Theatre of P. O. Hviezdoslav and the disputes over it.

The performance took place at the Main Square,³³ on a raised and slightly inclined stage of 10 m² with a marley-type floor. The background of the stage was formed by the facade of the Old Town Hall from whose windows three singers performed *The St John Passion* in a typical Gregorian chant and with a usual role distribution (the Narrator/Evangelist, Jesus, and a Reader for all other voices).

The Passion story itself was performed in silence – it began downstage in the lowest part with the front edge in the height of 1.5 metres (Garden of Gethsemane). The climaxing Calvary scene was played upstage near the highest edge of the square-shaped stage.

The back edge of the stage included seven light pillars projected from the bottom through holes in the floor covered by grating. This light solution by Pavol Hudák was an abstract representation of a seven-armed candelabrum.³⁴

The abstractness of light pillars in *Passio* was not readable for the audience; it framed the space for actors – the characters that betrayed Christ (Judas and Peter, Pilate and Caiaphas,³⁵ criminals) walked into these pillars supported by smoke machines. The pillars were being shut off until only the middle one remained – the vertical part of the cross. The lighting was more of an emphasis on the deep historical and mystical connection of the Christian and Jewish faiths than a confrontation of their respective symbols.³⁶

The Bratislava outdoor production of *Passio* is connected to Anavim motion studies performed in the chapel of the Franciscan Church. These studies were funded partially from their own resources and partially from a grant. Macin Bornus' internships inspired a different take on the Gregorian chant and were an important impulse for this production.³⁷

As it was supposed to be a scenic oratory, the designer Jana Sedlačková (Zaujecová) used acolyte albs, instead of antic trends popular in films, to create a Middle-Ages stylisation of costumes. Bamboo sticks, a peacock feather, a black rope, a roll of white cloth (burial shroud) and drapery with the printing of Rublev's icon were used as props.

The acting was as ascetic as the production design and followed the structure of

³² The Candle Demonstration (also known as Bratislava Good Friday) took place on 25 March 1988 on Hviezdoslavovo Square. A peaceful protest gathering of citizens was violently dispersed.

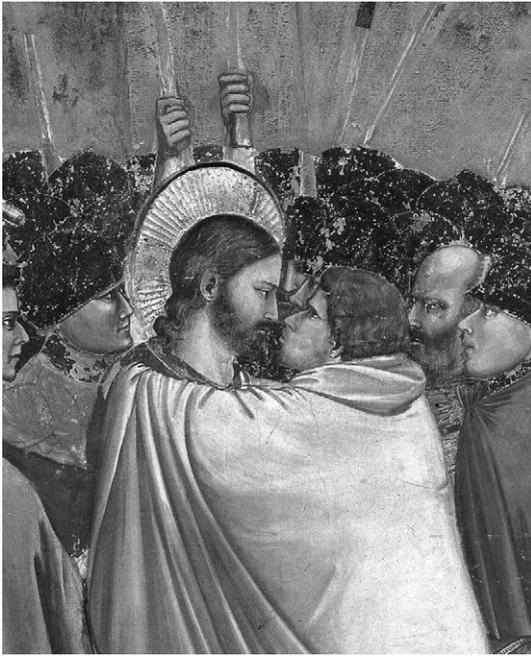
³³ Formally, the production has the attributes of ante-temple theatre. It also attracted the visitors to nearby churches as the Main Square forms one urban unit with Františkánske Square.

³⁴ *Passio* (2004) thus incorporated the same concept as Pavol Smolík, who used the seven-armed candelabrum as the main prop in his enactments of the Passion play. Candles were put out one by one until the candelabrum turned into a cross. Connecting the Old and the New Testament by the New Fire was the main motive of his interior productions *Jánove pašie* (*St John Passion*) at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

³⁵ As high priests are never present on stage at the same time and both are silent roles, Caiaphas and Annas were merged into one role in *Passio*.

³⁶ The connection of the cross and the menorah makes a similar impression as in the painting *White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall.

³⁷ The first internship at the Bratislava Franciscans was initiated by Otto Adamec, the protagonist of the first *St John Passion* in Bratislava at the Trinitarians and the founder of Bratislava's branch of Tomek Dabrowski's Tai Chi school. Otto Adamec used all the money inherited from his parents for the event. The following internships were at the Franciscan monastery in Hlohovec.



Giotto: *The Kiss of Judas*, poles emerge from a black background created by helmets and compositionally fulfil the same function as the seven swords in the Pietà pictorial canon.

the sung text.³⁸ Dancers are used to moving a lot and for some of them it was difficult to adapt to the minimalist mindset where the only goal is to intensify words by embodying them while applying the Noh rule of “feel 100 percent, show 70”.

The St John Passion (John 18) can be read aloud in 10 minutes, sung for twice as long and in the production the same text covered 50 minutes – with instrumental parts that the storyline needed adding to the final length of course. Music in the production was enriched by four pieces of Pärt’s music: before the beginning of narration, in the scene where Peter meets tied Christ, in the scene of the Way of the Cross to Golgotha and in the final scene where the body of Christ is taken down from the cross. These instrumental parts were meant to compensate for epic brevity, to create pauses and allow for the further development of motion.

The choreography combined contemporary dance expression with elements derived from liturgical motion, Noh theatre, Tai Chi and Sufi whirling as means of the mystical exploration of the cosmos through movement.³⁹ These elements are not used for esoteric reasons but simply because our own culture is lacking in this respect. We preserved only texts and static figural compositions in visual arts.⁴⁰ *Mise-en-scènes* of poor theatre involved a search for movement connecting static images.

³⁸ At first, the possibility of staging the production in Latin (or Japanese) was considered with the minimising of the illustrative moment and the intention to perform abroad in mind. However, the primary aim was to perform annually in Slovakia. Doing so at any time other than Easter was unthinkable with a group of people that did not constitute an ensemble and had various employments.

³⁹ The relationship between Islamic and Christian mysticism can be proved by Ta’ Zieh – a Sufi Passion play in Iran and Bangladesh.

⁴⁰ <http://www.ostium.sk/index.php?mod=magazine&act=show&aid=353>.

The goal was not a realistic depiction in a film-like manner, and the execution was not supposed to resemble informal behaviour. It could be characterised as analytical and sculptural – the form where every move expresses a certain thought or beat of the heart. The form of the Passion play that was sung and enacted aimed to grasp hidden movements of the audience's souls with a cathartic effect.

The basis for *Passio* was the art canon known from the Gothic panel painting of Madonna with Christ in the centre and other saintly women in the four corners or outer wings. The painting expresses the sentence "Blessed art thou among women," the angel's greeting from the prayer "Hail Mary". In the iconographic canon of *Annunciation*, one finds mostly only Mary with the Angel, or various signs of God's presence (a ray of light, a dove, a hand, a face and a miniature picture of Trinity). However, pure citations and allegories are not the core of the performance. This is the reason why *Passio* was built upon a mixture of both described art canons. The Angel entered the stage and fought with women (five Marys) in a two-person *Tui Shou* Tai Chi exercise until he faced the one that beat him. Then the best woman assumed the role of the Virgin Mary, and this principle of fair play contributed to the credibility of character and acting.

In the Passion story women's roles are silent. As all actors were to be present on stage at the same time in the chosen dance realisation, the women had to be there before the story started to unfold. Therefore, a scene of Annunciation which merged with the movement part of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was inserted before the Passion story.

Later on, the women form a counterbalance to the men, which is in accordance with the Biblical description. In the scene where Christ is whipped, the women create an inner circle around Christ and the men beating at the ground with sticks create the outer circle. In a different scene, when Christ is sent from Pilate to a high priest, the women represented a wall of Pilate's house. During the Way of the Cross, the crucifixion and the descent from the cross, the women acted within a traditional iconographic framework and composed a choir, support and an echo of the story while filling in the blank space in the gospel narration that is exclusive to the men. The angel from the scene of Annunciation carries the meaning of timelessness and prophecy in this realisation of Passion. He appeared with a feather wing (a peacock feather stuck into a bamboo stick) every time the words "so that the Scripture would be fulfilled" occurred in the text.

Scenes:

1. Angel chooses Mary from among the women because she is the only one ready to accept both joy and pain. As for the choreography – the end of Mary's movement part merges with the solo of Christ on the Mount of Olives, thus connecting the Annunciation scene with the Passion.
2. The figure of Christ with an invisible chalice is shining on the Mount of Olives, and in the garden below his disciples are sleeping.
3. The arrival of a cohort causes a confrontation; Jesus descends from the Mount to stop it.
4. Lighting up the figure of Christ on the text "I am he." The light as a display of God's power causes the others to fall to the ground. This moment of awe is not broken until the Kiss of Judas.

5. Peter hits Malchus with a sword. Christ steps in between them, pushes Peter's weapon away and touches Malchus' ear to heal it.
6. The Denial of Peter and a soldier cuffing Christ are connected by movement as the cause and the effect.
7. Christ meets Peter after the Denial – his stretched-out hand brings reminiscences of Christ's walking on the sea.
8. Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate hold two ends of a red rope and use it to pass the tied up Christ between one another. During questioning, Christ is moving inside the loop of the rope, and Pilate is untying Christ when speaking to him.
9. During the whipping, the women conceal Christ and move to the rhythm of the men beating at the ground with sticks. When the women step aside, Christ emerges as a king – he is wearing a cape and has a crown on his head. The gate of the high priest's house is composed of the men and stands opposite to the wall of Pilate's house formed by the women.
10. Pilate is walking between Christ and Caiaphas; he finds the punishment sufficient. The plotting of the Pharisees is expressed by a dumbshow with sticks.
11. After the word "Golgotha", the Gregorian chant is interrupted by an instrumental part, and the Way of the Cross begins. Christ meets every character, or at least their eyes, and continues his way to die for them. Having fallen over, Christ meets Veronica, who wipes his face and shows the bloody face print on the handkerchief – represented by the icon by Andrei Rublev (a positive printed on the linen) – to those gathered.
12. After the final fall, Christ no longer stands up, and one of his hands is nailed to the cross. Scenically, the crucifixion is carried out by putting a bamboo stick into the back of Christ's sleeves. Christ is holding the ends of the stick between his fingers.
13. During the crucifixion, Christ stretches out his other hand on his own, moving it slightly ahead of the stick being inserted into the sleeve (as if he was stretching his hand towards the drowning Peter). The first criminal reacts to this (played by the same actor as Peter), looks at the cross, and to the words "and with him two others" his whole body turns towards the cross. After a short pause, to the words "one on either side", the second criminal (played by the same actor as Judas) looks at Christ and turns away from the cross.
14. To the words "and Jesus in the middle", the picture of Christ emerges on the vertical part of the cross – that is, in the light pillar.
15. While a group of women express their attitude towards the criminals and the cross by their postures, men lift five bamboo sticks, as if drawing five straight lines and with the help of the remaining sticks and the rope create the inscription INRI. This is performed theatrically; however, with the figural composition of Christ in the background, the action gives the impression of a film close-up shot.
16. Women spread out the burial shroud and men cast lots for the garment with the sticks from the disassembled inscription in the style of the Mikado game.
17. Christ turns to John and Mary, which develops the motif of concern for others, that was already present in the garden, during the Way of the Cross and in the gesture of his hand stretched out towards Peter and the criminal. John walks to Mary, and a soldier slowly puts a spear with vinegar to Christ's mouth.
18. The words "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" conclude the singing. The



The Passion according to Bartholomew, Silence and Co., Bratislava, 2012

soldier spears Christ's side to the sound of a bell's ringing and steps away. It is done to fulfil the Scripture – the tone of it cannot be aggressive.

19. When light shines from the cross, Magdalene bows and lays her head to Christ's feet, assuming the liturgical gesture of kneeling, which is common at this place, on behalf of the whole community.
20. The final composition of the descent from the cross culminates in the portrayal of Pietà in the style of the canon of the Mother of Sorrows, where instead of swords bamboo sticks are used in radial arrangement. An important element is the rhythm which the men taking part in the final scene keep in order to draw the attention of the audience to the sculptural composition of Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Christ.

The scene of Pietà later is compositionally opened up by a five-metre long piece of linen being unfolded from Christ's stretched-out hand to the auditorium.⁴¹ The ending seems to have been subconsciously inspired by Giotto⁴² and at the same time by the scene from Brook's film *The Mahabharata*, in which Arjuna supports the head of a dying warrior with a pillow of arrows.⁴³

⁴¹ In the film version, the camera would move from the close up of the hand lying on the linen to the linen's other end, where the names of the actors would be drawn out onto the drapery, similar to signatures on a painting.

⁴² BELLOSI, Luciano: Giotto. Florence: Scala, 2003. Detail of the Kiss of Judas fresco on the cover.

⁴³ BANU, Georges: Peter Brook de Timon d' Athenes a la Tempête. Paris: Flammarion, 1991, the upper picture on page 6 of the picture appendix of Mahabharata (1985).

As is apparent from the sequence of scenes, the main motion motif was the stretching out of a hand: Jesus stretches his hand out towards Judas, who betrays him, towards Peter even after the Denial, and stretches the other hand out towards criminals, saving one of them even on the cross. After his death, within the Pietà composition wrapping up the scene of the descent from the cross, Peter puts Christ's hand onto the white linen stretched out towards all the people. Finally, when the light slowly retreats from the rendition of Pietà through the detail of this hand on the white burial shroud, the actors leave the stage.

The response from the audience, the press and electronic media was positive. Reviews of *Passio* expressed the hope that Bratislava might become another historical European city with the Passion tradition,⁴⁴ and the cast were ready to polish the production to a shining finish by the following year and show what they could not that year.

For example, as there is a laser on the Main Square, it was considered that it could be used for nailing to the cross in accordance with the iconographic canon of the *Stigmata of St Francis*. Furthermore, because the wind there usually blows from the left – from Františkánske Square, a Japanese flag (a red sun) carried on a pole behind the stage from the side of the embassy⁴⁵ was supposed to emerge for a moment behind Christ's head, similar to the last verse of Apollinaire's *Zone* and the scene from *The Mahabharata* where a flying weapon is carried across the whole stage in a straight line without a hesitation.

Even though the production, performed on the Main Square, was received favourably, it has not been staged again because the live rendition of the Passion preserves its meaning and charm only if performed during the Holy Week. Besides the planned re-staging the following year, there arose the problem how to please a larger audience at a convenient time – and with this there also rose the question of making a film.⁴⁶ A recording was made for this purpose (from the only staging recorded on two cameras) as a preparation for the film adaptation and at the same time as a memory aid for the dancers. It is something between a simple recording and film-like piece with well thought-out shots. The word "Múzeum" ("Museum") and a five-pointed star on a board (the remnants of the square's former name – the Square of 4 April) that did not disturb the theatrical performance cause trouble in the film recording. However, after the restoration of the facade of the Old Town Hall these disappeared, so nothing obstructs a full shot featuring the architecture. Even though the Lux and Noe TV stations did not exist at that time, the film was supposed to inspire other cities in Slovakia where Passion plays were staged. This plan, which was part of the intended repetition of the production, has never been realised.

The following year, the city council commissioned – probably to save some money⁴⁷ – a group of amateurs in motorbike costumes to give the Passion play a modern look for the lack of better ideas. They had really good black fire-fighter helmets,

⁴⁴ www.europassion.be.

⁴⁵ The Japanese embassy has an analogical position on the square in front of the Santa Croce basilica in Florence.

⁴⁶ The TA3 TV station broadcast the first 10 minutes live with unprepared commentary.

⁴⁷ Renting the stage, the light and the sound equipment account for most of the expenses. However, without them an outdoor project cannot be realised.

which could have been used to form a black contrasting circle behind Christ as in Giotto's fresco *Kiss of Judas*. However, the new organisers did not see things this way. In the following years the restoration of the town hall prevented the production from being repeated, and that was the end of the Passion play on the Main Square.⁴⁸

Silence & Co.

Continuing this dramaturgical line does not necessarily mean direct inspiration; it can mean drawing inspiration from the same sources. This is proved by a small and intimate production entitled *Bartimejove pašije: Monodilema o pravde a strachu* (*The Passion According to Bartholomew: a monodilemma about truth and fear*), premièred on 5 May 2012 in the Bratislava Old Town club Ticho a spol. (Silence & Co.). It is common that authors return to what they have previously been working with.

The New Testament contains the Passion according to Matthew, Luke, Mark and John. But where is Bartholomew? Bartholomew is mentioned only once in the Bible, in Mark 10:46–52, in a passage about a blind man receiving sight. This happened shortly before Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and not long before the way to Golgotha.

The production *The Passion According to Bartholomew* presents how enriching reading the Bible from Bartholomew's point of view can be. We understand that the joy of having sight makes the healed follow Christ, but we rarely think about what happened to the crowds of those whom Jesus healed after his death. On the one hand, there is a turning point in their life that each of them experienced when meeting Christ with all his might and glory and being healed. On the other hand, there is a shock when they see how alone and fragile he is, when they see how the apostles abandoned him: those same devoted apostles who sometimes pushed the ill away because they wanted to be closer to their master so that they would not miss a single word.

After Christ is crucified, the apostles think about returning to fishing. But to what and where should those healed by Christ return? A blind man knows no craft and lives in seclusion of the mercy of others. He left his environment to follow Christ, but he cannot return. His recovery would remind others of Christ, awaken their bad conscience, prove them guilty of injustice to the one who did good and healed both the soul and the body. Bartholomew foresees this and is afraid to return: "If they did this to you, Christ, what are they going to do to us?" There are moments when he fears for his life, when he would rather give up his gift of sight. He experiences an anxious solitude, but there is no way to annul what he went through. He is on a quest. He has to learn to protect the extraordinary memory, so that he can return to it, but at the same time to live his faith without dependence on the constant presence of God. In this respect his experience is a metaphor of the challenge that everyone faces and thus is also the answer why the authors chose this point of view.

The actor Ivan Martinka penetrated deeply into the psyche of the healed blind man. In the crisis caused by the absence of Jesus, Martinka's Bartholomew gets hold of the reality as he knew it before being healed: the haptic perception of fire and wa-

⁴⁸ When working with young people, the need to alternate roles arises, and things such as tailoring new costumes and scene study have to be done anew. As a result, the creative team gradually gave up the original intention.

ter, listening to the sounds of the world and his own voice and the memories of other voices. The music of Andrej Kalinka (co-director and librettist of the production), which is performed together with Michal Mikuláš, completes the beautiful world of the sounds of this production. The visual part is also interesting: the painter's light and everything taking place in a dim room with a bright beam of light representing the sight that forces one to narrow one's eyes. The semi-darkness that one stares into creates the perfect place for a miracle – it shows what is beyond sight. The mystery is almost asking to emerge from the darkness and silence.

In order to find the strength to continue, Bartholomew has to meet something even more fragile – in this production it is the doll of a baby. With this baby on his shoulder, Bartholomew leaves the stage through water – it evokes Saint Christopher, but also the lame girl on a man's shoulder from the film *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky.

What is intimate is good. *The Passion According to Bartholomew* is an intimate production of art value and depth one rarely meets even on big stages. It fits the pleasant space of Silence & Co., but it could be staged anywhere in Slovakia. One could hardly find a more humble play than *The Passion According to Bartholomew*: it is so unlike the performances that require a Gothic setting and sculptures, or *Passio*, the Passion play from the Main Square with 12 dancers and 3 singers. The modesty of form makes the production playable practically anywhere and eliminates the problems described above. Martinka and Kalinka have thus become the torchbearers of poor theatre. Their production brings forth the story of a hermit who has seen all the faces of evil. When asking how to avoid them, he got the answer: humility, which always prevails.

Conclusion

Andrej Mafašik confronts “the concept of the stage as a pulpit that guides people how to live” with “the concept of a distinct individual shout that does not claim to be universally valid.”⁴⁹ Productions from the Anavim group can be understood as silent shouts. Staging Passion plays, however, opens a new theme, or rather brings back an old one. This theme overreaches the discourse defined by Mafašik's dichotomy of a guide and shout characteristic for the earlier period with its questions and proposals.

If one were to choose – supposing naturalistic forms are left out – then temple and ante-temple theatre is more of a shout, it emphasises the mystery play. It does not reduce Christianity into moral rules and cannot be perceived as a pulpit guide. On the other hand, taking the nature of Passion plays into consideration, it still possesses the features of universality and eternal truth.

In this respect, last year's production of *The Passion According to Bartholomew* deserves special attention as it inclines towards the shout in Mafašik's guide–shout dichotomy. Elena Knopová confirms this by commenting on the main character of the production by Andrej Kalinka and Ivan Martinka: “He is exploring his experience,

⁴⁹ “[...] but can at a certain moment draw attention to a specific problem and give the viewer a chance to think whether it is also his trauma. It does not perceive the individual as a unit of mass, but as a unique individuality with a subjective system of values, who is looking for his place in the world without the determinative influences of social origin and without the illusionary secure feeling of possessing universal truth. It does not preach its own truth, but gives the opportunity to look for it.” MAFAŠÍK, Andrej: Artikulácia etických problémov doby v medzigeneračnom dialógu v slovenskom divadle v 80. rokoch. In: Podmaková, D. (ed.): Generačné premeny a podoby slovenského divadla. Bratislava: Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy. 2012, p. 22.

asking if he has not just become a hostage of his emotions, if he's just imagining his sight moving on the stage from one end to the other, from top to bottom, kneeling down, curling up. He is asking."⁵⁰

This asking refutes the cliché that religious experience conveys a feeling of security in which one can comfortably barricade oneself and give up further search. Even if we feel secure, there is still more of what is unknown to us. Thus one should not be presented with a guide when looking for something sacral, but with some deeper and wider concept – a shout, a lament or an invitation. It is suitable to mention a quotation by the scholar of religion Jaroslav Pelikán: "While tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." He added that: "Tradition means living in dialogue with the past while at the same time not forgetting where and when we live and that it is us who have to make a decision. Traditionalism, however, believes that doing something for the first time is not possible."⁵¹

This can also be applied to the search for the sacral expression in theatre art – let it be an encouragement for anyone who is for the first time trying to achieve something while drawing from a Biblical source.

Translated by Martin Nichta and Michal Pestún

⁵⁰ KNOPOVÁ, Elena: Nevšedné posolstvo viery optikou Bartimeja. Bratislava: Kod – Konkrétne o divadle, 2012, Vol. 6, No. 6, p. 13.

⁵¹ http://www.postoy.sk/spomienka_na_jaroslava_pelikana.