
THE ARTISTIC AND NON-ARTISTIC REASONS FOR THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GENERATIONALITY IN SLOVAK THEATRE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract: The author analyses the development of Slovak professional theatre after the Second World War from the perspective of emerging generationally-related theatrical artistic teams. He notes that generational manifestations have always been conditioned by the social situation because the basic attributes of this concept are the uniformity of opinion and the ability to strongly articulate civic and artistic views in controversy and confrontation with the prevailing social atmosphere. The 1960s brought about a release of social tension and in this period quite a number of active and trained young theatre artists stepped up against a strong group of older artists, who after years of schematism showed remarkable vitality and were able to absorb many elements of modern theatre. Thus the first underappreciated generational theatre was the Theatre on the Promenade. In the 1970s there was a tendency towards a generational theatre, especially in the theatres in Trnava, Nitra and Martin, but in all cases these were repertory theatres staging productions varying from generational proclamations of "otherness" to mainstream pieces. Clearly defined generational theatre was given the opportunity to develop only after the social upheaval in 1989.

The issue of researching Slovak theatre in the second half of the 20th century has been fundamentally influenced by the social frames of artistic production in that period. There were two key events which caused the change of the initial paradigm of artistic activities. The first of these was the Communist Party's seizure of power in post-war Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and the second was the occupation of the country by Warsaw Pact military forces in August 1968.

A consequence of the first event, alternately labelled by historians as "the victory of the working people" or "the communist putsch", was the passing of Act No. 32/48 on Theatre (the "theatre law"). This was the first legislative standard which was approved by the Czechoslovak National Assembly after Klement Gottwald (the Czechoslovak communist leader) came to power. This law had been worked on since the Second World War by a group of left-wing intellectuals and creative artists in the theatre who had agreed on the fact that it was necessary to put theatre under state control as an initial step towards the core ambition of making society understand that theatrical production was an artistic activity and not a form of commercial enterprise. On 20 March 1948 the law abolished all the private, civic and (eventually) cooperative theatres that had been established beforehand and only state institutions and regional branches of the National Committee were entitled to establish and run theatrical institutions. In addition, the Theatre and Dramaturgical Board (Divadelná a dramaturgická rada) was established under the new law (one for the Czech lands and Moravia and one for Slovakia as an advisory body for the minister of education).



Production of the Slovak National Theatre – SoNda group, Mark Rozovsky: *Neviete náhodou, koľko dostal Gagarin za ten let? (Do You Happen to Know How Much Gagarin Got for that Flight?)* Translation: Emília Štercová, scene and costume designer: Ivan Štěpán, director: Peter Mikulík. Premiere: 29 September 1965. It was performed together with a one-act play by Alexander Serafimovich titled *Meniny v devätnástom (Name Day in the Nineteenth Year)* instead of a farce written by Ion Luca Caragiale titled *Master Leonida facing the Reactionaries (Pán Leonida a reakcia)*. Premiere 14 March 1965. In the photograph: Emília Vášáryová. Photograph from the Theatre Institute's archive.

It was a central body with the power to assess theatrical matters, and it was allowed to provide input into the organisation, administration and direction of theatrical activity. 18 members of the Slovak Theatre and Dramaturgical Board, headed by its chairman, Mikuláš Huba (a prominent actor at the Slovak National Theatre), pursued a plan which had been outlined, roughly prepared and partly pushed through by Andrej Bagar, a left-wing actor and director who had been expelled from the Slovak National Theatre during the Second World War, who at the time became the post-war manager of theatres in Slovakia. The plan stated that apart from the existing professional theatres in Bratislava, Prešov and Martin, other theatrical institutions in Slovakia would open in 1945. On the basis of experiences with the Village Theatre (*Vesnické divadlo*) in the Czech lands, to which the first Slovak theatre group temporarily belonged, the United Agrarian Association (*Jednotný zväz roľníkov*) established their own "Village Theatre" (*Dedinské divadlo*) in Slovakia, which later on had five groups (one performed in the Hungarian language and for ethnically mixed audiences in southern Slovakia while another specialised in productions for children and young people). The main social requirement here was clearly the promotion of a new society (and particularly its agricultural policy) all over Slovakia. Later on the Village Theatre (*Dedinské divadlo*) produced the likes of the Hungarian Local Theatre (*Maďarské oblastné divadlo*) in Komárno, the Spiš Theatre (*Spišské divadlo*) in Spišská Nová Ves and the Regional Theatre (*Krajské divadlo*) in Trnava. Actors and directors with

varying degrees of experience in the Village Theatre (*Dedinské divadlo*) performed at a time when this type of touring professional theatre became morally worn out (the beginning of the 1960s) more or less in all theatres. The Czechoslovak People's Army took over the Slovak Chamber Theatre (*Slovenské komorné divadlo*) in Martin and turned it into the Army Theatre (*Armádne divadlo*), which was obliged to perform

where there were larger amounts of Slovak soldiers, including those in Czech garrisons.

On the one hand, the generous completion of the network of theatres meant a great increase in opportunities for young talented theatre artists, and seeing a performance by professional actors became a possibility for basically every Slovak citizen. On the other hand, cultural society in Slovakia did not have the necessary professionally-trained human capital at its disposal. The Academy of Performing Arts was only emerging and the State Conservatory (the transformed Music and Dramatic Academy for Slovakia) could not even adequately supply the three theatres already existing in 1945 with graduates. Thus, the basis of the institution of professional theatre was primarily formed by experienced amateurs who left their non-theatre jobs (either temporarily or permanently) to work in these new theatrical institutions. Many of them undertook a specialised course in theatre, which from 1950 to 1954 on the initiative of Jozef Budský and in three centres (The Nová scéna Theatre in Bratislava, the State Theatre in Košice and the Ukrainian National Theatre in Prešov) enabled students to gain a basic theatrical qualification over two years (while maintaining a job outside the theatre) which was equivalent to a diploma from the State Conservatory.

The 1950s had a rather negative role in the formation of theatrical generations. The general and omnipresent idea of “collectivisation” did not offer much opportunity for talented individuals to express themselves. It stressed the collective instead of individuality, and the ideologisation of artistic space, which was mainly demonstrated by the full acceptance of Andrei Zhdanov’s aesthetics and the consistent monopolisation of greatly reduced references to Constantin Stanislavski’s principles in the theatrical arts. The omnipresent control and suspicion of possible “seditious activities” in situations when the Communist Party even organised monstrous law suits with cruel sentences against their former leading personalities (Rudolf Slánský, Gustav Husák, etc.), spying on theatre groups by informers from the state security forces and the directive party management of society by nomenclature groups in all spheres and competences, including culture and art, and also with creative artists, who had repeatedly shown their talent before 1948, all evoked a fear and reluctance to venture into more significant and major art projects. In addition, Jozef Budský, Karol Zachar, Martin Gregor, Mikuláš Huba, Viliam Záborský and many other important individuals who entered the theatre when the National Theatre’s drama group went through a successful era of performances by Ján Jamnický and Ferdinand Hoffmann obediently hung their heads and invested their free time and talent into the animation of obvious propagandistic mistakes similar to Ladislav Mňačko’s *Mosty na východ* (*Bridges Towards the East*) or Ján Skalka’s *Kozie mlieko* (*Goat’s Milk*), which despite being considered symbols were far from extraordinary and certainly not the most extreme examples of work from the period in terms of quality. In addition, Peter Karvaš, who was very educated and became popular very quickly in the brief period of post-war democracy, joined this trend with no problem and his works such as *Ludia z našej ulice* (*The People Of Our Street*), *Srdce plné radosti* (*A Heart Full Of Joy*) and others fully accepted and promoted the period’s ideological as well as artistic dogma.

It is not possible to speak of a generational profiling of theatre companies in this context because there were no elementary conditions for this to occur. Such conditions only began to be developed in the 1960s. Although the international political situation had sometimes escalated (the Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis),



Bratislava's Theatre Studio – Theatre on the Promenade. Aleksei Nikolaevich Arbuzov: *My Poor Marat* [Úbohý můj Marat]. Translation: Vladimír Strnisko, scene and costume designer: Milan Čorba, director: Vladimír Strnisko. Premiere 6 December 1970. In the photograph: Milan Kňažko (Marat), Magda Vášáryová (Lika) and Pavol Mikulík (Leonidik). Photograph taken by Pavol Blažo, the Theatre Institute's archive.

within the socialist camp and hence in the Czechoslovak Republic (from 1960 officially a “socialist republic”) there was a gradual standardisation of relations.

Unlike the statues and portraits of the “great leader”, the mechanisms allowing the Communist Party to control and operate life, work and theatre production did not disappear with the cult of Stalin. However, a gradual increase in the standard of living, the restoration of contacts with other cultures, the publishing of translations of plays and theoretical publications which were not only of Soviet or socialist origin and the gradual saturation of theatres by graduates from the Academy of Performing Arts as well as the inspiring example of Czech culture¹ created the conditions for the beginning of an artistic and generational differentiation.

This development gained extremely important promotional support in the rapidly growing production of Slovak television studios and primarily in Bratislava's branch of Czechoslovak Television. The second half of the 1960s in particular was a period of mass purchasing of TV sets for households, which ultimately allowed actors per-

¹ In Prague between 1957-58 in the Reduta and then from 1958 in the Theatre on the Balustrade (Divadlo na zábradlí), Drama Club (Činoherní klub) and Semafor (Semaphore Theatre) there were concentrated attempts inspired by the Czech interwar avant-garde towards a diversification, clear genre, and clear artistic and personal crystallising of various theatre groups.

forming in regularly broadcast drama series, namely original productions and plays adapted for television, to gain much more popularity in one night than several years of systematic performing in the theatre had given them previously.

It is important to perceive a number of signals suggesting that young theatre actors understood theatrical production as a much broader range of activities and output than that offered on theatre posters as indications that there was some inner will to start looking at theatre differently than was common in existing professional theatre groups. From 1959 some of the most popular examples of a different type of theatre were performances by the young comedians Milan Lasica and Július Satinský, who developed the tradition of cabaret. They used to perform occasionally in the Theatre of the House of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship (Divadielko Domu Československo-sovietskeho priateľstva),² formerly Esterházy's Palace, and at "afternoon teas" for young people at the Tatra Hotel and elsewhere. At the beginning of the 1960s³ a chamber theatre was established on Záhradnícka Street in Bratislava on the premises of the Zdroj enterprise and was occupied by a number of amateur theatre groups. One of them was the Theatre Group at the Educational Centre in Bratislava–Nivy (Divadelný súbor pri Osvetovej besede Bratislava – Nivy), which mostly involved university students from Bratislava. After 1965 in particular, when Lubomír Vajdička (subsequently a leading director of the theatre in Martin and at the drama ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre) began to gain experience as a theatre director, productions at the A-Theatre (A-divadlo) represented a problem for the offerings by professional groups. The satirical persiflage *Hamlet IV*, Hans Sachs' *Carnival Plays (Samopašné hry)* and Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Mandrake (Mandragora)* developed inspirations drawn from cabaret theatre, and with their distinctive stylisation they set themselves apart from the dominant realistic acting. It should be emphasised, however, that this group brought together several artists from the Academy of Performing Arts who were getting ready for future professional careers in the theatre: in addition to Lubomír Vajdička, this group included the future editor Štefan Havlík, the scenographer Jozef Ciller, and the actors Jozef Bednárík and Dušan Jamrich.

The theatre critic Ján Jaborník made the following observation: "The dawn of the new developmental periods of our performing arts were often proclaimed by signals from school, where the generational feeling is certainly the freshest and most intense. [...] The strands progressively and ambitiously forming the generation of the 1960s came out of the former Theatre Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts. We can mention some productions of the first half of the 1960s: the practically manifest stagings by Karol Spišák of Yevgeny Švarc's *Kite (Šarkan)*; Karel Kraus's staging of Roger Planchon's well-known dramatisation of Alexander Dumas' *Three Musketeers*; Milan Sládek's magnificent staging of Pavel Kyrmezer's *Komedie o bohatci a Lazarovi (A Comedy about the Rich Man and Lazarus, 1964)*; and the opuses which emerged without the involvement of teachers – Sľavomir Mrožek's one-act plays *The Party (Veselica)* and *Strip-tease* with the protagonists Marián Labuda, Stano Dančiak and Pavol Mikulík, who were led by the theatre studies students Vladimír Strnisko, Milan Lasica and Martin Porubjak; and the Čapek brothers' *Lásky hra osudná (Fateful Game of Love)*, di-

² Initially the Berlínka cafe and now the Slovak National Gallery on Ľudovít Štúr Square.

³ The theatre itself was built in 1961 and a year later it was given additional dressing rooms and facilities.

rected by Peter Mikulík, where the theatre studies students Milan Lasica and Július Satinský played great dramatic and comedic characters.”⁴

In the drama ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre,⁵ which from March 1962 had a place for chamber theatre (the Malá scéna Theatre on Dostoevsky Street), there was the young director Pavol Haspra, who had come to the Slovak National Theatre after beginning in Nitra as a representative of the modern perception of theatricality and was clearly able to play an integrating and profiling creative role. He was gradually joined in 1964 by Josef Adamovič, Michal Dočolomanský, Oldrich Hlaváček, Štefan Kvietik, Peter Mikulík, Eva Poláková, Hana Sarvašová, Juraj Slezáček, Viera Topinková, Božidara Turzonovová and Emília Vášáryová as well as the pantomime group of Eduard Žlábek and Milan Sládek, the dramaturges Eva Malinová and Margita Mayerová and Pavol Haspra’s intrinsically kindred scenographer Vladimír Suchánek. In their repertoire there appeared productions which would have been unimaginable a few years before, starting with a play by Arthur Adamov called *Jar 71. roku* (*The Spring of ‘71*) transposed into the 1950s (from the temporal aspect this was “only recently”) of the condemned “bourgeois nationalist” Ladislav Holdoš (and Michal Chorvát), Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Physicists* (*Fyzici*), *Hercules* and *Augiášov chliev* (*Augias’ Barn*), Slavomir Mrožek’s *Moriak* (*Turkey*), Bertolt Brecht’s folk play *Mr Puntila and His Man Matti* (*Pán Puntila a jeho sluha Matti*), Josef Topol’s *Koniec maškár* (*The End of Frights*), Václav Havel’s *Záhradná slávnosť* (*The Garden Party*), Arthur Miller’s play *After the Fall* (*Po páde*), Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (*Kto sa bojí Virginie Woolfovej?*) and the plays *Jazva* (*Scar*) and *Veľká parochňa* (*the Great Wig*) by Peter Karvaš.⁶ When in the mid-1960s (during the 1965/66 season) Vladimír Strnisko appeared in the group as the dramaturge of the Malá scéna Theatre, Soňa Šimková as a lecturer of dramaturgy, and Stanislav Dančiak, Marián Labuda, Ivan Mistrík and Pavol Mikulík as actors (Peter Mikulík at that time had already replaced Ivan Lichard at the post of director), a note also appeared in several productions of the Slovak National Theatre (also known by its acronym SND) stating that this was a project of *SoNDa* (*Probe*).⁷

⁴ JABORNÍK, Ján. Na úvod. In MISTRÍK, Miloš, JABORNÍK, Ján (ed). *Divadlo na korze 1968 – 1971*. Bratislava: Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1994, p. 12. ISBN 80-85718-20-0.

⁵ The term “National Theatre” was used until 1 October 1958.

⁶ Just for comparison, ten years earlier, for example in the 1953/1954 season, the National Theatre had eight premieres – Štefan Králik’s *Svätá Barbora* (*St Barbara*), Ján Palárik’s *Dobrodružstvo pri obžinkoch* (*The Adventure during the Harvest Festival*), Molière’s *The Learned Women*, Peter Karvaš’s *Srdce plné radosti* (*Heart Full of Joy*), a comedy by Václav Jelinek called *Škandál v obrazárni* (*Scandal in the Gallery*), a play by Alexander Kornijčuk called *Chirurg Platon Krečet*, William Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*.

⁷ For the first time in the staging of a play by Ion Luca Caragiale entitled *Master Leonida Facing the Reactionaries* (*Pán Leonida a reakcia*), which was given in conjunction with a one-act play by Alexander Serafimovich entitled *Name Day in the Nineteenth Year* (*Meniny v devätnástom*), premiere 14 March 1965, both directed by Peter Mikulík. The SoNDa group included Stanislav Dančiak, Marián Labuda and Pavol Mikulík, at that time students of the Academy of Performing Arts (in 1965 they graduated in acting). A subsequent SoNDa project was a staged grotesque comedy by Mark Rozovský called *Neviete náhodou, koľko dostal Gagarin za ten let?* (*Do You Happen to Know How Much Gagarin Got for that Flight?*), directed by Peter Mikulík, presented in the autumn of 1965 with *Name Day in the Nineteenth Year* instead of Caragiale’s *Master Leonida facing the Reactionaries* and a satirical comedy by Heinar Kipphardt titled *Chairs* (4 December 1965, directed by Karol Spišák).



Bratislava's Theatre Studio – Theatre on the Promenade. Aleksei Nikolaevich Arbuzov: *My Poor Marat* (*Úbohý môj Marat*). Translation: Vladimír Strnisko, scene and costume designer: Milan Čorba, director: Vladimír Strnisko. Premiere 6 December 1970. In the photograph: Zuzana Kocúriková (Lika), Martin Huba (Leonidik) and Juraj Kukura (Marat). Photograph taken by Pavol Blažo, the Theatre Institute's archive.

Although an observer after some time might think that this development and such a harmony of fortunate circumstances (personal conditions, political liberalisation and television viewers' interest supported by the promotion of artists) must generate a massive generational entrance and a clear distinction from the generation that had been shaping the theatre since the 1940s, this did not happen. There are very likely several reasons for this. Firstly, the generation which could be identified as the theatrical generation of the directors Ján Jamnický and Jozef Budský, whose core was formed at the National Theatre during the 1940s (Martin Guttman-Gregor, Viliam Záborský, Mikuláš Huba and others), was subsequently continuously strengthened in the post-war years by other artists (e.g. Ladislav Chudík, Gustáv Valach, Karol Machata, Mária Kráľovičová, Zdena Gruberová, Jozef Kroner and many others). After an artistic hibernation in the 1950s, they entered the 1960s with renewed vigour and a desire to demonstrate their creative potential. A most transparent example is that of the director Josef Budský, who after *Smrt' Jánošíkova* (*The Death of Janosik*, based on Ján Botto's ballad), Andrej Sládkovič's poem entitled *Marína* and Leopold Lahola's *Atentát* (Assassination)⁸ committed himself to Štefan Králik's *Buky Podpolianske* (*Beeches under Poľana*), Ivan Popov's *Rodina* (*A Family*) and Alexander Trenev's *Lyubov' Iar-*

⁸ The National Theatre introduced these productions in 1948 and 1949.

ovaia (*Lubov Jarová*). He also made a class and Marxist revolutionary interpretation of Lope de Vega's play *Fuente Ovejuna* and a play by Peter Karvaš entitled *Srdce plné radosti* (*A Heart Full of Joy*), but from *Pieseň našej jari* (*The Song of Our Spring*) (1956) he returned to the trajectory of major humanistic ideas (he was a left-wing oriented artist and a convinced communist, so Budský's productions were reasonably close to the opinions of the contemporary ideologues) and a revealing formal shape, evolving the legacy of expressionist theatre.⁹ In the mid-1960s Jozef Budský consistently cast the young members of the group in his productions: Josef Topol's *Koniec maškár* (*End of Frights*), Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (*Vládca Oidipus*), Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (*Zástupca*), Aleksandr Sukhovo-Kobylin's *Tarekin's Death* (*Tarekinova smrť*), Peter Karvaš' *Experiment Damokles* (*The Damocles Experiment*) and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (*Višňový sad*). He entered the creative process inspired by the works of contemporary domestic authors such as Peter Karvaš, and looked for creative inspiration in the works of modern European playwrights (Bertold Brecht, Rolf Hochhuth and Josef Topol) as well as in the classics of world drama (Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare and Sophocles).

Secondly, the most important representatives of this theatre generation, perhaps due to the rupture caused by the socialist descriptive and realistic episode in the 1950s, entered theatre events in the early 1960s with an exceptional desire to prove their artistic qualities and meet the challenges presented by new authors. These representatives of a new generation of directing and dramaturgy saw this as a chance to demonstrate their talents and abilities. One can realise that the difference in acting between productions in the period of schematism and in the 1960s is most obvious due to the descriptively detailed realistic miniatures and the often absurd search for the motivations of individual actions and appearances as well as of the large and clear gesture and declamative aspects pointing acting towards being a more civil and internalising expression which emphasised an individual character's uniqueness and the authenticity of an actor's expression (i.e. ultimately, and paradoxically, the fulfilment of Constantin Stanislavski's ambitions and his call to integrate an actor with a character, a thorough transformation of an actor into a dramatic character) alongside the expanding possibility that in order to succeed in television actors only required

⁹ However, in the late 1950s Jozef Budský introduced Jozef Tyl's *Krvavý súd* (*Bloody court*), Vsevolod Vyshevesky's *Optimistic Tragedy* (*Optimistická tragédia*), Karel Čapek's *Bílá nemoc* (*The White Disease*), Alexej Arbuzov's *Episode on the Banks of the River* (*Príhoda na brehu rieky*) and in 1961 Anton Chekhov's *Ivanov*, with which the Slovak National Theatre completed a triumphant tour of the Soviet Union in 1961. Budský's *Bloody Court*, drew the following reaction from Alena Urbanová: "In Czech theatre many things also moved at that time; Zhdanov's unreasonable standards of socialist realism were in fact going to waste. This process, however, has not reached the national classics yet. The last staging of the Prague National Theatre presented us with *Kutnohorskí haviari* (*The Kutná Hora Miners*), the classic Czech work by Josef Kajetán Tyl, almost as a Marxist work, as a tool for the training of class struggle [and a] realistic conscientious miniature and careful redrawing of the 'typical' properties of miners/proletarians and the mean exploiter. Just boring. And suddenly we were looking at the same play, staged with a bold boom of a romantic tragedy. No illustration of a historical conflict, nothing predetermined, nothing superficial. Each of the characters has a unique and unrepeatable individuality that followed their objectives with a passionate effort. There were sparks out of their collisions: hatred, the despair of a futile rebellion and tarnished love, having power and the madness of cruelty. All this is sandwiched into an undivided and stylistically pure form: a theatre of large gestures without theatrics, strong emotions without hysteria, a sonorous tone without pathos." URBANOVÁ, Alena. *Správny muž v správnom čase*. In: Podmaková, Dagmar (ed.). *Josef Budský*. Bratislava: Kabinet divadla a filmu SAV, 2001, pp. 119-120. ISBN 80-967283-5-0.

more informal and internally persuasive demonstrations without any pathos or theatrics. The result of this was that the young and unusually strong group in the Slovak National Theatre, which was both numerous and talented, did not have the opportunity to stabilise themselves against the “old” art of their predecessors. The young filmmakers sooner or later blended into the continuously modernising generation and their organic linkage came into existence.

Thirdly, Slovak theatre in the 1960s already formed a logically constructed system that enabled talented individuals to succeed. This assertion can be demonstrated in the dozens of examples of actors, stage directors and scenographers or dramaturges, who upon obtaining professional experience in smaller groups continued in the State Theatre in Košice and the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising (*Divadlo Slovenského národného povstania*)¹⁰ in Martin, from where the paths of the most talented ones then led to theatres in Bratislava such as the Slovak National Theatre and the Nová scéna Theatre. A respectable environment of theatrical criticism¹¹ ensured a solid awareness of notable theatre activities all over the country and the state monopoly

on theatrical activities created opportunities for the (commercially inefficient) exchange of performances and hosting of groups, so virtually all the more interesting productions in theatres outside Bratislava could be seen on Bratislava stages. It is important to point out that for the members of Bratislava theatres the hosting of their recent colleagues from Martin, Zvolen, Košice, Prešov and Nitra was a pleasing social event and they were curious about their productions. The reciprocal touring performances of the Slovak National Theatre in Slovak cities and towns provoked an almost hysterical interest because everyone wanted to “touch” the artists who



Bratislava's Theatre Studio – Theatre on the Promenade. Aleksei Nikolaevich Arbuzov: *My Poor Marat* [*Úbohý môj Marat*]. Translation: Vladimír Strnisko, scene and costume designer: Milan Čorba, director: Vladimír Strnisko. Premiere 6 December 1970. In the photograph: Milan Kňažko (Marat) and Magda Vášáryová (Lika). Photograph taken by Pavol Blažo, the Theatre Institute's archive.

¹⁰ From 1960 originally the Slovak Chamber Theatre (Slovenské komorné divadlo) then the Army Theatre. When it came under civilian management it became the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising in Martin.

¹¹ Reviews and critiques of theatre premieres were regularly published in national daily newspapers such as Pravda, Rude Právo (until 1969, there was a Slovak version), Smena, Práca, Lud, the regional newspapers Hlas ľudu, Smer and Slovenský východ and the magazines Kultúrny život, Mladá tvorba, Slovenské divadlo, Film a divadlo and Slovenské pohľady. Divadlo, the magazine of the Union of Czechoslovak Theatre Artists, was published less regularly in Prague.



Bratislava's Theatre Studio – Theatre on the Promenade. Alexander Nikolayevich Ostrovsky: *The Forest [Les]*. Translation: Martin Porubjak and Vladimír Strnisko, scene designer: Tomáš Berka, costume designer: Milan Čorba, director: Vladimír Strnisko. Premiere 14 June 1971. Peter Debnár as Gennady Neschastlívsev (the surname translates as “Unhappiness”). Photograph from the Theatre Institute’s archive.

were perceived through the TV screen almost like members of Slovak households. On the other hand, such a system de facto blocked the ability to create theatre groups outside Bratislava as stable and clear-cut generational groups of artists who would be able to assert a distinctive artistic perspective.

Fourthly, the phenomenon of television brought about a remarkable popularity for actors who performed the most often, and the social status of theatre artists guaranteed already by the Theatre Act of 1948 rose sharply as they became one of the most prestigious social elites. Acting in a theatre group was not as lucrative as appearances in television, film and radio, but considering the fact that theatre directors and dramaturges were often successful in these media it became convenient to involve teams in the development of radio and television productions and films who were aware of what they could expect from others involved in these ventures. Moreover, due to generally applicable legislative rules it was also not easy to stay out of an existing job and seek opportunities through the casting system, which was commonplace in Western Europe; probably the only Slovak actor who was able to survive for a longer period in this way was Ivan Palúch.

The new generation of Slovak theatre, however, failed to organise and assert themselves even in the favourable social environment of the relatively liberal 1960s when they were in close contact with generations of their predecessors and teachers. They succeeded in this after the foundation of the state-owned Theatre Studio (Divadelné štúdio),¹² which because of the space in which it performed was better known as the Theatre on the Promenade (Divadlo na korze).

¹² Created with the inspiration of a similar facility in Prague in 1967. From 1968 there was the Theatre of Poetry (Divadlo poézie), the Theatre of Lasica and Satinský (Divadlo Lasicu a Satinského) and the drama and music group Prúdy. After the loss of the Theatre of Poetry in 1968 and the emigration of Milan Sládek, a new poetic group emerged in 1970, which after the abolition of the Theatre Studio and the dissolution of the company of actors and the Theatre of Lasica and Satinský in 1971 was called the Poetic Scene (Poetická scéna). It worked independently until its fusion with the Nová scéna Theatre in 1976.

The Theatre on the Promenade (we have in mind mainly the group of actors) was the first Slovak professional theatre which was programmatically shaped as the opposite of the contemporary theatrical mainstream. The main initiator of its creation was the graduated dramaturge Vladimír Strnisko,¹³ who was clearly headed in the direction of becoming a director. The dramaturge of the plays was Martin Porubjak. There were actors who switched from the Slovak National Theatre to a newly established stage theatre, such as Stanislav Dančiak, Marián Labuda and Pavol Mikulík. They were later joined by Martin Huba, who after graduation had been contracted to the State Theatre in Košice and in the 1967/68 season to the Theatre of Poetry (Divadlo poézie). There was also Zita Furková, who had been employed in Zvolen, Nitra, Trnava and the Theatre of Poetry; and Peter Debnár, who was originally a director at the Theatre of Peter Jilemnický. However, he was more significant as a film actor. Out of the actors who performed in stagings of the Theatre of Poetry, Ľubo Gregor and Zora Kolínska also joined the group. Other individualities who became members of the group were the film actress Marta Rašlová, Helena Húsková from the Nitra Theatre, the scenic and costume designer Milan Čorba and later on also the actors Juraj Kukura, Milan Kňazko and Magdaléna Vášáryová. Peter Mikulík, who had been involved in the establishment of the new group eventually decided to stay in the Slovak National Theatre. According to initial plans, the drama group was supposed to have been created after the reconstruction of their premises in the Astorka building in 1969. However, the decisions of Milan Sládek and Eduard Žlábek to leave Czechoslovakia after the occupation accelerated the whole process. The group's first premiere was the introduction of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*,¹⁴ followed by Sławomir Mrożek's one-act plays (directed by the guest director Peter Mikulík), Nikolai Gogol's *Marriage (Ženba)*, which was performed at the Theatre on the Promenade and directed by Miloš Pietor (he later staged the one-act plays *Jubilee* and *Wedding (Svadba)* by Anton Chekhov and four productions by Vladimír Strnisko – Arthur Kopit's tragic farce *Ach ocko, chudák ocko... (Oh Dad, Poor Dad ...)*, Alexei Arbuzov's play *My Poor Marat (Môj úbohý Marat)*, Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Alexander Ostrovsky's *Forest (Les)*. In June 1971 the Theatre Studio was abolished by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic,¹⁵ officially for violations of economic regulations and "the ideological and artistic imperfections in its operation".¹⁶ A substantial part of the drama group then moved to the Nová scéna Theatre.

The story of the Theatre on the Promenade lasted for three seasons and consisted of a series of eight plays.¹⁷ In modern Slovak theatre studies we still often work with

¹³ In the 1965/66 season he was a dramaturge at the Malá scéna Theatre in the Slovak National Theatre, where at that time there emerged productions defined from the rest of the repertoire, being labelled as a SoNDa work.

¹⁴ Translated by Dušan Slobodník, directed by Milan Lasica and Vladimír Strnisko. Premiere 21 December 1968.

¹⁵ In line with the federal arrangement of Czechoslovakia, national ministries of culture came into existence on 1 January 1969.

¹⁶ Cited in PORUBJAK, Martin. Diskusia na konferencii. In MISTRÍK, Miloš, JABORNÍK, Ján (ed). *Divadlo na korze 1968 – 1971*. Bratislava: Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1994, p. 81. ISBN 80-85718-20-0.

¹⁷ In the cited discussion piece, Porubjak mentioned that Pavel Kohout's *August, August, August*, directed by Peter Mikulík, was banned in rehearsal week and Dušan Hanák's staging of Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter (Nemý čašník)* and Ionesco's *Lesson (Lekcia)* was stopped shortly before completion.

the “Theatre on the Promenade generation”. This tradition is also referred to by new artists: it is well-known in the history of Slovak theatre. There is a reason for the intensive and deep legacy which the Theatre on the Promenade has left behind in the history of our theatre culture and which has influenced it through subsequent theatre groups and pupils who either acknowledge the tradition of the theatre or deny it. Importantly, this was the first time a theatre group had not emerged “by the rules”: it was neither created by a director or manager, nor was it a team potentially eligible for acting in a certain type of planned productions. The group was created as a team of people who understood each other. They were people who knew that they switched from the certainty of theatres with a tradition to the uncertainty of a new project, people who may have not been able to clearly articulate what kind of theatre and poetics they would like to do but who knew exactly where their future did not lie. To quote Porubjak: “The poetics represented by Karol Zachar did not grab us. It did not seem very comic or funny. It was very far from us. [...] Anyway, we did not want to argue with this point of view, and I believe and we all believed that the two should simply stand next to each other – the Slovak National Theatre with Karol Zachar and the Promenade – as two obvious kinds of generational theatre which both have the same right for life.”¹⁸

The second exceptionally important factor was concentration and continuity concerning theatre productions. This was probably the first time that the individual stagings, which for various reasons and at a specific time occurred on the same theatre poster, were not created independently; instead of this, there was a continuous flow of theatrical events which was produced thanks to the different genres and rotation of artistic teams, including Czech experimental theatres (Drama Club and Kladiadlo). Their unique acting was another unifying element besides the “team spirit”.

In order to understand why the members of the theatre shared the same opinion, it is necessary to remember that all of them grew up during the relative freedom of the 1960s and they experienced what it meant trying to find an authentic Czechoslovak path connected with the name of Alexander Dubček. They also went through the trauma caused by the military occupation by supposedly “allied” states without there being any protest from any of the countries of the “free and democratic” Western world, who (as was shown) all respected the post-war distribution of power. The fate of the Czech and Slovak people was not worth the risk of complicating trade relations with the Soviet Union and its satellite states. The naive Czechoslovak dream about the reformation of socialism and its human face was ruined by tanks and planes, and the Theatre on the Promenade was formed when occupation forces were still to be found in city outskirts. Its members were young people who could not even pretend to have great expectations of the world around them or their own future. The traumatising social reality of the desperate struggle for saving at least a fragment of the programme objectives in 1968 as well as a set of acts which lead to the loss of illusions (a treaty on the “temporary” placement of armed forces in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the re-establishment of censorship, etc.) all clearly influenced the poetics of the Theatre on the Promenade, which earned the name of “grotesque realism”. In the

¹⁸ PORUBJAK, p. 80.

The Nová scéna Theatre in Bratislava. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov: *Three Sisters*. Translation: Vladimír Strnisko (during its premiere it was introduced as "the dramaturgy of the Nová scéna Theatre"), scene designer: Oto Šujan, costume designer: Stanislava Vaničková, director: Miloš Pietor. Premieres 24 and 25 March 1972. In the photograph: from left, Ida Rapačová (Masha), Eva Rysová (Olya) and Magda Vášáryová (Irina). Photograph from the Theatre Institute's archive.



words of Miloš Mistrík: "The world was grotesque for the members of Theatre on the Promenade and they did not want to conceal anything. Therefore they portrayed the world as they saw it. What was grotesque in their stagings was not an ornament but a deep life feeling."¹⁹

25 years after the Second World War grotesque stagings spread around the world in an atmosphere of scepticism and disillusionment with a social reality determined by political, economic and cultural elites as well as a sense of hopelessness arising from the existence of weapons with the potential to destroy the whole planet several times over. The drama and theatre of the absurd most accurately reflected these feelings, which unlike the post-war enthusiasm and building programmes affected not only the producers but the spectators as well. The grotesque in the theatre of the absurd, the loss of faith in communication and the concentration on bizarre human efforts expressed the feelings of a generation which was aware they were living in a world deformed by the pressure of a global power struggle, where they had lost historical and seemingly eternal moral values and certitudes. This generation had to put up with the fact that despite verbalised announcements about "friendship", "solidarity" and "cooperation", even their closest partner would reach for a weapon and power when his own interests were threatened. It was the same with theatre in the late 1960s in Europe and also to a great extent in North America. Therefore, it was not a coincidence that the first performance of the Theatre on the Promenade was a classic work of the theatre of the absurd, *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett; a grotesque

¹⁹ MISTRÍK, Miloš. Idey a ideály Divadla na korze. In. MISTRÍK, Miloš, JABORNÍK, Ján (ed). *Divadlo na korze 1968 – 1971*, Bratislava : Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1994, p. 21.



The Nová scéna Theatre in Bratislava. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov: *Three Sisters (Tri sestry)*. Translation: Vladimír Strnisko (during its premiere it was introduced as “the dramaturgy of the Nová scéna Theatre”). Scene designer: Oto Šujan, costume designer: Stanislava Vaníčková, director: Miloš Pietor. Premieres 24 and 25 March 1972. In the photograph: Jarmila Koleníčová (Irina) and Eliška Müllerová (Olya). Photograph from the Theatre Institute’s archive.

view of the world was characteristic for its whole repertoire regardless of whether they performed plays by a Russian realist or an American absurdist playwright.

There is no doubt that the similar feelings, knowledge and attitudes presented in connection with the Theatre on the Promenade could have been found with many other producers in different Slovak theatres. Some of these features can also be identified in their productions thanks to references in contemporary theatre criticism. One example of this is Miloš Pietor’s staging of Gorky’s drama *The Lower Depths (Na dne)* in the building of the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising in Martin,²⁰ which was performed two years before the formation of the Theatre on the Promenade. To a certain extent, this can be considered a “prologue” to what was later evolving in the basement on Sedlárska Street. The feelings of the younger theatrical generation were only transformed into generational theatre within the conditions of a small like-minded ensemble.

²⁰ Premiere, 16 October 1967.

The fact that acting was the unifying element of the Theatre on the Promenade has already been mentioned. This kind of acting was different from what the audience had been accustomed to. It was performance which was inspired by traditional psychological realism and knowledge of Stanislavski's system of acting,²¹ but which was perceived only as a means for further creative work. Great gestures, pretences and pathos were out of the question in the performances of the Theatre on the Promenade, where the first spectators were sitting at the very edge of the stage – nothing could be “as if” because everything was controlled in detail and everything was closely connected. Therefore, acting had to be perceived as absolutely authentic and expressing personal attitudes and individual reactions. The actor becomes almost completely identified with his character. On the other hand, the character does not only use the actor's psychophysical equipment and he is not a product which is factually dependant on the actor's personal feelings. Instead it is the aim of dramaturgy and production to reorganise the original literary material and interpret the situation which enables the actor to identify internally with his character and find the optimal gesture, intonation, non-verbal reaction and look. Details and their uniqueness and suggestiveness were exceptionally important for acting in the Theatre on the Promenade. However, this should not be confused with the descriptive details used in the 1950s or with improvisation; details were strictly selected and fixed and they were the result of a long and intensive search and examination. The permanent search for internal sources of humour, even in the most stressful situations, and the ability to emphasise the apparently strong dramatic situation with a surprisingly grotesque “full stop” was characteristic for the Theatre on the Promenade. It was usual to hear fits of laughter during the performances, but these impulses were different from those in the cheerful comedies by Karol Zachar or in the comedy and variety shows of František Dibarbora or Jozef Kroner, which were very popular at that time. Anecdotes were replaced by gags, which were accurately constructed and precisely emphasised. Moreover, these gags were based on the contrast between semantically void expression and non-verbal action: something which became characteristic for the producers who worked with the Theatre on the Promenade. A dramatic situation was often in sheer contrast to what the characters verbally declared, what they said and what they talked about. The word was relativised by an action; the action altered the sense of the word and changed pathos to farce. Pietor's ideal was “for the physical performance of the actor to be in the counterpoint to the text. This is more impressive than when the subtext is contrapuntal to the text. When physical performance is contrapuntal to the content, it is visual and therefore more theatrical and more impressive than just contrapuntal intonation.”²² One of the most powerful moments of Pietor's *Hamlet* performed in the Nová scéna Theatre was the scene when Polonius sees Laertes off for his studies in Germany. Ophelia and Laertes parody Polonius's advice in advance and this generally boring scene turns into one of great amusement; at the

²¹ This was now an authentic knowledge. Stanislavski's translated key theoretical works about theatre were available in the 1960s, and people no longer had to rely on the “Hungarian brochures” which Ján Borodáč had used for providing information about Stanislavski in the 1920s or the simplified manuals by Zhdanov published in the 1950s.

²² BAKOŠOVÁ – HLAVENKOVÁ, Zuzana. Herectvo staré a nové podľa Pietra. In: MISTRÍK, Miloš (ed.) *Režisér Miloš Pietor*. Bratislava : Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1992, pp.112–113. ISBN 80-9000513-5-9.

same time, the audience can see exactly that Polonius is a haughty, arrogant and self-confident man/official who sticks to stereotypes and chatters all the time.

Some theatre scholars think that the noticeable introduction of non-verbal means in Theatre on the Promenade was connected with the coexistence of groups of various genres (Sládek's pantomimic group and Lasica and Satinský) and their previous co-operation; Sládek produced *Komédiu o boháčovi a Lazarovi* (*A Comedy about a Rich Man and Lazarus*) in Štúdio VŠMU (the Studio of the Academy of Performing Arts) with actors who were later members of the drama group and who acted together in films as well. Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková said that: "Milan Lasica and Július Satinský were, both consciously and subconsciously, intellectual initiators of an acting generation that was formed naturally and which had gradually educated their successors on the way of expressing the ideas about the world."²³ There was a close relationship among the authors who were able to use dramatic means of expression from the character of a developing genre more intensively and more innovatively; although these means of expression (which were not exploited very much in the drama) were inspiring for the actors, we reckon that the dramaturgic and stage concepts of the production were more significant and crucial.

The situation eventually allowed for the partial continuity of the production of the Theatre on the Promenade for several seasons even after the institution ceased to exist and the majority of artists had moved to the Nová scéna Theatre. However, nothing prevented them from scattering, which caused (as already mentioned) a situation where young actors were not able to break into professional companies. The Nová scéna Theatre produced stagings of all kinds such as classical operettas, highly respected modern musical productions²⁴ and tabloid comedies as well as "ideological" repertoire that reappeared on the theatre poster after the beginning of "normalisation". The Theatre on the Promenade became a part of Nová scéna Theatre on 1 September 1971 and already in October of that year Stanislav Dančiak played a balloon seller, Milan Kňazko played Prospero, Pavol Mikulík played Tutti and Peter Debnár was High Priest Lapitou in Oto Kaľuša's staging of a story written by Yury Olesha titled *Klauniáda* or *The Three Fat Men* (*Klauniáda, alebo o troch nenažrancoch*).²⁵ Martin Huba played Bohorodný and Stanislav Dančiak played Dodo in Károly Szakonyi's play *A Fault in Transmission* (*Porucha vo vysielaní*).²⁶ Only later on in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* under Miloš Pietor's directing was there a more distinctive performance by what previously had been a homogeneous group of actors who had continuously worked together.²⁷

²³ BAKOŠOVÁ – HLAVENKOVÁ, Zuzana. Sloboda hravosti a hravosť smiechu alebo Herci a klauni na korze. In: MISTRÍK, Miloš, JABORNÍK, Ján (ed.) *Divadlo na korze 1968 – 1971*. Bratislava: Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1994, pp. 25–26. ISBN 80-85718-20-0.

²⁴ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Nová scéna Theatre performed *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*, *Zorba the Greek*, *The Fiddler on the Roof* and *Show Boat*, which were prepared by Dalibor Heger (dramaturge), Zdeněk Macháček and Bohuš Slezák (conductors), Boris Slovák (choreography) and Bedrich Kramosil (production). These extraordinary popular stagings were well received by contemporary critics.

²⁵ Premiere 3 October 1971.

²⁶ Premiere 20 December 1971.

²⁷ Masha was played by Zora Kolínska (Ida Rapaičová as her alternate), Irina was played by Magda Vášáryová (with Jarmila Koleničová as her alternate), Tuzenbach was played by Martin Huba (with Pavol Mikulík as his alternate) and Ferapont was played by Peter Debnár (with Vlado Kostovič as his alternate). Premiere 24 and 25 March 1972.

The Nová scéna Theatre
in Bratislava. William
Shakespeare: *Hamlet*.
Translation: Jozef Kot,
scene designer: Oto
Šujan, costume designer:
Stanislava Vaníčková,
director: Miloš Pietor.
Premiere 15 February 1974.
Starring Martin Huba.
Photograph from the
Theatre Institute's archive.



Ján Jaborník later wrote that “The Nová scéna Theatre²⁸ provided a suitable place for the appropriate adaptation and new development of the direct heritage of Theatre on the Promenade and its inspirations.”²⁹ He added that: “The Theatre on the Promenade seemed to sort of open up and make way for a creative means of coexistence. The members of the Nová scéna Theatre, or a particular spectrum of them, had to express their inner willingness to cooperate, which later on turned out to be worthwhile. In this symbiotic relationship the Theatre on the Promenade movement was more artistically and aesthetically determining and more expansive.”³⁰

²⁸ There was a complete reconstruction of theatrical space in the Astorka theatre building; it was renovated for Sládek’s pantomime group and for the Theatre Studio. After its dissolution the property together with the unfinished hall was transferred to the Nová scéna Theatre.

²⁹ JABORNÍK, Ján. *Divadlo na korze po zrušení*. In: MISTRÍK, Miloš, JABORNÍK, Ján (ed.). *Divadlo na korze 1968 – 1971*. Bratislava: Koordinačná rada pre vydávanie divadelných hier a teatrologickej literatúry, 1994, p. 63. ISBN 80-85718-20-0.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.62.

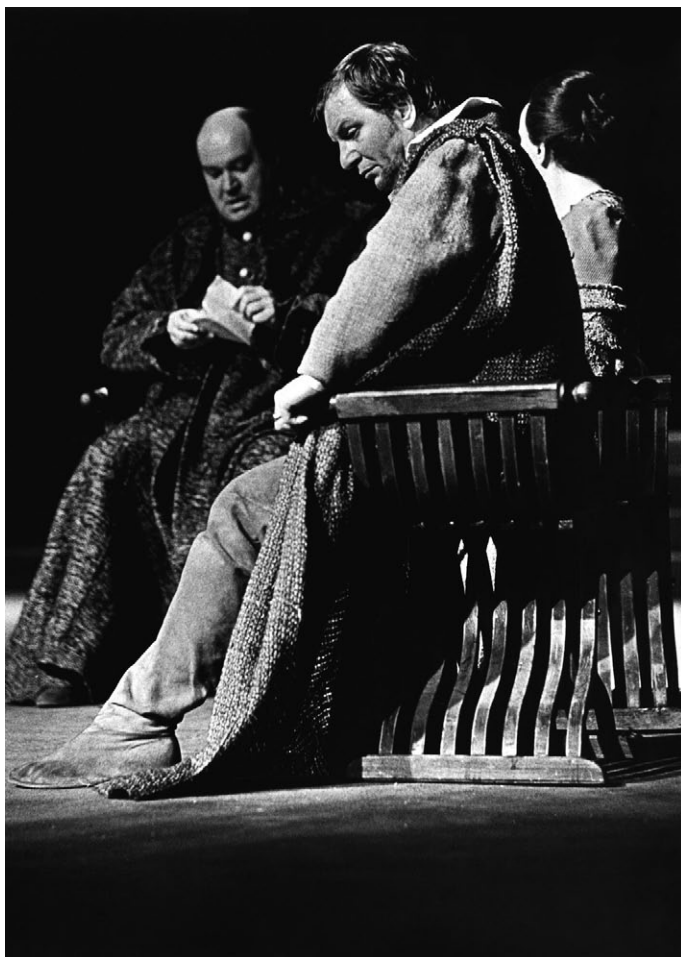
The merger with the Nová scéna Theatre also initiated a set of events clearly documenting the termination of the phenomenon of the "Theatre on the Promenade generation", even though Miloš Pietor and later Vladimír Strnisko followed on from their work at Theatre on the Promenade with their stagings in the Nová scéna Theatre and developed its inspirations. The first event here was the very acceptance of the merger itself. Martin Porubjak remembers the sessions with the director of the Nová scéna Theatre, Dalibor Heger, where at the beginning they talked about having some autonomy. The Theatre on the Promenade even proposed performing on excursions during the reconstruction of the Astorka theatre building, but the group eventually capitulated and signed the contract offered to them despite knowing that not all of them would be allowed to work for the new employer. This clearly meant a paralysation and relativisation of the systematically built-up feeling of the ensemble, its internal unity and sense of belonging. Working with a different repertoire, different partners and directors, and with great possibilities to be employed in television (not only in "serious" literary drama productions but also in entertainment and children's programmes), as well as the resigned (or perhaps prosperous?) acceptance of Communist Party membership by some former actors of the Theatre on the Promenade (which had evidently been the only organisation within the Ministry of Culture where it had not been possible to establish a basic organisation of the Communist Party of Slovakia as none of the actors had been a member) all meant that already by the end of the 1970s the Theatre on the Promenade became only a memory and a legend. All the achievements of the former members of the Theatre on the Promenade in the Nová scéna Theatre and in the Slovak National Theatre comprised a different chapter in Slovak theatre history. It was no longer an internally and ideologically compatible statement of a generation.

The situation described in connection with the relatively high number of young writers in the Slovak National Theatre in the 1960s was repeated in many theatres outside of Bratislava in the 1970s. However, the theatres in Košice, Martin, Nitra and Trnava as well as the Jonáš Záborský Theatre (Divadlo Jonáša Záborského) in Prešov did not witness the formation of a real and consistent generational theatre as the writers who tried to do so were always in a minority position in contrast to writers of different generational affiliations (including their own!) who preferred mainstream theatrical productions. Primarily there was always a lack of a basic starting platform for a display of generational theatre: an ideological consensus on attitudes about social development and an articulated will to express a certain mental message through staging aimed at an audience with a similar mindset. It is not by chance that most professional theatres activities focusing on generational theatrical expression were in the form of a "study" or – as in Nitra – a "subtheatre" ("poddivadlo"). Writers intuitively felt that they had to separate such works from the context of the routine theatrical practice in the organisation in order to be successful with their convictions about the theatre.

The internal foundations (the ideological orientation and overall attitude) and the disgust of young artists with the social situation in which they found themselves were relatively similar to those experienced by the Theatre on the so-called Promenade generation. The situation at the time of so-called "normalisation" in the 1970s was clearer in its own way than the situation one decade earlier: people no longer even had illusions about the freedom of creativity and no one believed in the ideals

frequently mentioned at communist congresses. People perceived them to be a clear “staking-out” of space in an absurd metaplay. While respecting the determined amount of freedom, artists pretended to create freely, and the political authorities as the “leading force of society” realised that the citizens needed at least an illusion of freedom as the party controlled their opinions and expressions in everyday life in this period known as “goulash socialism”. The liquidation of the Theatre on the Promenade (1971) and the Tatra Revue cabaret (1970) was a clear reminder and warning that there are boundaries which could not be crossed without consequences. The Communist Party also knew of many “gentler” methods of how to make their power known to those who tried too hard to lift themselves out of the ordinary grey mass. The most frequent “discipline” method was in the filling of positions at Slovak Television, Slovak Radio and in film production. In the 1970s there was a huge gap in social status between those actors who performed only at their home theatres and those who got the opportunity to act in television, film and radio productions. Besides this, the sophisticated system of social awards, particularly the awarding of the title of “merited artist” or “national artist”, which entitled one to significantly greater salaries for performances, caused considerable rivalry among actors. Whereas theatre actors without any such title or chance of systematic work, particularly in television, lived at the standard level of educated people and were able to pay for a three-room apartment and a Trabant, Škoda MB or Zhiguli car, actors with titles such as “merited artist” and “national artist” who performed on television would sooner or later move to the neighbourhood of villas inhabited by higher society and would buy a car from the Tuzex network (a chain of stores offering imported goods for the privileged members of society), which explicitly showed their success. “The chosen ones”, artists who did not oppose the government (and who were very often extraordinary and creative personalities), were tempted by these material advantages. This revealed the typical and cynically pragmatic attitudes of the communist elite during “normalisation”: in order to have significantly more favourable living conditions for oneself as well as for one’s whole family, it was necessary to stay in restricted areas, occasionally take part in propaganda activities: it was unavoidable to perform in some core works such as *The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* (30 prípadov majora Zemana) TV series, “ideological” works of Soviet or domestic origin such as heroic epics about the Slovak National Uprising, the anti-fascist resistance or the struggle with “emigrant” traitors, and behave loyally (i.e. if not membership in the Communist Party itself then at least membership in the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement and the Socialist Union of Youth). Life was not so favourable for those who opposed any of these conditions.

Some significant sets of generational artistic activities in the 1970s and 1980s have already been dealt with in other texts. In order to present a more general result, it is necessary to emphasise what was characteristic for the development of thinking about the display of generational theatre during these decades. Firstly, the idea of a generational theatre somehow overlapped with the attempted idea of an alternative theatre. There was a “group within the group” created in the theatre companies around one or two leading personalities, the vast majority of whom were directors, which meant that these people were willing to sacrifice their comfort as well as their free time in order to realise more ambitious projects. These people included Peter Opálený from the Košice State Theatre, Lubomír Vajdička and Ondrej Šulaj from the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising in Martin, Jozef Mokoš from the Puppet The-



The Nová scéna Theatre in Bratislava. William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*. Translation: Jozef Kot, scene designer: Oto Šujan, costume designer: Stanislava Vaničková, director: Miloš Pietor. Premiere 15 February 1974. On the left: Dušan Blaškovič (Polonius), in the foreground: Vlado Müller (Claudius). Photograph from the Theatre Institute's archive.

atre in Banská Bystrica, Jozef Bednárík from the Andrej Bagar Theatre and Regional Theatre in Nitra, Blahoslav Uhlár and Juraj Nvota from the Theatre for Children and Youth in Trnava, Eduard Gürtler from the Jonáš Záborský Theatre in Prešov, and Stanislav Párnický and Jozef Mokoš from the Poetic Ensemble of the Nová scéna Theatre. These stagings were mostly created within the approved dramaturgic plans and they were also regular parts of the theatre performances. However, in their creation the producers used techniques different from those which were usually used in these theatres. What made the productions so exceptional was often emphasised by the choice of a different theatrical space or by the conspicuous decoration of the available theatre hall.³¹

³¹ For more on this, see MAŤAŠÍK, Andrej (Generačné preskupovanie v slovenskom divadelníctve, in *Slovenské divadlo*) and MAŤAŠÍK, Andrej (Hľadanie nového dramatika [sedemdesiate roky 20. storočia] v slovenskom divadelnom kontexte) in *Slovenské divadlo*, 2011, Vol. 59, No.4, pp. 349–365.

Secondly, all the registered attempts to form a group of willing and ambitious producers addressing different themes as well as a different formal organisation of statements to the audience failed to reach the point when it would be a characteristic, typical and profiled type of communication in theatre. After Ladislav Farkaš left the Theatre for Children and Youth in Trnava, Blahoslav Uhlár and Juraj Nvota in particular tried to form such a group, although the inevitability of respecting the clear profile of the theatre as an institution with significant educational and training obligations as well as rigidly defined groups of recipients was counterproductive. All the other attempts of “young” or “younger” theatre producers were nothing but supplements to the prevailing repertoire, although some of them considerably influenced the total image of the theatre in the cultural public awareness (e.g. Jozef Bednárík’s stagings in Nitra). Only very rarely did our artistic leaders, mainly the directors already mentioned, find stable and plentiful groups of artistic colleagues primarily among generationally close members of the theatre companies. The attractive vision of working in Bratislava and lucrative television offers played an important role in this situation.

In the 1980s Slovak theatres had to deal with a major generational change as the natural change had slowed down; this was partly due to the petrification at the beginning of “normalisation”. Little by little, actors reached their retiring age and therefore were supposed to leave; sometimes they left willingly and sometimes they were forced out due to the vital performances of their younger colleagues. Miloš Pietor and Lubomír Vajdička moved to the Slovak National Theatre (Vladimír Strnisko later appeared there as a guest as well) and each of them got their own way, bringing some of their colleagues as well: Miloš Pietor brought Martin Huba, Juraj Kukura, Magda Vášáryová, Milan Kňažko and Dušan Blaškovič; Lubomír Vajdička brought Lubomír Paulovič and Peter Bzdúch. As a result, other numerous transfers and modifications of artistic groups across Slovakia followed: Roman Polák moved from Košice to Martin, and Ladislav Podmaka and Ondrej Šulaj moved to the Nová scéna Theatre from Trnava and Martin respectively.

As a consequence of the political changes in the Soviet Union after the death of Leonid Brezhnev and especially after the beginning of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Perestroika, the ideological pressure on artists was gradually reduced despite the efforts of Czechoslovak dogmatists to maintain the status quo. Various ambitious theatrical appeals therefore logically appeared in theatres’ main programme using the whole capacity of the company and it was not necessary to search for alternative options. This was the reason why the Nová scéna Theatre in the 1980s was generally known as a theatre with a clearly defined poetics determined by Vladimír Strnisko; the team of actors from the Theatre on the Promenade was increased by other equal members such as Milan Lasica, Július Satinský, Ida Rapaičová, Eduard Bindas and Marián Zednikovič. Despite the formal dominance of Strnisko’s stagings, the theatre management also supported the stagings by Oto Kатуša, Peter Opálený and Ondrej Šulaj. The important fact was that the audience could find sharp critical accounts about the state of society not only in isolated studio, alternative or other peripheral stagings but more and more often in regular productions. A few select examples include the staging of Ken Kesey’s and Dale Wasserman’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* under the name of *Eniki Beniki*, Leonid Andreyev’s *The Life of Man* in the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising in Martin, Henrik Ibsen’s *An Enemy of*

the People and Lubomír Feldek's *Skúška (The Rehearsal)* in the Slovak National Theatre, and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Bertolt Brecht's *Man Equals Man* in the Nová scéna Theatre's Poetic Ensemble. Young producers lost their substantial reason to unite and to try to produce a common performance based on an articulation of their generational difference.

The situation changed considerably after the social upheaval in the autumn of 1989 when citizens organised demonstrations on the squares and forced changes in the leadership of the country. Theatre artists showed great initiative and were visible during this process; often they were the ones who encouraged those less courageous to clearly articulate their ideas. It was a paradox that the aroused interest in public affairs caused big problems with audience numbers in theatres, but it also revealed many other problems that the theatres and theatre producers have been dealing with until today. Dagmar Podmaková deals with this development in a separate study.³² It is remarkable that from the viewpoint of examining generational issues, the consequences of the restoration of the Theatre on the Promenade as well as the satisfaction of its members were the same as two decades earlier: the generation of producers in their fifties occupied the key strategic positions and in order for young producers to assert their different world views and produce types of drama different from the mainstream derived from the tradition of Theatre on the Promenade, or at least referring to it, they began to draw attention to themselves at the end of the 1990s as a newly formed opposition to this self-constituted mainstream. This could indicate that it eventually would be possible for Slovak theatres to function as permanently regenerating groups and companies which are variously defined without the intervention of artificial ruptures of a non-artistic character and motivation in their development.

Translated by Denisa Galáčová and Eva Štefániková

³² PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. Slovenské divadlo v prostredí spoločnosti – od 80. rokov 20. storočia pod dnešok. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2011, Vol. 59, No.3, pp. 208-217.