



EXPRESSIONAL BIPOLARITY OF THEATRE (SELECTED CASE STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE)

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Abstract: The author contemplates expressional bipolarity of contemporary art of theatre. He is personally interested in whether theatre has yet a chance to purify spectators. He explores theatre in terms of reception, and also focuses on the methods of addressing the themes of the day. Using case studies of selected productions in contemporary theatre, he reflects on the intentions of a number of theatre directors whose particular intention is for the theatre to provoke or manipulate spectators.

Key words: theatre, dramaturgy, reception, polarity, expressiveness

Introduction

In contemporary (particularly in independent) theatre and in performative fields in contemporary art, theatre makers are increasingly keen in their statements to affect spectators, prompt in them an appropriate transformation, or to eliminate an adverse, undesired phenomenon. The theatre piece has often the potential to prompt dramatic spectator response, though it may not always be able to instigate societal change. Yet some productions are indeed able to present powerful statements on a whole range of social issues. It is worthwhile to focus more closely on the unique moments in the tragic aspects of the world when theatre – at times shockingly – intervenes, communicates or otherwise affects reception.

The Prophylactic Effect of Theatre

The very fact that this study explores the prophylactic effect of theatre, given the uncommon expression, may sound like goading. It is used in an attempt to identify specific cases of theatre productions that plainly exert cathartic effect. Slovak theatre theorist Dagmar Inštorisová argues that “in every type of theatre, the spectator always recognises, using both wit and sense – in the sense of Ancient Greek catharsis – and reviews opinions, ideas and sentiments different from his own, regardless the quality and focus of theatre performance and spectator erudition.”¹ The Czech theatre theorist Zdeněk Hořínek suggests that theatre “plays (or can have), in addition to the purely cathartic role (or better said: in spite of it), also a social role: drama, by drawing spectator into its own artificial world, makes him experience emotions, states,

¹ INŠTORISOVÁ, Dagmar. *O výrazovej variabilite divadelného diela* [On Expressional Variability of Theatre Piece]. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2013, p. 211. ISBN 978-80-558-0519-1.

passions or those of the others, solve their problems, participate in their lives. Hence, with all the inadvertent augmentation it offers, it nurtures his emotionality and sensuality, expanding his intellectual horizon. (...) Aristotle, the first European theorist of drama, with his teaching on *catharsis*, highlights the ethical and psychological role of theatre: theatre is a specific form of social hygiene, the catharsis of human passion."²

It is no accident that this study uses the medical expression (prophylaxis) with its remedial effect. In terms of direct effect of the art of theatre, to consider the presence of catharsis and its role in drama genres (largely in tragedy) is no novelty. The American theatre theorist Marvin Carlson explains: "Ordinary interpretation considers catharsis to be Greek medical term; unlike Plato, Aristotle argues that tragedy doesn't prompt emotions. In fact, it strips spectators of passions. Tragedy should thus have homeopathic effect that cures by being administered in small doses of similar remedies, in case of the sentiments of empathy and fear."³

An ability of theatre to be both poison and remedy has been known since the times of tragedy. In general, tragedy has a number of meanings. Tragedy is essentially differentiated as one that happens in real life and the other in theatre. Slovenian theatre theorist Krištof Jacek Kozak points out: "Tragedy in life – we all know it, we all have become acquainted with what it means. Tragedy in theatre – we can control it better than the one that takes place in real life. Yet its analysis also enables better insight into reality from which it draws."⁴ The British literary theorist Terry Eagleton further suggests: "Tragedy can be moving, yet it is presumed to contain something terrible, some chilling characteristic that shocks and stuns (...) 'Tragic' and 'very sad' are quite different terms. (...) If a very old person dies, his life partner can perceive the event as being tragic, though it's not shocking, terrifying, catastrophic, fateful, or a consequence of a conceited breach of divine law. Here the word tragic means something 'very, very sad' for the partner and simply something sad or very sad for the others."⁵

Even Aristotle understood these aspects of the tragic effects largely in connection with something severe, as an instrument of destruction of the character with whom the catastrophe is principally linked as a result of peripeteia and anagnorisis. "Catastrophe brings about destruction or pain, such as the dying on stage, too much peril, injury and the like."⁶ It is the pathos referred to in connection with the composition of drama itself.⁷ The recognition of this apparent expressional bipolarity of theatre is linked to its central ethical and reception effect which tends to be connected with the effect on spectator. One can thus speak of dual effect of theatre production that stretches from obvious gloom, negativism, all the way to the brightening of something quite moving, of the Eagletonian "very, very sad." The Belgian theatre director,

² HOŘÍNEK, Zdeněk. *Duchovní dimenze divadla aneb Vertikální přesahy* [Spiritual Dimension of Theatre or Vertical Inroads]. Praha : Pražská scéna, 2004, p. 11. ISBN 80-86102-46-7.

³ CARLSON, Marvin. *Dejiny divadelných teórií* [History of Theatre Theories]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2006, p. 13. ISBN 80-88987-23-7.

⁴ KOZAK, Krištof Jacek. *Príťažlivá osudovosť: subjekt a tragédia* [An Attractive Fatefulness: Subject and Tragedy]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2012, p. 14. ISBN 978-80-89369-46-1.

⁵ EAGLETON, Terry. *Sladké násilí. Idea tragična*. [Sweet Violence. The Idea of the Tragic]. Brno : HOST, 2004, pp. 20 – 21. ISBN 80-7294-132-1.

⁶ ARISTOTELES. *Poetika* [Poetics]. Bratislava : Thetis, 2009, p. 27. ISBN 978-80-970115-3-6.

⁷ STEHLÍKOVÁ, Eva. *Antické divadlo* [Antique Theatre]. Praha : Karolinum, 2005, p. 240. ISBN 80-246-1105-8.

choreographer and multi-genre artist Jan Fabre in his reflection of the production *Prometheus–Landscape II* (2011) confessed: “I find the effect of catharsis to be an important principle. (...) Sometimes I feel that I am, in a way, an Ancient Greek healer. (...) The Greek word *pharmakon* means both medication and poison. (...) For actors, dancers and spectators my theatre is the aesthetics of poisoning that can possibly be a cure, too.”⁸ He thus introduced the prime objective of his directorial work that can be both cathartic and poisonous.

The opposites often alternate in theatre practice which is linked to the bipolarity in the perception of the world:

1. A perspective that is unilaterally understood in terms of decomposition (decomposing morbidity), the mayhem in the world is accentuated in expression and set towards sharp, controversial confrontation. The point can be illustrated by the production *Postfaktótum* by the independent avant-garde Slovak theatre STOKA (2017, directed by Blahoslav Uhlár et al.). The author’s method of collective improvisation enables theatre makers to present a kaleidoscope of fleeting fragments of the contemporary atomising world where repugnance turns into a provoking scream.
2. A perspective of theatre makers, as understood in terms of a harmonious vision (naturalistic harshness, at times even savageness in stage statement ultimately leads to conciliatory message that bears a cathartic effect). For instance, members of the actors’ company Teatro Tatro in their latest production *Stalker* (2018, directed by Ondrej Spišák) aim, despite the harsh poetics, to deliver humanely effective statements, particularly in the conclusion of the play.

Such perspective among theatre makers also becomes, through the set theme, a kind of diagnosis of society or an era when the production emerges with the ethical interpolation. The controversial point of theatre (art) piece is thus most closely related to its effect of attacking the recipient – in terms of reception perspective. Nonetheless, as Kozak suggests, “a question arises whether art can at all epitomise reality, along with asking about what role art plays in contemporary society. The historic shift between art and reality has become quite apparent after the demise of myth: if, during Antiquity, reality was absorbed in a myth, thus being vitally linked to arts as well, the demise of myth has ruptured the connection, opening wide gap in between. Life without metaphysics makes many understand a portrayal of reality to be a farce.”⁹

It is quite certain that theatre makers often need to use their art or specific title to inspire discussion about the set theme. Within the context of contemporary European theatre, one can mention the works by Árpád Schilling (*FEKETEország, Krétakör Színház*, Budapest, 2004), Rodrigo García (*Accidens/Matar para comer*, La Carnicería Teatro, Madrid 2005), Christoph Schlingensiefel (*Ausländer raus: Bitte liebt Österreich*, Vienna, 2000), and works by other controversial names in contemporary operatic and drama directing (Frank Castorf, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Oliver Frljić, etc.). They use the aforementioned potential of theatre to prompt controversial flurry, as well as therapeutic equanimity, i.e. both fear and empathy. In theatre, both extremities alter-

⁸ Quoted according to DUPONT, Florence. *Aristoteles alebo upír západného divadla* [Aristotle or the Vamp of Western Theatre]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2016, pp. 17 – 18. ISBN 978-80-8190-013-6.

⁹ KOZAK, Krištof Jacek. *Príťažlivá osudovosť: subjekt a tragédia* [An Attractive Fatefulness: Subject and Tragedy], p. 46.

nate and gradate to a different degree. It arises from the cathartic potential of theatre that makes it possible to balance the extremes of the era. The ethical and reception effect of theatre piece is based on the presentation of scenes in conflicting shape.

Expressional Bipolarity of Contemporary Theatre

Hence, theatre may occasionally have an enormous effect on audiences. In such instants, spectators often experience fear, awe and, possibly, repugnance. This occurs particularly when reality is presented through more aggressive instants that resolutely attack recipients. The staged image of the world is starkly portrayed within the widest possible spectre. The confrontation thus set proves uneasy. It prompts expressional bipolarity of fear and empathy at the same time. That makes self-discovery through theatre a unique opportunity: where else has spectator a chance to change, purify into the ideal version of himself and experience catharsis?

Expressional bipolarity becomes evident through a specific sign utterance. Disintegration in theatre astonishes spectator, luring him and attracting in the widest possible dimensions and variations. In controversial cases, some theatre directors reach for extreme instants of attack: they often present the utmost, extreme aspect of the world or life, opting for more radical intervention methods in order to prompt aggravation. The faces of the world, as recognised on stage by the spectator, are often uncomplimentary and largely unpleasant. That, too, is a value of theatre (production) statement: to present spectators with such image of disorganised world.

Today, a number of theatre makers, in their stage statements, keep working with more appellative positions. They often compose their productions to split audience in two in terms of acceptance, identification with a specific message. For instance, the Czech theatre director Jiří Havelka (b. 1980), is particularly keen on exploring taboos that are often ignored by the (Czech) public.¹⁰ The production *Já, hrdina* [I the Hero], (2011 Disk Theatre, Prague) was a police-like investigative reconstruction of documentary nature. It revisited the case of the brothers Ctirad and Josef Mašín.¹¹ It is also worth mentioning here Havelka's original production *Dechovka* [The Brass Band], (2014, VOSTO5 Theatre, Prague). In the play he reconstructed the massacre near Dobronín (during the expulsion of ethnic Germans after World War II from the town of Dobronín near the city of Jihlava, a number of local residents were brutally murdered). In the production *Elity* [The Elites], (2017, Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava) Havelka, who largely drew from archival sources at the National Memory Institute, from a range of interviews and authentic testimonies about the activities of the State Police, created a grim, if not chilling account of the end of the period of normalization in Czechoslovakia¹².

¹⁰ See further in BALLAY, Miroslav – FUJÁK, Július et al: *(De)tabuizácia smrti v diskurzoch súčasného umenia* [Removal of] Taboos of Death in Contemporary Art Discourse]. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2016, p. 75. ISBN 978-80-558-1098-0.

¹¹ The brothers Ctirad and Josef Mašín continue to polarise the Czech public. During the Communist regime in the 1950s they escaped from Czechoslovakia to the West, whilst killing two members of the National Security Corps. One faction of the public considers them to be heroes, whilst the other deems them to be cold-blooded murderers.

¹² The period of reinstatement of orthodox Communism that followed after the armed invasion of Czechoslovakia and the suppression of the Prague Spring with its liberal version of Communism.

A number of authors reconstruct cultural (historic) memory, often ending up exposing traumas investigative finding, research, cue or reminder. Theatre thus revives events often quite intentionally isolated by the public. The American theatre theorist and theatre director Richard Schechner considers reconstruction of something that happened elsewhere to be one of the key models of natural theatre: the model of the sudden, of performance and departure. As he further suggests, "in urban space, the model produces the 'natural'. If an accident happens and it is then staged (as it happens in guerrilla theatre): a crowd of the curious gathers to find out what happened. The crowd surrounds the event – in the case of an accident – and its consequences, discussing what happened, to whom, and why; questions are often asked. Similarly to plays and court hearings which represent formal versions of an accident, they, too, are immersed in the reconstruction of the event. It happens verbally at the hearings, and analogically in theatre: by repeating what happened (in reality, fictitiously, mythically, and religiously). Brecht wanted theatre spectators to ask the same questions as the crowd asks."¹³

Other contemporary example of expressional bipolarity lends the controversial Croatian theatre director Oliver Frlić (*1976). He intentionally uses the opportunity and/or ability to polarise or radicalise audiences in in the former Yugoslavia and beyond by setting out themes that traumatise given society. His intention is to openly shock or appeal to the conscience of spectators by radical means. The Polish theatre theorist Aneta Głowacka reports a number of cases of censorship and harsh reactions to the Frlić productions within the Polish cultural context. She points out that "the concerns about the deteriorating situation in the Stary teatr in Krakow made Jan Kłata call off (just two weeks before the première in late 2013) the scheduled première of the *Nie-Boska komedia* [The Un-Divine Comedy] by Zygmunt Krasiński, as directed by Oliver Frlić. Whilst he was entitled to such decision as director of the theatre, his was no doubt a pre-emptive censorship with which Kłata remains associated in theatre context until today. The production was about the sensitive issue of antisemitism in Poland, which appears in the Krasiński play. Even earlier, news came about resignation from rehearsals by a number of actors who weren't au fait with the vision of the Croatian director."¹⁴

In Polish context the name of Oliver Frlić is also associated with two additional controversial reactions to the staging of his production *Kłątwa* [The Curse] (2017, Teatr Powszechny im. Zygmunta Hübnera, Warsaw), in which he quite freely follows on the works by Stanisław Wyspiański. Głowacka argues that the radical adaptation "is connected with most current public and political issues in Poland that trigger controversy – the (actual and emblematic) abuse of power by the Roman Catholic Church, ignoring paedophilia among high clergy, treating religion as merchandise on the part of politicians and right-wing activists to score political bonuses, disregarding women's rights, including the legalisation of abortion, or antisemitism that is

¹³ SCHECHNER, Richard. *Performancia: teórie, praktiky, rituály* [Performance: Theories, Practice, Rituals]. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2009, pp. 185 – 186. ISBN 978-80-89369-11-9.

¹⁴ GŁOWACKA, Aneta. *Cenzúra v prevleku – nové formy vplyvu na divadelný život v Poľsku* [Censorship in Disguise – new forms of effects in theatre life in Poland]. In PUKAN, Miron – KUŠNÍROVÁ, Eva (eds). *Kontexty alternatívneho divadla v súčasnom myslení* [Contexts of Alternative Theatre in Contemporary Thought]. Prešov : FF PU, 2017, p. 68. ISBN 978-80-555-1951-7.

deeply rooted in Poland. Face to face the refugee crisis, the latter becomes manifested in an adverse attitude to immigrants.”¹⁵ Another illustration of the negative reception of Frljić’s directorial work has been recently noted in the Czech Republic. In protest against his production *Our Violence and Your Violence* (Slovensko Mladinsko Theatre, Ljubljana, Slovenia) brought to the Theatre World Brno Festival, activists came on stage trying to prevent actors from performing.

It is quite certain that the Frljić productions (anywhere in European theatres) are based on an intentional manipulation in order to provoke, or even whip the conscience of recipients. He often explores themes like the civil war and war crimes in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Such are also the productions of the original political and documentary theatre *25,671* (2013, Prešernovo Theatre Kranj, Slovenia) and *Aleksandra Zec* [Alexandra Zec] (2014, HKD Theatre, Rijeka, Croatia). In both cases, Frljić radically exposes the traumas by making a theme of different tragedies within the society and in life. Their expressiveness stretches from the intensity of gloom, negativism, all the way to the extension of something most moving, sad, etc. He thus achieves expressional bipolarity that can be understood as a blend of horror and sentiment in the reception of the production. He uses a diverse palette of expressions, what enables him to crack established stereotypes of perception. He leads to the expressional bipolarity by uncovering a given case, by reconstruction.

When premièred in Slovenia, the production *25,671* triggered extraordinary uproar. The figure 25,671 refers to the number of nationals who, in 1992, definitely lost their nationality in the newly-founded Republic of Slovenia.¹⁶ This continues to be quite a sensitive and difficult issue for Slovenes. Frljić uses documentary authenticity to present the mounting nationalism that has spread across the tiny country after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. By using recorded hymnic music, he captured readiness among Slovenes to defend their country against the Yugoslav army and to win independence. The director exerted stance attack on the recipient by using simple means, such as the tendentious patriotic anthem played periodically from recording.

The effective interactivity with the audience shocked and clearly puzzled already at the point of opening. Spectators were asked to hand in their ID cards (some of the more cautious e.g. handed in their library cards instead), what generated the first measure of tension.¹⁷ The theatre makers freely laid out the collected documents across the acting area. The director kept the spectators in certain tension throughout the performance. At one point, an actor collected the documents on stage and read out the names on them. This generated an awkward, even delicate situation. It radi-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁶ See further the bulletin of the Divadelná Nitra Festival 2013. Member of the dramaturgy council Martina Vannayová in her annotation to this original project puts it succinctly: “...in the political situation at the time the act on the part of the Slovenes might have been a revenge for the attack by the Yugoslav troops. Yet even if all removed had been members of other Yugoslav army, as the misleading information suggested, the act would be unjustifiable. Many families who remain affected by such fate continue to suffer.” VAN-NYOVÁ, Martina: ‘25 671’. In BAKOŠOVÁ, Lujza (ed.). Bulletin k festivalu Divadelná Nitra [Bulletin for the Divadelná Nitra Festival]. (27 September – 2 October 2013). Nitra : Asociácia Divadelná Nitra, 2013, p. 35.

¹⁷ There are by no means exceptional methods. They largely achieve the more effective communication variability and, especially, the share of certain participation on the very course of events. In such case spectator, on entering the auditorium, (un!)intentionally hands over their ID card. By subjecting himself to such atypical, quite a humiliating method, he experiences a kind of discrimination. This act obviously shows a dimension of performativity and (potential) participation in the course of events.

cally gradated especially when the actor picked up a random ID card with the intention to cut it in half. He starkly asked the card holder for a permission. If agreed, he did so, which was something the spectator didn't quite expect. The destruction of an important identification document represented an aggressive performative moment. The theatre makers had to prompt in the members of the audience a sense of someone who has been erased from the list of nationals in a given country, merely on the grounds of ethnicity. The element of destruction created expressional bipolarity. It incited anger and shock (damage of an important document). The aggressive moment was effective given its demonstrable quality as an instrument that presented to the spectators an obvious analogous state: when a national without documents finds out one day to be a nonentity. The director attacked the audiences directly in individual aggressive instants. He achieved them through the immediate interactive sphere: by speaking to the audience, giving direct instructions, interaction – engaging the audience, possibly by the methods of destruction, etc. One would say the interactivity played an important role within the expressional polarity (and its setting in this production).

Frljić created an appellative, controversial theatre piece that was to literally generate emotional blackmail. That happened, in particular, when he brought on stage an authentic Serbian family who were wronged by being stripped of their nationality (being removed, in 1992, from the list of nationals in Slovenia), by having their ID card taken. Without the documents one could not de facto exist. The case puts Slovenia that seems, *prima facie*, a flawless country (having avoided open war conflicts as the first of the countries of the FYU to have earned independence, in quite a bad light. Frljić removed the taboo of a difficult topic. By reaching for the expressional theatre methods, he affected ethical polarisation during the reception of the production. On stage, the Serbian family of three kept silently facing the spectators, what came across palpably as a challenge to compensation or as an attempt at harmonious sensitisation that followed after the polarisation of the audience. Spectators were shocked not merely by the declassified and, at the same time little acknowledged fact, and by the direct nature of the emotional blackmail on stage – especially the still, civil looks of the members of the Serbian family in quiet, silent confrontation with the audience.

The production *Aleksandra Zec* [Alexandra Zec, 2014] also touches upon the revival of recent wrongs, that remain covered up in Croatia. Frljić presents a real story of extermination of a Serbian family (including a 12-year old daughter Alexandra) as a criminal act on the part of Croats committed against Serbian nationals during the civil war. He tested the ability of Croatian public to come to terms with inhumanity during the collective revenge taken by Croats against members of a Serbian family.

In the opening of the production, we see a group of actors, seated and/or silently standing around a bench. Behind we see spades that predict a burial. In still sculpture-like expression, they speak to the audience (lights remain turned on in the auditorium throughout the opening scene). An actress delivers a monologue with excess harshness, even combative gradation, addressing her words to the audience:

What did you come to watch?

What do the tickets say?

Alexandra Zec.

Nice name. How many years have we been repeating the name?

20!

Alexandra Zec!
 Have you remembered it well?
 Alexandra Zec!
 Who killed her? The Croats.
 To fucking hell with the little bitch! Where did she find herself?
 In Croatia, where else!
 And how about the Croat children who died in the war?
 How about that?
 They were 33 just in the town of Slavonski Brod! And in the entire
 Croatia?
 No one is interested in them? And how about the mothers who cannot bury their
 children?
 They even haven't got a grave.
 But not us ... It is the Serbs to be the victims. They must integrate to live normally
 here.
 How about my father who fought in the war? Too few days in war to earn pen-
 sion!
 He's missing days! He wasn't shooting enough at the Serbs!
 So, make up your mind at last?
 Are Serbs the victims?
 (...) ¹⁸

Frljić chose, yet again, a forbidding theme to present his theatre of 'cruelty'.¹⁹ The theme of pain (the callousness of a triple murder) in the production corresponded with the severity and dramatic nature of expression. The theme of insupportability has also been reflected in the controversial cruelty of aggressive impulses. Instead of elements of performativity and increased interactivity in the 25,671, Frljić opted for an evocative, yet simple expressivity. His forte was illustration and descriptive, naturalistic drawing. The utterly realistic items – spades and soil – stood out starkly on the side of the relatively vacant stage. Individual actors' arrangements were concentrated in centre stage. The theatricality was distorted by authentic photographs of the massacre of the family that added the production material documentary authenticity. After nearly two decades, the theatre maker touched upon the sensitive event without the different stereotypes. They created a reconstruction of the triple murder, for which no one has been, as yet, made responsible.²⁰

The production was composed of stage images saturated with tension. It became particularly concentrated, together with the thick atmosphere, in the images of torture and the actual depiction of violence. The production team presented many radical, aggressive instants, such as the figures of the mother and daughter being tied up

¹⁸ FRLJIĆ, Oliver. *Aleksandra Zec*. Production script. (Copy). Non-paginated.

¹⁹ Though this is no paraphrase on the promoter of the idea of the theatre of cruelty of Antonin Artaud.

²⁰ As stated in the Bulletin for the New Drama Festival 2018: "The perpetrators were five Croatian policemen. Though they confessed to the crime, the court declared them not guilty. The tragedy of the Zec family in Croatia has come to epitomise the cover up of truth, of dysfunctional justice and escaping the conscience. Frljić's own provocation and harsh stage symbols, the sensitive theme, use of documents and fiction revive in the drama the idea of meta-theatre as space where the limits between art and life are removed." See further ULMANOVÁ, Martina. Bulletin k festivalu Nová dráma [Bulletin for the Festival New Drama 2018] (14 – 19 May 2018). Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2018, p. 43.

and tortured. The tension grew further as the body of the murdered girl was brought in. After the callousness portrayed with the naturalistic measure of realism, the spectators followed the mortal act of burial of the girl's body. Stiff silence surrounded the monotonous covering of Alexandra's body with soil, using spades. Frljić made utmost use of a number, often literal metaphors and visual elements, such as the archetypal soil and spades. To the stark and often harsh visual elements he added striking music (Zbigniew Preisner, Goran Bregović, Mozart's *Requiem* etc.) as a counterpoint to the aggressive nature of individual scenes. The entire production was seeped in morbidity and the theme of death, killing and murder as a mortal act, in the full scale of cruelty, aggression, brutality, etc., what added the piece funeral character.

Ultimately, the most controversial part of the production was its post-mortal part: the silent burial of the girl's body by the group of passive partakers in the massacre, as a silent reproach of conscience of the Croat society. Frljić was aware of the expressional bipolarity of catharsis: of the fear and empathy. The Albanian writer Ismail Kadare points out that "nowhere else than at a funeral fear and empathy capture human soul more powerfully."²¹ He further argues that "it culminates at the point when the deceased is laid in earth. The open grave or, better said, a pile of spoil around the grave is the first scene of tragic theatre."²² The often-controversial use of expressional means have thus generated an ethical effect in the reception of the theatre piece.

At the same time, the director included in the original documentary a principle used in the production fiction in the post-mortal scene. Four girls, who are the same age as the murdered girl, approach the buried body (the girls wore headbands with bunny ears). Together, they remove the body from the grave. Alexandra Zec then sits at the table to become acquainted with them. They remain in reserved, civil conversation. This prompts a comparison of the entire production to a funeral ritual. As Kadare suggests, "theatre performance may be deemed a continuation of the ritual ..."²³ The post-mortal situation is a mechanism of manipulation of emotion that is expected to be a dilemma for the spectator (the intentional use of children particularly in this scene triggered among members of the audience sorrow and/or compassion with the victims; at the same time, it became provocative using heightened sentimentalism).

The director intended to provoke spectators rather than to prompt empathic sorrow. With the post-mortal scene, a twofold effect was achieved: fear and sorrow through the excess of emotional appeal. Such ambivalence represented expressional bipolarity, whilst also serving as ethical interpolation. As Kadare suggests, "the return of the dead, his resurrection has, no doubt, been the arch-dream of the entire human species. Since resurrection proved impossible, the authors of early tragedies emulated the process: they raised the body (of the deceased) from the coffin to enable it to move on stage, speak, and give testimony."²⁴

Similar appellative degree of expressivity emerged in the closing scene of the Serbian family in the 25,671. Whilst *Aleksandra Zec* contained the atypical post-mortal

²¹ KADARE, Ismail: *Aischylos, ten veľký smoliar* [Aeschylus: The Great Miser]. Bratislava : Kalligram 2006, p. 20. ISBN 80-7149-894-7.

²² Ibid., p. 21.

²³ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁴ Ibid., p 25.

scene (digging out the dead body) and the fictitious conversation among the girls of different ethnicity (Croatian and Serbian), in 25,671, it is the reality instead of fiction that makes its way on stage. Vis-à-vis the audience, the Serbian family stood in silence in their own anguish. The acting area was virtually overtaken by reality. In *Aleksandra Zec* the director let Alexandra's conversation with her new friends run for an agonisingly long time (virtually like masochistic agony). Yet the closing questioning dialogue between Alexandra and the Serb, Nina Bitinić, had a soothing/poly-factual effect.

ALEXANDRA: What's your name?

NINA: Nina.

ALEXANDRA: Surname?

NINA: Batinić.

ALEXANDRA: How old are you?

NINA: 12.

ALEXANDRA: When were you born?

NINA: 10 June 2001.

ALEXANDRA: Ethnicity.

NINA: Serbian.

ALEXANDRA: Hobbies?

NINA: I play piano.

ALEXANDRA: Do you? What do you play?

NINA: Sonatinas, etudes, cheerful and more sorrowful compositions.

ALEXANDRA: Which do you prefer, the cheerful or the more sorrowful?

NINA: Those more sorrowful.²⁵

Conclusion

The examples of contemporary theatre practice suggest that, in terms of the poly-factual effect of theatricality, it is the theme that is most effective, as is its placement within situational context. The theme may thus be 'prophylactic'. It can shudder, provoke or accentuate a plenty in the discussion or reflections. Thus, along with the theme, the specific situational context of the setting increases the effect of the piece with its scope of influence. Here, too, in part and from case to case, a number of theatre methods are used that enable conveying the message, including through appeal.

The expressional bipolarity of the effect of theatre piece emerges realistically by touching upon an unacceptable or difficult theme. Its sensitivity may prove quite attractive to many contemporary theatre makers (theatre directors). They boldly engage in reconstructions to expose many otherwise impenetrable cases. They often use historical research into the theme which is then integrated by collective work. This frequently applies to the reconstructions of historic (collective) memory within the context of contemporary theatre methods.²⁶ Reconstruction that is used by original

²⁵ FRLJIĆ, Oliver. *Aleksandra Zec*. Production script. (Copy). Non-paginated.

²⁶ They help unveil that which is unknown, mysterious, suppressed or intentionally isolated (perhaps by using social mechanisms). From time to time, theatre arrives at such uneasy, painful, even undesired themes, for instance by adapting the themes of the horrors of war, those related to WWII, genocides, the Shoah, etc. Such dark sides can be found in the history of every nation.

(political) documentary theatre may have exceptionally powerful reception effect on collective sensitisation, change of stereotypes in cultural tradition, and on national pains and taboos. It is quite apparent that some theatre directors present the agonising themes by reaching for dramatic means: the topic they address, is controversial (sensitive), hence undeniably painful.

How then to come at all to terms with trauma? Theatre directors in documentary approaches tend to opt for authentic relevance of their production to present them appellatively, possibly with civil impartiality. They often build on communicative purpose of the theme which, given its controversial nature, exasperates and polarises audiences. They present the theme anew, aiming to achieve universal poly-factual effect. Hence, two methods of addressing sensitive issues emerge. On the one hand, they may involve a theme (hitherto) largely unknown to the majority society. On the other hand, theatre makers can touch upon collective trauma of the past and expose it from a different angle. Both approaches entail an intention to awaken cultural memory and collective conscience. Their constant explanation contributes to a more comprehensive reconciliation with historic and societal traumas that retain potency. The decision about the appropriate degree of effect by the relevant expressiveness is up to individual directors. An expressly exasperating provocation may indeed prompt instinctive reaction manifested as protest wave or resolute rejection. That is due to the expressional bipolarity. In terms of reception, it combines the aspects of gloom, negativism with cathartic sorrow dimension of effect, as has been the case of both Frlić productions examined in this paper.

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