

TRANSFORMATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY THEATRE PRACTICES. A REFLECTION ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS AS RESEARCH



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Abstract: The study offers an outline of certain modifications of contemporary Slovak theatre culture under the influence of ongoing socio-cultural changes. The author reviews the status of contemporary theatre in society while following the ever-changing character of its individual functions. He deals with innovative trends of various directorial representatives in the context of independent culture in Slovakia. He offers a more in-depth view of the non-standard theatre practices, which connect creative process to research; documentary practices and intermedia theatre practices.

Key words: documentary theatre, research, directing, poetics, independent culture

The poetics of contemporary Slovak theatre functioning in an environment full of dynamic socio-cultural changes is considerably diverse. They are characterized by a plurality of influences and tendencies. It is thus impossible to speak of a unified poetics, style or even a production approach. This study attempts to reflect the unusual themes found in numerous directorial personalities in Slovakia. It bears witness to the overlap of creators' innovative practices, which are often a proof of a theatre's communicational ability. We can observe several dominant trends in contemporary Slovak theatre (documentary, ritual, intermedia, etc.). They inject contemporary theatre culture especially with a new theatre language, formal means of expression and even directorial poetics. Their occurrence is tied to the change in the status of theatre in society and its constantly growing spectrum of functions.

A New (Prophylactic) Function of Theatre (?)

A shift in production poetics partially goes hand in hand with a shift in theatre status, its significance and its dominating reception impact. The creators of contemporary Slovak theatre are, for example, turning towards the revitalization of the past and of cultural memory. We can also clearly observe a certain shift towards its tangible engagement in the reflexive act of holding up a mirror to society. A new, prophylactic function of theatre is, de facto, created. It needs to be noted that it is, to a certain degree, determined by the theme that it is so obviously connected to.¹ As the Slovak theatrologist, Diana Laciaková, aptly observes: "... coping with contemporary issues through finding their historical continuity or discontinuity, as well as through

¹ One must also not forget that apart from the process of revitalization of cultural memory, numerous social, minority-related, political, gender-related and spiritual themes constantly keep on appearing in contemporary Slovak theatre.

their analysis in the socio-political context (...) is one of the most distinctive creative tendencies in contemporary Slovak theatre as well..."² The dramaturgy of several theatres, namely from the independent spectrum of artistic culture, is being purposefully adjusted to these tendencies, with an inclination towards reflecting the contemporary (historical), socio-cultural affairs and openly presenting them on the stage. To illustrate, the Czech director Jiří Havelka, in this regard, enjoys making use of the reconstruction of certain traumatizing events, or alternatively affairs, polarizing the society. This tendency is present in his authorial productions, i.e. *Já, hrdina* ([Me, the Hero] 2011, Divadlo Disk Praha), or his recent production of the authorial play *Elity* ([Elites] 2017), which he wrote as a tailor-made text for the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. It is, too, based on cultural memory: the reconstruction of the socio-political history of our country just before and after the revolution of 1989. Again, it mostly concerns authorial, documentary way of unambiguous and firm directorial poetics, which Havelka had a chance to perfect on numerous Czech stages. By unveiling affairs through the principles of documentary theatre, he re-updates, revives and retrieves unequivocally tabooed socio-historical themes in front of the audience. He is equally aware of the relativity of theatre as a fleeting, ephemeral medium.³

From time to time, modern creative professionals bring forth certain inventive thematic spheres of issues, through which they model the dominant reception impact of their particular production narrative. It is understandable that this spectrum resonates in various ways, especially if it concerns a tabooed or controversial issue. Unusual production opportunities open up for creators especially when it comes to the issues that have not yet been covered in Slovakia. Dramaturges thus sketch the primary thematic area of modern society in great detail. Usually, directors model the dominant reception impact of a production in an optimal way, through which they establish a new functional status of theatre. The function that theatre eventually acquires depends on the communication acceptance of targeted audiences and it cannot be generalized automatically.⁴ Through a theme of a particular production, the creators raise many social questions, thus provoking the necessary public discourse. By establishing a theme for a particular production, they can alter and in a certain sense also adjust the important functional role of theatre.

Hence, therapeutic function can resonate in theatre alongside its entertainment function. On the other hand, documentary and politically engaged theatre is visibly related to educational, or rather didactic function, as well as to the aesthetic role of theatre; experimental theatre is related to aesthetic, as well as value-related and especially intellectual role, etc. As the plurality of themes in contemporary theatre multiplies, we cannot speak exclusively of one function of theatre. It is more and more connected to personalised (particular) targeting of, for example, minority theatres,

² LACIAKOVÁ, Diana. Spoločenské a dokumentárne v divadle Jána Šimka. In KNOPOVÁ, Elena (ed.). *Divadelní režiséři na prelome tisícročí*. Bratislava : Združenie slovenských divadelných kritikov a teoretikov, Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy SAV, 2014, pp. 258 – 282. ISBN 978-80-969266-4-0. Excerpt translated from Slovak.

³ BALLAY, Miroslav. (De)tabuizácia smrti v súčasnom divadle. In BALLAY, Miroslav et al. *(De)tabuizácia smrti v diskurzoch súčasného umenia*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2016, p. 76. ISBN 978-80-558-1098-0.

⁴ Especially in the area of commercial (agency, mainstream) theatre, one can observe a direct link between the dramaturgical choice of theme and the functional unilateral or broader targeting.

alternative theatres of marginalized groups, or special independent theatre groupings. Their research and the resulting erratic dramaturgy and programme structure oftentimes carry a unique, rare or even exclusive role.

The creator (director) usually provokes a considerable reception impact in the communicative process through an unusual theme. One time, particular theme is focused on the psychological/ethical aspect, while the other time on the spiritual/religious aspect, or, alternatively it is connected to a didactic, educational effect in its programme. It is related to the different dramaturgy strategies and orientations of individual theatres.

In general, it might be said that contemporary functional value parameters of theatres differ especially in their resultant reception impact on the theatre audience through a degree of the work's aesthetic effect on the audience. By generalizing these effects, we may arrive at summarising, functional aspects of theatre. In a sense, each individual seeks something different in theatre. It hinges on the changing status of theatre in society usually related to different expectations. Due to this fact its functions are modified, because each individual seeks in it something of his/her own, even something personal: cultural and social enrichment, aesthetic experiences, education, moral and value valency of effect, cathartic and therapeutic effects, entertainment (relaxation, recreation), religious and spiritual levels of reception experience, or even a ritual tendency of the audience's involvement in the form of authentic participation in a scenic event, etc.

It is subsequently followed by a notional classification of the individual functional aspects of theatre. We may speak of a primarily socializing function of a theatre event in the context of a certain collective involvement (of both the participants and of the public).⁵ This collective involvement presents a ritual remnant of theatre. Each visit to the theatre is accompanied by a ritual. To a lot of theatre-goers, participating in theatre events is an important ritual activity. As long as a theatre event complies with any primarily social (socialization) and ritual function, it becomes a collective integration intersection in intercultural mutuality. It is through this socio-cultural, integration ability that theatre is becoming an important intersection of cultures (in a dialogue of cultures, collaborations or even in globalisation and the like). This very collective presence of spectators in a theatre event has a culturally enriching purpose and function. It becomes a space for the mediating of aesthetic values. In a way, the participation of diverse audiences (discerning or lay, educated) in a theatre event meets the overall purpose of theatre communication in the cultural elevation, self-discovery and cultivation of the audiences.

We must not also overlook the sign nature of theatre communication. In this sense, theatre has an exclusively sign function, which is inevitable for any theatrical communication. In other words, a dramatic work presents a complex semiotic system in communication sense, because it is caught in a network of symbolic signs, conventions, cultural traditions, etc. This sign nature of theatre has a predominantly cultural

⁵ It mainly concerns the purpose of any single human interaction (as long as we fundamentally think of theatre as a space for interpersonal communication). In the intentions of an American theorist and director Richard Schechner, the purpose of such interaction is present in the core of each and every theatrical interaction (performance).

base.⁶ The sign nature is assigned not only to the structure of the production (work of theatre as a sign), but also to the overall communicative character of theatrical language. Said in the words of the Slovak theatrologist Dagmar Inštitorisová: "... a dramatic work is born as a language only when there is a balance established between the spectator (recipient), creative (procedural) and constructional (non-connotative) naming of all its aspects, that is, only if the authorial level finds an adequately clear naming of its strategies by the recipients, as well as a clear naming of the constructional level in both cases."⁷ We have to base ourselves on the sign nature of culture, which unequivocally involves theatre as well. Theatre audience discerns various cultural symbols as a vital part of the relevantly on-going meta-social commentary within the meaning of the approaches of cultural teatrology.⁸

However, let us return to contemporary theatre culture. The poetics of contemporary Slovak theatre is predominantly based on culture. This very culture allows the functioning of dominant cultural codes in it which, when especially viewed from current perspective, are immediately accepted. One of the age-old, functional aspects of theatre is to semantically impact varied audiences through a diversity of production narratives and distinct messages. It is the reception-related uncovering of meanings, which is an essential, even the key function of theatre in the communication relation itself. Due to it being a system of signs and symbols, theatre has a valuable meaning-bearing function.

When it comes to the to-date recorded production approaches, the most important purpose is to namely offer multi-dimensional platforms of meaning. Even in contemporary context, theatre is mainly becoming a space where diverse, unique narratives are interpreted through individual directorial poetics. In every dramatic work, directors convey an interpretation of the world in the very core of their production concept (or alternatively their directorial and dramaturgical concept), modelling the world as a sign (that is, as a certain compressed model).⁹

Out of the contemporary diversified poetics of production works in Slovakia, we may, therefore, highlight namely the authorial practices of contemporary documentary theatre. They have been instrumental in the creation of several distinctive, noteworthy works, noted for their distinctive value, even compellingness within the context of their meaning. Documentary practices are now used by several directors from numerous Slovak theatres and groupings. Their creative process in many ways alludes to an unusual understanding of theatre in contemporary society. Multidimensional functions are clearly saturated by documentary (experimental) theatre, which includes material, researches, and alternatively ethnographic field researches and the like. The key theme is predominantly generated through stimulating research

⁶ Culture itself finds its sign origin in semiotic aspect. A work of theatre works as a specific sign situation that we witness in an authentic *hic et nunc*.

⁷ INŠTITORISOVÁ, Dagmar. *Autorské stratégie nového divadla*. In PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar (ed.). *Generačné premeny a podoby slovenského divadla*. Bratislava : Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy SAV, 2012, p. 98. ISBN 978-80-971155-0-0. Excerpt translated from Slovak.

⁸ DUDZIK, Wojciech. *Ke kulturní teatrologii*. In KUNDEROVÁ, Radka (ed.). *Tendence v současném myšlení o divadle. Ad honorem prof. PhDr. Ivo Osolobě*. Brno : JAMU, 2010, p. 66. ISBN 978-80-86928-82-1.

⁹ In this sense, theatre is an art of the shortcut – the most intelligent one. Theatre thus bears a strange function of intelligible production (tendency). The fact that it is the compressed shortcut of immense extent and potential forces the creators to adjust the theatrical reality as a counterpart to the actuality of life.

alongside the creative process. We could argue that the foremost functional domain of documentary theatre is to make accessible meaningful themes surrounding the reality of life. In this sense, we could agree with the French teatrologist Patrice Pavis and his definition, according to which documentary theatre: "as its own text, it only uses documents and authentic sources, taken out and 'assembled' in accordance with the socio-political proposition of the dramatist."¹⁰

It is in this way that the contemporary theatre production visibly approaches the engaged levels of influence. It concerns the aforementioned prophylactic function of theatre. The creators discuss, for example, a socially bulging topic and use it to point to something traumatizing, even controversial that is present in contemporary culture. It presents the recipient with a unique opportunity to confront himself or herself with the creative research matter of diverse nature. The recipient oftentimes perceives the character of these research materials (for example, collections from different field researches and the like). Each of these materials woven into a dramatic work has a distinctive expressional quality and an individual, expressive (reception) effect. It is often a factual expression of authentic reality in the form of the stage reality of theatre. In Slovakia, certain directors approximate documentary theatre through their approaches and the nature of their creative process; among them are theatre director Iveta Ditte Jurčová; screenwriter and dramaturge Michal Ditte (Pôtoň Theatre, Bátovce¹¹); an author, director and performer Sláva Daubnerová, and many others.

Research-based Tendencies of the Work of Pôtoň Theatre, Bátovce

The directorial and dramaturgical tandem of Iveta Ditte Jurčová (1968) – Michal Ditte (1981) has been long bound for the research line of theatre in their distinctive authorial poetics, especially concerning their particular authorial projects. In their work, they make accessible the innovative purpose of theatre in contemporary society. They oftentimes establish poetics of civility, common natural authenticity, platitude, factuality, and marginally also triviality and even succinctness in certain absurd dimensions, reaches of everydayness, and so on. The contemporary authorial expression of creators, the articulation of authentic experience and unveiling mostly non-traditional, forgotten themes through documentary theatre are among the most captivating features.

The work of Pôtoň Theatre is thus authentically (contextually) rooted in a certain socio-cultural environment. This conclusion is also reached by Slovak teatrologist Elena Knopová, when she characterizes the genesis and the status of this professional theatre in the context of independent culture in Slovakia. "Ever since it was founded in 2000, Divadlo Pôtoň [Pôtoň Theatre] has been closely interconnected with southern Slovakia, with the Levice region. Creative professionals of the theatre develop their theatre activities in the territory of this region. Currently, Levice region is repeat-

¹⁰ PAVIS, Patrice. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris : DUNOD, 1996. [In Slovak: PAVIS, Patrice. *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 126. ISBN 80-88987-24-5. Excerpt translated from Slovak.]

¹¹ The only professional theatre in Slovakia with its residence in the countryside, in a relatively small village of Bátovce located in the Levice region on the southwest of Slovakia. Their activity is tied to the project called *Centre of Creativity and Arts*.



Michal Ditte: *Psota* [Poverty]. Marián Andrišek (Boy), Henrieta Rabová (Girl). Pôtoň Theatre, premiered on 24 February 2012. Direction Iveta Ditte Jurčová. Photo of the theatre archives.

edly listed in statistical surveys among the regions of Slovakia at risk of poverty, which has had an impact upon the development of Pôtoň Theatre. Its keen interest in documentary type of production with a markedly social message is, logically, an outcome of the receptiveness of its members to the environment in which they are engulfed and shaped. Its operation in marginalised regions, oftentimes affected by deprivation of different kinds (material, cultural, and mental) has become its artistic and civil manifesto. Theatre professionals have voluntarily chosen a socially problematic region and population to become their home, which has determined their mission to employ artistic and non-artistic activities in elevating the milieu and to gradually mitigate the above deprivations.¹² It is predominantly from this unique localization of Pôtoň Theatre that other wide-range dimensions and pragmatic use emerge, because the theatre offers a more continuous reflection of noticeable, socio-cultural themes (poverty, identity, war, migration and others). There is a clear shift in the function of a theatre of this type, which not only resides in the periphery, but also examines several marginal themes with a warning appeal, profiled through research (for instance, the following productions: *Terra Granus*, *Psota* [Poverty], *Krajina nepokosených lúk* [A Land of Unscythed Meadows], *Vojenské meno Rama* [Military Name Rama])¹³. Due to the fact that their creators (both home and visiting) clearly focus on a serious field reconnaissance (their work also includes dominant probing into the cultural raster in terms of realized research), their status in contemporary Slovak theatre culture is noteworthy and extraordinary. Even Elena Knopová observes that

¹² KNOPOVÁ, Elena. Theatre in the Context of Poverty, Poverty in the Context of Theatre. The Issue of Poverty and Social Exclusion Demonstrated on *Psota* [Poverty], Production of Pôtoň Theatre. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2016, Vol. 64, No. 3, p. 266.

¹³ The very last production *Vojenské meno Rama* (Military Name Rama, 2017) was created on the basis of the residence of Ukrainian director Sashko Brama (1988) in Pôtoň Theatre in the Centre of Creativity and Arts in Bátovce, i.e. in cooperation/creative collaboration with Pôtoň Theatre.

“... the co-called theatre of research has become a dominant feature of their work (...) [the productions] helped theatre makers carry out audience research and the research of its response to such issues as national and personal identity, affinity with the unknown and social identity and relationship with the arts. (...) Another typical feature is collective and authors’ creation in a documentary-oriented form of theatre. However, this is not documentary theatre in the proper sense of the word.”¹⁴

In this regard, the creative tandem is often distinctively directed at an effective, so-called prophylactic function of theatre (in the sense of preventing something pathological, considerably infectious, spreading in the society). Through this form of prevention, the creators capture the harmful manifestations of society and their symptoms derived from the contemporary perspective in a documentary way. Program-wisely, numerous contemporary directorial poetics (not only in the observed poetics of Pôtoň Theatre) are primarily focused on this very prophylactic tendency. That is clear from the engagement of theatres as well as single creators, which offer a contemporary perspective on Slovak society, its traumas and burning issues, current topics, etc.

The prophylactic effect of such theatre should make an expressional (reception) impact on its recipient, enriched by a meaningful communicational value: the anticipation of a significant threat, which is somehow felt and sensitively perceived in



Míchal Ditte: *Psota* [Poverty]. Marián Viskup (Man), Henrieta Rabová (Girl). Pôtoň Theatre, premiered on 24 February 2012. Direction Iveta Ditte Jurčová. Photo of the theatre archives.

¹⁴ KNOPOVÁ, E. Theatre in the Context of Poverty, Poverty in the Context of Theatre. The Issue of Poverty and Social Exclusion Demonstrated on *Psota* [Poverty], Production of Pôtoň Theatre, p. 266.



Michal Ditte: *Psota* [Poverty]. Rado Ligač (Adam), Marián Viskup (Man). Pôtoň Theatre, premiered on 24 February 2012. Direction Iveta Ditte Jurčová. Photo of the theatre archives.

society (for example, the aforementioned theme of poverty, identity, war, etc.). Ultimately, the positive effect of making such marginal, tabooed or generally overlooked themes accessible deserves our appreciation, as by reflecting on them, theatrical work gains a prophylactic meaning.

When it comes to Slovak context, the production entitled *Poverty* (2012), directed by Iveta Ditte Jurčová, is what especially resonated with audiences and critics in the past decade. In it, the director uncovered a sensitive and partially pushed-aside theme of real poverty, present especially in the marginalised areas of Slovakia, while the majority society overlooks it. Ditte Jurčová not only opted for this theme based on extensive and multiple researches (it is evident that she had to search in the authentic cultural area in order to discover it), but she also transformed the work for the stage, i.e. into a certain illusionary fiction in the form of a dramatic text written by Michal

Michal Ditte: *Psota*
[Poverty]. Marián Viskup
(Man), Andrea Sabová
(Woman), Rado Ligač
(Adam). Pôtoň Theatre,
premiered on 24 February
2012. Direction Iveta Ditte
Jurčová. Photo of the
theatre archives.



Ditte.¹⁵ The production is about a Slovak family patent poverty. Ditte Jurčová purposefully translated the chosen theme into a more universal language. It suddenly ceased to be poverty of a real, particular marginalised group of citizens (ethnicity unspecified on purpose), but a generalized problem, authentically linked to the environment of southwestern, or, rather, southern Slovakia. Out of this socio-cultural terrain we see emerging a case of poverty hitting many families in Slovakia, all in a documentary format. In a targeted way, the director gave prominence to the identified penury in Slovakia, based on the field research in Tekovské Lužany, as well as in other locations in this region.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See BALLAY, Miroslav. (De)tabuizácia smrti v súčasnom divadle, pp. 49 – 87.

In the form of theatre, the transformed reality of poverty functioned predominantly as a sign. The prophylactic effect of the theatre production entitled *Poverty* then flowed out of the evident ability of single creators to articulate real expressions of a living world through stage illusion. These were reflected through a clearly documentary optics – researched, collected and adequately processed (by the author) into an appealing work with a resonating effect and an impact in the social sphere.

Research-based Creative Process of the Director and Performer Sláva Daubnerová

Sláva Daubnerová (1980), Slovak performer, director and author, carries out an intensive documentary research within the scope of selected themes, which she subjects to her own, authorial interpretation. In her physical (kinetic) expression, she usually achieves aesthetically (formally) unique intermedia projects. When collecting creative material, she equally proceeds from predominantly research-related foundation, through which she clearly contributes to authorial reflection on numerous useful themes: general, universal, as well as marginal ones. Just like the Pôtoň Theatre tandem, Daubnerová, too, probes into the diverse raster of contemporary culture through targeted search.¹⁷ She brings forth heavy and even problematic themes, which oftentimes illustrate the quality of the present world in the author's intensified interpretation. Sláva Daubnerová usually thoroughly documents and researches



Sláva Daubnerová: *Solo lamentoso*. Premiered on 10 December 2012 at the SEUK Theatre. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý.

¹⁷ Here we can already take note of the earlier creative interferences of Sláva Daubnerová with the tandem Iveta Ditte Jurčová and Michal Ditte, right before her choice to gain independence in the P.A.T. theatre, particularly the production titled *Shake ShakespeaRe_Macbeth* (2007, Pôtoň Theatre).



Sláva Daubnerová: *Solo lamentoso*. Premiered on 10 December 2012 at the SLUK Theatre. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý.

the particular themes of her authorial work. Subsequently, she transforms them in a physical and intermedia way as performer. Her domain is mostly her own authorial position in the performances of physical/intermedia theatre. She likes to combine authentic, occasionally almost civil expression with real video projection of herself during the performance. The audience witnesses the creation of a combination of the author's authentic acting and visual projection, alternatively non-verbal physical expression in combination with her reproduced voice, etc. An example of this is the highly appreciated *Solo lamentoso* (2015), which was particularly well received by the theatre and critic community.¹⁸ In it, Daubnerová gives an account of "singing house" case in Štúrovo, which has been given a broad mass media coverage.¹⁹ It was a story of a woman, who was a nuisance to her neighbourhood: for fourteen years, every single day, she would pester her neighbours by putting on reproduced music, an aria sung by Plácido Domingo. In this case, too, the author, director and performer Sláva Daubnerová got hold of an almost unbelievable-sounding theme, all via the documentary approach – her own targeted research of a real case. Through this case emerged a noteworthy theme with a wider reach: the human fight against society in defence of their freedom/independence. The discovery of this theme was an outcome of the author's research of the environment, of its sociology, the context of an urban location (etc.), which inspired a thorough uncovering of a the life testimony of a bizarre woman, Eva N. Sláva Daubnerová gradually tried to grasp this

¹⁸ In 2016, the visual and kinetic performance *Solo lamentoso* won the Student Jury Prize at the festival New Drama 2016.

¹⁹ The town is located in southern Slovakia, which is an ethnically mixed area.



Sláva Daubnerová: *Solo lamentoso*. Premiered on 10 December 2012 at the SEUK Theatre. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý.

mysterious female in multiple ways. The intent was to portray a person/a woman, seemingly simple, honest, paying her taxes, but at the same time lost in her weirdness. Monotonousness became the resulting expression of the physical performance in the rendition of Sláva Daubnerová. She constantly administered it in greater and greater doses, literally gradating it. Consequently, it was through this monstrosity that the performer achieved a certain ritual quality (everyday repeating of the same aria and so on). It was an exceptionally interesting way to even achieve the prophylactic effect of theatre in the form of an inner confession of a controversial citizen of the town of Štúrovo. Through an intensive authorial, physical manner, Daubnerová “interiorized” the peculiar citizen of Štúrovo fighting the public. She devised her own creative research from the media-covered case of the “singing house”. However, she enriched the media content with an observational probe into the actions of an individual, behaving on the one hand with aversion, and on the other, in a prophylactic reactive way towards the surroundings. The director’s approach was based on a strict avoidance of judging the controversial citizen of the town of Štúrovo. One could say that through her, she tried to effectively diagnose the whole contemporary society. In order to achieve this goal, she made use of a problematic citizen and an attempt to immerse into her moral profile. Daubnerová’s documentary research clearly resulted in generalization: from a particular struggle of an ordinary citizen, of an outsider who turned against her neighbours living in the same street, to a general struggle of an individual with the general external factors of her environment. To a great extent, she was tempted to examine the moral ambivalence of peculiar Eva N., who, in her personal conflict with the neighbouring community, opted for a non-traditional, even radical solution of her personal problem (the constant playing of the



Sláva Daubnerová: *Solo lamentoso*. Premiered on 10 December 2012 at the SEUK Theatre. Photo by Ctibor Bachratý.

same aria). According to Slovak theatre historian Dagmar Podmaková, “Sláva Daubnerová’s productions do not pose the question of the borderline between documentary theatre and performance within the meaning of the theatre of visual arts (Patrice Pavis). Against their backdrop, the spectator waits in suspense for the development of the story, ... Her project *Solo lamentoso* (2015) is a response to the so-called singing house in the town of Štúrovo which has been given a broad mass-media coverage. For fourteen years, a female citizen of Štúrovo used to annoy her neighbours, who lived in the same street, by playing excessively loud music. This was her reaction to the barking of the dogs in the neighbourhood. Daubnerová unfolds the sad and tragic story of neighbourly relations, as narrated by the owner of the “singing house”, Éva N. The desperate discontentment and suffering of Éva N. outgrows into anger and hatred which is also reflected in her Internet blogs. By combining music, movement, accompanying words of the protagonist, excerpts of authentic television shots, Sláva Daubnerová expresses man’s solitude. A dearth of understanding of her neighbours in their lowness is portrayed metaphorically, through small mock-ups of houses encircling the real and isolated world of Éva N., hidden inside her house. The aria of revenge of the Queen of the Night from Mozart’s *Čarovná flauta* [The Magic Flute], in the finale replacing the aria of Manrico from Verdi’s *Trubadúr* [The Troubadour] rendered by Plácido Domingo, which she repeatedly played for many years (deliberately in low-quality recording), is a painful allusion to human life.”²⁰

²⁰ PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar. In Quest of a New (Slovak) Dramaturgy. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2016, Vol. 64, No. 3, p. 257. Excerpt translated from Slovak.

Daubnerová's research was linked to shedding light on a mysterious character of Štúrovo, excluded from the society/the majority due to her apparent weirdness. Through her own examination, but especially through the kinetic and overall inter-media expression, the director and author (the performer) strictly established an appellative, exceptionally reception impact of a personal authorial narrative. Through the aforementioned monotonousness of her performance, she stimulated the predominantly ethical and appellative impact of the work. Here we need to further categorize Daubnerová's specific physical expression combined with the intermedia one. In the words of the theatrologist Elena Knopová: "As director and performer, Sláva Daubnerová also focuses on a simple repetitive action, generally minimalistic expression (both lexically and expressively). She boils down her character to a basic set of signs dominated by physicality and image (...) There is an absence of imitation or pretence of emotional states (...)." ²¹ In certain places in *Solo lamentoso*, she expressed rituality through stereotypic movement. Through rituality she made present the figuratively escalated conflict of society and the defence of a peculiar individual belonging to it. ²²

Between Various Art Forms

Andrej Kalinka (1978) is a musical composer, author, librettist and director. In his authorial creative work (mostly in the Bratislava artist grouping *Med a prach* [Honey and Dust] and alternatively other theatre and artist groupings), he consistently applies research focusing on varied, mostly musical and art (sacral) material, which serves him to establish several reception influences of his meditative, contemplative works. Kalinka likes using them to immerse into spiritual themes. In his case, research consists of a broad-spectrum search – a selection of particular musical works, usually from the sacral sphere, which he then subjects to his own authorial interpretation, at least in a thorough scenic grasp.

The experimental language of the authorial creative work of Andrej Kalinka mainly lies in an intensive combining (synthesizing) of several art forms (for example, in the works entitled *Bartimejove pašie* ([Bartimaeus's Passion] 2012), *Domov Eros Viera* ([Home Eros Faith] 2014), *Kráska a hnus* ([Beauty and Disgust] 2016) and others). It results in works situated in between theatre, concert, art installation, performance, etc. A clear thematisation of the sacral subject and musical citations lead to a primarily spiritual influence in the poetics of the *Med a prach* grouping. Andrej Kalinka consistently focuses on an intensive uncovering (as if through an archaeological scrutiny) of primarily spiritual beauty. That is why his authorial (textual, directorial and musical) creative work possesses a religious dimension, for example, thanks to frequent, apparent paraphrases and citations from musical works and chants or textual fragments from the liturgical works in Old Slavonic and individual fragments from the Gospel texts in Latin, etc. In this case, Kalinka's works could be compared to at least a scenic

²¹ KNOPOVÁ, Elena. Postdramatické divadlo minimalistickej réžie v tvorbe Slávy Daubnerovej a Eduarda Kudláča. In PODMAKOVÁ, Dagmar (ed.). *Proces rozvoja divadelnej réžie po roku 1989*. Bratislava : Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy SAV, 2012, p. 112. ISBN 978-80-967283-9-8.

²² In 2017, the Slovak National Theatre ordered an authorial production of *Spievajúci dom* [The Singing House] under the direction of Sláva Daubnerová, brought about due to the earlier well-received performance *Solo lamentoso* (2015).

meditation. For example, in the work *Beauty and Disgust* (2016), the author achieved a ritual effect with a multiple effect on the recipient. In the tectonics of the majority of his scenic works, one could observe the ritual elements in individual developing scores. He is inspired by parts, sometimes just “essences” of religious holidays, which he re-enacts in spectacular diversity. The structure of a work composed in such a fashion is made of a continuous sequence of scores of mostly musical and notational nature. Scores, originally purely musical, serve the purpose of the individual registration of the multiple voices of all performers, the goal being the fixation of the created polysemy of the voices of a literally renaissance quality. The reception impact is, understandably so, enhanced by the scenic dimension of such composed concert/performance/installation. The spiritual dimension of the experience does not stem from the liturgical foundation of the utilized religious motifs in the vocal and instrumental interpretation, but rather from the holistic effect of the noble- and sacred-looking fragments of cultural heritage.

In this sense, Andrej Kalinka contributes to the re-evaluation of the contemporary mission of theatre. Consequently, he is heading towards its religious side. He experiments with various art genres. The contemplative nature of this type of theatre is also enhanced by non-theatrical spaces, valuable historical buildings, temples and the like, where he localises the course of his scenic works in a well-thought-out manner. In many ways, Kalinka’s authorial endeavours may be referred to as site specific works (synagogue, museum, gallery spaces), which, through their genius loci, contribute to the multidimensional transcendental reach.

Conclusion

Out of the proposed sketch of the metamorphoses of contemporary Slovak theatre in on-going socio-cultural transformations, we may sense a clear modification of its functional roles. In contemporary theatre, it is much easier to notice an intensified socially committed tendency, as well as its prophylactic function alongside the usual cathartic function. The reception (communication) impact of theatre is also worth our attention, as it presents an important aspect of authorial (directorial) creative process. It may be concluded that the changing communication significance of contemporary theatre in relation to the transformations of the mentioned theatre practices (creative process as research; documentary, intermedia or ritual practices) is undeniably linked to the pragmatic modification of its age-old functions – or generally its overall functional changeability.

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