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Theatre as a Value-based Discourse
Slovak Theatre and Contemporary
European Theatre Culture

Elena Knopová (ed.)

Conference Proceedings
from the International Scientific Conference
5th and 6th of October 2017
Bratislava, Slovakia

Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Institute of Theatre and Film Research



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Theatre as a Value-based Discourse
Slovak Theatre and Contemporary European Theatre Culture

Conference Proceedings from the International Scientific Conference
“Theatre as a Value-based Discourse – Slovak Theatre
and Contemporary European Theatre Culture“,
5th and 6th of October 2017, Bratislava, Slovakia

Editor: PhDr. Elena Knopová, PhD.

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**Theatre as a Value-based Discourse –
Slovak Theatre and Contemporary European Theatre Culture**

International Scientific Conference
5th and 6th of October 2017
Bratislava, Slovakia

Organizers:

Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Association of Slovak Theatre Critics and Theoreticians

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Conference Languages:

Slovak, English, French

Conference Schedule

Thursday 5. 10. 2017

9:30 – *Welcoming the participants*

9:40 – 12:30

Chair of the section is Elena Knopová

MILOŠ MISTRÍK: Slovak Theatre as a European Entity

Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia

ARNAUD RYKNER: “Contemporary is Only a Difficult Time to Get Through.” Claude Régy: an Untimely and Borderless Theatre

New Sorbonne University – Paris 3; University Institute of France, France

DENIS PONIŽ: The Central Europe Phenomenon: How Does It Influence the Theatre Culture in Region?

Emeritus professor, Ljubljana, Slovenia

MICHAL BABIAK: From Mirrors to Kaleidoscopes: The Possibilities of Shaping Value-based Discourse in a World of Relative Values

Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

JAN VEDRAL: Director Martin Čičvák and Actor Ondřej Brousek in the Big Drama Productions of the Vinohrady Theatre: The Thematization of the Experienced Reality of a Postmodern Contemporary in Modern Drama Productions (Ibsen, Camus, Frisch, Shaffer)

Vinohrady Theatre, Prague, Czech Republic

ROBERT BAYER: Myth and History – Producing Time and Social Criticism. Notes to the “Oil Version” of *The Ring Cycle* Presented by Frank Castorf in Bayreuth

Theatre researcher and publicist, Munich, Germany

13:30 – 17:00

Chair of the section is Miloš Mistrík

MARCO CONSOLINI: **Dario Fo: Heir to Commedia dell'Arte**

New Sorbonne University – Paris 3, France

VINCENZO MAZZA: **A Theatre Against Totalitarianisms. *L'État de siège* [The State of Siege], a Play by Jean-Louis Barrault and Albert Camus**

Paul-Valéry University – Montpellier 3, France

DOROTA FOX: **Etnographic Theatre in Poland as a Medium of Cultural Memory**

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

MAREK GODOVIČ: **Past and Present Values – the Conversion of Values in the Work of Sławomir Mrozek and their Relevance for the Present World**

Theatre Institute in Bratislava, Slovakia

ANETA GŁOWACKA: **Contemporary Political Theatre in Poland. From Criticism to Commitment**

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Friday 6. 10. 2017

9:00 – 12:30

Chair of the section is Dáša Čiripová

CLARA ESCODA: **Divergent Subjects: Disrupting the Inherited Lifelines of Global Capitalism in Alice Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (2014)**

University of Barcelona, Spain

VERÓNICA RODRÍGUEZ: **The Politico-Aesthetic Value of David Greig's Theatre**

University of Barcelona, Spain

MICHAELA MOJŽIŠOVÁ: The Picture of a Crisis in Interpersonal Relationships and Critique of Patriarchy in the Works of Opera Director Peter Konwitschny

Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia

LUCYNA SPYRKA: Possibilities and Limitations of Translation of the Slovak Drama into Polish Culture

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

ROK ANDRES: Theatre and Culture in the Period of an Artistic Progress

University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

DAGMAR PODMAKOVÁ: The Image/Message of the “Endlösung” in Bratislava Productions of the Last Decade

Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia

13:30 – 16:00

Chair of the section is Michaela Mojžišová

ELENA KNOPOVÁ: Memory Appeal as a Theatrical Value: The Power of Humanity and the Ideology of Patriotism

Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia

DAGMAR KROČANOVÁ: Drama Under Threat (Events and Personalities of National History as the Subject Matter and Theme for 20th and 21st Century Slovak Drama)

Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

MIROSLAV BALLAY: Prophylactic Importance of Contemporary Theatre (Using Selected Examples of Current Theatre Approaches)

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia

MARTIN TIMKO: Bednárík's Reports on the State of Our World

Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica; Theatre Institute in Bratislava, Slovakia

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Preface

What is contemporary European theatre like? In recent years, it has been sceptically believed that big personalities or grand themes have vanished. There is too much mediocrity and there are no personalities of the 20th century calibre who would have the power to move the theatre forward, to expand its forms and styles and to establish ingenious schools that would create new space for experimenting. And, above all, to shape a theatre responsive to the needs of our time. Modern theatre should also take an active part in a value-based discourse, bring up current themes that reverberate in unison with Man of our time, which is particularly complex and full of conflicts. Society needs such kind of theatre and we have it. But, can we recognize it?

The conference focus was on the analysis of values represented by contemporary drama in recent decades and their connection with the newly-conceived values of a society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. There is a need to define the state of theatre and its capacity to express, through artistic means, the theme of Man and his or her role in modern society, to explore to what extent theatre can fulfil its mission, from social, ethical or philosophical points of view, to be the stage of the world and to mirror Man's soul.

The objective of the proceedings was to present papers on theatre ensembles and theatre personalities who pose life-provoking themes in the world of conflicts. Each domestic or foreign speaker was invited to present an original example and through a kaleidoscope of papers the conference participants had the opportunity to observe what contemporary theatre is like, what personalities, ensembles or themes it offers. New emerging initiatives are expected to be inspirational. On the other hand, this also applies to older theatre and drama personalities, highly respected names, art streams, schools that have been around for many years or that re-emerge to join in the discourse with the generations of theatre professionals.

The main conference thematic areas were Theatre personalities and modern theatre, The value message of the older personalities of theatre and

drama for contemporary drama creation, Theatre acting as a support for or destruction of values, Art theatre and/or opinion theatre, Theatre language as a quest for a paragon.

What can be the message to the future? Between 1987 and 2018, in Taormina for the first time and most recently in St. Petersburg, the Europe Theatre Prize was awarded. The main prize was awarded to the most esteemed personalities of European theatre and also The Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities went to tens of theatre professionals who contributed to the creation of theatre arts on the verge of millennia. Currently, for lack of funding, the event has come to a halt. Should it be renewed, will we be able to name the inspirational processes which contribute to making headway in our theatre? In European theatre? It is expected that also our conference will give answers to the questions, be to a modest extent.

Editor

Slovak Theatre as a European Entity

Miloš Mistrík

Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia

Abstract: The article presents an overview of the conference's core themes, especially the relationship between Slovak and European theatre and the issue of values introduced by theatre in the 20th and 21st centuries. In addition to authenticity and truthfulness, there are negative themes alerting to a crisis in values that has been prevailing ever since the time of the early generation of authors of the theatre of the absurd from the mid-20th century. Sometimes the purpose of such an image is to alert our contemporaries to start seeking a way out of the crisis. However, in recent years it has become imperative to ask ourselves whether the predominance of negative themes has the power to mobilize men to defiance and put them on a mission for new points of departure. This paper poses questions and brings up certain thematic subjects, assuming that the papers presented will strive to give answers to the highlighted theme from a variety of perspectives.

Keywords: Slovak theatre, European theatre, the theatre of the absurd, in-yer-face drama, crisis of values

Slovak and European

It is no coincidence that Slovak theatre in the European context has been linked with the issue of values. Our intention was to deliberate on Slovak theatre but not ignore its context, which for convenience is referred to as "European". We have also decided to invite colleagues from other countries to talk about their theatre contexts, dramatists, and personalities shaping their national traditions and the present. Our intention was to present a multi-dimensional picture of diverse dramatic works, developmental stages, and artistic trends across the continent. Slovak theatre is perceived as an autonomous component of European culture and one of many European entities. It has absorbed a variety of influences from abroad, largely thanks to the productions of foreign playwrights whose works undergo a kind of nostrification throughout the staging process. The staging of a foreign play means its author is invariably involved in national ideological and social contexts.

Foreign influences are not only introduced via the production of foreign dramatic texts but also via immediate inspiration drawn by national theatre professionals from theatre practice. There is a variety of individual styles of direction and transpersonal schools of acting which raise the interest of our theatre professionals and are an inspiration for a positive, affirmative, or even a contradictory or controversial reaction. National theatre scenes have responded to Stanislavski's system (the director Janko Borodáč), biomechanics (the director Ján Jamnický), and postmodernism (the director Jozef Bednárík). Another option is to engage in an argument with them, for instance, with the psychological realism in the Slovak National Theatre of the late 1930s and the avant garde of the 1980s onwards which is present in the works of the creative professionals Karol Horák and Jozef Bednárík. In this manner, the national theatre is both interlinked with neighbouring and close cultures (e.g., Czech, Russian, Polish, and German) as well as with others which also cope with diverse artistic trends (e.g., French and English) as various ideas circulate across all of Europe. Without their impulses Slovak theatre would not be around; after all, would there even be a theatre culture without William Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Konstantin Sergejevich Stanislavski, Louise Jovet, or Jerzy Grotowski?

But it would not suffice to just talk about the overlap between Slovak and European theatre and about individual productions, directors, actors, opera singers, and literary authors. If we stay at the level of restaging, individual scenes, sketches, costumes, or masks, in the best case we would end up in making external comparisons or gathering statistical data; however, this would be without a more profound message. It goes without saying that individuals are also important as they provide essential factual material for research; however, if we are complacent with them we will end up analysing modern variations of *commedia dell'arte* masks, which are found in modern productions, or directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine, whose productions and rehearsing were inspired by biomechanics and impulses and were found in Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekte*. Such partial characteristics of comparison will not contribute to achieving the goals of this conference.

Therefore, there is a crucial word ("values") contained in the name of the conference. At a time of a universal values crisis perceived by the modern world, we are tempted to ask what values, if any, Slovak and foreign theatre had to offer to their audiences. If there are some values present, what kind of values are they? We are not just hinting at formal declarations that interconnect the dramatic arts here and elsewhere but rather at something

more profound, something hidden deep down there and permanently and obstinately present.

It was easy to write out the conference name “Theatre as a Value-based Discourse – Slovak Theatre and Contemporary European Theatre Culture”, but it is more challenging to try to define it further. At a time of a universal value crisis, it is difficult to talk about values that are expected to connect us. Are there any such common values? Sometimes we have a problem to agree on whether uniting Europe brings a new value or whether authentic values are found in its regions in national states. Naturally, this conference is not focused on big politics; such topics will be skipped. Above all, our aim is to outline whether (if at all) and what values are communicated by dramatic art, i.e., whether there are any such common values that connect us and which everyone understands and identifies themselves with, or, to say the least, whether they are instrumental in bringing us closer together and helping us understand one another. It is to be hoped that the papers to be presented will contain such values, and that we will be able to define them.

The loss of values

With respect to drama creation and theatre, it can be said that it was Samuel Beckett who took away our last hope by not allowing Godot to come. *Čakanie na Godota* [Waiting for Godot] proved futile. Redemption from without by someone who will save us was never materialized in Beckett’s play, and this was clearly demonstrated by the Irish dramatist during the time of writing the play between 1948 and 1949 as well as in 1953, when the play was first staged in Paris. Let us ignore the question as to who Godot is, what he epitomizes, and what is expected of him. There are numerous answers to that, and in Slovak theatre practice one finds several interpretations of Godot productions (directed by Milan Lasica, Vladimír Strnisko, Pavel Mikulík, Štefan Korenči, Róbert Mankovecký, Martin Čičvák, and Blahoslav Uhlár). The essence is not hidden in Godot per se, in him as a person or in his face, appearance, role, or action, but rather in the fact that he did not turn up. Vladimir and Estragon lose hope and they get stuck on the crossroads of an impasse. They have nowhere to go, their past has vanished, and their future does not lie open before them. Roughly around the same decade of the 20th century, this bleak fact was also asserted by two couples (the Smiths and the Martins) in Ionesco’s *Plešatá speváčka* [The Bald Soprano], albeit viewed from a different perspective. They reach a point when they no longer under-

stand one another, and they stop in a mutually motionless posture, making no headway and losing hope and their future. One could say that *Plešatá speváčka* [The Bald Soprano] and *Čakanie na Godota* [Waiting for Godot] contain very nihilistic messages. However, after many decades, are we not in a very similar situation today? With this group of playwrights singled out by Martin Esslin (let us not forget that Jean Genet, Fernando Arrabal, and Harold Pinter also belonged there), one is fully aware of their scepticism and their dilemma, which is generally explained by the fact that they were able to artistically sense and recognize the crises and lurking threats of the century from war right down to the making of an atomic bomb more than ordinary men. Their souls responded to what posed a risk to the blinded world, and they expressed their fear through their plays. Their seemingly negativist authorial views may also be explained conversely; they were determined not to hide the truth, i.e., in terms of authorship, the motivations for their action were positive. After all, dramas are, or ought to be, about getting to know the truth, and the truth is one of the biggest of values. It depends on whether the author can be authentic in the way he approaches the audience. The truth is not always pleasant; on the contrary, it can sometimes literally be unpleasant, such as the truth about the state of the world expressed by Beckett through Godot not turning up. He talked about nothingness, and by talking about it he actually advocated the existence of man. He was engaged artistically and philosophically. The catharsis was accomplished through the purgatory process of the cruel truth. The grotesque, absurd, and almost inhuman world of the theatre of the absurd can be understood as a big warning, like tam-tam drums against inhumanity and ignorance, as something positive through the portrayal of the negative.

From the mid-twentieth century to its end, theatre experienced a period of a negativist view of the world along with the prospect of a world with a better future. However, these were not just decades during which only pessimistic plays were written or tragedies staged. There were also comedies, and most importantly there were psychologically, philosophically, and logically analytical emotional plays without nonsense and full of humanism and admiration for man, even though he sometimes failed in them. Let us recall the emotional Tennessee Williams, the socially analytical Arthur Miller, the man of principle Jean-Paul Sartre, and the humane Slovak Ivan Bukovčan as well as many others. This was a time when positive values were reached through exceptionally critical or negative attitudes towards reality, towards the state of man, and towards the world. There are several values that defy

nothingness, starting with old traditional values such as preservation, freedom, hope, love, and friendship. In theatre, which is mimetically concrete and where a human is portrayed by a human, the above values acquire a human face and a human dimension.

How are we to approach the period that came later, the early 21st century, which we are now living in? There are other changes taking place which may have been anticipated, and yet they are being ushered in with great urgency. In modern drama and theatre, things that used to be mythicized only recently are no longer a taboo. Reality has surpassed all our concerns and premonitions. For instance, the violence portrayed on stage thirty years ago was an innocent scuffle compared to what is being shown now. Sex in a production used to be a kind of metaphor compared to the modern and realistically rendered borderline practices in certain productions today where even pornographers would blush. Suicide is no longer a delicate and sad theme having an ancient touch; it appears almost as a seductive theme like *Psychosis 4:48* by Sarah Kane. When musing over modern drama, would it be correct to say that by staging such negative things the authors in fact aspire to a kind of prevention, much like the case of the theatre of the absurd? In other words, is it not about an artistic administration of a powerful theatrical medicine inducing a negative response which boosts our emotional and intellectual immunity towards evil portrayed on stage?

This is easily said. There is an overt intention to shock the audience, and the question is whether we have to make do with commercial theatre and aggressive commercial practices or rather with a genuinely true and authentic artistic narrative. It should not be forgotten that in recent decades there has been a shift across all of European society from conservative attitudes to more liberal ones, which is manifested, among other things, in the attitudes to spiritual matters. That which was unthinkable to be fit for staging twenty-five years ago would not outrage us now and would only shock the most conservative members of society. Let me mention the Polish case of *Klatwa* [The Curse] staged by Warsaw Teatr Powszechny [Powszechny Theatre] or a more recent similar experience from the Slovak town of Brezno, where an amateur performance of *Kováči* [The Blacksmiths] by Miloš Nikolič was banned by the central Slovak protector of national purity.

Have we not reached the very end of the existence of values? This could happen eventually, considering the parallel chaos of value criteria and value hierarchy along with the individualization and atomization of positive phenomena and the disintegration of the belief system into as many parts as

there are people in the world. We are witnessing the emergence of the predominance of a kind of essential and single value which egotistic humankind is still willing to profess to: a value acknowledged by billions of true selves. The history of theatre art and drama may smoothly guide us through a thousand-year old timeline of human evolution. Ancient drama had a transparent value structure; the world's order was clear and understandable, it was the infallible gods taking decisions and affecting human fate. In classicist drama, honour and the king were fought for, and man oscillated in this value frame, which was delineated by power and society. Even in the late 19th century, burgher drama was a reflection of a solid albeit slowly disintegrating social pattern. The values were clearly set in socialist realism as well: art was derived from working-class people and was intended for the working proletariat on its way to a better future.

Having said that, not everything ought to be viewed so bleakly. If we believe that ancient theatre is far too transparent while the picture of the modern world as portrayed by contemporary theatre is perceived as conflicting, contradictory, reaching to the extremes and pulling down principles and classical morality, decency, and breaking all taboos, this is not to imply that we only live in extremes and that we have abandoned initially virtuous inspirations for good. The value crisis is reflected in drama, the repertoires of European theatres, direction, and creation, and was tirelessly alerted to by the theatre of the absurd and conclusively supported by the most recent period of contemporary theatre of the early 21st century, by authors whose creation was referred to as "in-yer-face" by Alex Sierz. This is largely because contemporary theatre also contains positive values, and one should be knowledgeable of them by comparing Slovak theatre within the European context, or, better still, within a universal human context. The history of theatre art is a continuum, and it captures all facets of our lives, sometimes the better ones and sometimes the worse ones. Continuity also has a geographical dimension; the European overlaps with the Slovak and vice versa.

Connections

Having realized that Slovak theatre is connected to European theatre historically, geographically, and in terms of values, the question of how we are interconnected is very apt. Why is it that through Slovak theatre we feel we are in Europe, and why is it that Europe is mirrored in our theatre? If we are to base ourselves on external signs, such as the participation of Slovak theatres

in foreign festivals, the hosting of Slovak directors and actors in other countries, or the translation and performance of our national drama creation in reputable theatre buildings, we would get an unpleasant feeling that Slovak theatre continues to be deficient in the properly European dimension as it fails to assert itself elsewhere. (The reasons behind the external failure of contacts are different, such as the language barrier, the poor functioning of promotion-oriented institutions, and undoubtedly the indifference of other countries to get out of a rut and seek emerging and unknown cultures.)

The connection between Slovak theatre and the theatre of another countries which has no distinct external manifestation must therefore have a different form of existence. To my mind, this is taking place through a rhizomatic international dramatic structure. Deleuze's rhizomatic model refers to a branched and non-hierarchically grown acentered system: any point of this model can be transversally connected to any other thing at any point. The theatre and theatre professionals do not care much about keeping decorum, but they would much rather see things with their own eyes, read texts, meet people, learn from their colleagues, visit an exhibition, and watch a film on a projection screen. In principle, theatre is a collective art, and this really works for them. This is best proven by the hands-on experience drawn from Slovak theatre which is represented by Jozef Bednárík's productions. At the time we lived behind the Iron Curtain, he saw a great number of performances put on European and international stages. When we reflect on his productions, we recognize his innovative feedback on what was then postmodernism. At a time when our theory and critique did not exactly name the new period's artistic trend and the philosophy of postmodernism (i.e., the 1980s), Bednárík, while lacking theoretical preparation, was inspired by it in his own productions by learning from seeing. Another example is Blaho Uhlár, who started the Stoka Theatre Company in the early 1990s. We remember the "texts" of his productions that were improvised by actors, and when the critical and black glasses of Uhlár's narrative are compared to the drama staged in parallel abroad one cannot but see the obvious similarity between them. After 2000, Theatre SKRAT, which was founded by Ľubomír Burgr, was clearly inspired by Uhlár. In recent decades, undeclared ties have been nothing new. They have been known from long ago and were present in the early works of Leopold Lahola and Peter Karvaš in the 1940s, which reflected on literary existentialism. Last but not least, the inspiration drawn from Russian theatre and declared in the works of Janko Borodáč and Ján Jamnický has already been touched upon. Slovak and European theatre have

shared a common basis, and Slovak theatre, sometimes in discontinuity and with time delays, has been connecting with European theatre culture over and over again.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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Biography:

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From Mirrors to Kaleidoscopes: The Possibilities of Shaping Value-based Discourse in a World of Relative Values

Michal Babiak

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Abstract: This contribution reflects on the possibility of setting up value-based criteria, as well as evaluation itself, in a postmodern context. Drawing on the theses of Walter Benjamin, the contribution points out the loss of the auratic dimension of art and theatre in the postmodern context as well as the loss of modernist engagement. It questions Francis Fukuyama's thesis about "the end of history" and reflects on current forms of theatre practice that contain residues of, or a potential return to, a modernist programme. The contribution leaves open the question of how much the departure points of postmodernist poetics have been exhausted today, and/or whether one could speak of a return once again to the idea-based departure points of modernism.

Key words: modernism, postmodernism, Walter Benjamin, Francis Fukuyama, "end of history", values, evaluation, engagement

In what is surely one of the most frequently quoted texts dealing with the essence and mission of theatre, Shakespeare's Hamlet says: "Anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure..." Shakespeare's metaphor of a mirror becomes a synecdoche of mimesis construed by the spirit of the Renaissance in Aristotle's understanding; art is based on mimesis, that is imitation and a presentation of sensory objectification, however, not of ideas, as Plato claimed, but as mimesis of reality. Moving art from the low intellectual level, lower than nature itself, where Plato put it (mimesis as the art of imitating nature, and nature being only the representation of ideas), Aristotle attributes tragedy with an important social and mental position, reflecting it as a cathartic phenomenon which provides man with a repeating ideal production of the inner juices, harmonic accord, and thus also a more objective view of the world. This is the beginning of a journey where theatre experienced different views of its status in society:

it was given the attribute of having a moral and dogmatic function, of being a didactic tool in relation to science as being an inferior instrument that could present life and the world even to the common man. However, it was also assigned the task of carrying ideologies, being a war instrument, and a critic of individual and social ailments; it was given the task of being a moral institution of nations as well as being an entertainment tool all the way to the status of a sovereign artwork whose primary task was to follow its aesthetic function and push any other functions to the background.

From the times of agon until the 20th century, theatre was a space in which the imperative of reflecting on “nature, showing its beauty to virtue, ugliness to malice, its true image and imprint to the time...” was part and parcel of the understanding of its essence, mission, and task in man’s social world. It is a space that highlights the decline of values, morals, and the humanity of man or community, naming the need to reject a value system, thematizing the atavism or deviation of values, and calls for the establishment of a new framework of values, a new value pyramid, pattern, or set of ideals. Whenever the audience applauds, interrupting a production at the very moment when an actor says that notoriously known value observation – that something is rotten in the state of Denmark – every prime minister should realize it is now time to sacrifice one of his ministers. Just like when Nora decides to leave the family hearth, society has two options: either to make a discussion about the state of the family in the community or simply ban the theatrical play. Alfred de Vigny raised the issue of poetic freedom and the position of the poet in society in *Chatterton*, while Friedrich Schiller showed the non-productive, morally perverse, corrupt and disintegrating feudal system in late 18th-century Germany (his effort was also honoured by an honorary citizenship of the French Revolution); theatre mocked and pilloried the values of one or the other religious confession, calling for revolutionary values before it demanded peace.

However, it is generally known that the problem of Western culture arose in the 20th century as a change of the social and cultural paradigm occurred when artists and later also philosophers, aestheticians, and others raised the question of the end of modernism and the onset of a postmodern situation and discourse. I wish to forgo the resolve to more broadly explicate the incentives underlying the origination of postmodernism and the postmodernist feeling about the world, as well as its expressions in various areas of Western culture (and/or its transgression into a context outside of the Euro-Atlantic civilization), and instead focus only on those moments of the post-

modern situation that are related to the question of values and evaluation. In something of a generalization, there is often an assumption that the post-modern period introduced the concept of radical pluralization and essential questioning of the value system on which Western values had rested for centuries: starting with the critique of Eurocentrism, through the critique of logocentrism, from a broadly construed relativization of the spiritual and cultural tradition, all the way to the rejection of the teleological concept of history, culture, and generally any development or progress. The turning point that occurred in Western culture in the last decades of the 20th century was essential and allowed the presentation of a metaphorical opposition of the two previous epochs – modernism and postmodernism – already by the end of the century. Instead of intellectual and elitist modernism, postmodernism appeared to be more mainstream: there was male and female postmodernism, and leftist and neoconservative postmodernism. Friedrich Nietzsche's work in the postmodern period, just like a large portion of other cultural phenomena, is continuously recycled and acquires a new dimension along the lines of a postmodernist perception of his ideas about the death of God, or the death of *homo religiosus*, his meditations about the need of a reassessment of values, his critique of Christian morality in favour of the Dionysian principle, and so on. Similarly, Nietzsche's late 19th-century statement that our culture is no longer capable of identifying what is high and what is low acquires new levels of argumentation in a postmodern context. Western man seems to have lost certainty about what is his value and his non-value. In a remote echo of Nietzsche's theses, one can also reflect on the impulses coming from other theorists dealing with issues of modernism and postmodernism: Hermann Broch believes that the disintegration of values occurred because of a loss of religious centralism that established the conditions for the shaping of a system of values. A similar statement can be found in Begin's thesis that a loss of common axioms (social and ideological) occurred, which consequently led to the impossibility of creating a hierarchy of values. Artaud's assumption that evaluation is possible only in the context of religious eras is directly inspired by Nietzsche's attitudes to the death of God and by the appeals to reassess all values.

In an environment of broadly conceived pluralism, on a democratic socio-political level as well as within a framework of a universal questioning of certainties declared by the Enlightenment tradition, which Western culture was based on until the period between the two world wars, the postmodern situation has produced a feeling of definitive reconciliation and non-

problematic coexistence of as broad a range of art and cultural phenomena as possible.

Theatre also ceases to be a space in which values (negative as well as positive) are presented and is no longer “a mirror of nature”; it becomes a fragmented and pluralist kaleidoscope. If postmodernism has announced the end of big ideological narratives, why should the stage show any struggle against condemnable values and affirmatively present new values? Once Francis Fukuyama told us that we had reached the end of history, that is, we had already discovered the best history could have shown us, we no longer needed to discover anything new. The theatre has been also presenting this thesis: it has ceased addressing potential dilemmas because, as Fukuyama assumes, there is no place for dilemmas. Just like in the social and cultural sphere, in theatre we can also only enjoy the feeling that we have reached the end of the road, and are “alive and well”, with no personal harm, and that we can now, until Judgement Day, indulge in the fruits of the deserved *dolce far niente*. We will forever only recycle old stories, with no extra radical attitude, because there is no place for new, original attitudes in the postmodern situation. Originality was a matter of the now overcoming modernism, it was a part of the modernist programme that spoke of the need for permanent progress. What do we need progress for now that we have reached the end of our journey? When no more development is possible, when the only thing we can do today (and it is part of our programming too) is to turn back to our rich history and choose from it, quote or paraphrase from it, recycle it over and over again, recycle anything, ideally everything?

Postmodernist art, including postmodern theatre, has lost its auratic essence that Walter Benjamin spoke of – the essence that was once part of modernist art. Along the line of Benjamin’s finding that modern culture is auratic, that is, “it creates around itself an aura of uniqueness and non-recurrence, which distinguishes it from the ordinariness of everyday social life”¹, we can concur that postmodernist culture is non-auratic. The aura of uniqueness and non-recurrence was broken by the onset of mass culture which, according to Benjamin, resulted in the fading of the aura of both modern art and culture. This fading of aura, along Benjamin’s argumentation, is caused mostly by the mass media and “a market of cultural commodities that adds and adjusts everything that was once auratic, intended

1 BENJAMIN, W. *Dílo a jeho zdroj*. Praha : Odeon, 1979, pp. 21–22.

for elites only”². The mass media blurred the lines between high and popular culture, between professional and popular criticism, and between the author and the work.³

Some production forms created in the context of postmodern theatre, however, raise the question of whether such expressions represent a transgression between professional and popular culture (that is, the impact of mass media attacking what was rather auratic, as described by Benjamin) or whether they are just residues of modernist programmes. These forms might include diverse theatre productions featuring non-professional actors, often people from social peripheries, such as homeless people who offer the search for so-called “authentic emotionality”, or productions presented in non-theatrical, often very authentic spaces, or even documentary drama scripts created based on authentic testimonies of various communities (again, frequently from marginalized social groups).

We are aware that such theatrical expressions differ from productions made in what seems to follow the main line of postmodernist poetics. Their principal otherness lies in their degree of engagement: as if being again on the line of the modernist need to protect human dignity and execute the imperative of the progressive quest for a more just world, these productions seem to be unwilling to reconcile with the attitude that everything has been said, that everything is absolutely all right, that nothing needs to be done, that there is no need for any engagement, because we have reached the end of the road and have regained Paradise – which is exactly what the postmodernist idea is inferring. Are productions of this type a new kind of rebellion announcing to the world that we are no longer in Paradise, or not at the end of any road, but that we are on a road which is equally as long as man’s stay on Earth?

Did such productions discover that the postmodern situation was a dead-end street, at the end of which we are doomed to wait for our own end in numbing inactivity, and that the only way to escape this sweet embrace of death, the only way out of inactivity, is to once again open our eyes and discover all things in a new definition, to again rename good and evil, to call anomaly what it is, to say that perspective is perspective, to distinguish value from non-value and once again find “what is high and what is low”.

2 Ibid.

3 HUBÍK, S. *Postmoderní kultura. Úvod do problematiky*. Olomouc : Mladé Umění k Lidem, 1991, p. 47.

Looking at the issue this way, it is no longer important whether such an attitude is a residue of modernism or a transgression of postmodernism. Theatre has to reflect on the question of whether some authors remained firmly anchored to modernist positions in the belief that this world would always offer something to reflect in theatre and using artistic means, while simultaneously assuming a value-based position. Other authors, after leaving the modernist programme and succumbing to the careless luxury of the postmodernist poetic programme, then became traitors a second time over and, like little beasts, opened their eyes just to return to modernism, which they betrayed because of their vision of prosperity. A cynic would say that it is a negation of a negation, which is – as is well known – something natural and inevitable in the dialectical sequence.

Nonetheless, we should still review another issue that emerges in relation to the engagement of the period of modernism and postmodernism – an issue demonstrated by Dubravka Oraić Tolić who used very suggestive examples. Tolić is a theorist who has pointed out that there is an essential difference between modernist and postmodernist engagement:

“The modernist engagement was large and passionate, just like the ideas on behalf of which it occurred. Zola was arrested because of his ‘J’accuse’. Pound was locked up in a cage for promoting Mussolini’s regime; Sartre was torn because of ethical issues related to the theory and praxis of communism.”⁴

On the other hand, the postmodernist engagement is essentially different. It could be said that it is salon-based, incapable of self-sacrifice, commenting on issues from the secure distance of private study; Tolić demonstrates this using examples from the Yugoslavian conflict of the 1990s:

“War on the territory of former Yugoslavia also introduced the character of the modern, engaged intellectual. However, it was no longer a living person, but only his shadow – a simulation of the formerly ardent carrier of big ideas. At the outset of the war, French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut defended the position of Croatia being the victim, Susan Sontag went to Sarajevo to manifest her solidarity with the besieged city, Jean Baudrillard uttered his legend-

4 ORAIĆ TOLIĆ, D. *Muška moderna i ženska postmoderna. Rođenje virtualne kulture*. Zagreb : Naklada Ljevak, p. 183.

ary statement that Europe had died in Sarajevo... And finally, when the war rolled away to Bosnia and Herzegovina and become 'entangled', the engagement slacked and intellectuals shrugged everything off, trying to equalize all involved parties, until they lost any interest in this issue."⁵

Are we still living in postmodern times, in an end-of-history period, in which we have once again found our lost paradise, or do the numerous movements at a social level across the Western world (from refugees, through "Brexit", threats of war conflicts in various parts of the world, all the way to the growth of right-wing radicalism, religious radicalism, permanent impoverishment and a geopolitical redefinition of borders) force us to perceive our world as an unfinished chapter that has not, and probably never will, discover the best of all possible worlds?

Optimists will surely say that if we have sobered up after the postmodernist carnival of the late 20th century, all we can do now is to look for and discover values and re-establish a value system. But is it possible? Can we do this in what Lipovetsky calls "the era of emptiness"? In a "burnt-out society" as Byung-Chul Han calls our times? Or, how Budan puts it, on the move "from a society without hope towards hope without a society", and "either having a future without society or having a society without future"? Is this even possible, if our society is tired, as Chekhov described its values?

What has to happen to give a postmodern intellectual once again the position of social commitment, despite sacrificing oneself, and not the position of political kitsch?

Can we still be enraptured by the image of a struggle for some kind of value presented on stage, or will we, like Ranevskaya in a bittersweet nostalgia for a golden age, suffering from migraines, in a sentimental melancholy and a theatrical gesture, slip away to join some imposturous, new love in our version of Paris?

Translated by Ivan Lacko

5 Ibid, pp. 183–184.

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Biography:

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Theatre and Culture in a Period of Artistic Progress: The Importance of the 1960s for Theatre Institutions

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Abstract: In the 1960s an (aesthetic) turn occurred in the field of Slovene theatre. This could be perceived as a rejection of the socialist (or social-realist) view of art. This break started at the end of the 1950s with the establishment of non-institutional theatres (the Experimental Theatre in Ljubljana, Oder 57, and other). This was a period of the emergence of new contemporary theatre practices (small stages, experiments, and theatre as the result of group participation) and the arrival of new genres (theatre of the absurd). The image of Slovene theatre in socialist society began to change with the impact of the neo avant-garde and experimental theatrical practices, and this article will briefly describe their origin. The alterations were expressed through production, performances, and aesthetics. The 1960s were a time when institutional theatres began to use new forms, principles, texts, and (Western European) philosophy in performances.

This article aims to show the coexistence and symbiosis of the artistic and aesthetic development of Slovene theatre in both the institutional and non-institutional spheres. This connection was revealed with an aesthetic-philosophical view on theatre as well as in direction and acting itself (i.e., the practical approach) when one actor was part of both institutional and non-institutional practices. Therefore, the transfer of principles from experimental stages into institutions was essential for visible changes that could be seen in repertoires, casts, critical reception, methods of acting and directing, and the arrival of new generations.

This article was prepared by reviewing repertoires and making comparisons between different theatres. Critics' reviews of certain performances and actors have been evaluated. In particular, the historical time and space that determine the relationships between art and a political model was taken into account. The consideration of the context is inescapable when dealing with theatrical facts. The political and social situation constantly influences the relationships within theatre art and the messages that the authors want to communicate through their artistic work.

Keywords: Slovene theatre, 1960s, non-institutional theatre, experimental theatre, SNG Drama Ljubljana

I

The 1960s were a time of great prosperity for Slovene theatre and are still of great importance for theatre history. This statement can be justified and connected to the political and social situation in that time in the former Yugoslavia. For the first time since the Second World War, people were able to buy foreign currency, the authorities re-opened the borders, shopping trips to other countries (Austria and Italy) became popular, the government started building new apartments, it was possible to get a consumer loan in banks, household standards were rising, and more and more families were able to afford a vacation on the seaside.¹ On the other hand, “[p]olitical and economic changes resulted in increased social differences. In 1968 students joined the workers’ protest against the government. A new social class emerged. The middle class slowly began to outgrow the working class and the farmers. These changes also resulted in the rise of individualism”².

It was in the 1960s when Slovene theatre reached one of the biggest aesthetic turns of the second half of the 20th century. The main cause of this was the refusal of all principles of social realism and socialist art in theatre. (Neo) avant-garde and experimental groups also appeared: e.g., OHO, Pupilija, 442–443, and Veternica.

In his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger emphasized that we must not look at pieces of art as individual objects but rather in connection to society or social status:

“The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.”³

By exchanging the word “bourgeois” for “socialist”, we can interpret and use Bürger’s quote to describe the Slovene neo avant-garde movement in the 1960s. One of the most well-known characteristics of the neo avant-garde is

1 NEČAK, D. – REPE, B. *Oris sodobne obče in slovenske zgodovine*. Ljubljana : Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za zgodovino, 2003, p. 299.

2 Ibid, p. 300.

3 BÜRGER, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 49.

refusing the status of art in socialist society. Art as an institution is no longer connected with the everyday life of society.

For a wider context, the prominent representatives of (neo) avant-garde movements can be briefly presented. In the Slovene region, the (historical) avant-garde began with Ferdo Delak, Novo Mesto Spring⁴, Marij Kogoj, Avgust Černigoj, and Ivan Mrak. After the Second World War, they continued (as neo-avant-garde and/or experimental practices) with Oder 57, the Ad Hoc Theatre of Draga Ahačič, the Experimental Theatre of Balbina Battelino Baranovič, Študentsko aktualno gledališče (ŠAG)⁵, the OHO Group⁶, the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre⁷, the Glej Theatre, Pekarna, NSK⁸, and Gledališče sester Scipiona Nasice⁹. Individuals and groups shared some crucial similarities: a different use of (theatrical or artistic) language as well as body and text, changing a point of view, and establishing a new and active relationship with the audience.

Hans Thies Lehmann wrote about the neo avant-garde:

“They constantly sacrifice parts of the dramatic performance. But in the end they keep a crucial connection between the text of the act, theatre procedures, reports, and performance representation directed to them.”¹⁰

In Slovene institutional and non-institutional theatre, the beginning of the 1960s was essential for artistic, aesthetic, and discursive development. All post-war artistic practices can be described as experimental theatre practice and in some cases as neo-avant-garde theatre practice. Barbara Orel has pointed out the most important performers:

4 It was started in 1920 by the poets Miran Jarc and Anton Podbevšek, the painter Božidar Jakac, and others.

5 This can be translated as “Student Contemporary Theatre”, led by Dušan Jovanovič.

6 The group was active between 1966 and 1971 and mostly focused on ready-made art.

7 The group was active between 1969 and 1972 and became famous because of their uncompromising approach in practising avant-garde theatre. They combined various forms: pop-culture, collage dramaturgy, video, performance, and happenings.

8 Neue Slowenische Kunst, a political art collective founded in 1984.

9 Scipion Nasice Sister’s Theatre (1983–1987) was part of the NSK project with the groups Laibach and Irwin.

10 LEHMANN, H.-T. *Postdramsko gledališče*. Ljubljana : Maska, 2003, p. 70.

“The happenings in the groups OHO and Nomenklatura, the ritualistic forms of theatre in the group of Tomaž Kralj (Beli krog) and Vetrnica by Vlado Šav. The Pekarna theatre by Lado Kralj, the events by the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, the artistic performances of Dalibor Bori Zupančič, Miroslav Slana, and others. All artists and their groups were based on free life principles and the outbreak of hippie culture. They were also based on the ideas of authenticity, spontaneity, genuineness, and directness.”¹¹

Deviation from convention began in the 1960s. This led artists away from institutions and the already mentioned bourgeois (or socialist) concept of theatre with *Perspektive* journal, the Oder 57 theatre, and others. It should not be forgotten that the “seed of the neo avant-garde movement in Slovenia emerged from the circle of secondary school students with Marko Pogačnik and Iztok Geister Plamen. In the secondary school newspaper *Plamenica* [A Torch] in 1963, they expressed a tendency to overcome the established forms of reception”¹².

The artistic/performing space was more intensively developed in the 1970s, which was the result (heritage) of powerful groups and performances from the 1960s, such as from the Pupilija Ferkeverk theatre group with its artistic leader Dušan Jovanović. In the article *Happenings and Slovene Performing Arts*, Barbara Orel wrote:

“Pupilija with its total stage language hit a breaking point in Slovene performing arts. This is when – as Venó Taufer wrote – a decade of different conception of directional concepts, text approaches, the role of actors, and radically different conceptions of the theatre started. In particular in the Eksperimentalno gledališče Glej and Pekarna.”¹³

At the end of the 1960s, the establishment of independent theatres happened. At that time, the youngest generation of artists was strongly engaged in purely theatrical matters. Gašper Troha has pointed out two concepts: the

11 OREL, B. K zgodovini performansa na Slovenskem: eksperimentalne gledališke prakse v obdobju 1966–1986. In SUŠEC MICHIELI, B. – LUKAN, B. – ŠORLI, M. *Dinamika sprememb v slovenskem gledališču 20. stoletja*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maska, 2010, p. 274.

12 JESENKO, P. Potohodec kot ritualni fragment gledališke neoavantgarde na Slovenskem (prvi fragment o gledališču Pekarna). In *Maska*, 2009, Vol. 24, Nos. 123–124, p. 22.

13 OREL, B. Hpeningi in slovenske scenske umetnosti. In *Maska*, 2009, Vol. 24, Nos. 123–124, p. 64.

abolition of the primacy of the text and the restoration of the ritual in theatre.¹⁴ One author pointed out that a significant turning point occurred at the end of the 1960s, when a white hen was killed on 29 October 1969 during the performance of *Pupilija, papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki* (The Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, director Dušan Jovanovič). The critic Venko Taufer marked this event as the death of a literary and the only aesthetically functional theatre in Slovenia.¹⁵ But as will be presented below, this statement was not entirely true. As a symbol, the white hen was really the most radical expression and had its consequences; however, important changes had begun to happen at least a decade earlier. This statement was also supported in Troha's article, where he presented all of the performance circumstances in the context of the historical background and position of the group in the theatrical system.¹⁶

II

The 1960s were a period of accelerated and essential development in the performing arts. It should be pointed out that in this period, institutional theatres slowly began to integrate poetics and incorporate approaches from very powerful non-institutional theatres into their own theatre practice.

Bojan Štih¹⁷ was the manager of SNG Drama Ljubljana¹⁸ from 1960 to 1969. He significantly contributed to the new principles of performing contemporary Slovene plays and new Western works on the national stage. The staging of *Rhinocéros* [Rhinceros] by Eugene Ionesco at the end of the 1960/61 season foretold rich repertoires in the following seasons which included plays by Tennessee Williams, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, John Osborne, Max Frisch, Edward Albee, Albert Camus, Dario Fo, Arthur Miller, and oth-

14 TROHA, G. *Ujetniki svobode: slovenska dramatika in družba med letoma 1943 in 1990*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maribor: Aristej, 2015, p. 120.

15 TAUFER, V. Eksperimentalno gledališče v Križankah: Pupilija papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki. In MILOHNIČ, A. – SVETINA, I. *Prišli so Pupilčki*. Ljubljana : Maska ; Slovenski gledališki muzej, 2009, p. 28.

16 TROHA, G. Truplo bele kokoši. In *Filozofski vestnik*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 127–134.

17 Bojan Štih (1923–1986), a critic, essayist, editor, and manager of SNG Drama Ljubljana in the crucial period of its progress, pro-Western streams, and passage of new principles in institutional theatre.

18 Slovene National Theatre Drama in Ljubljana, traditionally the main Slovene theatre house.

ers.¹⁹ His period in the national theatre is known as the re-Europeanization of Slovene theatre.²⁰

The arts management of large theatre institutions had a desire to stage contemporary West European plays. This desire turned into reality because of the drastically changed political and social circumstances and a very powerful production on the off-scene, where groups had created a fresh view of the creation process, new forms in aesthetic and contemporary texts, and philosophical thought in the Slovene cultural space. Here are some of the more prominent examples: (1) John Osborne took over the presentation of social problems in the “English-speaking area”, which had been the main topic of Arthur Miller in the 1950s. Of course, Osborne was not performed to such an extent as he was a young author with no large opus, but he was incorporated in an intense thematic, topical, and contemporary way into the theatrical milieu. Performances included *Look Back in Anger* (1958, SNG Drama Ljubljana; 1966, AGRFT²¹), *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1959, SNG Drama Maribor), *Luther* (1962, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Inadmissible Evidence* (1966, MGL). (2) The 1960s also witnessed the work of Edward Albee with performances of *The American Dream* (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1964, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *The Zoo Story* (1966, AGRFT), *A Delicate Balance* (1969, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Everything in the Garden* (1969, MGL²²; 1970, SNG Drama Maribor). (3) Friedrich Dürrenmatt was the most prominent author from the German-speaking area: *Der Besuch der alten Dame* [The Visit] (1958, MGL; 1960, SNG Drama Maribor), *Romulus der Grosse* [Romulus the Great] (1962, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Die Physiker* [The Physicists] (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Der Meteor* [The Meteor] (1966, MGL), and *Die Wiedertäufer* [The Anabaptists] (1968, MGL).

Another special phenomenon of the Slovene cultural space was the connection (or fascination) with the French philosophy of existentialism. This was quite evident because of the performances of contemporary French playwrights, which were the main influence on the development of original

19 ANDRES, R. Umetniški kolektivi na Slovenskem in uprizorjanje zahodnoevropske dramatike. In *Tvorivá osobnost a kolektivny charakter divadelnej tvorby: zborník referátov z XIII. medzinárodnej Banskobystrickej teatrologickej konferencie v cykle DNES A TU*. (Ed. Andrej Maťašík). Banská Bystrica : Akadémia umení v Banskej Bystrici, Fakulta dramatických umení, 2016, p. 168.

20 TROHA, G. Truplo bele kokoši. In *Filozofski vestnik*, p. 120.

21 Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film, and Television.

22 MGL – Mestno gledališče ljubljansko – Ljubljana City Theatre.

Slovene drama and theatrical/performance expression. The works of Primož Kozak²³, Marjan Rožanc²⁴, and others were created under the influence of existentialism. Some great performances of Albert Camus's work were created on Slovene stages in this period: *Caligula* (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Le Malentendu* [The Misunderstanding] (1960, SLG Celje; 1967, MGL), and *Les Possédés* [The Possessed] (1970, MGL). This period was mostly marked by the plays of Jean Paul Sartre: *Huis-Clos* [No Exit] (1958, 1969) and *Les Mains sales* [Dirty Hands] (1962, 1964, and 1966). Other performances of Sartre's work were *Le Putain respectueuse* [The Respectful Putain] (1954, PK Kranj; 1960, SNG Nova Gorica), *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* [The Condemned in Altona] (1960, MGL), *Les Mouches* [The Flies] (1961, AGRFT), *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* [The Devil and the Good Lord] (1965, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Morts sans sépulture* [The Victors] (1969, SLG Celje). To explain the situation, it is necessary to mention that his *Critique de la raison dialectique* [Critique of Critical Reason] was published in *Perspektive* journal four years in a row.

The 1960s were also marked by the arrival of absurd drama. Eugene Ionesco was present on stage with his core works: *La Leçon* [The Lesson] (1958), *La Cantatrice Chauve* [The Bald Soprano] (1958), *Les Chaises* [The Chairs] (1960), *Rhinocéros* [Rhinoceros] (1961), *Le Soif et la faim* [Hunger and Thirst] (1967), and *Roi se meurt* [Exit the King] (1970). There was a little less enthusiasm (which, however, was no less important) about Samuel Beckett's plays. The affection of authors²⁵ (artists, practitioners, and theatres) for the French cultural space was stronger than for the English-speaking one. However, during this period, some interesting young authors appeared, and Slovene artistic leaders in theatres put their works into repertoires without any difficulty. Especially exposed at the beginning of his journey were Harold Pinter with *The Homecoming* (1967) and *The Caretaker* (1970) and Tom Stoppard in 1969 with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; Peter Shaffer, who began his career as a playwright in the 1950s, appeared in Slovene theatres twice with *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*, and once with the *Black Comedy*.

The desire of institutional theatre management for the performance of contemporary Western European drama was possible because of the changed political and social conditions and strong production of non-institutional groups that brought into the Slovene cultural space a fresh look at creation

23 (1921–1981), playwright, essayist, professor.

24 (1930–1990), playwright, writer, essayist.

25 Such as Draga Ahačič, Jože Javoršek, and others.

processes, new aesthetic norms, and new texts and philosophical thought. All these processes resulted in institutions distancing themselves from the perception of bourgeois theatre. The concept of socialist thought in the theatre was still present as a consolidation of power through propaganda, art, and ideology. This flow in literature and theatre art is called “socialist realism” and began with Gorky and Mayakovsky. Later Matjaž Kmecl coined the term “socially critical realism”.²⁶

Various authors (like the theoretician and critic Janko Kos) emphasized that socialist realism, as we had known it from the Soviet Union, was never present in Slovenia. It was just a form of social realism. This was represented in theatre art through the “critique of the past class society and its remnants” and portrayed the new, idealized socialist society in terms of socialist education.²⁷ Here we must take into account the statement of Jože Šegedin, the president of the theatre council of SNG Drama Ljubljana in the 1958/59 season. During his speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Drama Theatre (6 February 1959), he said:

“I think the main goal of social governance in the theatre is protecting the needs and interests of our socialist society through social governance, and at the same time guaranteeing complete freedom in the development of theatre art.”²⁸

On the perspectives and development of theatrical art, he added: “We see in the ZKJ²⁹ programme that our most advanced social forces will ensure that our theatrical culture develops on the basis of socialist humanism.”³⁰ We can assume that at the end of the 1950s the authorities had not yet given up their active involvement in the creation of artistic programmes, aesthetics, and the regulation of actual artistic production. This was proven in the 1960s with a series of interference with the freedom of creativity. The most notorious example was certainly the interruption and cancellation of the performance of *Topla greda* [The hot Beam]³¹ by Marjan Rožanc (Oder 57, 1964).

26 KMECL, M. *Mali literarni leksikon*. Ljubljana : Univerzum, 1983, p. 73.

27 Ibid, p. 74.

28 ŠEGEDIN, J. Slavnostni nagovor. In *Gledališki list SNG Drama Ljubljana*, 1959, No. 9, p. 258.

29 ZKJ – Zveza komunistov Jugoslavije – League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

30 ŠEGEDIN, J. Slavnostni nagovor. In *Gledališki list SNG Drama Ljubljana*, p. 260.

31 A partially translated title is “Hotbed”.

Regardless of political pressure and attempts to actively influence the theatre community (there is no difference between the institutional and non-institutional ones), the modernization of theatre was progressing more rapidly and intensively than before. Taras Kermauner described this vividness:

“Due to the analogue demonstration of young critical artists at the performance of *Povečevalno steklo* [The Magnifying Glass] by Jože Javoršek in 1956, and even more so because of the demonstrations at the performance of *Topla greda* in 1964 by Oder 57, it is clear that the possibility of transforming professional theatre into theatre as a direct action still exists. This potential attempts to undermine the theatre as a box, which has become mostly a culture as a special movement dividing bourgeois society into many segments. The military abolishes this division and re-establishes direct participation by which the whole world should be transformed into the theatre and the theatre into war.”³²

All these processes resulted in a distancing of institutions from the perception of bourgeois theatre and from socialist thought in theatre. This had been understood as a tool for consolidating the authority of the Party and the government and the use of ideological propaganda in the performing arts. In the 1960s, socialist approaches which were significant for the period after the Second World War and the 1950s slowly began to disappear. The most obvious proof of the situation can be seen in the staging of plays from Western Europe firstly on non-institutional stages and then on institutional ones. A few examples of this shift are given in the following: *Huis-Clos* by Jean Paul Sartre was first staged in the Ad Hoc Theatre in 1958, and in 1960 another two performances of his texts took place. Sartre’s most popular play of the period was *Les Mains Sales* which was also staged in the Ad Hoc Theatre by Draga Ahačič in 1962. After that it was staged in institutions in 1964 and 1966. In 1958 the members of Oder 57 staged two plays by Eugene Ionesco: *La Leçon* and *La Cantatrice Chauve*. After that, *Les Chaises* were staged in 1960 (SSG Trst) and *Rhinocéros* was staged in 1961 (SNG Drama Ljubljana), both of them in institutional theatres. This pattern could be seen in a large number of plays (from Western European and domestic authors). This situation can be interpreted as the self-censorship of institutions. It seems that they first checked the efficiency, the value, and most importantly the reac-

32 KERMAUNER, T. Slovenska dramatika in gledališče. In SVETINA, I. *Vidiki slovenske gledališke zgodovine*. Ljubljana : Slovenski gledališki muzej, Vol. 39, No. 79, 2003, p. 31.

tion of the authorities and public before they accepted such a text (or author) into their repertoire.

This transition was particularly intense after *Perspektive* journal was abolished in 1964. At that time the alternative stage principles moved to the institutions. This was possible because of more efficient control under the cultural policy determined by the Communist Party.

III

In the first half of the 1960s, the Ad Hoc Theatre (founder Draga Ahačič) was still performing. With their different approaches to production, they brought important Western authors (Jean Paul Sartre, Jean Giraudoux, George Michel, and others) into the Slovene cultural space. In 1960 Draga Ahačič wrote a polemical article for the journal *Naša sodobnost*. Its main theme was a performance by the French group of Madeleine Renaud and Jean Louis Barrault in Ljubljana. In the article she advocated contemporary French theatrical practice, particularly “total theatre”, and the primary role of the text; this was also the main poetic of Draga Ahačič as a director. She defined two main poles of the dramatic and theatre creativity in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

“Contemporary theatre production is caught between two extremes. The first: outdated, literary, psychological, and bourgeois theatre; the second: avant-garde, anti-literary, squeaky clean, and total theatre.”³³

The first of these, of course, was the production of politically approved, accepted, and encouraged drama (performance). The second group referred to the activities (poetics) of her own interest (from her own Ad Hoc Theatre) and the activities of other experimental groups (off-scene). Regarding the theatre of Jean-L. Barrault, she wrote that it distanced itself from the formalism of clean or total theatre as seen by those who do not seek “the art in themselves, but themselves in the art”. She added: “Because of their own inner emptiness, they don’t have the understanding or the need for deeper human content. They hold on to various formalist dogmas, and without a thought leave themselves to new waves.”³⁴

33 AHAČIČ, D. Gledališče za človeka. In *Naša sodobnost*, 1960, Vol. 8, Nos. 8/9, p. 828.

34 Ibid, p. 829.

In the article, Draga Ahačič also highlighted some other problems connected to the reception of new and contemporary theoretical or performance streams of the period. Her vision of the theatre can be seen by analysing the repertoires.³⁵ This vision in general was one of a centrally placed human (individual or subject) that she proved with the selection and staging of plays from Western Europe (especially France).³⁶ Let us look at another example from the beginning of the 1960s. At that time, Oder 57 staged a great deal of contemporary Slovene drama (mostly from the circle of *Perspektive* journal). After its closure (or rather revocation) in 1964, a major part of the non-institutional mission and practices were directly transferred to institutional theatres. Bojan Štih (the manager of SNG Drama) established Mala drama (Little Drama), a new stage in the building of the national theatre. This new space was intended for “national and foreign radical theatrical attempts and experiments”³⁷.

All searches, poetics, and philosophies from the off-scene were transferred directly to national institutions. Before that, new approaches transitioned along with actors who played on experimental stages and at the same time worked in the institutions. Young theatre directors played a major role. Their generation started working outside institutions, but in 1960s they slowly make it to the forefront. The establishment of Mala drama was the peak of artistic development in the period. It was an experiment incorporated into the practice and work of an institutional theatre. The attitude of the pro-

35 Such research has been done in the article: ANDRES, R. Umetniški kolektivi na Slovenskem in uprizorjanje zahodnoevropske dramatike. In *Tvorivá osobnosť a kolektívny charakter divadelnej tvorby: zborník referátov z XIII. medzinárodnej Banskobystrickej teatrologickej konferencie v cykle DNES A TU*, pp. 161–172.

36 “The Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Barrault Group is an artistically alive, healthy, and mature theatrical body. Despite the recognition and success which the group has experienced in the largest cities of the world, it did not stagnate, absorbed in its own size; it rather embarked on a journey to the most demanding and eternally unattainable goal – perfection with deep and sincere commitment in search of new ideas and initiatives. Precisely because of this artistic responsibility, which grows from a desire to bring the author to the audience, Barrault’s theatre, ‘born out of love for man’, deserves the title of theatre for humanity. As Barrault himself says: ‘Whatever we do in the future, we must never forget that for all, for the author and for those who serve him, theatre is primarily a human being.’” See AHAČIČ, D. Gledališče za človeka. In *Naša sodobnost*, p. 833.

37 PONIŽ, D. Prolegomena k raziskavi vloge in pomena slovenske dramatike in gledališča pri prehodu iz totalitarnega v demokratični sistem od leta 1960 do 1990. In SUŠEC MICHIELI, B. – LUKAN, B. – ŠORLI, M. *Dinamika sprememb v slovenskem gledališču 20. stoletja*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maska, 2010, p. 257.

fessional public to the production of experimental principles in the institutions can be seen in a review by the critic Pogačnik of the performance of the *Plešasta pevka* [The Bald Soprano] by Eugene Ionesco (8. 4. 1958, Oder 57): “When the avant-garde has a roof over its head, it is less ‘avant-gardy’, and a bald soprano would be much less bald on the big stage”, and “it is not bad for Ljubljana to have a Huchette, besides Comedie, Marigny, and Ronde.”³⁸

IV

An important aspect of the modernization of the Slovene theatrical space is the practice that permanently employed and ensemble actors would move from institutional to non-institutional theatres and back again. Beside the regular work in the institutions, they played in non-institutional theatres and gained additional experience on stages of experimental practice and small stages. Above all, they were able to work with modern texts and directing approaches (aesthetics).

Three elements contributed to modernization within the theatrical practice: dramatic texts, directing, and acting. This article has already outlined the arrival of the dramatic texts of contemporary European and American authors. As already mentioned, the 1960s were marked by the arrival of a younger generation of directors who were the first theatre professionals educated after the war. This was a generation that was reticent to the traditions arising from the social revolution or even reluctant about them.³⁹

One of the most prominent examples is the director Mile Korun, who is now considered one of the greatest directors of post-war Slovene theatre. After a series of directed plays in the institutions, he established himself at the beginning of the 1960s with Eugene Ionesco’s *La Leçon* (1963, AGRFT), Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage* and Dario Fo’s *Gli Archangeli non giocano al flipper* [Archangels Don’t Play Pinball] (both 1963), Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1964), and many others. Mile Korun never engaged in experimental stages, but he was one of the generation of directors with a strong engagement in the non-institutional scene. From his debut, he therefore developed innovation within the institutions. Franci Križaj was a director at

38 POGAČNIK, J. Plešasta pevka. In *Slovenski poročevalec*, 1958, Vol. 19, No. 89, p. 4, (15. 4. 1958).

39 Directors such as Slavko Jan, Bratko Kreft, Branko Gavella, Viktor Molka, and others.

Oder 57. From 1966 he was an internal director at SLG Celje⁴⁰, where he directed modern texts by national and foreign authors as well as the classics. His first direction at Oder 57 was *Escorial* by Michel Ghelderode (1 September 1959). We can say that this was a direct transfer of non-institutional principles to institutions.

Dušan Jovanović had a significant impact on Slovene drama and theatre in the second half of the 20th century. He began his artistic path with experiments and in experimental groups. With his ground-breaking directing poetics, he entered Slovene social and theatrical creativity with criticalness and even excesses. We can compare this to the already mentioned killing of the white hen on stage, which caused real newspaper and political hysteria. In the 1960s there was still a strong presence of the older generation of directors who had mostly emerged from the pre-war era or for whom the social revolution was both life and an artistic ideal. Young theatre directors, such as Miran Herzog and Žarko Peta, who were not attached to an experimental or non-institutional theatre established themselves within institutions. However, this period was marked by artists who came from the experimental field and made great careers in the institutional theatres as mentioned above. There were also those such as Draga Ahačič, who found a true artistic milieu in experimental theatre despite previous work in institutions. Actors and actresses present a special example. They were the central messengers of the text and directional approaches and appeared in various casts inside and outside their home theatre companies. Specific examples of the transition from experimental stages to national institutions were certainly the staging of *Antigona* [Antigone] by Dominik Smole and *Afera* [The Affair] by Primož Kozak. Both dramas were firstly staged at Oder 57 and shortly after on the stage of SNG Drama Ljubljana. The similarities were not just in the same text but also in some other peculiarities.

The performances of dramas were a special turning point due to their expressive power. The plays were staged in the following order: *Afera* was firstly performed at Oder 57, premiering on 20 March 1961, and soon afterwards was performed at the national theatre, premiering on 12 December 1961. *Antigona* premiered on 8 April 1960 and later in SNG Maribor on 5 November 1960 before being performed at SNG Drama Ljubljana on 25 December 1960.

40 Slovensko ljudsko gledališče Celje – The Slovene People's Theatre Celje.

Special attention must be paid to actors that, in addition to their work in non-institutional theatres, created great roles for the important texts of contemporary Western European authors. Most of these actors later enjoyed significant acting careers with many awards and grand historical roles. The cast of *Antigona* in Ljubljana in 1960 is particularly interesting. Actor Jurij Souček performed at both Oder 57 and SNG Drama as Kreon, and Branko Miklavc did so as Teirezijas.⁴¹ Dušan Škedl performed on the stage of Oder 57 as a Guard, while in SNG Drama he played the Messenger. A similar situation appeared in the production of *Afera*, where Jurij Souček performed the role of Commissioner Jeremija in both performances. In both performances, Lojze Rozman played the role of Simon. It may also be important to note that in spite of the different directors (at Oder 57 Franci Križaj, at SNG Drama France Jamnik), the costume designer, Anja Dolenc, remained the same. Despite the fact that the performances were different in their aesthetic and directing approaches, the transmission of acting principles certainly took place. The progressive methods of the new Slovene text and the performance methods of the non-institutional scene influenced the modernization of SNG Drama Ljubljana.

The critical reception of *Antigona* in SNG Drama was ideologically schematic, rejecting both the concept and the performance of Smole's drama; the critic Marjan Brezovar dedicated his writing to the ideology of the text and sought his weak derivations in expression. Therefore, the positive attitude towards acting creations came as a surprise. This was especially the case with Jurij Souček, who "rescued the schematic character of Kreon", "gave the character a new dimension", and surprised with the conciseness of the performance.⁴² All the facts about the actor's performance represented a breath of fresh air in expression, which definitely appeared due to the loosening (and permeability) of the classical (bourgeois, also socialist) view of theatre and acting practices outside the institutions.

Something similar happened in the critique by Josip Vidmar of Kozak's *Afera* (also in SNG Drama Ljubljana), where the whole plot of the play was emphasized and analysed (also as a European trend!) The critic dedicated almost the same amount of text to the actors as to the content itself. He described them as "five young lions of the theatre" and continued that "the director had at his disposal players who devoted themselves to their roles

41 In SNG Drama the alternative actor was Stane Sever.

42 BREZOVAR, M. *Antigona*. In *Delo*, 1960, Vol. 2, No. 357, p. 6, (31. 12. 1960).

with a rare eagerness and ability”.⁴³ The critic concluded with the evaluation: “A rare performance in our Drama theatre that is full of flying, creative will, and real abilities.”⁴⁴

The role of actors in transferring the aesthetics of the non-institutional scene into the institutions is of great importance in the present research. The number of directors linked to both poles was not so big. Actors were a much more powerful connection. As mentioned before, important actors were involved in both spheres. Jurij Souček, for example, was also active as the director of an absurd drama by Fernando Arrabal entitled *L'architecte et l'empereur d'Assyrie* [The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria]. He directed it at Mala drama in the 1968/69 season (the premiere was on 20 December 1968) and played in it alongside Janez Hočevar.

An important connection between the two forms of theatrical practice were those actors who already had long careers in the institutions: Lojze Rozman, Polde Bibič, Danilo Benedičič, Iva Zupančič, Rudi Kosmač, Vida Juvan, Duša Počkaj, Branko Miklavc, Brane Ivanc, and many others. Most of these actors and actresses were the bearers of the repertoire in their theatres (mostly Drama SNG Ljubljana) in the selected period. Through their participation outside their regular work, they introduced modern acting principles into the institutions, developed experimental theatre, and created their artistic expressions with a symbiosis between the two poles of performing arts practices.

In his memoirs on this period, Polde Bibič states:

“Although he was an actor in an institution, we admired Lojze Rozman. He was the bearer of the mood of our time. We admired Jurij Souček for his talent, musical ear, and feeling for modern, new things, which he could only develop later at Oder 57. In the City Theatre (MGL) we admired the simple, fine, unpredictable acting of Janez Albreht. We were inspired by the glowing comic force of Janez Škof from Celje. We rushed to Kranj, where they performed the first Sartre in Slovenia.”⁴⁵

43 VIDMAR, J. Afera. In *Delo* 1961, Vol. 3, No. 344, p. 7, (17. 12. 1961).

44 Ibid.

45 BIBIČ, P. Kako sem doživljal Oder 57. In PETAN, Ž. – PARTLJIČ, T. *Oder 57*. Ljubljana : Knjižnica Mestnega gledališča ljubljanskega, 1988, p. 67.

V

Some might think that too much significance has been given to this period. In such a case, it is worthwhile adding a quote by the Slovene critic and historian Janko Kos from 1972:

“Since the theatres in Ljubljana returned to more traditional directions, the performances of the avant-garde groups are recently the only modern Slovene theatre. They warned the general public about some problems of contemporary Slovene theatre and culture in general.”⁴⁶

He added that performances from the beginning of the 1960s and the whole decade modernized the existing traditional theatre.

If we conducted a comparative study and followed the history of Slovene theatre up to the 1970s, we would recognize that the next decade was more politically rigid and strict. Institutional theatres returned to a position of no social and political criticism, and they stopped researching new aesthetic and expressional possibilities. Therefore, the new experimental groups which re-emerged were based on the heritage of groups from the beginning of the 1960s. Just as the coexistence of institutional and non-institutional theatre in the 1960s was of crucial importance for the development of the performing arts, with influence occurring in both directions, it is also essential in modern times that we are aware of the mutual enrichment of both fields of theatrical practice.

Translated by the author

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Biography:

Rok Andres is a dramaturge and screenwriter. He graduated in dramaturgy from the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (University of Ljubljana) and has worked on various projects, including practical theatre work, writing for film projects, moderating debates about drama and theatre, directing events, and leading workshops for young theatre enthusiasts. As a dramaturge and assistant, he has worked in Slovene theatres (the National Theatre Drama Ljubljana, the National Theatre Drama Maribor, the Ljubljana City Theatre, the Prešeren Theatre Kranj, and others). He writes articles on theatre productions and has published in various scholarly publications on drama and theatre. Currently he is employed as an assistant lecturer (junior researcher) at the University of Nova Gorica.

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A Theatre Against Totalitarianisms: *L'État de siège*, a Play by Jean-Louis Barrault and Albert Camus

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Abstract: *L'État de siège* [The State of Siege], a play by Jean-Louis Barrault and Albert Camus, is the result of a long history. In the mid-1930s, Barrault dreamed of making a show about the plague with Antonin Artaud, adapting Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, which had been published in 1722. With the long internment of Artaud, the project remained on hold until 1942 during the Occupation; Barrault decided to complete the adaptation of Defoe's book and sought a writer who would write the dialogues. Barrault first solicited Jean-Paul Sartre, who refused and suggested he should contact Camus instead. The author of *Caligula* asked the theatre director to wait for the publication of his novel *La Peste* [The Plague] which would not appear until June 1947. From that moment on, the two men collaborated closely for more than a year. On 27 October 1948, they presented *L'État de siège* at the Théâtre Marigny. The play, which was a resounding failure, represented the perhaps late reply of two theatre artists to the Occupation which France had suffered as well as to the European totalitarianisms which had led to the Second World War.

Key words: Albert Camus, Jean-Louis Barrault, theatre, collaboration, totalitarianism, adaptation, the Occupation, the press

The theatre is value-laden

If you look closely at the title of the conference “Theatre as a Value-based Discourse”, the field of research they offer us is very broad. However, if we accept periphrastic theatre, where discourse is value-laden, then we are now faced with a virtual tautology because in the West since the time of Pericles, theatre has been a place where citizens, whose word is synonymous with “hero”, are both called upon and obliged to engage in better defining their function within society and above all their future. It is certain that over the course of more than twenty-five centuries, theatre has betrayed, nullified, and forgotten this ethical and civic function several times, but what we understand by live entertainment, in the structure which was defined and

“fixed” in the fifth century BCE, is endogamically value-laden. By virtue of its internal laws and its way of communicating, theatre conveys and generates the moral values of the individual as well as ideological values.

***L'État de siège*, a play by Albert Camus and Jean-Louis Barrault**

The play discussed here, *L'État de siège, spectacle en trois pièces* [The State of Siege, show in three pieces], is a play which was unsuccessfully staged (yes, unsuccessfully staged) by Albert Camus and Jean-Louis Barrault, who were two of the leading figures of the 20th-century French cultural scene. Why was it unsuccessful? It was certainly a resounding failure, given that between Thursday 28 October 1948 and Friday 14 January 1949 it was performed only twenty-two times to less than full houses. As we know, if it is to survive (i.e., stay open) in the ephemeral form of live shows, theatre needs to be successful. Despite all the authors' efforts, this success was not forthcoming.

Why should one even talk about *L'État de siège*? Because the collaboration between Camus and Barrault embodies profound values. It can be claimed without fear of contradiction that *L'État de siège* represents an attempt through theatre's intrinsic means to respond to the totalitarianisms that infested Europe between the 1920s and 1948, the year of the play's first production.

While Albert Camus is very well known thanks to his literary work and for his contribution to the theatre, Barrault is less well known; there is a big gap between what the theatre director achieved and what we are able to analyse today, which is simply the consequence of the ephemeral nature of all live theatre. For those who may be unfamiliar with Barrault, Michel Autrand defines him as the benchmark for the performing arts in 20th-century France:

“Jean-Louis Barrault is undoubtedly, through the steadfastness and energy that he displayed in the most diverse occupations, France's greatest 20th-century showman: mime, actor, theatre director, company manager, arranger of international tours, writer and editor of revues, and tireless organizer of life-enhancing encounters. If you add his triumphs as actor in two of Marcel Carné's films, “*Drôle de drame*” [“*Bizarre, Bizarre*”] and “*Les Enfants du paradis*”, you will search in vain for another such rich personality.”¹

1 AUTRAND, M. Jean-Louis Barrault. In GUÉRIN, J. *Dictionnaire Camus*. Paris : Éditions Robert Laffont, 2009, p. 73. All quotations and titles have been translated by the author of this article.

The genesis of the show

The genesis of *L'État de siège* was a very long one. The first point to be made when talking about the history of the play is that it was not an original play by Camus. To understand the origin of this project, you have to go back to the years 1934 and 1935, when Barrault visited Antonin Artaud just before this Poet of Marseille left for Mexico and Ireland, where, following events that are still not really clear, he was interned (he would remain excluded from all social life, being confined in several institutions from 23 September 1937² to 26 May 1946³).

Barrault and Artaud intended to put on a show on the subject of the plague, making use of the ideas that Artaud had developed in his celebrated article *Le théâtre et la peste* [The Theatre and the Plague] published in *La Nouvelle revue française* in October 1934, where he mentioned that the scourge of the plague brought death but also excessive behaviour which served a cathartic function, which theatre can obviously do as well. The narrative framework, on the other hand, was to have been provided by a chronicle that for more than two centuries had been regarded as devoid of scientific interest and lacking in historical reliability. This was *Journal de l'année de la peste* [A Journal of the Plague Year], which Daniel Defoe had published in 1722. The journal recounts the difficulties that London experienced in 1665 at the time of a plague epidemic.

For the reasons mentioned, Artaud was unable to continue collaboration and Barrault had to leave the project in a drawer. It was only during the throes of the Occupation that the theatre director decided to adapt Defoe's book and write a play, and not a simple outline as has often been stated.⁴ The play bore a title unknown even to specialists of 20th-century theatre: *Le Mal des ardents* [The Pestilence]. This adaptation was written between 1941 and 1942. Aware

2 MAEDER, T. *Antonin Artaud*. Paris : Plon, 1978, p. 206.

3 THÉVENIN, P. 1896–1948. In *Cahiers de la Compagnie Renaud-Barrault*, 1958, Nos. 22–23, pp. 17–45; MAEDER, T. *Antonin Artaud*, p. 261; MÈREDIEU F. *C'était Antonin Artaud*. Paris : Fayard, 2006, p. 865.

4 Camus, who would have wanted to share the play's paternity with Barrault himself, as he states in the theatre programme conserved in the Fonds Barrault at the BnF, speaks of Barrault's work in terms of a "staging outline". However, given the quantity of manuscript and typed documents regarding the play, the outline here cannot be defined as a synonym of work limited in quantity and scope but is rather seen as a term indicating a phase prior to the definitive version of the dramatic text. For the theatre programme, see: Bibliothèque nationale de France [National library of France]: Fonds Renaud-Barrault, 4 COL-178 (238).

that he needed a writer to make the play's dialogue more effective, Barrault first turned to Jean-Paul Sartre, who declined for reasons to do with the staging of *Les Mouches* [The Flies], which was initially to have been done by Barrault but was eventually entrusted to Charles Dullin.⁵ Consequently, Sartre advised Barrault to approach Camus, because it was common knowledge in the writers' fraternity that Camus was writing a book on the effects of epidemics. Camus was enthusiastic at the idea of working with Barrault, because he knew of his work in the theatre to the point of making this comment in his notebooks in 1941 even though the two men had not yet met:

“In mime *Les Comédiens routiers* [Actors on the Road] use an incomprehensible language⁶ (an Esperanto of farce) not for its meaning but in order to give it life. Chanceler rightly emphasizes the importance of mime. The body in the theatre: all contemporary French theatre (except Barrault) has forgotten this.”⁷

However, Camus wanted to finish the *récit* that he would call *La Peste* and asked Barrault to come back to him once the task was completed. *La Peste* arrived in Paris bookshops on 10 June 1947. The collaboration between Camus and Barrault began as soon as the book was in press and did not stop until the play was put on. But while Camus's contribution was initially confined solely to writing dialogue⁸, it quickly changed in nature. In his *Souvenirs pour demain* [Memories for Tomorrow], Barrault tells us what their collaboration of “more than a year of uninterrupted work”⁹ was like:

5 Sartre withdrew his first play, *Les Mouches*, from Barrault because of a disagreement over the role of Electra, which was eventually played by Olga Kosakiewicz (who becomes Olga Dominique in the theatre programme), who was very close to Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre. The first performance of *Les Mouches* took place at the Théâtre de la Cité on 2 June 1943 and was staged by Charles Dullin. Cf. MAZZA V. *Albert Camus et 'L'Etat de siège' . Genèse d'un spectacle*. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017, pp. 94–108.

6 Did the use of *fatrasie* in *La Faim* have this origin for Barrault? Might this be another link before Camus and Barrault were to meet?

7 CAMUS, A. *Œuvres complètes*, t. II. (Ed. Jaqueline Lévi-Valensi). Paris : Gallimard, 2016, p. 928.

8 Initially Barrault wanted to use Camus as a “librettist” there in order to write some of the dialogue for his adaptation of Daniel Defoe's book. Cf. DUSSANE. *Maria Casarès*. Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1953, p. 58.

9 BnF: Fonds Renaud-Barrault, 4 COL-178 (238). The theatre programme has twenty unnumbered pages. Advertising covers eight inside pages and three of the four cover pages.

“Camus accepted enthusiastically. I was joyous and already saw myself being involved with Camus for a good part of my life. Camus was my ‘opportunity’. We enjoyed complete understanding. (...) We worked in a state of euphoria. I would say even a state of innocence. We felt ‘in the ascendancy’. All we had to do was slap death for death to retreat. Throughout the period of composition and then during the rehearsals we savoured a kind of happiness. The word to describe it would be joy. The joy of creating, of shaping a spatial object.”¹⁰

The reasons for failure

So why was the show a failure? In discussing the aesthetic reasons, Barrault and Camus declared in the Foreword to the published play that *L'État de siège*:

“...is not a play of traditional structure but a show whose avowed ambition is to mix all the dramatic forms of expression ranging from lyrical monologue to collective theatre through dumbshow, farce, and chorus.”¹¹

One can imagine that the public at the Marigny Theatre, which runs alongside the Champs Élysée, did not like a show that was difficult to classify and where the text was merely one component amidst a whole panoply of “dramatic forms of expression”. However, part of the reason for this failure is also to be found in the political position of Camus, who was not aligned (quite the contrary) with the French Communist Party and who had also been very critical of the church, attributing it a negative role in the play. Moreover, Camus set the play in Cadiz in order to remind people that Spain was still under a dictatorship despite that war having ended. This was in order to send a message to the French Communists, who were very close to the positions of the Soviet Union, which they considered a land of freedom. The movers and shakers of Paris as well as the press – *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, and “the red” *Les Lettres française* – had the influence to determine the success of a show and decreed that *L'État de siège* was a failed and belated response to the painful questions linked to the dark period of the Occupation. Jean-Jacques Gautier and Robert Kemp, who were representatives of a more traditional France, as well as Aragon’s wife, Elsa Triolet, and the Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel, were very hostile and personally

10 BARRAULT, J.-L. *Souvenirs pour demain*. Paris : Seuil, 1972, p. 204.

11 CAMUS, A. *L'État de siège*. Paris : Gallimard, 1948, p. 9.

attacked Camus, decreeing that he was neither a dramatist, philosopher, man of the theatre, or a novelist. Jean-Jacques Gautier opened his article in *Le Monde* the day after the premiere with a sentence smacking of an irrevocable indictment:

“This major visual, ideological, and dramatic spectacle is well worthy of our attention and discussion. However, it remains astonishingly inhuman because, while touching on the problems that move us deeply, it fails at any time to communicate to us the smallest scrap of emotion.”¹²

This journalist, who had won the Goncourt Prize in 1946 for *Histoire d'un fait divers* and who was admitted into the Académie française in 1972, aimed to strike at the three main aspects of the play: the staging, the ideological message, and the quality of the writing. The play was panned from the very opening words and before any analysis. Gautier then went on to attack the writer by accusing him of having chosen symbols and archetypes in order to speak by way of metaphor about the Occupation and the question of fear under the sway of dictatorship.

“You need human beings, you need real life and fewer symbols, you need more plot and fewer archetypes, more characters and less algebra, more action and less demonstration, more real people and fewer mere entities, less rhetoric, less grey matter, and more emotion....”¹³

Barrault and Camus's play was difficult to classify because it employed several dramatic forms. From an aesthetic viewpoint, the show eluded any kind of definition by becoming difficult even to define as theatre instead of a choreographic spectacle. From the ideological standpoint, the subject of the Occupation was too close in 1948 to the events really experienced to become the subject of a public debate, which is what a theatre stage is.

Camus had declared he wanted to write about totalitarianisms by treating them as a modern myth: a subject which aims to achieve a broader dimension of the tackled issue and a subject which aims at universality. Camus explains this clearly in the theatre programme, which affords the opportunity to give an account of the genesis of the show:

12 GAUTIER, J.-J. “L'État de siège” d'Albert Camus. In *Le Monde*, 1948, (29. 10. 1948).

13 Ibid.

“In 1941 Barrault had the idea of staging a show on the theme of the plague, which Antonin Artaud had also attempted. In the following years, it seemed to him easier to adapt for the purpose Daniel Foe’s [sic] great book ‘*Le Journal de l’année de la Peste*’ [sic]. He then produced an outline staging. When he learned that I myself was going to publish a novel on the same theme, he proposed that I should write the dialogue for this outline. I had other ideas on the question, and in particular it seemed preferable to me to drop Daniel de Foe [sic] and revert to Barrault’s original idea. Our initial conversations then led us to imagine a sort of modern myth.”¹⁴

Along with the essay *L’Homme révolté* [The Rebel] and the play *Les Justes* [The Just Assassins], Camus’s novel *La Peste* was part of the revolt cycle. *L’État de siège* was not part of the programmatic plan conceived in June 1947 at the same time as the publication of his novel, but the play does contain certain ideas that you find in *La Peste*, namely the attempt to overcome fear and the defeat of evil thanks to collective action, or, to use Camus’ vocabulary, by revolt. Here is the plan that Camus drafted from 17 to 25 June 1947 shortly after the publication of *La Peste*:

“1st series. Absurd: *L’Étranger* – *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* – *Caligula* and *Le Malentendu*.

2nd – Revolt: *La Peste* (and annexes) – *L’Homme révolté* – Kaliayev.¹⁵

3rd – Judgement – the first man.

4th – Love torn asunder: *The Stake* – *Of Love* – *The Tempter*.

5th – Creation corrected or *The System* – major novel + major meditation + unplayable play.”¹⁶

The press against the show

With *L’État de siège*, Camus and Barrault wanted to expose the horrors of totalitarianism, which they call the “scourge of the century”¹⁷, but they also wanted

14 BnF: Fonds Renaud-Barrault, 4-COL-178 (238). Some assertions would require correction, but the reconstruction of the genesis is right. The exceptions firstly concern Daniel Defoe’s novel, which is very present in *L’État de siège*, and secondly Artaud’s ideas, which do not appear in the play.

15 This was one of the titles chosen before the one that was adopted – *Les Justes*.

16 CAMUS, A. *Œuvres complètes*, t. II., pp. 1084–1085.

17 In the days running up to the opening performance, Barrault stated: “Camus is a man of

to convey a message of hope regarding the overcoming of fear and the possibility of victory over absolute evil if people are united, in other words, if they create the conditions to act together in order to revolt. While *Le Monde* tried to undermine the significance of Camus's commitment, *Le Figaro*, via a short review by Robert Kemp – who in 1956 was admitted into the Académie française like Jean-Jacques Gautier had been – communicates disappointment after so much expectation, given that this collaboration between Barrault and Camus was regarded as the main event of the 1948/1949 theatre season:

“What a let-down! What bitter disappointment! Terrible boredom.... Oh! Mr Camus's talent is not dormant, is not constantly out for the count, it does bestir itself.... But rarely so. Everything gets lost in words, words, words. And you think about all those martyrdoms suffered in silence, the concision of the farewells to their families by those who are to be shot, the discreet nobility of real complaints.”¹⁸

This passage shows how difficult it was to handle a sensitive argument, and that no matter what formal perspective was adopted, the risk of being criticized or ill received was considerable. However, there is another factor that needs to be stressed. *L'État de siège* was strongly criticized by the press at the time of its first performance not only because the allegories were defined as simplistic but also because of the abundance of choreographic movement and mimed passages. Jean-Jacques Gautier wrote of a “choreographic tragedy” and “dance theatre”¹⁹, and Jean Mauduit claimed that Barrault “tends to transform the theatre into a sort of symbolic choreography”²⁰, to give just two examples. It is possible that this spectacle was so different from what the theatre of the time had on offer that the press was divided between those

the theatre and an authentic individual. His play is of a total honesty. We will be performing it on 27th October. You could say, if you like, that it is about the scourge of the age.” Cf. JEENER, J.-B. *L'État de siège doit faire la preuve que nous sommes une vraie troupe nous dit Jean-Louis Barrault [L'État de siège is to prove that we are a real troupe, Jean-Louis Barrault told us]*. In *Le Figaro*, 1948, (20. 10. 1948). Some journalists also expressed themselves in these terms to indicate the forms of totalitarianism: FAVALELLI, M. *L'État de siège d'Albert Camus au théâtre Marigny expose (allégoriquement) notre “mal du siècle” [Albert Camus' L'État de siège at the Marigny Theatre exposes (allegorically) the “scourge of our age”]*. In *Paris-Presse*, 1948, (29. 10. 1948).

18 KEMP, R. *L'État de siège au Théâtre Marigny*. In *Le Figaro*, 1948, (29. 10. 1948).

19 GAUTIER, J.-J. *L'État de siège d'Albert Camus*. In *Le Monde*.

20 MAUDUIT, J. *L'État de siège, d'Albert Camus*. In *Témoignage chrétien*, 1948, (5. 11. 1948).

who saw an excess of text and those who saw over-dynamic staging. But the possibility that the movers and shakers and intelligentsia wanted to settle scores with Camus and Barrault for their success and their nonaligned position remains the most convincing hypothesis.²¹

Elsa Triolet and *Les Lettres françaises*

While almost all the journalists harshly criticized the play at the time of its first production, there are still some press reactions to consider individually, even if only briefly. There were two articles which did not confine themselves to just criticizing the play and took advantage of the prevailing orthodoxy of regarding the show as unsuccessful in order to discredit Camus as a writer and a committed one at that. Elsa Triolet was Louis Aragon's wife, and they both represented a model for communists in France. Aragon was the manager of *Les Lettres françaises* between 1953 and 1972, and at the time the show was put on Elsa Triolet was that publication's theatre critic.²² She had sung Camus's praises over *L'Étranger* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in a short book published in 1945.²³ At *L'État de siège*'s first production, Camus as its co-author was ultimately accused of not being a good dramatist and someone who used a journalistic technique to compose a dramatic text:²⁴

“In fact, this modern myth amounts to a series of *Combat* editorials buried in the undergrowth of a learned staging. Editorials which are not a direct response to the events of the day are blunted, reaching no one. And the very way abjection, spinelessness, tyranny, courage, and love are expressed in no way impresses their image or moves us.”²⁵

21 The press was already stressing a few months after the Renaud-Barrault company was set up that it was overshadowing the Comédie française and that Barrault could become its administrator. Cf. BÉNÉDICK, C. Jean-Louis Barrault succèdera-t-il à M. André Obey? [Will Jean-Louis Barrault take over from Mr André Obey?]. In *Le Petit Poitou*, 1947, (11. 2. 1947); OUTIE, C. Jean-Louis Barrault administrera-t-il le Théâtre Français? [Will Jean-Louis Barrault administer the National Theatre?]. In *France libre*, 1947, (12. 2. 1947).

22 Elsa Triolet's first feuilleton théâtral appeared in issue No. 230 of *Les Lettres françaises*, (21. 10. 1948). The theatre reviews are to be found on page 7, which is the penultimate page.

23 TRIOLET, E. *Le Mythe de la baronne Mélanie* (with two drawings by Henri Matisse). Neuchâtel ; Paris : Ides et Calendes, 1945.

24 Elsa Triolet was not the only person to almost exclusively criticize Camus over *L'État de siège*, when both of the show's authors should have been addressed.

25 TRIOLET, E. Jouer sur le velours... Théâtre Marigny: “L'État de siège”. In *Les Lettres françaises*, 1948, (4. 11. 1948).

The error lies, as it were, in using a genre unsuitable for dramatic writing, particularly as the journalistic register that Camus is said to have used clearly lacked the depth of reflection necessary to treat totalitarianism in an effective way. Triolet goes on raining blows on Camus, mocking his talent, a talent which eventually she fails to locate:

“All the same, I have been trying to find out how this text (I cannot bring myself to call it a play) might be rehabilitated. I have tried everything: Albert Camus is not a dramatic author, of course, but a philosopher... he is not a philosopher, of course, but a poet... he is not a poet, of course, but a psychologist... he is not a psychologist, of course, but an historian... he is not an historian, of course, but a politician... Nothing holds together, there is no excuse. But what, then, is he? A novelist?... And yet this show casts an odd light on these novels, on his philosophical thinking...”²⁶

The more the review goes on, the more the criticism is broadened out in an attempt to strike down more than the dramatist and man of the theatre. Triolet seeks to undermine what might be the certainties of Camus’s readers, who regarded him as a novelist and philosopher. It is a real settling of scores by a member of the French Communist Party with someone who was nonaligned.

Barrault’s explanations

Unlike Camus, Barrault sought to defend his show in the days following the deadly blows of criticism and later on when stock was taken of his company’s time at the Marigny Theatre. In 1954 the director revealed the major difficulties he had had to face since the company had been set up. Barrault recalled *Hamlet*, the company’s first show, which afforded him great satisfaction but which was the most difficult play from the physical standpoint due to the length of the performance and the efforts demanded as well as from the psychological standpoint because the characters’ anxieties weighed heavily on the shoulders of the actors before and after each performance. But the failure of *L’État de siège* was a great disappointment for Barrault and removed the possibility of creating a duo similar to that of Louis Jouvet and

26 Ibid.

Jean Giraudoux.²⁷ Moreover, Barrault anticipated that Camus “would, given his sensibility, bear it [the failure] gallantly, but would be no less affected by it, and I began to fear that he might be lost to us”²⁸.

In seeking out the mistake, Barrault stressed that Camus’s wish to make a political play with easily identifiable allegories, while ultimately neglecting the metaphysical side sustained by Artaud’s ideas, turned the show into an incandescent object which unsettled both intellectuals and critics, who were forced to ask themselves questions about France’s position during the Occupation and the phoney war. Here is the passage on the failure of *L'État de siège* from Barrault’s second autobiography:

“What mistake did we make? For we surely did make one. Perhaps this one. For me, *La Peste* was salutary through the accumulation of dark forces brought to a climax: the initiatory, magical conception inspired by Artaud. This was to give to the play an Aeschylean lyricism. For Camus, *La Peste* or the dictator was Evil, a social Evil that fear alone sustained, but which the suppression of fear put to flight. The style was more modern but could also become Aristophanesque. The common point between our two feelings was the suppression of fear, overcoming the greatest despair”²⁹.

Spain, the Church, and Gabriel Marcel

Unlike Barrault, Camus did not respond to any of his peers except for Gabriel Marcel, who was indignant for several reasons of an ideological nature. One reason was because the church had been stigmatized by being given a minor role with decidedly negative connotations. In addition, the play was located on the Iberian peninsula instead of another place where individual freedom was not respected:

“First, I do not find it courageous or even very honest to have located the action in Spain, in Cadiz, rather than in some Dalmatian or Albanian port or sub-Carpathian city: I cannot help thinking that this fact is not to be imputed to Mr Camus himself whose bravery is obvious. Any impartial, well-informed

27 BARRAULT, J.-L. *Mes deux grands chagrins de théâtre* [My two great sorrows of theatre]. In *Le Figaro littéraire*, 1954, (24. 4. 1954).

28 BARRAULT, J.-L. *Nouvelles réflexions sur le théâtre*. Paris : Flammarion, 1959, p. 33.

29 *Ibid*, pp. 33–34.

person will agree that for some time the news most likely to drive to despair those concerned for human dignity and freedom does not come at all from the Iberian peninsula.”³⁰

In a long article, Gabriel Marcel shows that he does not know the origin of the show and compares the novel *La Peste* with *L'État de siège* while making a list of the changes said to be the basis for the show's failure. After declaring that he is entirely in agreement with Camus if “you confine yourself to the natural and political order”³¹ concerning people's freedom, Marcel continues his attack on a moral and religious front:

“There is a dimension lacking in him, he knows it and suffers, I believe, from it: but why was it necessary to assign the Church only a ridiculous and odious role in the play, which was not the case in *La Peste*. On this point, too, the contrast is distressing.”³²

The Catholic philosopher cannot stand seeing the character of the priest, who does not appear in the cast list, confined to a negligible position in an extreme situation like that of an occupation, even if it is constructed via allegorical figures. After recognizing the writer's status in the French literary panorama, Marcel's conclusion unfortunately has a cruelly prophetic air:

“I therefore continue to think that in our literature today he is one of the very rare men, one of the very rare consciences of which our country can be legitimately proud. But until further notice I will be unable to believe that he is a dramatic author.”³³

Camus's only response and its connection with *L'État de siège*

Camus responded with an article entitled *Pourquoi l'Espagne ?* [Why Spain?], which became highly celebrated and appeared in the newspaper of which he had been editor-in-chief. His response seeks to show that the denunciation

30 MARCEL, G. *L'État de siège*. In *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 1948, (11. 11. 1948).

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

of the deprivation of freedom does not belong to any ideology, and that no one can call this into question by accusing him of being partisan:

“You will probably find a great deal of passion here for a petty pretext. (...) There are ambitions which are not my ambitions (...) But it seems to me that there is another ambition that should be the ambition of all writers: to bear witness and to cry out whenever possible, to the extent of our talent, on behalf of those who are subjugated like us. It is this ambition that you have called into question in your article, and I will never cease to refuse you the right to do so as long as a man’s murder will seem to render you indignant only to the extent that the man shares your ideas.”³⁴

The consequences of the failure for the two playwrights were considerable. Barrault would no longer work with another author of his generation in such a close way where the tasks are mixed to the point that you no longer know who was responsible for what aspect of the show. For Camus, the fallout was even simpler to describe. He would write no more original plays and stuck only to adaptations. *Les Justes*, which would be performed at the Hebertot Theatre on 15 December 1949 in the staging of Paul Cetty, was already ongoing at the time *La Peste* was being written.

In the hope of having generated a certain curiosity in a little-known play, whose dramatic content has not been under review here, it only remains to recall the very particular affection that Camus held for the simultaneously painful and euphoric experience that the *L'État de siège* venture represented. Presenting his plays for an American edition published in 1957, he wrote:

“At its premiere in Paris *L'État de siège* effortlessly obtained the unanimity of the critics. There are certainly few plays which will have enjoyed such a complete panning. The result is all the more regrettable in that I have never ceased to consider that *L'État de siège* is, with all its flaws, perhaps the piece of my writing that most resembles me.”³⁵

Translated by Robert Fowler

34 CAMUS, A. Pourquoi l'Espagne? In *Combat*, 1948, (25. 11. 1948).

35 CAMUS, A. *Œuvres complètes*, t. II., p. 372.

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The Limitations of Slovak Modernist Drama (Július Barč-Ivan as a Case Study)

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Abstract: The study discusses Slovak Modernist drama in the interwar period and analyses works by Július Barč-Ivan (1909–1953). It shows the heterogeneity and plurality of his approaches when constructing plays, which led to an innovative “creative destruction” of the dramatic form. Some of these innovations were based on implementing lyrical and epical principles in drama, whereas some of them were related to contexts of visual arts, painting, and film; some of them reflected philosophical, theological, and psychological concepts. The article also argues that Barč-Ivan, partially consciously and partially unconsciously, imposed limits and control on this destruction so that the form withstood and restricted the chaos. Regarding theatre, it argues that Barč-Ivan’s plays contain Modernist elements that resisted staging in his time and resisted staging generally, even though postmodern theatre might have brought some solutions to the challenges.

Key words: Slovak Modernist drama, Expressionist drama, Július Barč-Ivan (1909–1953), dramatic form, *dramatis personae*, dramatic plot, interdisciplinarity and multimedia in drama

Modernization processes in Europe between the middle of the 19th and 20th centuries not only enhanced industrialization and technical progress but also changed political systems and societal values as well as cultural and artistic production. Modernism encompassed numerous contradictions between the national and cosmopolitan, local and universal, natural and civilized, primitive and technically developed, subjective and collective, and the individual and the masses. In the arts, homogeneous and harmonious unity that also guaranteed a social contract was replaced by heterogeneity and fragmentation. “In Eastern Europe, as elsewhere”, Marci Shore has suggested, “the aesthetic ‘crisis of representation’ was a crisis of modernity”¹. Arts following the fall of empires reflected chaos, revolution, provocation, and

1 SHORE, M. Eastern Europe. In LEWIS, P. *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 228.

a desire for novelty. While “moderna belonged to empire, the avant-garde was modernism in a post-imperial age”².

In Slovakia, modernization processes and avant-garde movements only manifested in the interwar period. Nevertheless, along with “opening windows to Europe”, especially in the 1920s, there was a strong desire to preserve the traditions and continuity of cultural development. The resistance to accepting innovations from foreign cultures had to do with a perception of national culture as means of perseverance. In addition, Slovak interwar culture only manifested some Modernist contradictions, such as the opposition between the urban and rural, the historical and mythical, and rational and instinctual principles. Other aspects, such as revolt and revolution, were only limited to a handful of young communist intellectuals. Slovak culture almost ignored incentives to break sexual taboos and attack institutions and language, which can be explained by historical circumstances (the persecutions of Slovak institutions and language by Hungarian authorities before 1918).

The denial of Realism in Slovak interwar literature was accompanied by the penetration of lyricism into all genres. In fiction, Expressionism gave rise to Naturism (also called Lyrical Prose School) in the late 1930s and 1940s, which emphasized irrational and mythical forces in nature and people and limited historical and social aspects. Neo-Symbolism and avant-garde movements, especially Poetism and Surrealism, developed in poetry. Drama was influenced by the Realist tradition; however, contacts with German and Czech theatre cultures facilitated the rise of some experimental pieces, echoing Expressionism and Poetism (“lyrical theatre”).

Július Barč-Ivan (1909–1953) can be considered a “founding father” as well as the “swan-song” of Slovak Modernist drama. In the 1970s, Zoltán Rampák characterized Barč-Ivan’s drama from the 1930s and 1940s as Expressionist, whereas in the 1980s Ivan Kusý wrote about the “drama of ideas and model situations” (which could be a euphemism for Existentialism at times when non-Marxist philosophies and aesthetics were rejected). Other scholars, such as Július Vanovič, pointed at the psychological and spiritual (religious) aspects of Barč-Ivan’s drama.³ Attributes such as “Expressionist”,

2 Ibid, p. 217.

3 For more details, see RAMPÁK, Z. *Július Barč-Ivan: štúdie o dramatickej tvorbe*. Martin : Osveta, 1972; VANOVIČ, J. *Cesta samotárova*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1994 (written in the late 1960s); KUSÝ, I. *Dráma ideí a modelových situácií, Július Barč-Ivan*. In ROSENBAUM, K. *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry V. Literatúra v rokoch 1918 – 1945*. Bratislava : VEDA, 1984.

“Existentialist”, “à thèse”, “psychological”, “religious”, and many others aspire for precision and imply a potential “hybridization” of drama. It is interesting that some aspects and meanings in Barč-Ivan’s drama could benefit from the revival of theatre of the past (religious and philosophical drama), whereas others require new theatre means and languages (and spaces).

Apart from two works banned due to censorship⁴, Barč-Ivan’s plays were staged in his lifetime.⁵ However, the old-fashioned Realist staging, surviving in the interwar period due to the underdeveloped theatre tradition in Slovakia⁶, did not enable directors and actors to communicate all aspects of his works. Even though Barč-Ivan is part of today’s repertoire in Slovak theatres (be they professional, amateur, or student-led), he is still considered difficult to stage.⁷ However, his work largely inspired a younger generation of playwrights writing Existentialist and absurd drama in Slovakia in the late 1940s and in the 1960s. For example, the works of Štefan Králik (1909–1983), Peter Karvaš (1920–1999), Leopold Lahola (1918–1968), Ivan Bukovčan (1921–1975), and others revived the spirit of Modernist experimentation and were an alternative to the dullness of Socialist Realism.

Modernism brought a crisis of mimesis and violated the purity of genres, and Barč-Ivan’s drama reflected this “contamination”. Heterogeneity and multiplicity can be applied when discussing Barč-Ivan’s multi-ethnic origin (the German and Hungarian background of his parents)⁸ as well as when considering his writing and dealing with the genre of his drama. Besides drama, Barč-Ivan wrote fiction, religious texts, and journalistic texts; he also attempted to write a film script.⁹ His plays used principles and techniques of

4 Two plays, *Diktátor* [The Dictator] and *Mastný hrniec* [The Greasy Pot], were banned for alluding to the regime: the former in 1938 and the latter in 1941.

5 In theatres in Martin, Bratislava and Košice.

6 The professional Slovak National Theatre was only founded in Bratislava in 1920.

7 He was considered a playwright of a literary (book) drama waiting for a capable director, at least according to reviews from the mid-1990s when one of his plays was staged at the Slovak National Theatre.

8 His father’s family background was German, whereas his mother, née Ivan, was ethnically Hungarian. Barč-Ivan felt a deep affection towards his mother and used her maiden name along with his father’s family name.

9 One of his early short stories, *Film*, published in a collection entitled *Pohádka* [Fairy Tale] in 1933, was written in the form of a script. After the Second World War, when the Czechoslovak Film Company encouraged writers to contribute towards the development of this media, Barč-Ivan submitted a film script based on his story *Cesta ďaleká* [A Long Journey]. In spite of its interesting theme (euthanasia which could also be interpreted in religious terms as a father’s sacrifice of a son), the script was rejected.

classical drama as well as of poetry, fiction, and film. The themes of his drama alluded to political practices and ideologies as well as to Protestant theology and psychology.

With respect to drama, this study shows the heterogeneity and plurality of Barč-Ivan's approaches when constructing plays, which got manifested as "contaminating" drama by other genres and arts and led to an innovative "creative destruction" of the dramatic form. The question is how compatible various centripetal elements in a Modernist dramatic form can be in order to produce a good play. The author also argues that Barč-Ivan, partially consciously and unconsciously, imposed limits and control on this destruction so that the form withstood and restricted the chaos.

With respect to theatre, this article also argues that Barč-Ivan's plays contain Modernist elements that resisted staging in his time, especially when considering theatre spaces as well as technical possibilities and actors' preparation. Moreover, "the theatre's intrinsic connection to physical reality and social existence (communicated through the bodies of the actors and their relationship to each other) make some of the key modernist principles inapplicable"¹⁰. What is more, Barč-Ivan's plays contain elements that resist staging generally, even though postmodern theatre might have brought some solutions to Modernist challenges.

Before looking at the "form" of Barč-Ivan's plays, it is important to discuss the predominant themes of his drama, also mentioning their connection with concepts of utopia and dystopia. In several plays from the 1930s, such as *Tritisíc ľudí* [Three Thousand People] (staged in 1934, published in 1935), *Človek ktorého zbili* [The Man Who Was Beaten] (staged in 1936, published in 1964), *Diktátor* [The Dictator] (staged and withdrawn from the repertoire in 1938, published in 1981), and *Na konci cesty* [At The End of the Journey] (staged in 1939, published in 1942), Barč-Ivan showed the decline of trust in humanity and democracy among individuals and in society. However, except for *Diktátor*¹¹, order and justice were restored in his plays, which were mostly set in a historically or geographically distant milieu. The resemblance with

10 INNES, Ch. Modernism in Drama. In LEVENSON, M. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 131.

11 Based on the title, one is tempted to think about possible parallels with the American movie *The Great Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin from 1940. However, Barč-Ivan seemed to allude to European dictatorships in a more abstract manner than Chaplin did. It is also interesting that in his story *Pohádka* from the early 1930s, Barč-Ivan presented the anarchist movement. He considered it a similar danger to democracy.

Czechoslovakia was still perceivable, but the plays had a more general validity; the situation was similar but not identical to the Slovak one. The use of simile already implied Barč-Ivan's inclination to metaphor. Through clashing principles, ideologies, and worldviews, the plays showed various possibilities of resolving conflicts. Multiple options ("versions"), along with a film-like technique of replaying some scenes, were used to violate the linearity of the plot. *Diktátor* pointed out the "theatralization" of political life as well as the affinities between politics and theatre. For example, instead of a "character" (a unique personality with a clearly defined distinguishing principle), politics required a "role", since characters wear "masks", faces are irrelevant.

The predominant feature of Barč-Ivan's plays written during the Second World War – such as *Matka* [Mother] (staged and published in 1943), *Neznámy* [The Unknown] (staged and published in 1944), and *Dvaja* [Two] (staged and published in 1945) – was the effort to re-establish an equilibrium; this happened as "transubstantiation": the antagonist integrated the protagonist's oppositional principle that was originally strange to him or her, and thus "evil" got subdued. In the 1930s, Barč-Ivan's dramas resulted in the idea that "yet, the world is a good place", but his plays from the wartime period show almost a Manichean duality: an eternal struggle between good and evil. Evil is present and strong but good penetrates it and hinders its expansiveness. The plays *Veža* [The Tower] (staged and published in 1947) and *Koniec* [The End] (written in 1948, fully published and staged in 2001) were written in the interim post-war period between 1945 and 1949. The former was set in Biblical times (alluding to Babel) and the latter after a nuclear catastrophe, but they both dealt with the future of mankind. They can be perceived in the context of utopias and dystopias related to traditional eschatology as well as the fear of abusing technical progress. In *Veža*, Barč-Ivan stated that an absolute good was impossible if evil persisted; evil would remain an active force and the world was doomed to duality. In *Koniec*, darkness (decline, death) absorbs light (life), but life might have been preserved somewhere (u-topos). Both plays communicate the superiority of universal (history) over individual desire, and this perspective brings them closer to religious writing. Since utopian and dystopian elements also express a collective fear of the decline of values in the existing world as well as of the rising new world¹², these plays also reflected the clash between ideologies in the era of "phony peace".

12 KLAJČ, D. *The Plot of the Future. Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor : The University of Michigan Press, 1991, p. 7.

The initial and final parts of Barč-Ivan's writing emphasized his worries about the current state and future of humankind, whereas his best plays written during the Second World War examined the nature and manifestations of "evil". In the initial period, empirical and psychological realities remained separate and autonomous. During the war, they mirrored each other and merged. In the final period, a panoramic perspective of universal action dominated; setting in time and space, as well as individuals and their psyche, became less relevant. Barč-Ivan's ideas about the universe might echo the Protestant theology of crisis based on the concept of the separation between God and the created world. Humans wishing to bridge the gap make a futile effort to reach God but remain limited to their human standards. However, revelation and salvation have been going on throughout history. The divine and the human, totality and fragments, might overlap like panoramic and partial perspectives on the stage. This concept should obviously be taken into consideration when thinking of a theatre space for staging Barč-Ivan.

At the same time, Barč-Ivan's religious background contradicted, or at least limited, his approach to Modernism. Even though he showed that there was duality in the universe, his faith was probably not Gnostic. Postulating God as utterly different and silent, but One, he also confirmed that totality was superior to any partiality and could be exposed to destruction but not annihilated. In accordance with this principle, Barč-Ivan understood protests, pleas, and sacrifices but rejected upheavals, revolts, and revolutions.¹³ Humans, including artists, can aspire to creative destruction but will inevitably remain limited to re-arranging existing elements: abandoning the form would be similar to killing God, and would only bring chaos and nothingness.

Since the titles of most of Barč-Ivan's plays are nominal, the processes of synthesis, analysis, abstraction, and concretization can be applied when thinking about them. The plays stimulate two-fold operations. Firstly, generic terms get analytically divided into partial and more specific manifestations; then the restoration of meanings again requires synthesis and abstraction. (Barč-Ivan's plays also could be "deconstructed" and interpreted by asking questions like "What is a mother?", "What is a father?", "What is strong?", and "What is weak?") Modern arts, especially Cubism, largely depended on a similar attitude to structure and composition. Another trend

¹³ See, for example *Matka* and his works of fiction, such as *Pohádka* (from the early 1930s) as well as *Cesta ďaleká* and *Železné ruky* [Iron Arms], which were both written in the late 1940s.

worth mentioning in relation to Barč-Ivan's dramas of the 1940s is his tendency to empty the stage of props and reduce colours and shapes (which reminds one of the avant-garde in the visual arts).

As already mentioned, Barč-Ivan's drama drew upon lyrical and epical principles, which also meant an intrinsic tension within the dramatic form. The lyrical principle was considered to be generally present in the modern arts; in Barč-Ivan, it was related to the focus on the subject and on the inner psychological reality. Barč-Ivan's use of duality and masks reflected the crisis of identity and echoed the Romantic and Modernist tradition of the *doppelgänger*. The split of the personality was expressed by exploiting two or even more characters (i.e., *Neznámy*). The loss of substance led to an arbitrariness of "signs"; as a consequence, individuals could be replaced by roles and faces by masks.

Like many Expressionist artists, Barč-Ivan expressed states beyond reason and instinctual reactions, such as madness, visions, premonitions, "dark nights of the soul", violence, and crime. These could be interpreted either by "ascending" to spiritual realms or by "descending" to unconscious realms. The subjectivity and arbitrariness in his works enhanced uncertainty and fear as well as isolation. This situation was also reflected in the nature of dramatic repartee and dialogues¹⁴, which either became brief, repetitive, and often tense, or tended to be rhetoric and pathetic. This feature could be perceived as one of the Expressionist techniques experimenting with language where "concentration" meant the reduction to elementary and substantial utterances and "decentration" emphasized the eloquence and ornamental qualities of language.¹⁵ By using this approach, his plays acquired a diverse tempo and rhythm. Dialogue got closer to monologue (which is also typical for lyrics); on the other hand, he also produced mass scenes with polyphony (which obviously was inspired by the social reality of his era). Since Barč-Ivan also widely used pause and silence, much of the action was to be expressed by emphasis, intonation, and volume of the voice as well as by non-verbal means such as mimicry, gesticulation, body posture, and proximity. Some scenes in Barč-Ivan's plays would thus require experimental or physical theatre, pantomime, and dance, which was obviously far beyond staging practices in Slovakia in his time. Barč-Ivan implied the limits of language; one of

14 RAMPÁK, Z. *Július Barč-Ivan: štúdié o dramatickej tvorbe*. Martin : Osveta, 1972, pp. 13– 57.

15 TERRAY, E. K poetike nemeckého literárneho expresionizmu. In *Problémy literárnej avantgardy*. Bratislava : VEDA, 1968, p. 348.

the remaining challenges for theatre is whether one can transcend and find a new language capable of expressing states beyond reason and *logos*.

In addition to lyric and epic, Barč-Ivan's drama largely benefited from techniques developed by film such as retrospection, freezing, and repeating as well as slowing down and accelerating action with different emphases. The simultaneity of time and space was made possible by implementing techniques of cut and montage. The relationship of the partial and total could also be expressed by using different focus and shifting between the full image and the detail.

An interesting detail related to Barč-Ivan's drama is the prevalence of "male" protagonists, except for Mother in the eponymous play and Marianna in *Dvaja*, both of whom are desexualized characters. Marianna's madness eliminates her sexuality, making her reminiscent of Ophelia, the Woman in White, or the female patient in Robert Wiene's film *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* [The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari] (1920). Even though Modernism and the avant-garde challenged traditional concepts of family and broke sexual taboos, Barč-Ivan remained conservative in this regard. In numerous works, for example, in *Na konci cesty*, *Matka*, and especially in the novel *Železné ruky*, he showed the crisis of the family but was against the removal of hierarchy, authority, and paternal superiority.

The epic principle, traditionally related to the category of dramatic plot, also manifested as personal history or pre-history that was not always shown on the stage in actions but often only reconstructed in speaking, which caused Barč-Ivan to be reproached for the predominance of words over actions on stage, or, in other words, for writing "literary" dramas. In utterances, he frequently used the past tense considered typical for epics as well as a conditional mode that suppressed time implications and emphasized alternative actions. Barč-Ivan also used various concepts of time: besides linear and chronological time of events and actions, he used the subjective experience of time as well as the cyclical concept of time. In his plays with elements of utopia and dystopia, he violated and denied concepts of physical and measurable time in accordance with modern physics and philosophy. Since human actions were only a part of universal processes, they were to be perceived as fragments close to a scene in a play. This concept could be communicated by exploiting space in theatre, for example, by using a second, circular, or panoramic space (which brings us back to Medieval theatre spaces), or by using technical means such as the reflection (mirroring) of two or several spaces or a projection. Using multiple spaces and implementing multimedia in perfor-

mances is one of the possibilities of how to communicate the deeper meanings of Barč-Ivan's dramas. The plot of Barč-Ivan's plays is neither "united" nor "of appropriate magnitude". It covers a timeframe that does not overlap with real time or the time of performance and cannot be presented through Realistic acting on the stage in "brick and mortar" theatres.

On one hand, Barč-Ivan's plays showed affinities with the drama of ideas (*à thèse*); on the other hand, they favoured subjectivity. Philosophical and religious aspects primarily underlined universal principles and concepts, whereas psychological and psychoanalytical elements focused on individuals. Two-fold manifestations in Barč-Ivan's drama were seemingly contradictory, but they became united in abstraction and metaphor. As was the case of the setting with looser references to historical time and space, his characters lost concrete and typical features and functioned more as principles or archetypes.

Barč-Ivan innovated dramatic categories by multiple means. Some of these innovations of dramatic form were based on implementing lyrical and epical principles in drama, whereas some of them were related to contexts of visual arts, painting, and "moving pictures". Some of them reflected philosophical, theological, and psychological concepts. Using duality and masks, showing irrational states, and preferring silence and non-verbal communication to language, he created characters that were able to express a crisis of identity and crisis of reason. (He also "democratized" his drama, often choosing characters from the social periphery.) He rejected the linearity and unity of a dramatic plot. His familiarity with different time concepts, as well as with film techniques, resulted in presenting multiple and simultaneous actions with a different rhythm. The complexity of Barč-Ivan's drama surpassed Realist theatre, and some approaches and meanings also went beyond the possibilities of Modernist theatre of the era. In this respect, Modernist drama challenged the rise of postmodern theatre. In addition, Barč-Ivan's Modernism was also limited in a different sense: even though he approached several limits (concerning the Christian religion, family, language, and so on), he did not go beyond them. He was probably aware that if the destruction got out of control, it would change into chaos, similarly to the situation when the lack of rational control means madness.¹⁶ Barč-Ivan defended the world that had

16 For Marianna in the play *Dvaja*, her madness also means happiness and harmony while her rational and conscious existence was miserable (the idea of happiness beyond reason). Barč-Ivan also used the motif of madness in his story *Návrat* [The Return], but he treated it as a distortion of reality leading to violence.

a form: a person endowed with life, reason, and language nonetheless only has access to this side of being.

Translated by the author

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Values of the Past, Values of the Present: the Conversion of Values in Sławomir Mrożek's Work and their Message for Today

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Abstract: This study examines the transformation of creative approaches in the work of the Polish playwright Sławomir Mrożek and its influence on the values that his works point to. The transformation of the thinking of society and changes in the political climate and social conditions led to a diverse grasp of the absurdity of everyday life. However, the playwright's work did not stop at the production of one-acts and plays influenced by absurd drama; it continued in the way of revealing real facts and characters and in the effort to achieve the internal motives of both the characters as well as the functioning of social laws.

This article also focuses on the approach to values in Mrożek's creative process. How did he perceive the sphere of values? Mrożek was a playwright who systematically worked, especially in the first period of his work, with irony, paraphrasing, and the absurdity of situations. A logical question therefore arises: Does the relativization of values open a space for new values, or is it just his manifest and protest opposing something and somebody without suggesting a solution, a way out, or even hope?

Keywords: values, absurd drama, co-ordinated absurdity, theatre of the absurd, Central Europe

A playwright from Central Europe who has become recognized and staged on almost every continent is a paradox in the social and cultural context of this region. Sławomir Mrożek was indeed such a paradox, considering that by the end of the 1950s he had immediately become famous for his first play at a time when Eastern Bloc writers were seen as exotic in Western Europe but were not frequent guests there. Soon Poland became too small for him, so he travelled on a holiday that turned into a long-term emigration after 1968. After Italy, France, the United States, and Mexico he then returned to his native Poland only to finally settle in Nice, France. He spent significant parts of his life abroad. He acquired the feeling of an emigrant, he knew how emigrants felt and lived, and this became his lifestyle.

Before we reach the line of development in Mrożek's creative process, let us consider to what extent Mrożek is an authority for the present in bringing current themes or discourses to the cultural space of Poland and Central Europe. Mrożek became one of the most respected figures in Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of the 20th century. This fact is closely related to his life's peripeteia that voluntarily placed him in the light of the eternal emigrant. In 1968 Mrożek and his wife moved to Paris. From his correspondence with the writer A. Tarn¹ and the theatre scholar J. Błoński² we can sense that he wanted to know something else; he needed a different experience. At that time, Charles de Gaulle was in power in France, but the left-wing world view and the socialist establishment's idealization was becoming increasingly popular. A break in his life as an emigrant occurred in the autumn of 1968, when he published a letter in *Le Monde*³ and in the Parisian newspaper *Culture* protesting the entry of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia. As a result, he earned the displeasure of the Polish government, which ordered him to immediately return to Poland within two weeks. Mrożek responded by requesting for political asylum in France. In Poland, Mrożek's actions met with the support of theatre-makers, but many worried about their own positions. After Mrożek did not return to Poland, the official reaction was almost immediate. Within a few days, all his works in Poland had been banned and his plays could not be staged. They were taken out of theatre repertoires. This ban applied to any kind of public presentation. The government had not intervened against Mrożek's plays before, because they were very popular. But now that he was an enemy of the people, it was a good opportunity to realize this intention.

After the political changes in Poland, he arrived home and was generally cordially received. In 1990 he came to Kraków for a two-week festival of his

1 Adam Tarn (20. 10. 1902, Łódź – 23. 6. 1974, Lausanne) was one of the most important figures of Polish postmodern theatre studies. In 1956 he founded the journal *Dialog*, focusing on international and Polish drama and theatre.

2 Jan Błoński (15. 11. 1931, Warsaw – 10. 2. 2009, Kraków) was a historian of literature, critic, essayist, and translator. He was the author of the extensive analysis of Mrożek's texts, *Wszystkie sztuki Sławomira Mrożka*.

3 MROŻEK, Sławomir. "List do Czechosłowacji" In *Le Monde*, 1968: "I am a Polish writer, not an emigrant. I am a member of the Union of Polish Writers. Regarding the active participation of the PPR in the armed aggression in Czechoslovakia, I express the following: I protest this action. I am in solidarity with all Czechs and Slovaks who have stood up against this action. Especially with my colleagues, Czech and Slovak writers, who are being persecuted and imprisoned."

plays on his sixtieth birthday. The Mrożek Theatre Festival was also organized in Amsterdam (1988) and Stockholm (1991). Of the four plays that Mrożek wrote during his stay in Mexico between 1990 and 2000, the most important is *Milóść na Krymie* [Love in the Crimea] (1993). The play captures Russian, Bolshevik, and post-Soviet history. In 1996 he returned with his wife to Kraków. Six years later he had a heart attack because of a head injury. The consequence of this was the loss of the ability to communicate in speech and script. Thanks to therapy that lasted for three years, he regained the ability to communicate and write. Some health problems had already occurred in Mexico, but his exhaustion fully manifested itself in Poland.

In 2006 his autobiography *Baltazar*, written after his heart attack to reinforce his brain activity, was published. This was the name Mrożek heard in dreams. It was supposed to be his new existence and the beginning of a new life. His illness had destroyed his personality, but he was able to evaluate his present life and analyse it from a different perspective.

Between 2000 and 2010, his most prominent pieces included those staged by Jerzy Jarocki (*Tango, Milóść na Krymie*) at the Teatr Narodowy [National Theatre] in Warsaw. Although spectators and critics expressed their interest, as a playwright Mrożek gradually lost contact with contemporary drama and its direction. He lost the status of mentor and artistic authority, particularly in the eyes of the younger generation of Polish theatre artists.

In the 1990s and the early 2000s, Mrożek went through a difficult period. In May 2008 he decided to leave Poland again and “stay forever” in Nice to relax and recuperate. This was obviously a decision influenced by the fact that the performance of his plays in Poland was very rare during the last few years of his life, and the younger generation of directors had an ambiguous, even negative, attitude to them.

In a debate in the *Dialog* journal, the theatre scholar Jacek Sieradzki raised the question more broadly: “Does Mrożek still have a chance in the present times?”⁴ Mrożek undoubtedly asked himself this question during his lifetime. The sense of a negative answer, in addition to his health problems, was one of the causes why he decided to undergo a final emigration and move from Kraków to Nice. After returning to his homeland in 1996, he had become disillusioned with the situation in culture and art. Younger generations often did not find their way to his one-act performances, his most significant

4 JARZĘBSKI, J. – RATAJCZAKOWA, D. – SIERADZKI, J. – SUGIERA, M. – SZCZAWIŃSKA, W. Czyściec? In *Dialog*, 2014, Vol. 58, No. 3, pp. 5–10.

feature-length works, or his more recent metaphysical plays. Mroźek did not get involved in the intergenerational conflict; for the younger generation, he became a playwright whom they accepted as one of the Polish giants, and they do not regularly use his texts. The director Kazimierz Kutz even stood up against the younger generation, particularly pointing out the young Polish director Weronika Szczawińska, and noted that her generation treated Mroźek with enmity. He expressed the hope that when the young ones grew up, they would humbly return to him. Statements such as this increased the intergenerational polarization. According to Jacek Sieradzki, even the death of the playwright did not reduce this problem. The younger generation of Polish theatre artists are not rebelling against Mroźek; they simply ignore him. The theatre scholar Małgorzata Sugiera states that rather than an intergenerational conflict, the problem is more about a natural cultural and social transformation that Mroźek reflects in his texts. As an example, she used the play *Indyk* [Turkey], where the author fragmentizes the storyline and characters in a way that is close to the current understanding of the drama. The interest or disinterest of the younger generation, including directors such as Krzysztof Warlikowski, was very cold. He even said that he would rather emigrate than stage his plays. The rigidity of this position is not aimed at Mroźek personally but rather at the theatrical poetics that he represents.

The theatre scholar Dobrochna Ratajczakowa states that “many of his plays have simply become prisoners of the situation since 1956”⁵. A situation in which, depending on certain freedoms, even dramatic authors might look at political and social conditions with some criticism and irony could allow them to more clearly point to the double-faced nature of the morality and actions of the establishment. The platform of absurd drama seemed appropriate for such a reflection and even inevitable under the circumstances. The audience subconsciously understood the hidden and less concealed connotations that appeared mainly in Mroźek’s one-acts. In the form of a feature-length play, the elements of absurd drama appeared in his most famous play *Tango*. After publishing *Tango* in 1964 in the journal *Dialog*, the play quickly found its way to the international scene (France, Germany, and the United States).

In the play, he criticizes intergenerational conflict and through an absurd situation indirectly expresses his opinion on forms of violence, marasmus,

5 JARZĘBSKI, J. – RATAJCAKOWA, D. – SIERADZKI, J. – SUGIERA, M. – SZCAWIŃSKA, W. Czyściec? In *Dialog*, pp. 5-10.

and the fear of power. Ultimately, the political level provides a very precise and uncomplicated vision of society at the time of totalitarianism. Even with the best formulated ideas, any ideology may shift to totalitarianism and the brutality of power, which is proven in the conclusion of the play. The raw power, represented by Edo, conquers the family and reaches into the social limelight as an undeterred individual and aggressor. Mrożek chose the family setting, because in the second half of the 20th century the socialist establishment called it “the basic cell of society” in a half-life of decay where nihilism was fighting with activism, anarchy with dictatorship, and morality with decline. On the other hand, the norms imposed by the political and social order were entering family relationships. Mrożek submits these relationships to his construct, where the younger generation stands on the side of marriage and fidelity, and the generation of the parents maintains the values of their youth and independence in relationships and lifestyle.

We can say that Mrożek wrote a play where, unlike in the grotesque one-acts, he applies the “co-ordinated absurdity”⁶ mentioned by Jan Błoński, which combines elements of the grotesque and comic opera with the facts of the period. He does not work with accurate facts but uses them to such an extent that it is possible to outline the inner connections and patterns of the family. He uses the real foundation of a family tragedy, but absurdity does not result from the symbol; it is not a woman buried in sand as in Beckett's *Happy Days*, characters in a setting of nobody and nothing. This is analogous to his play *Striptease*, where the omnipresent hand does not create absurdity but rather a situation of two men who let themselves be manipulated or are manipulated by it. His characters live real lives in their home in a specific time; they deal with situations that are close to reality (generational conflict, marriage, infidelity, and relationships), but they are bizarrely locked in them. Everyone defends the philosophy of their lives and personal beliefs. It is this co-ordinated absurdity abstracted in *Tango* that has attracted artists around the world more than any other Mrożek play. The circle of generational differences spirals back to the present, where we witness the various unprecedented misunderstandings growing into conflicts. The values and the message that the grotesque characters carry in them are fragmentary and somewhat distorted. In the case of *Tango*, the symbols become characters; we see them more specifically, but their behaviour is more realistic. Their interpretation thus becomes less clear.

6 SUGIERA, M. *Dramaturgia Sławomira Mrożka*. Kraków : Uniwersytas, 1996, p. 121.

In addition to *Tango*, Mrożek wrote other major plays during his time abroad such as *Emigranci* [Emigrants] (1978) in France and *Milósć na Krymie* (1998) in Mexico. In *Emigrants*, as has been discovered in the current research, Mrożek mainly deals with the feeling of an emigrant who has no choice: he must remain abroad because his homeland will not take him back due to the bad political situation. We named this “internal emigration”. His position as a human being is in the position of an intellectual, outcast, and dissident whose fate is not to return but rather to abide. His thinking and talent are expelled beyond the borders without the possibility of return. It is his identification with the character AA from his play that appears in the conflict with the economic migrant XX, who feels nostalgic for his native Poland. XX is a volunteer emigrant, and AA is the author himself who has been side-lined by his own homeland. On the other hand, being famous and popular abroad (mainly for *Tango* and *Emigranci*) granted him the status of a person whose existence had to be accepted by the representatives of power in Poland itself.

In *Emigranci*, Mrożek describes an external experience with Polish politics and the period of normalization. He is not true to the facts; he is not concerned with documenting a country in which he cannot live, and in the contemporary state of Polish politics he does not want to. Despite his gradual transformation from being an author as an absurdist to an author as a realist who is controlled by a strange logic of circumstances, to then being an author as a philosopher, the truthful representation of reality was of no interest to Mrożek. As a native Pole, he looks from the outside at a country which is gradually affected by political and social convulsions that physically weaken the social organism until a state of emergency is declared. As an emigrant who cannot return to his homeland, he is isolated from it; despite himself, he must seek a new identity in a foreign environment. Mrożek had many years of experience in this, so in his play he was able to draw on the situations he had experienced. In *Emigranci*, he almost microscopically focused on the real situation of two emigrants: AA cannot return to his country due to political emigration, and XX is an economic migrant who decided to solve his family situation by a temporary separation. Mrożek utilizes a real motivation in the text. The characters do not become types but are more sophisticated. AA is an intellectual who spends most of his days in his room with books and newspapers. He may be considered as an alter ego of Mrożek, but only partially. Mrożek did not emigrate from Poland for political reasons. At least in 1963, when he left Poland, it was not so. XX is a typical “gastarbeiter” who

went abroad to financially secure his family in Poland. For him, the basement apartment where he and AA live together is only a transitory place where he simply struggles to survive. He is a “momentary” emigrant, and he knows that his emigration will end at some point. He has no need to settle down. His thoughts are home-oriented to “the people back at home” and his family. In contrast to *Tango*, in *Emigranci* we can observe the collapse of family ties, which are replaced by solitude, the desire to find a balance in life, freedom, and material or intellectual sufficiency. For the present time, which is marked by many problems, including the migrant crisis, the aspect of searching for an identity and roots is very current and provides opportunities for comparison.

Mrożek's shift from absurd dramatic poetics to more psychological plays has already been mentioned: from the characters who carried signs of psychologization, gradually passing to the formation of metaphysical relationships in the characterization and actions of dramatic characters, through to the archetype of characters that possess an essence or attributes. His efforts resulted in one of his most debatable and prolific plays, *Milóść na Krymie*. He wrote this full-length play in Mexico in 1993. In the first act, which strictly adheres to Chekhov's poetics, one can feel logic and thoughtfulness. It is as if Mrożek wanted to get closer to Chekhov, but on the other hand he can be sharper and more focused in certain moments. He moved to the Nice guesthouse (named after the French city where Mrożek moved at the end of his life) in 1910, which is a period when czarist Russia was going through a crisis and gradual decay. The dissatisfaction of the lower classes with their social and economic situation was increasing. The intelligentsia was in a state of marasmus, without the energy to change anything and relying on the memories of times when it was the instigator of change. The Recreation Centre in 1928, where the second act takes place, portrays a period when nearly a decade had passed since the Great Socialist Revolution. The initial revolutionary slogans aimed at the weakest social groups are being implemented through a growing bureaucratic apparatus that is full of corruption, hypocrisy, and an ineffective hierarchy based on bribes and nepotism. The third act reflects the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the search for the lost position of the declining Soviet empire, from where Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov emerges as a demon from the past.

If we wanted to compare *Milóść na Krymie* with contemporary drama, the closest to it thematically would be the play *Czwarta siostra* [The Fourth Sister] written by Janusz Głowacki. Both plays originated in the

1990s.⁷ Like Mrożek, Głowacki experienced life as an emigrant. He was more interested in the reality of Russia during the Russian–Chechen conflict, the wild political situation, and the rise of the mafia and oligarchs. The play has a parade of big and small characters that lived and survived during three historical eras (the imperial, the socialist, and the early capitalist periods) that shaped Russia during the 20th century. The breakdown of the family is tied in with a paraphrase at Chekhov’s reception and a strong nostalgia for times when logic had some sense before we get into the nepotism of the 1920s, when the situational absurdity of bureaucracy comes to the fore.

The play *Milóść na Krymie* represents another turning point in Mrożek’s career as a playwright. Although it is not influenced by the country of his emigration (at that time Mexico) but rather by detachment figuratively likened to the geographical distance from Europe, he overcomes three periods of European history: before the First World War, the rise of communism, and the turbulent beginnings of democracy in Eastern Europe. Mrożek’s introversion is suppressed in his texts. Through his characters, he expresses his opinion on the social structure and interpersonal relationships, and the absurdity of everyday life that is influenced by a system that changes into reality and that melts away in the metaphysics and allegories of Mrożek’s last play *Karnawał, czyli pierwsza żona Adama* [Carnival or the First Wife of Adam]. Mrożek’s life and works are the history of a country torn by changes of regime, changes in the poetics of dramatic works, and changes in personal life. It is a triangle of significant lines that in Mrożek’s life does not represent a change of attitudes to life but rather how he regards these attitudes and confronts them.

The director and playwright Maciej Wojtyszko used the meeting of Mrożek with W. Gombrowicz in Chiavari, Italy, in his play *Dowód na istnienie drugiego* [The Reason for the Existence of the Other] (2012)⁸. Wojtyszko is known in the context of Polish theatre as a scriptwriter who takes pride in the text; being an author himself, he tries to accept the comments and notes of the author. He staged Mrożek’s plays, including *Milóść na Krymie* (Teatr Stary, Kraków, 1994). He was also the director of his last play, *Karnawał, czyli pierwsza żona Adama*. In *Dowód na istnienie drugiego*, according to the scenic notes from the conclusion of the play, Wojtyszko does not claim documentary precision. The meeting of both writers took place in June 1965 in Chiavari

7 *The Fourth Sister* was published in a journal seven years later (*Dialog* 10/1999).

8 *Dowód na istnienie drugiego*, published in *Dialog* 2/2013.

and Lavagne, where they spent the whole month together. We also know of the meeting in Vence, France.

The work of Mrożek reflects the values that were relativized or celebrated at the time they originated. The value of family in *Tango* alternates with the value of the relativization of freedom in *Emigrants* only to result in the depressed hope that comes with *Milóść na Krymie*. These processes, which appear in his three works, refer to the path and problems that Europe has been struggling with from the second half of the 20th century to the present: alienation, the search for new identity, and an uncertain future on the verge of the relational apocalypse that horrifies us and forces us to subconsciously think about the necessity of ending, but which also gives us a slight hope that everything can change.

The discourse on the values and the impact of various global crises in recent years has once again become a reality. The values that we wanted to eliminate, or at least combat, have not been replaced by anything else. Mrożek is confronted with this finding in *Karnawał, czyli pierwsza zona Adama*, where civilization is returning to the very beginning and the archetype and essence of humanity are redefined. His last play was received by Polish critics and spectators with mixed feelings. It premiered in Teatr Polski in Warsaw and was directed by Jarosław Gajewski (after the director Jerzy Jarocki refused to take part). The plot is situated in a very undetermined place during what appears to be spring. The cast ranges from ancient Prometheus through Goethe and Margaret to Adam and his two wives, Eve and Lilith. The characters deal with the male-female principle of the human being and its existence; the play culminates with a conflict between Adam and Lilith during a carnival when the characters dance in masks. The two main characters mysteriously disappear, and we see only Adam's loneliness when he hears Lilith's voice calling to him.

During the premiere, Mrożek changed his view on co-operation between the author and director; and he gave him more freedom and space. In this last play, we may feel a certain resignation over the possible positive development that society in Central and Eastern Europe should take. This area has become a transition or "purgatory" between East and West, where thoughts are not transformed into values but rather into desires that Central Europe struggles to fulfil as a nationally and historically diverse territory.

Through his not very successful and flawed play, and like many thinkers from all around the world, Mrożek brings into the debate about values an important moment of restarting and redefining the world and its mechanisms.

Although Mrożek remains in the background (this applies to the sporadic presentation of his plays in Poland and abroad) for the coming generation and the period of great changes, the theses that he sketched in his works are reflected in many aspects in the reality of the present.

Translated by Peter Godovič

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Marek Godovič graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava in Drama Science and Polish Studies as well as from the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in Screenwriting and Dramaturgy. He completed his postgraduate study in 2017 at the Theatre Faculty of Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He has worked in

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Theatre and Value: Confounding as Dismasure in David Greig's *The Events*

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Abstract: In this article, author addresses the politico-aesthetic value of David Greig's *The Events* (2013) in the context of globalization. Globalization is characterized as a moment in our history which is highly marked by the ideology of the "individual", of categories, and of separateness, which not only impacts the way we see ourselves and the world but also the mode in which we think, feel, and do things, preventing connectedness from fundamentally occurring. Greig's theatre has a politico-aesthetic value because it generates confounding – a formal strategy that precipitates the undoing of categories by unmarking their contours – responding and critiquing the global imperative of individualism and objecthood. Confounding introduces "dismasure" (Pascal Gielen) – an amalgamation of concepts which can be equated with difference, variety, dissensus, and different perspectives – in culture by offering unbound versions of bodies as well as other categories. Value is further produced, because through these strategies of confounding which generate dismeasure a sense of interconnection, interdependence, and co-responsibility is conceptually suggested and blown onto the spectator and her outlook on the world. In other words, the value of Greig's theatre lies in the fact that it shatters the compartmentalization of bodies, worlds, and thinking, suggesting a sense of interconnectedness.

Keywords: David Greig, value, confounding, dismeasure, *The Events*, globalization

An overview of the intersection of theatre and value in theatre and performance scholarship at present reveals an interest in the topic from the perspective of audience response. This trend is present in articles such as Janelle Reinelt's "What UK Spectators Know: Understanding How We Come to Value Theatre"¹, books such as Kirsty Sedgman's *Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales* (2016), and funded projects such as "Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution" (2014) carried out by Janelle

1 REINELT, J. (P.I.) – EDGAR, D. – MEGSON, Ch. – REBELLATO, D. – WILKINSON, J. – WODDIS, J. *Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution*, 2014. [online]. [cit. 14. 8. 2017]. Available at: <http://britishtheatreconference.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Critical-Mass-10.7.pdf>.

Reinelt (P. I.), David Edgar, Chris Megson, Dan Rebellato, Julie Wilkinson, and Jane Woddis, and “Measuring the Value of Theatre for Tyneside Audiences” (2015) carried out by Joshua Edelman and Maja Šorli. The craze for measurement has also reached applied practices; see, for instance, Matthew Reason and Nick Rowe’s *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in Theatre, Music and Art* (2017). This is, of course, a non-exhaustive exploration of a now vast field.

Perhaps impact-based research’s motivation is not just a genuine interest in understanding audience response, among other phenomena, but is also in actually responding to the constant accusation that the arts have no value. For instance, if a point about the cultural value of performance needs to be made – Adrian Heathfield was co-director of Performance Matters, a four-year AHRC funded research project on the cultural value of performance (2009 to 2013) – it is somehow because that recognition does not generally exist. Funding towards the arts and artistic education has been under attack since 2010, when the coalition government in the United Kingdom introduced severe cuts to the sector even though we know that the arts generate more value compared to the amount of funding they receive. As the Precarious Workers’ Brigade claim, “the humanities, critical studies, and reflective practices in further education, that kind of trajectory, is under attack. It is not valued for its capacity to produce a certain kind of subject”².

All of this is happening in a world where value standards are set, for instance, by Mark Zuckerberg’s catchy mantra: “Move fast and break things”³, and where political institutions, once perhaps appreciated for their legitimacy, have lost their value to citizens across the globe to a certain extent. In this context, addressing the question of value⁴ and value in the arts seems

2 LIVERGANT, E. Learning to Stand Together. Elyssa Livergant Interviews Precarious Workers’ Brigade. In *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 2017. [online]. [cit. 1. 9. 2017]. Available at: <https://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2017/precious-workers-brigade/>.

3 “It [Move fast and break things] meant that new tools and features on the platform might not be perfect, but creation speed was key, even if there were some missteps along the way.” In MURPHY, S. *Facebook Changes Its ‘Move Fast and Break Things’ Motto*. [cit. 16. 8. 2017]. Available at: <http://mashable.com/2014/04/30/facebooks-new-mantra-move-fast-with-stability/#gwXbzsbIRPqn>. Facebook’s CEO lately argued for a less attractive but more realistic motto, “Move Fast with Stable Infra”, which emphasizes stability and getting things right from the beginning.

4 Some straightforward definitions of value are the usefulness or importance of something, the monetary worth of something, and the exchangeability of something. “Values” in the plural can designate the moral worth of something.

as urgent as ever, and yet it is an ancient preoccupation as well. Plato's "banishment of the poets from *The Republic* led to the development of a *positive* but defensive case for the arts, which included both self-improvement (through the cathartic and educative effect of theatre) and civic-improvement (through either distracting the populace from less savoury activity or promoting received ideas)"⁵. Two thousand years later, Barry Freeman and Kathleen Gallagher ask in their work *In Defence of Theatre: Aesthetic Practices and Social Interventions*: "What are the virtues and values of theatre and performance that, if not unique, are at least especially important today?"⁶

A possible way of thinking about the value of theatre (deviating now from quantifiable methods) is theatre's arguable need for presence: "The need for presence in theatre, the need to *be there*, however inconvenient, may be among the things that make it so valuable."⁷ Presence can indeed be a quite subversive concept in the context of globalization, attaching, as it does, value to a time that "we" supposedly do not have (because "we" are presumably too busy) and to a place (and a space for art) which constantly struggles to subsist under the threat of austerity and/or precarity. Besides, presence in the theatre necessarily means co-presence and potentially "the power to make us think together"⁸, which surely might encapsulate some value. But theatre has a need for something else, and that is stories. Cognitivists are among those who would argue for the power of stories because they conform an identity. In other words, the stories we tell ourselves and each other shape who we are. If who we become together is important, then it seems legitimate to say that engaging in story-telling practices has some kind of value.

As Erin Hurley states in *Theatre & Feeling*, "[t]heatre traffics frequently and fundamentally in feeling in all its forms – affect, sensation, emotion, mood"⁹. Although that "trafficking" can, of course, be used for different purposes, there is possibly value just in the invoking of feeling, in the sheer reminder that "we" are sentient beings, who in a clear context of precarious-

5 EDELMAN, J. – ŠORLI, M. – ROBINSON, M. *The Value of Theatre and Dance for Tyneside's Audiences*. [cit. 5. 9. 2017]. Available at: http://www.theemptyspace.org.uk/documents/_view/545f689c7bbb88fd2f8b4576.

6 FREEMAN, B. – GALLAGHER, K. *In Defence of Theatre: Aesthetic Practices and Social Interventions*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2016, p. 2.

7 Ibid, p. 8.

8 STENGERS, I. The Care of the Possible: Isabelle Stengers Interviewed by Erik Bordeleau. In *Scapegoat*, 2010, Vol. 1, p. 17.

9 HURLEY, E. *Theatre & Feeling*. Basingstoke ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 4.

ness, both ontological and political, should have time and space to feel. Looking at a different sense of affect, Judith Butler has consistently suggested that we are disposed to feel in certain ways, within certain affective circuits which do not recognize “the equal value of lives”¹⁰. As Rebecca Schneider summarizes for us, “[a]n accounting for lives as valued and deaths as grievable is, she [Butler] argues, essential to the maintenance of a public in which persons *appear* to have rights”¹¹. Similarly, Sarah Ahmed argues that “emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow ‘others’ with meaning and value”¹². The value of theatre in this context would be to uphold those invisible and ungrievable as visible and grievable, and position these persons within circuits of affect. Indeed, given that “not only do the stateless or migrant or *sans papiers* exist precariously, but ‘the public’s’ capacity to even ‘apprehend’ (which is not the same as recognize) these persons as live or as dead – as injurable – is also precarious”¹³. Theatre can contribute towards facilitating this apprehension.

Another way of thinking about value in the theatre is its capacity to reconnect perception and experience. As Nicholas Ridout claims in *Theatre & Ethics*: “Theatre reconnects perception and experience, thus perhaps healing wounds which are both personal (psychological) and social (political).”¹⁴ This is particularly so “in theatrical situations in which the audience is actively aware of its own participation in the event rather than a passive recipient of media saturation”¹⁵. Perhaps the value of theatre lies in its raising attention to our “capacity to do and be part of things”, i.e., in its potentially making us feel part of a network of relations and actions. Echoing Jean Luc-Nancy’s seminal *The Inoperative Community* (1991), the value of theatre lies in its suggesting (and potentially making us feel) our existence as being-with.

Although this article endorses claims such as: “Theatre is valuable in and of itself (...) Society needs theatre.”¹⁶ It is central to signpost that:

10 SCHNEIDER, R. It Seems As If... I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor. In *TDR: The Drama Review*, 2012, Vol. 56, No. 4, p. 150.

11 *Ibid*, p. 151.

12 AHMED, S. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2004, p. 4.

13 SCHNEIDER, R. It Seems As If... I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor. In *TDR: The Drama Review*, p. 152.

14 RIDOUT, N. *Theatre & Ethics*. Basingstoke ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 58.

15 *Ibid*.

16 CAREY, A. – RAUCH, B. Foreword: Audience Revolution. In *Caridad Svich. Audience (R)evolutions: Dispatches from the Field*. New York : Theatre Communications Group, Inc, 2016, p. xii.

“The values that guide people are not ‘natural,’ transcendent, timeless, God-given, or inalienable. Values belong to ideology, science, the arts, religion, politics, and other areas of human endeavor and inquiry. Values are hard-won and contingent, changing over time according to social and historical circumstances. Values are a function of cultures, groups, and individuals. Values can be used to protect and liberate or to control and oppress.”¹⁷

This reveals, among other things, our power as far as values’ formation and existence are concerned. People and/or society create a value by deciding where they attach that value. For that value to remain attached to those specific things, practices, codes, and so on, it needs to be practised. This may mean that a signifying practice such as theatre can participate in the placing and maintaining of a value. This also means that when we talk about value in the theatre, we talk about value *across* it; value traverses us and includes society, life beyond the theatre, and the community as a whole. Theatre interested in value/s is intrinsically a theatre which connects with the real world. A value (as a practice rather than a quality) is then co-generated, acted upon, and lived through and beyond theatre. The question of value is therefore a question of culture and public space, where theatre can be seen as a “valuable” participant.

The politics of “aesthetics”: dismeasuring by confounding

This brings us to the work of the sociologist Pascal Gielen. In a keynote address at “The Art of Valuing: Between Evidence and Evidence-Based” event organized by the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), which took place in Brussels in February 2015, Gielen commented on the results of “The Value of Culture” research report by saying it was “an investigative report, in which Pascal Gielen (along with a team of sociologists, economists, philosophers, and psychologists from the University of Groningen) assembled a series of research results on the value, meaning, and impact of the arts and culture on people within society.”¹⁸

17 SCHECHNER, R. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. London ; New York : Routledge, 2013, p. 1.

18 GIELEN, P. No Culture, No Europe. In *The art of Valuing*. [cit. 16. 8. 2018]. Available at: https://www.ietm.org/en/system/files/publications/150401_ietm_the_art_of_valuing_opening_speeches.pdf.

According to Gielen, culture is about “giving meaning to human existence in society”; culture is a process of sense-making.¹⁹ However, Gielen argues that we are undergoing a crisis of sense-making because there is no trust in democracy and in political institutions. In other words, our failure to make sense, to make meaning, and to enact significant practices which confer meaning to our lives reveals itself in the failure of politics.²⁰ If there is no trust in governments, this is therefore a cultural problem. Gielen argues that the riots in London in 2011 were treated as senseless violence. This unfortunately means that value is placed in this society/culture in senselessness (and “the unimaginable”). For anybody who has seen and/or suffered inequality and injustice upfront, it does not take a lot to imagine the worst of evils being unleashed. Sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman quickly pointed out that there is “meaning” to this violence, that there is “sense” in the riots, which defies society’s value of senselessness and meaninglessness.²¹ In this context, the value of (art and) theatre is in its conferring of meaning to human life and our practices.

This process of sense-making specifically occurs through what Gielen calls “dismasure”²². As Gielen puts it, “[a]rt introduces dismeasure in culture” when it shows that “there can always be different views [and] opinions”²³ and when it confronts people with something and twists their perception. In other words, culture is a reservoir to give meaning/significance to ourselves and give meaning by bringing dismeasure to people’s lives. Theatre can then be understood as a signifying (and therefore valuable) practice, because it introduces dismeasure into our lives by potentially creating new meanings, exposing dif-

19 Ibid.

20 See Pascal Gielen’s edited volume *No Culture, No Europe: On the Foundation of Politics*. The book’s central position is that “culture is the basic source to give meaning and form to societies. It is the essential, binding fabric of investigating and assessing identity, human activities and political awareness, enabling us to act politically”. Available at: <http://www.valiz.nl/en/publications/no-culture-no-europe.html>.

21 In this context, Sophie Nield has read the London riots as theatrical acts that stage tactics of resistance performed by those excluded from representation and exempted from meaning.

22 See GIELEN, P. – ELKHUIZEN, S. – VAN DEN HOOGEN, Q. – LIJSTER, T. – OTTE, H. *Culture – The Substructure for a European Common*. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2015. [online]. [cit. 16. 8. 2017]. Available at: <http://nck.pl/media/attachments/317242/Culture%2C%20the%20substructure%20for%20a%20European%20common.pdf>.

23 GIELEN, P. *No Culture, No Europe*. In *The art of Valuing*. [cit. 16. 8. 2018]. Available at: https://www.ietm.org/en/system/files/publications/150401_ietm_the_art_of_valuing_opening_speeches.pdf.

ferent views, using contradiction, antagonism and dissensus, and encouraging dialogue and debate.²⁴ New significations, sense, and identities arising from this dismeasuring²⁵ might urge people to take meaning for themselves and see that they actually have meaning, that they are meaningful, that their lives make sense and take place, and that they (“we”) exist.²⁶ A specific strategy that arguably produces dismeasure in David Greig’s work is that of confounding. In an article published in *The Guardian*, Forced Entertainment’s artistic director Tim Etchells claims: “I’ve seen this many times in performances by the brilliant French choreographer Jerome Bel and by the Belgian avant-gardist Jan Fabre. Both excel in creating a space of confounding contradiction which can produce extraordinary reactions.”²⁷ In this article, I argue for the value of confounding in the work of Greig, who is a Scottish playwright.

One of the logics that globalization defends most ardently (and therefore places value upon) is that of individuality, categorization, and compartmentalization, and the ensuing senses of isolation, separation, and containment. Needless to say, this makes the world more quantifiable and measurable. Although I use the word “globalization” to describe the networked, going-global, interpenetrating character of our times, I also use it to describe the implementation of the doctrine that has given way to, or at least enormously shaped, that character. In the second sense then, globalization may generally be described as “global neo-liberalism, the global extension of capitalism under neo-liberal policies”²⁸ and as the very project and/or narrative that un-

24 By introducing dismeasure in our life, art could contribute to what Jacques Rancière calls “the redistribution of the sensible”: “a way of redistributing the objects and images that comprise the common world as it is already given, or of creating situations apt to modify our gazes and our attitudes with respect to this collective environment”. See RANCIÈRE, J. *Aesthetics and its Discontents*. London: Polity Press, 2009, p. 21.

25 The concept of “dismasure” is very close to what Maria Magdalena Schwaegermann understands as politics in the arts: “It’s a question of showing the public different positions, also unfamiliar positions, and cultural differences and in doing so, taking away reservations and anxieties in order to create openness, curiosity, and at best tolerance.” See HAMILTON, M. Arts and Politics and the Zürcher Theater Spektakel. Maria Magdalena Schwaegermann talks with Margaret Hamilton. In *Performance Paradigm*, 2007, Vol. 3, p. 3.

26 All of this means that meaning, and therefore what we decide to place value on, is a changeable thing denoting dynamism and process, which reflects that culture embeds politics and that the dismeasuring potentially provoked by theatre is highly political.

27 ETHELLES, T. The Crying Game of Theatre. In *The Guardian*, 2009. [cit. 5. 12. 2017]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2009/aug/28/crying-theatre>.

28 Cf. REBELLATO, D. From the State of the Nation to Globalisation: Shifting Political Agendas in Contemporary British Playwriting. In *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British*

derpins that extension to every nook and corner of the globe. In this context, I understand neoliberalism as:

“...a revived form of liberalism which thrived first in Britain in the seventeenth century and which recognizes and *prioritizes the individual's* right to seek self-fulfilment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-instituted regulations, such as the requirements to pay appropriate taxes, to heed trade restrictions or to observe employment laws pertaining to hiring, firing and paying workers”²⁹.

This is how it is flagged in Jen Harvie's description, or as Kenan Malik puts it, “[a]t the heart of [neo]liberalism stands the individual”³⁰. As Laurent Berlant has it, “‘neoliberalism’ [...] produces subjects who serve its interests”³¹. In *Liquid Fear*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that “[i]n the liquid modern society of consumers, each individual member is instructed, trained, and groomed to pursue individual happiness by individual means and through individual efforts”³².

This logic of individuality and “subjecthood” also extends to objects. To put it bluntly, and following Dan Rebellato, use-values (e.g., friendship) have become exchange-values (e.g., money) under globalization, and “[f]or these use-values to function effectively as exchange-values, they must acquire a certain objecthood: that is, they must become regular, bounded, self-contained”³³.

My argument is that confounding – the e/affect of bodies, categories, and structures becoming undone, unmarked, and unbounded, which characterizes Greig's work – produces dismeasure because it disrupts the described logic of individualism, confinement, and objecthood. Beyond destabilizing that particular globalization narrative, I also argue that Greig's theatre's strategies of confounding potentially produce senses of interdependence, co-responsibility, and interconnectedness. It is in this context that I understand

and Irish Drama (Eds. Nadine Holdsworth, Mary Luckhurst). Oxford : Blackwell, 2007, p. 250.

29 HARVIE, J. *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*. Basingstoke ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 12.

30 MALIK, K. Liberalism is Suffering But Democracy is Doing Just Fine. In *The Observer*, 2017, p. 37, (1. 1. 2017).

31 BERLANT, L. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham : Duke UP, 2011, p. 15.

32 BAUMAN, Z. *Liquid Fear*. Cambridge ; Malden : Polity, 2006, p. 48.

33 REBELLATO, D. Exit the Author. In *Vicky Angelaki. Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground*. Basingstoke ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 26.

confounding in Greig's work in relation to aesthetics, ethics, and politics. Indeed, I am not the first to consider aesthetics, ethics, and politics in unison. For instance, Alan Read has argued that "[i]t is not sufficient to address the 'politics of theatre' alone, the structures of funding, arts policies and jurisdictions, but in a remedial act, a practice which combines poetics and ethics, rethink what the theatre and its politics might be"³⁴. In addition, Ridout has claimed that "[a]esthetic experience becomes the condition of possibility for a particular kind of ethical relationship. The ethical relationship becomes, in its turn, the ground upon which political action might be attempted"³⁵.

In a Rancierian manner, and in my conception, aesthetics is not primarily concerned with theories of taste, as a discipline that studies art, but is rather understood within the framework of social and political reality and the potential specific repercussions of form and formal experimentation. Ethics is approached beyond Emmanuel Levinas's "the face of the Other"; it is understood as global ethics, where obligations go beyond physical and cultural proximity.³⁶ In my work on Greig, I have recurrently argued that a sense of ethics is injected in form – hence aesthetics – leaving plays injured and forms wounded.³⁷ Metaphorically, confounding usually implies violence as well because it means that structures are traversed, that contours are undone, that frames are removed, that walls are torn, that bodies reach out, and so on and so forth. The politics of aesthetics reside in confounding's capacity (among other formal strategies) to undo one of the most entrenched logics under globalization and the potential resonances that unmarking might have.

The value of confounding/dismasure (and measure) in *The Events*

Mechanisms of confounding – whereby bodies, categories, and structures become undone – are pervasive in Greig's work. However, this article is focused on confounding in *The Events* (2013), which is a play about extreme

34 READ, A. *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*. London ; New York : Routledge, 1995, p. 2.

35 RIDOUT, N. *Theatre & Ethics*, p. 66.

36 See BUTLER, J. Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation. In *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2012, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 134–151.

37 Hans-Thies Lehmann has expressed this idea in one of his articles, whose title is self-explanatory. See LEHMANN, H.-T. When Rage Coagulates into Form ...: On Jan Fabres 'Aesthetics of Poison'. In *Theaterschrift*, 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 90–103.

violent acts and specifically their traumatic aftermath. Although set in Scotland, it draws on the events in Oslo and Utoya in 2011, when Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in the name of white supremacy and a Christian and non-multicultural Europe. There are four characters: the Boy (the killer), Claire (a survivor and witness of the massacre), the Choir (those murdered), and the Repetiteur (who guides the choir by singing with them and playing the piano). The Choir is performed by real choirs which are from the places the performance takes place, and they change every night. This points out themes such as belonging, locality, and community. By implication, the play seems to suggest that this atrocity could happen not just to those kids in Utoya, among other victims, or kids in school shootings, but to any group of people. During the play, the spectator witnesses a mixture of dialogue, monologue, and lots of songs. The snap-shot-like, non-linear scenes have the purpose of delving into Claire's mental state and the Boy's motivations and unfolding landscapes of empathy, pain, suffering, and trauma, where the audience could possibly find a sense of healing.

The argument in this section is that several elements in *The Events* – primarily characters, space-time, and story/structure – are both carefully laid out as bounded categories and astutely undone to produce confounding and thus dismeasure. As I have argued before, confounding critiques the global logic of individuation, bringing about value through dismeasure.

In terms of character, characters in *The Events* step out of dramatic character. For instance, Claire announces with a clear Brechtian influence “[t]he father”, “[t]he friend”, and “[t]he politician”³⁸ with whom she has conversations about the Boy. All these people, related to the Boy, are in fact all performed by the Boy, confounding who the Boy is or seems to be. In addition, the Boy is performed by non-Caucasian actors (United Kingdom casts), clearly problematizing issues of multiculturalism, social identity under globalization, immigration, and locality.³⁹ In so doing, the play confounds in an unresolvable way the identity and individuality of the killer, asking pressing questions about belonging, community, and responsibility.

38 Cf. GREIG, D. *The Events*. London : Faber & Faber, 2013, pp. 25–31.

39 In Drammen, Buskerud (Norway), the actor who performed the Boy was “white and bearded, rather than an ethnic ‘outsider’, as he is in the UK production”. See CAVENDISH, D. David Greig: ‘I Always Knew I’d Put The Events in Front of a Norwegian Audience’. In *The Telegraph*, 2016. [cit. 1. 10. 2017]. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/10742089/David-Greig-I-always-knew-I-put-The-Events-in-front-of-a-Norwegian-audience.html>.

On the other hand, the Choir is a multi-tasking entity, which confounds their identity uniquely as a choir. For instance, they are a real choir, very much alive, and yet they also perform as Claire's dead choristers. The prominent presence of real community choirs on stage facing the spectator explores senses of connection between choir members and spectators, producing confounding as to who is who. I would contend that through this sense of confounding, it is suggested that this atrocity could happen to spectators, to any group of people, raising questions about common vulnerability.

As far as space-time is concerned, there is an unrestrained non-linearity and a sense of bleeding across of space-times. For instance, *The Events* intermingles the Illawarra River in Australia, "Viking warrior shamen", "Afghanistan", "Somalia", and "Leeds". Time is also epically stretched in *The Events* to encompass current global conflict, including jihadism and previous colonization processes, as seen with the reference to the aboriginal boy who witnessed the arrival of the very first ships from England in Australia.⁴⁰ In addition, Claire enacts different possible scenarios in the play where the life of the Boy takes different paths. In one, the Boy is adopted by Claire; in another, Claire kills him as a baby born with her own hands. All these spaces and times are confounded in the play, leaving the spectator floating in an uncertain yet connected space-time, suggesting perhaps that acts have repercussions along the line across history and geography.

Regarding story and structure, the shape of the narrative is highly fragmented. The form of *The Events* is broken and thus unbounded, undone, and unmarked. Greig has claimed that the play's "whole point" is that "you experience its form"⁴¹, which one could argue is broken and "glued" together in non-linear scenes. It is not only that the world is broken and that "the world breaks everyone", as Ernest Hemingway writes in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), but also that the play endures, delivers, and stages pain and trauma, confounding whose story this is and to what community this happened. In fact, the play seems to suggest: this is our pain, this is what we have done collectively, this is the world we live in, and when these things happen, they happen to all of us. However, the play simultaneously solicits the possibility of living in a broken way.

The resourceful use of music also has an important confounding func-

40 Cf. GREIG, D. *The Events*, pp. 12–70.

41 GREIG, D. – REBELLATO, D. Dan Rebellato in Conversation with David Greig. In *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 2016. [cit. 15. 4. 2016]. Available at: <http://www.contemporarytheatreview.org/2016/interview-with-david-greig/>.

tion adding to the above-described undoings. Song lyrics are occasionally on electronic display, the play consciously combines the emotional with the grotesque, and the spiritual with mainstream music, confounding emotions and muddling notions of sadness, empathy, forgiveness, revenge, and so on and so forth. In my experience as a spectator, at times I really did not know whether to laugh or cry, or both, which highlights a strong confounding of emotional responses and reactions.

By refusing to locate the events in specific bodies and in a unique space-time without doing away with notions of responsibility and location – actually one could argue that these strategies precisely redraw the “limits” of responsibility and location under globalization – the play can evoke other violent events across history, and thus foreground, and suggest that brutal acts such as the Boy’s do not erupt out of nowhere but are rather ingrained in a space-time continuum or “everywhereness” of violence that can assault anybody’s life. Greig’s theatre’s insistence on strategies of confounding may be seen as an attempt to challenge the ways spectators might think of their bodies as individuated and independent: a narrative – as argued throughout – sustained by neoliberal globalization. Confounding might incite her – the confounded spectator – to affectively feel part of the porous, interconnected landscape of the scenes from the world, a process that potentially affects the play and the spectator and encompasses the creative process, the staged work, and the world itself.

I cannot finish this section on value in *The Events* without mentioning a specific project that has measured the value of the play, the project “Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution” (2014) carried out by Janelle Reinelt (P. I.), David Edgar, Chris Megson, Dan Rebellato, Julie Wilkinson, and Jane Woddis:

“‘Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution’ looked at how theatre audiences value the experience of attending performances. We collected self-descriptions of experiences of individuals who attended the theatre, which were gathered through online surveys, personal interviews, and creative workshops. We also tapped memory by asking some subjects about a performance they saw at least one year ago.”⁴²

42 REINELT, J. (P.I.) – EDGAR, D. – MEGSON, Ch. – REBELLATO, D. – WILKINSON, J. – WODDIS, J. *Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution*, 2014, p. 5. [online]. [cit. 14. 8. 2017]. Available at: <http://britishtheatreconference.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Critical-Mass-10.7.pdf>.

The report stated about *The Events* that:

The production itself was highly valued by all but one who selected medium value. Among its assets, the use of local choirs was singled out in most responses as contributing strongly to the effect of the production. Again, the qualities of being challenging and thought-provoking were mentioned, and what one spectator described as ‘being part of a cultural conversation’. All but one of the respondents spoke to others, mostly friends, about the play, recommending it but also discussing content and ideas. The quality of the writing and effectiveness of the staging came in for praise, summed up by one respondent as ‘Brilliant acting, powerful writing with the choir adding an extra quality’.⁴³

In a context of “obsession with measurement”⁴⁴, Gielen comments on what happens with “value” in evidence-based policy. He argues that when, for instance, you study a performance, there are restrictions on time and particular events: there are no resources to study a bigger number of events and longer periods (even longer than a year). The events studied are also isolated, and therefore culture is de-contextualized. Another shortcoming is that this kind of research renders the value of culture to one of mere function: it is about what the piece “does”. Finally, there is a reduction of values to self-reflective competence – what respondents said the performance “did” – which measures a cognitive process rather than the value of culture.⁴⁵ Although I guess that Gielen would welcome the fact that one participant said s/he felt like “part of a cultural conversation” and that Reinelt, et al., emphasize that some participants shared their experiences with others, value in this report is mostly understood at the level of resonance of the show after the show.

A similar critique of impact is to be found in Baz Kershaw’s seminal study *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, where he argues that the empirical study of the efficacy of performance is restricted to the “theatrical environment, to the obviously observable results”, an approach which is “plagued” by “analytical difficulties and dangers”. Kershaw argues that for value – or the “socio-political efficacy of performance” – to

43 Ibid, pp. 102–103.

44 Gielen uses this phrase in the aforementioned keynote speech. For more details see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppdO7Bbc9CI>.

45 See GIELEN, P. No Culture, No Europe. In *The art of Valuing*. [cit. 16. 8. 2018]. Available at: https://www.ietm.org/en/system/files/publications/150401_ietm_the_art_of_valuing_opening_speeches.pdf.

exist, there must be an interaction between those immediate effects of performance and the “macro-level of the socio-political”.⁴⁶

This strand of criticism is also present nowadays. For instance, Caridad Svich claims that “applying the frame of efficacy to all art is unwieldly at best”⁴⁷. Like Gielen, I believe that measure and dismeasure must stand in a dialectical tension. That is, value cannot come from either one or the other in isolation but from a productive combination of both. I have been exploring how producing dismeasure might generate value. Of course, “measuring” dismeasure is a flawed method too, because I cannot guarantee that confounding in *The Events* has an impact in its socio-political context. As suggested throughout, value is created (and destroyed), practised, and maintained communally. As such, it is connected to questions of power, discourse, ideology, and thus meaning and legitimacy, where theatre has been argued to play a part.

Conclusion

While the weakness of evidence-based studies is that the value of “the after” is really hard to measure realistically – I am not claiming that analysing value through dismeasure is better or worse than impact-related research – in my article I have almost ignored the value of “before”. In other words, I have been looking throughout at value in theatre and their e/affects potentially during and afterwards. However, there is also value involved before the experience of spectating. I claimed earlier that value operates *across* where creative process is also involved. Despite being undervalued and devalued, the creative process is actually the place where value in the arts might start.⁴⁸ Indeed, I believe it is worth emphasizing the value of prep, of pre-, and of before, as part of a circuit of value which always operates *across*. How much value goes into this unseen (and most of the time unpaid) work?

Although one always tries to escape grand value judgements, I have written a full monograph on the playwright I have been talking about, and in

46 KERSHAW, B. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. London ; New York : Routledge, 1992, pp. 1–2.

47 SVICH, C. *Audience Revolutions: Dispatches from the Field*. New York : Theatre Communications Group, Inc, 2016, p. xii.

48 I am of course leaving out material aspects, including questions of funding, which I have not touched upon at all in this article.

so doing I am of course implying that Greig's work is valuable and that his work is worth looking at, useful, and of merit. In my discussion on Greig, I am dealing with specific aspects of value, which others might not understand as relevant to the question of value. In addition, I am making judgements about value, which are most certainly biased by my own opinions. Indeed, my article constitutes a partial, subjective, and incomplete analysis of value in theatre, Greig's work, and in particular in *The Events*. Additionally, my ruminations on value and theatre remain abstract and formalist and perhaps do not produce any "real" value at all. However, I refuse to jettison the need to face and look at value altogether in general and in relation to the arts and theatre and performance. I still think that there is value in thinking about value, and value in value as a practice, and that we have a say in what is valuable and what is not contributing towards the value of all life. Theatre has value beyond portraying value, that is, theatre has value whether it engages with ethical questions or not. In the same way, although I believe that Greig's theatre has value beyond the fact that it potentially elicits ethical responses in the spectator, Greig's theatre's ethical engagement is crucial to its value.

In this article, I have argued about the politico-aesthetic value of Greig's theatre in the context of globalization. I have characterized globalization as a moment in history highly marked by the ideology of the "individual", of categories, and of separateness, which not only impacts the way we see ourselves and the world but also the mode in which we think, feel, and do, preventing connectedness and complexity from fundamentally occurring. Categories pigeon-hole reality, disarticulating complex/complexity thinking. Greig's theatre has politico-aesthetic value, because it generates aesthetic strategies (one of them is confounding) that in turn respond and question the imperative of the global age: individualism. Value is produced, because through those strategies of confounding a sense of interconnection, interdependence, and co-responsibility is not only conceptually suggested but blown onto the spectator and her outlook on the world. In other words, the value of Greig's theatre lies in the fact that it shatters the compartmentalization of bodies, worlds, and thinking, suggesting a sense of interconnectedness. Although I am aware of how problematic the notion of value might be, I would still insist that looking at practices that aim at seeing ourselves in relation, perhaps connecting us, have value. Greig's tweet about the London Bridge attacks in London on 3 June 2017 "A Romanian baker, a Spanish skateboarder, a Millwall fan, an Australian nurse. All ran

into danger to defend others”⁴⁹ illustrates well that the value of Greig’s theatre “lies” in his theatre attempting to explore that togetherness, interconnectedness, and oneness. Greig’s theatre has value, because it is a theatre that believes and transmits that against the odds we will still run to protect each other.

Translated by the author

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Contemporary Political Theatre in Poland: From Criticism to Commitment

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Abstract: Politically engaged theatre has a long tradition in Poland, and today this kind of theatre is an important artistic stream. The first generation of artists whose debuts were after 1989 dealt with the aftermath of a number of political, social and economic changes on the topic of morality, rather than with analysing and assessing political decisions and the shape of democracy in Poland. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were artistic debuts for Monika Strzępka and Jan Klata, who have set the course of political theatre in Poland. The theatre proposed by Strzępka and Klata was primarily critical of the economic and political system, dealing with Polish myths and fantasies, often used in political games.

Another stream of political theatre, which has become increasingly important, is attempting to influence the shape of society. Artists who had been working in the last three years in Teatr Polski w Bydgoszczy [Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz] (Bartosz Frąckowiak, Paweł Wodziński) and cooperating with various institutions (Wiktor Rubin), ask questions about the shape of democracy in Poland, civic engagement, and solidarity in their performances. They often provoke spectators during their performances to express their views and make decisions. This article discusses contemporary political theatre in Poland, and in particular its roots, transformations, and variations.

Keywords: Monika Strzępka, Jan Klata, Wiktor Rubin, Marta Górnicka, contemporary Polish theatre, political theatre, socially-engaged art

Political theatre in Poland has a long tradition, although in the past it was primarily associated with the names of distinguished playwrights and directors. It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that this type of theatre evolved into a wider stream of artistic exploration. According to Patrice Pavis, theatre is political in two ways. Firstly, as a tool of social impact, and in this sense every kind of theatre is political. Secondly, it is political when it becomes involved in political actions through its performances, and thus it is ideological in its programme. The stage is then considered to be a place of human intervention and indirectly becomes a model of the world's transfor-

mation by man.¹ Paweł Mościcki, a Polish philosopher, essayist, and translator, distinguishes three types of relations between art and politics, which are also three types of artists' reaction to the political reality. This, in turn, is understood as the exercise of power by a certain group of people in a specific historical and political context as well as a "conceptual frame and conditions for the functioning of politics"². The first of the strategies listed by Mościcki is a defensive reaction, when artists avoid politics, considering it as morally evil. They are then more interested in general human issues: moral or existential rather than social ones. They create performances in isolation from the social context, trying to break away from the rules of politics. The other two types are quite similar to each other and are related to the need to speak on issues affected by politics. Engaged art breaks with the idea of "art for art's sake", recognizing the necessity of direct participation in the public space; it enters discussions and disputes, thus crossing "the border which separates artistic practices from other social practices, fully and responsibly integrating art with public space"³. Meanwhile, engaging art, derived from the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, assumes that "there is a structural homology between the field of art and the field of politics"⁴. Political effects are triggered by means of an artistic revolution. A change of the artistic language used to talk about reality can lead to a change in the perception of this reality. While engaged art speaks out on old issues, engaging art tries to seek and invent new division lines and enter new areas. Its task is also to question the limits of art itself.⁵

Mościcki's diagnosis in a sense coincides with the typology of Jacques Rancière, who in *The Emancipated Spectator* makes references to two models of theatre: one is theatre which continues Bertold Brecht's line dealing with criticism of the dominant political, economic, and artistic system. It is theatre which reconstructs and recreates phenomena to subject them to critical reflection. The other model originates from Antonin Artaud's art and has the ambition to engage the viewer in changing the existing social,

1 PAVIS, P. *Słownik terminów teatralnych*. (Ed. and translation Sławomir Świontek). Wrocław ; Warszawa ; Kraków : Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2002, p. 533.

2 MOŚCICKI, P. Zaangażowanie i autonomia teatru. In MOŚCICKI, P. *Polityka teatru. Eseje o sztuce angażującej*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008, p. 17.

3 Ibid, pp. 22–24.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

political, and artistic order.⁶ It is theatre which interacts with the viewer. By taking advantage of this quality of art which consists in articulating a political field closely related to the existence of the community⁷, it interferes in the emergence of potential models of common realities. It makes visible what was invisible and gives voice to those who have been deprived of it. According to Rancière, “the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distribute spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular”⁸. A similar view is shared by Bojana Kunst, a Slovenian philosopher and theatre theorist, who believes that art “expresses its relationships with politics, creating models of society and community in the process of active participation and interaction, offering such kinds of encounters that constantly encourage various forms of action”⁹. Theatrical practice shows that authors who deal with political theatre usually oscillate between these different models. They use these models each time to varying degrees, which results in a diversity of forms of political theatre in Poland. However, it is hard not to notice the transformation of this theatre, the growing popularity of some trends and the extinction of others. On the one hand, it is related to the emergence of successive generations of artists and the change in the language of theatre, its aesthetics, themes, and reference points, including artistic ones. On the other hand, it is linked to the changing political situation of the country and the awareness of society, and artists ultimately become part of it.

Theatrical artists who debuted after 1989 did not immediately become interested in politics as material for the stage, understood both in a traditional way as a pursuit to exercise and maintain power and as a certain logic of social life. Krystyna Duniec and Joanna Krakowska diagnosed this situation in the following way:

6 RANCIÈRE, J. Widz wyemancypowany. Translation Adam Ostolski. In *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2007, No. 13, p. 313.

7 RANCIÈRE, J. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons, 2009, pp. 23–26.

8 Ibid, p. 25.

9 KUNST, B. *Artysta w pracy. O pokrewieństwach sztuki i kapitalizmu*. Translation Pola Sobaś-Mikołajczyk, Dominika Gajewska, Joanna Jopek. Warszawa ; Lublin : Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Konfrontacje Teatralne / Centrum Kultury w Lublinie, 2016, p. 20.

“Celebration of the consensus [primarily in politics and the public debate after 1989], the rhetoric of there-being-no- alternative in the sphere of economy, and at the same time bringing ideological disputes to common sense, challenging the freaks, led to the situation where for at least a few years the basic territories of political and ideological expansion, such as history and historical settlements, national identity, social and economic order, were excluded from serious reflection and social debate.”¹⁰

The first generation of new theatre (new in terms of aesthetics and ideology) with Anna Augustynowicz (b. 1959), Grzegorz Jarzyna (b. 1968), Krzysztof Warlikowski (b.1962), Paweł Łysak (b. 1964) in collaboration with Paweł Wodziński (b. 1967), and others dealt with the aftermath of a number of political, social, and economic changes in the area of morality, rather than with analysing and assessing political decisions and the shape of democracy in Poland. As a result, among various topics discussed in this theatre there were initially issues related to the body, gender, and sexuality, whose forefront was visual and critical art of the 1990s (with Paweł Althamer, Katarzyna Kozyra, Alicja Żebrowska, Artur Żmijewski and others) as well as the atrophy of interpersonal relationships and the sense of hopelessness and loneliness in a big city.

This was probably because, as Krystian Lupa rightly pointed out, reality forced young artists to look for a new language of theatre “in the areas not only depleted but shameful. (...) Conventions of psychological theatre which show a man closed in the sphere of official expressions lost their credibility.” Hence the need to penetrate marginal human experiences, where, as it turned out, the fears were accumulating and did not only concern marginal social groups. Such a quest made it possible to “anew, almost anthropologically, convince ourselves that what we know about man from nineteenth-century tradition ceases to suffice. (...) This is accompanied by trust in what happens in the body”.¹¹ It soon became evident that at the turn of the century in Poland, the “Private is political” slogan by American feminists from the 1960s was highly relevant, especially since the works of artists who were

10 DUNIEC, K. – KRAKOWSKA, J. *Soc, sex i historia*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014, p. 232.

11 LUPA, K. Trzeba kondycji wariata. [Interview by Maryla Zielińska]. In *Teatr*, 2000, No. 9. Quote in: WOŹNICKA, J. Między przyswojeniem a odrzuceniem. In *20-lecie. Teatr polski po 1989*. (Eds. Dorota Jarząbek, Marcin Kościelniak, Grzegorz Niziołek). Kraków : Korporacja Ha!Art ; UJ, PWST, 2010, p. 382.

dealing with issues related to corporality, customs, and religion began to be subjected to various pressures and forms of censorship. Catholic and right-wing activists demanded the closing of the exhibition, the cancellation of the premiere, and the removal of the show from the playbill¹², trying to push “controversial” content in the public sphere such as the emancipation of women and homosexuals, the experiences of drug addicts and those suffering from mental illness, and themes of Catholicism’s influence on symbolic space into the void. This also caused tensions in critics’ assessments. When analysing the reception of Krzysztof Warlikowski’s performances from that period, Joanna Woźnicka wrote:

“On one side, there stood defenders of tradition and morals, often using the Catholic religion as the most important criterion that defines social reality, connected sometimes with right-wing political groups; on the other side there were supporters of liberal society, dealing with issues such as gender balance, respect for sexual and ethnic minorities, freedom of expression of different beliefs, and other principles of an open society.”¹³

For quite a long time, artists avoided direct involvement in politics and commenting on the stage of what was happening in the public sphere despite the fact that their performances were revealing fields of tension present in social life and specifically at the intersection of private life and the public sphere. It was only after a while, as new dramaturgy with the art of Paweł Demirski, Dorota Masłowska, and Przemysław Wojcieszek (a director and screenwriter) came along, that theatre became interested in, for example, the victims of political transformation, that is, inhabitants of small towns and post-state farm villages, secret abortions, and homelessness, or in speaking on behalf of those excluded by the state system. This was the time of the first resounding performances of Jan Klata (*Rewizor* [The Government Inspector] based on the play by Nikolai Gogol, 2003) and Maja Kleczewska (*Czyż nie dobija się koni?* [They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?], based on the text by Horace McCoy, 2003), which were both staged in the Teatr Dramatyczny im.

12 A register of acts of censorship in Poland covering the years 1999 to 2006 was prepared, among others, by Jarosław Miñałto. See MINAŁTO, J. Kronika wypadków cenzorskich. Ostatnie lata. In *Notatnik Teatralny*, 2006, No. 39–40.

13 WOŹNICKA, J. Między przyswojeniem a odrzuceniem. In *20-lecie. Teatr polski po 1989*, p. 392.

Jerzego Szaniawskiego w Wałbrzychu [Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre in Wałbrzych], which soon became one of the most interesting theatres in Poland. At the same time at the Teatr Wybrzeże w Gdańsku [Wybrzeże Theatre in Gdańsk], under the management of Maciej Nowak, Szybki Teatr Miejski [The Rapid City Theatre] started its activities. The theatre's creator and protector was Paweł Demirski, then a novice playwright who, in collaboration with other authors, prepared a series of documentary performances, raising, for example, the sensitive issue of the presence of Polish soldiers in Iraq, e.g. *Padnij!* [Get Down!] (2004). Demirski wrote other texts in a similar spirit, including *From Poland with Love* (2005) about Polish economic emigration to Great Britain or *Wałęsa. Historia wesola, a ogromnie przez to smutna* [Walesa. A Happy Story, Which is Why It's an Extremely Sad One] (2005) constructed on the basis of talks with the first leader of the Solidarity movement. It was owing to these activities that the theatre gained its clearly leftist face, although at that time its role was to give a voice to those excluded from the public debate rather than strive to transform the system of social relations.

Monika Strzępka's big entrance into theatre in 2007 as part of a duo with Paweł Demirski, who is a playwright, started a new and dynamic course of political theatre in Poland. Their socially and politically engaged performances presented a criticism of neo-liberalism in the sphere of politics and economics, because the artists took the side of those who did not benefit from the changes after 1989 (*Diamenty to węgiel, który wziął się do roboty* [Diamonds Are the Coal Which Got Down to Work], Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre in Wałbrzych, 2008). They criticized the political and artistic elites for renouncing Solidarity's ideals (*Był sobie Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej i Andrzej* [There was Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej and Andrzej] in Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre, 2010), the callousness of free-market mechanisms, and the social consequences of the commercialization of life (*Courtney Love*, Teatr Polski we Wrocławiu [Polski Theatre in Wrocław], 2012). Ultimately they tackled identity narratives and the myths of Polishness, proving that collectively a maintained imagery of a heroic past is false (*Dziady. Ekshumacja* [Forefathers' Eve: The Exhumation], Polski Theatre in Wrocław, 2007; *Był sobie Polak, Polak, Polak i diabeł* [There was a Pole, Pole, Pole, and a Devil], Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre in Wałbrzych, 2007). Since their first joint performance of *Dziady. Ekshumacja*, they have treated the theatre as a place for social debate, where sensitive topics are discussed, where obvious judgments and superstitions are undermined, and where you ask questions about the condition of the state. This question also appears in one of their

recent performances, namely in *K.* in Teatr Polski w Poznaniu [Polski Theatre in Poznań] (2017), in which they depict Poland under the rule of Jarosław Kaczyński. The performance does not, however, provide solutions on how to deal with the populist party currently ruling the country. It is rather an expression of civic helplessness and disappointment with the Polish political class. This does not mean that the duo does not believe in the power of collective action and interpersonal solidarity. Such faith was expressed, for example, in the performances of *O dobru* [On Good] (Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre in Wałbrzych, 2012) and *Triumf woli* [The Triumph of Will] (Narodowy Stary Teatr w Krakowie [National Stary Theatre in Kraków], 2016), and it was their faith in the possibility of society uniting in the defence of common values and interests.

Jan Klata accompanied Strzępka and Demirski in this disarming of community-creating narrations and symbols, and in tracking our national obsessions and complexes. He turned parts of our national mythology and history inside out. In *H.*, based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Wybrzeże Theatre in Gdańsk, 2004), he dealt with the myth of the Solidarity movement and criticized the elites who took power after 1989 (the performance was staged at the Gdańsk Shipyard, where the Solidarity Independent Self-Governing Union was formed). The reflections on power and history became the subject of one of his best performances, *Sprawa Dantona* [Danton's Case], based on a play by Stanisława Przybyszewska (Polski Theatre in Wrocław, 2008), in which the French Revolution became the basis for a reflection on the Polish transformation after 1989. In *Trylogia* [Trilogy], based on the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz (National Stary Theatre in Kraków, 2009), he pierced a balloon with the name "Polish heroism" on it. In turn, it was *Transfer!* (2006) performed by the Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny [Współczesny Theatre in Wrocław] that launched a debate about the Polish-German past. By inviting natural home-grown actors, that is, current and former inhabitants of Wrocław (before the Second World War the city lay within the borders of the German state), who then performed together with professional actors, Klata gave a voice to ordinary people and their experience of the war, which had until then been overlooked in historical narrations. As boldly as he did with history and national mythology, he also tackled the Catholic Church and Catholicism, criticizing Polish society for its folk rites and religious superficiality (*Lochy Watykanu* [Dungeons of the Vatican], Współczesny Theatre in Wrocław, 2004). Finally, he made an analysis of the national community, showing that it was now lethargic; dreaming about the past, it is detaching

itself from the present, and the symbols around which it builds its narratives are merely an empty frame (*Wesele* [The Wedding], National Stary Theatre in Kraków, 2017).

Over time, theatre, which at the beginning of the 21st century was engaged and critical, slowed down. Critics complained that artists had entrenched themselves without provoking social debate. In addition, the style of these performances, which were once considered iconoclastic through a violation of the principles of good taste and theatre conventions regarded as high art, became conventional. Both Strzępka and Demirski, as well as Klata, are considered today to be classic personalities of Polish theatre. The temperature of emotions on the border of theatre and public life has only recently been raised by *Kłątwa* [The Curse] based on the themes of Stanisław Wyspiański's drama and directed by Oliver Frlić (2017). By tackling the problem of the abuse of power by the Catholic Church in Poland, its ignorance of paedophilia among the clergy, the instrumental use of religion for its own interest, and the violation of women's rights, the performance has become a source of outrage among right-wing journalists and politicians as well as those who are involved in the radical right-wing or religious organizations. It was also used by the ruling party in their political and ideological struggle. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice's] party members unlawfully demanded the right to remove Paweł Łysak from the position of director of the Teatr Powszechny [Powszechny Theatre] and the Mayor of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, from her post. The city is the theatre's organizer, covering its fixed costs and financing its artistic activity. The attack on Gronkiewicz – Waltz was motivated mostly politically since she is a member of the Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform], which is the largest opposition party. What is certainly a new quality in the Polish theatrical life of recent years is the fact that in the case of *Kłątwa*, art – just as it was previously the case with critical art – went beyond the walls of theatre. The performance was the most-discussed premiere of the season. Moreover, even people who did not see it at least spoke about it.¹⁴ In the name of the defence of religious sentiments (there is fairly curious and controversial Article 196¹⁵ in the Polish

14 The wide field of influence of *Kłątwa* (social, political, and artistic) is shown in the number of *Notatnik Teatralny* devoted to this performance. See *Notatnik Teatralny*, 2017, Nos. 84 –85.

15 *Ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997. Kodeks Karny* [The Act of June 6, 1997. Penal Code]. [cit. 11. 5. 2018]. Available at: <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19970880553/U/D19970553Lj.pdf>.

Criminal Code to protect them), a number of religious and extreme-right organizations of a fascist character protested in front of the theatre's building. Such a powerful entrance of the performance into the social fabric revealed the fields of contemporary social conflicts which testify to a radical conservative turn in Polish politics and proved the existence of economic censorship and self-censorship in Polish theatre: many art festivals in Poland withdrew their invitation to the performance.

The expectations of critics complaining about stagnation and the subversive potential of art being suppressed by the artists could in this respect be satisfied by the Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz, led by Paweł Wodziński and Bartosz Frąckowiak since 2014. I am writing about it deliberately using the past tense, because in 2017 the local authorities of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship [Kuyavian-Pomeranian] decided not to prolong the contract with the two directors, who had openly decided to run a political and leftist theatre. A competition for the director was held in 2017, and the winner was a candidate giving priority to a more eclectic repertoire aimed at varied viewers, given that there is only one drama theatre in Bydgoszcz. The artists returned to Warsaw, where since January 2018 they have been running Biennale Warszawa [Biennale Warsaw], a cultural institution where they generate socially and politically involved projects such as meetings, debates, and performances.

In the case of Wodziński and Frąckowiak's theatre, one should not confuse political theatre with party theatre. A few years earlier, Frąckowiak quite skilfully described the idea of their theatre in an article written for *Notatnik Teatralny*:

“Political theatre should designate new lines of demarcation between positions and stances, undermining those set in stone. If theatre merely represents social phenomena, then it reproduces, strengthens, and legitimates the existing order. Unfortunately, political theatre has for too long been a theatre of representation.”¹⁶

What these two directors managed to do in just three seasons of running the Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz, regardless of the assessment of their

16 FRĄCKOWIAK, B. Agon, Passion, Profanation: Challenges for New Political Theatre. Translation Aleksandra Sakowska. In *Polish Theatre Journal*, 2015, No. 1. [cit. 11. 5. 2018]. Available at: <http://www.polishtheatrejournal.com/index.php/ptj/issue/view/6>.

performances' artistic quality, certainly makes a change to the perspective from which many Polish issues are discussed. The artists invited by them, including those from abroad, moved the existing axis of the analysis of our socio-political reality from an East–West to a North–South perspective, which completely changed the categories of its description from being national to economic. It became apparent that Poland was not a lonely island but rather located in a global network of dependencies and connections: political and economic ones. Local issues were granted a broader context and were set in a universal perspective. The artists showed the mechanisms which are a symptom of the exhaustion of a certain formula of the world in terms of its economy, politics, and civilization. Among the performances in which the theatre in Bydgoszcz reached for themes which transcend the country's borders, one should definitely mention *Afryka* [Africa], directed by Bartosz Frąckowiak (2014), *Murzyni* [Negroes] (2015), directed by Iga Gancarczyk (both of them raised the issue of neo-colonialism), and *Granice* [The Borders], directed by Frąckowiak (2016), where the director analysed the refugee crisis in Europe as a result of global capital. Finally, it is worth noting that the Bydgoszcz team also undertook a critical analysis of theatre as a sociocultural institution (a certain novelty in Poland) which keeps pace with current humanistic reflections. The directors declared a more democratic model of management of the institution and in artistic creation. Therefore, analysing the state of democracy and diagnosing the civil society and national community appear to be some of more recurrent themes in the performances in Bydgoszcz.

Obviously, the model of political theatre discussed so far does not exhaust all the strategies used by Polish artists today. Participatory theatre is becoming as strong as engaged theatre derived from Brecht's tradition, engaging the viewer in a completely different way. The realization of the idea of being political consists in conscious and active participation in a theatrical event, which can have an emancipatory effect in becoming aware of the mechanisms of power which we are subjected to both as a society and as individuals. Wiktor Rubin (b. 1978) and Jolanta Janiczak (b. 1982), the duo consisting of a drama director and a playwright, have been staging a number of such plays. One of their first joint performances was *Emigranci* [The Emigrants] from 2011 in Łażna Nowa Teatr [Łażna Nowa Theatre], based on the drama by Sławomir Mrożek. The main characters of the play are an intellectual and a labourer who are living in a basement in an unspecified Western European country. One of them left the country for political reasons, while the other one was an eco-

nomic immigrant. Being forced to share a common space, they are brought into various conflicts with each other which deepen their mutual antagonisms and animosities. This Mrozek drama from 1974 touched upon the problem existing in post-war Poland, namely, the gap between the intelligentsia and labourers. In their performances, the artists took a particular interest in the background and consequences of class divisions as well as in the performative dimension of various social roles. They looked at how the categories of “a member of the intelligentsia” and “a boor” are constructed as social roles and used to exercise symbolic power. For this purpose, they seated the audience on jute bags placed in a circle, which clearly marked the tension between the protagonists. Krzysztof Zarzecki, an actor, played the role of the educated person, while Mariusz Cichoński, a gas company collector and an amateur, was cast in the role of the labourer. Halfway through the performance, the actors switched roles and costumes. Although the tension between the actor, who was fully aware of his skills and abilities, and the natural non-professional was rather high, the role swapping and consequently the swapping of different languages used by the protagonists challenged the concept of belonging to a given class. It turned out that there was no difference between them.

In their subsequent performances, the duo tried to widen the viewer's field of activity by consistently engaging him in the game space. One of the duo's recent performances where this idea of participation was realized to the greatest degree is a variation on *Mistrz i Małgorzata* [The Master and Margarita] by Mikhail Bulgakov entitled *Każdy dostanie to, w co wierzy* [Everyone Will Get What They Believe In] in Teatr Powszechny im. Zygmunt Hübner w Warszawie [Zygmunt Hübner Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw], both in 2016. The artists created the theatrical situation of a meeting, freely using the characters and threads from the novel by the Russian author. The audience of the Powszechny Theatre welcomed Woland and his entourage visiting Warsaw which was checking how the nearly thirty-year-old democracy in Poland was doing. In this play, coming to the theatre meant accepting an invitation to the round table; that is, the stage. Being seated at the table was connected with the necessity to speak in public, engage in a conversation with the actor, disclose political views, or at least make a decision about the course of the performance by pressing a button. For example, the questions of society's ability to self-organize and its faith in the effectiveness of grassroots action were resolved by voting (the viewers had to assess whether as a group of individuals they were able to come up with solutions which they would eventually impose on the politicians). They were also asked to rate

their satisfaction with their possessions and assess their social utility. They had to state their earnings and priorities in life. The viewers sitting around the round table could decide how much they wanted to disclose about themselves in public and how far they wanted to go in their interactions with the actors, in a sense imitating the mechanism of social engagement. By reducing the physical distance, the artists tried to change the theatre formula from a mimetic show to one of a social event, with the viewer being its participant and co-author.

This performance did not meet all of the criteria for participative art, as Claire Bishop understands it, as a long-term project extended in time in which the artist is more a co-worker and a producer of situations, while the viewer is a co-creator or a participant.¹⁷ However, in *Każdy dostanie to, w co wierzy* the artists undoubtedly gave part of their area to the audience, allowing them to at least decide on the course of action. By doing so, they undermined the traditional modes of artistic creation and art consumption. Taking into account the artists' other performances, it seems that the purpose of applying this strategy is, above all, to transform the existing institutions and dependencies, including theatre itself. By offering their area to viewers within traditionally written roles, the artists make them aware of their self-agency and power. It is not so much about triggering a revolution, which the counterculture artists of the 1960s dreamed about, but about making an evolutionary change in reality. Besides, this complements the reflections of Philipp Schulte, who analysed the emancipation and participatory initiatives of German artists in this way:

“Emancipated viewers become emancipating co-players – because it gradually becomes clear that the rules which they have to obey are unacceptable, and it is necessary to break them in a conscious and creative way.”¹⁸

This type of theatre could also be called “performative”¹⁹, since it focuses

17 BISHOP, C. *Sztuczne piekła. Sztuka partycypacyjna i polityka widowni*. Translation Jacek Staniszewski. Warszawa : Bęc Zmiana, 2015, p. 19.

18 SCHULTE, P. *Patrzenie jest działaniem – lecz jest czymś więcej niż patrzeniem. Emancypacja i partycypacja we współczesnych formach teatralnych*. Translation Tomasz Grzelak. In *Mapowanie publiczności*. (Ed. Anna R. Burzyńska). Szczecin : Teatr Lalek „Pleciuga, 2015, p. 105.

19 FÉRAL, J. *Rzeczywistość wobec wyzwania teatru*. Translation Wojciech Prażuch. In *Diaskalia*, 2012, Nos. 109–110, p. 19.

on things happening and the active presence of the viewer. It is worth noting that this model of theatre has also recently been popular in Poland because it is perceived as the most effective way of encouraging the viewer's civic activity and consequently nurturing democratic ideals. It seems that the basis for thinking about theatre as an institution supporting the idea of democracy was also the creation of the choir theatre by Marta Górnicka due to its form when compared with projects by Einer Schlee, a German director. For every new performance, the director selects a chorus from among individuals who do not engage in professional singing. The chorus singers, varying in terms of experience, age, appearance, gender, and nationality, are "tuned" as if they were one instrument for the body and the voice. They become a representation of the community, representing its needs and expectations and disclosing circumstances in which their voice is heard. This is usually the voice of individuals excluded for various reasons, e.g., women, immigrants, nameless corporate employees, and the Roma. Due to the fact that the content which the choir refers to is commonly known – a libretto consisting of recognizable literary texts, media clichés, and even fragments of commercials and the Polish Constitution – they seem to be the elements of a collective consciousness.

Finally, I wish to mention a special kind of participatory theatre which may have a political dimension, given that the reconfiguration of society and the interference of actors who change the reality outside theatre are to be considered political. It is a multi-annual project called *Wielkopolska: Rewolucje* [Wielkopolska: Revolutions] by Agata Siwiak, who, in cooperation with the authorities of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, created a space for professional confrontation between artists and non-professionals. In 2012 she persuaded a number of Polish artists and curators to go to the cities, towns, and villages of Wielkopolska, where together with children from children's homes, the residents of old people's homes, pensioners, Roma, and female prisoners, they prepared a number of artistic projects based on the experiences of the community they cooperated with. Mikołaj Mikołajczyk, a dancer and choreographer, prepared a dance and movement show with elements of singing called *Teraz jest czas* [Now Is the Time] (2013) in cooperation with elderly people at the Dom Polski [Polish House] in Zakrzew, which can be regarded as a manifesto of old age that still has something to say. Subsequently, in Kolin, a place where the lynching of Roma took place, Joanna Warsza and Angelika Topolewska had a project called *Kwestia romska. Projekt z większością* [The Roma Question: A Project with the Majority] (2012), which aimed to

bring the Poles closer to the culture of the Roma minority. It turned out that, thanks to the involvement of the curators and the meetings initiated by them, the public began to talk about issues which were crucial yet marginalized such as a lack of trust and difficulties in Polish–Roma coexistence. In the following year, Michał Borczuch was working with sixteen children from the Szamocin Children’s Home and youths from the local Szamocin Station Theatre on the show *Lepiej tam nie idź* [You’d Better Not Go There] (2013), which touched upon the subject of childhood. In 2014 Wiktor Rubin and Jolanta Janiczak, together with Cezary Tomaszewski, a choreographer and performer, prepared a project entitled *Jakiż to chłopiec piękny i młody* [Who is this Lad So Handsome and Young?] in cooperation with the elderly residents of the Social Assistance House in Lisówki. It was a cross between a play, an exhibition, and a meeting, during which the residents talked about their lives and the problems of old age.

The *Wielkopolska: Rewolucje* project saw the creative field work of artists far away from the cultural centre. Owing to this project, the inhabitants of small towns situated far from Poznań, the capital of the region, could come into contact with avant-garde art and meet the artists, who they do not have access to on a daily basis. In turn, the artists could revise their stereotypical ideas about life in the province and the cultural needs of its inhabitants. The artistic undertaking then realized the idea of social communication because, as the curator said: “The people I was doing these workshops for did not go to major art festivals but happened to be creative and hungry for change. I realized that I had been criticizing the system, but without doing much for its democratization.”²⁰ Also, the activities which were carried out proved to be of great importance to the local communities, because they touched upon social issues which were crucial for them. In a sense, they led to a change in the world on a small scale. However, Bojana Kunst calls such plays “ineffective social practices”, arguing that artistic activities replace the real sphere of participation and thus belong more to the sphere of aesthetics than to politics.²¹ Zbigniew Libera, who is a Polish visual artist and performer, is of a different opinion and claims that “politics is not about implementing a certain set of views by means of the state apparatus, but instead is the place where our

20 CIEŚLAK, J. *Wielkopolska: Rewolucje – projekt Agaty Siwiak. Rzeczpospolita*. [cit. 10. 5. 2018]. Available at: <http://www.rp.pl/arttykul/1121335-Wielkopolska--Rewolucje---projekt-Agaty-Siwiak.html>.

21 KUNST, B. *Artysta w pracy. O pokrewieństwach sztuki i kapitalizmu*, p. 18.

demands, needs, and desires meet. Politics is therefore art"²². Consequently, political art does not necessarily have to be about political indoctrination but rather about actions undertaken for the sake of society, the initiation of emancipatory movements, and the renegotiation of the shape of society.

The panoramic view which I have depicted here includes the most crucial examples of thinking about theatre as a political activity which is meant to lead to change. Theatre directors and authors alike recognize the need to engage theatre in major social issues, discuss them, and intellectually provoke the viewer. This aim is realized by means of theatrical spectacles as well as through meetings, debates, and discussions. The need for building and strengthening civil society seems especially crucial now that power in the country has been taken over by the Law and Justice Party, a populist party which builds its political capital on chauvinism, xenophobia, and social conflicts. On the one hand, over the past twenty years political theatre in Poland has touched upon taboo subjects, violating and undermining the narratives which claim the right to be the only valid interpretation. It is a critical and engaged theatre tackling topics characteristic of capitalist societies. Its aim is to throw light on the most important problems related to the functioning of the state and society and to express important issues concerning the local or national community. On the other hand, it undertakes activities which encourage various forms of civic engagement and disobedience to various institutions of the state which exclude a number of social groups. This kind of theatre aims at building mutual trust and empathy, which will later become a tool of permanent change. It also occurs as a space for confrontation from different points of view, which is when art proves to be a safe training ground for the dispute. Paradoxically, the recent years of Law and Justice rule have brought more plays about the migration crisis and social solidarity with marginalized groups, such as elderly people and small town dwellers, than plays which directly criticize or ridicule the new political power.

Translated by Zuzanna Cieplińska-Zwonik

22 ŻMIJEWSKI, A. Polityczne gramatyki obrazów. In RANCIERE, J. *Estetyka jako polityka*. Translation Julian Kutyla, Piotr Mościcki. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007, p. 13.

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Memory Appeal as a Theatrical Value: The Power of Humanity and the Ideology of Patriotism

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Abstract: Since 2000, Slovak theatre has been increasingly focused on themes related to Slovak history. There has been a distinctive body of productions that portray and re-interpret the breakthrough periods in the socio-political development of the country while providing a new perspective on the fixed perception of personalities who used to be their component parts. For example, the 19th-century Enlightenment period, the Second World War and the period of the wartime Slovak State, and the Communist regime period from the latter half of the 20th century. During those periods, theatre professionals were intrigued by the different versions of totalitarian regime and their impact upon life and society. From local themes, we move to broader European contexts which often are documentary-like by nature and testify to the fact that even in Slovakia people have been living in European times. Productions are created on the basis of the dramatizations of literary works that capture collective and personal remembrances of the witnesses of these processes (for instance, *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [War's Unwomanly Face] by Svetlana Alexievich and *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Once Upon a Time in Bratislava] by Jo Langer). Reminiscences are heard from the stages in the form of memory chorales and intimate confessions. Their common feature is a breaking away from collective ideologies and identities (motherland and nation), favoured or dictated in the past, and coming back to the value of the life of a human being as a humanistically thinking and feeling being.

Key words: *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár*, *Vtedy v Bratislave*, contemporary Slovak theatre, the Great Patriotic War, the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia

Since 2000, Slovak theatre has been increasingly focused on themes related to Slovak history. In this context, it would be more appropriate to use the concept of “past” rather than “history”. Past turning points and events building up our history and determining the present were in the focus of creative professionals’ attention. These were specific and individualized events and situations in the form of people’s stories. As opposed to interpreted and inevitably generalizing history (frequently, with factual abstraction and thus

with a conditionally distorting and evasive emotionality), creative professionals ventured to capture a personal recollection, an experience or an emotion, and to bring them back to life. Often history, as narrated through theatre, acquired a different, richer, and more dynamic form than the generally known and recorded technical facts which had petrified the past as something bygone and immutable. History may appear to be more than just something firmly fixed, steadfast, and static. By contrast, past stories emanate a dynamic charge and desire to learn what is hidden behind official history. They allude to our past, to lived and to unvoiced experiences, to diverse events and fates which contain a promise of rawness, mysteriousness, and vividness.

Like in other post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, this tendency in Slovakia was associated with the new processes of self-awareness, self-identification, and self-definition, with the quest for finding one's identity and for redefining history, which disregarded a lot of humane aspects in original interpretations and pushed them into the background in the name of a "higher good". The socio-political turnaround after 1989 has gradually made theatre professionals want to research in an unbiased way who we are, what our roots are, what we believe in, and what values we profess. A very distinctive body of productions has emerged that portray and re-interpret the breakthrough periods in the socio-political development of Slovakia, while shedding new light on opinion-leading personalities, whose active participation is integral to the shaping of this. In a way, the productions have run counter to the well-known and established concepts, looked upon as generally fixed interpretations of what, how, and why something had happened.

For instance, productions have portrayed the 19th-century period of National Enlightenment, the Second World War and the wartime Slovak State (1939–1945), and the period of the Communist and socialist regime in Czechoslovakia from the mid-20th century. Aside from productions portraying cultural activists, politicians, and artists as individuals who happened to live within sweeping breakthrough moments of (political) history in the "here and now", there were also productions put on Slovak theatre stages that portrayed "ordinary people". They were their contemporaries who had experienced those periods first-hand, and over time they reflected, assessed, and commented on past events. Sometimes, these people were not completely anonymous individuals but rather men deliberately overlooked by recorded history. These individuals, through their revivification as the pro-

tagonists of plays, have been given the power to narrate their stories and engage in a discourse with history and its spectators. These were largely documentary-based productions which aspired to be something more than just non-fiction theatre. They endeavoured to present man's soul and emotions on stage, as captured in autobiographical books, quotations, recorded discourse, and personal letters, to divulge fragile and inherently human features. It seemed as if personal memory and flashbacks were put on an equal footing in a documentary medium, indispensable for the blending of the picture with our period.

Old myths have collapsed, but not for the sake of creating new ones or repudiating the old. Theatre and society got caught in an evolutionary incubation phase in which parts of the past were searched for that had affected both the external processes and the human soul, and consequently their persistent impact was constantly felt in the present time. These were not just things that were hurtful, traumatic, or uncured. Productions, or rather their characters, did not name and shame anyone, they did not discharge themselves of responsibility or of guilt. On the contrary, the aim of revived stocktaking (living through an event and commenting on it once again) was to get to know our future as a point of collision between the past and foreboded future.

In productions, the world was not divided into a series of opposites: us and them, good and bad, the loyal one and the enemy, and the winner and the defeated. Intolerant power, a magic negative hero who could only be portrayed in hidden form in the past, was allegorically and metaphorically transformed into a series of individual decisions and acts, amidst which man is bound to fight for himself. There has been a shift from a typically Slovak tragic perception of oneself and critical attitudes towards a period's system (as a representation of time) to analytical thinking and ambivalent attitudes (as current self-presentation).

The portrayed world has become more complex and diverse. Characters are more controversial because they observe the paradox of life per se rather than the authors' construed logics (or the story construed by the author). Just as life gives no unequivocal interpretations and answers, productions are not the messengers of news developed and interpreted based on a new wave of opinion, a new regime, or any momentarily enforced ideology (which was often the case in Slovak theatre in the past). Through these productions, the world outlook has become a tested entity, an implicit character of a dialogue between the stage and the auditorium reflecting on humanity and on human nature. In this case, memory is a tool or mechanism for understand-

ing life, while memory's appeal is a value articulated by theatre. Numerous productions reanimated memory; they referred to the current threat of the repetition of the past, whose negative sides were far too quickly forgotten by modern society. It may be said that theatre professionals were intrigued by various versions of totalitarianism and by their impact on society and on an individual's life as its active part.

Having said that, one must admit that dramatic scripts and productions were largely non-dramatic and suffered from what is being referred to as drama crisis, i.e., from epic quality, linearity, monologicality, subjectivism, dramatized reading, and narration. Dramatic action and acts changed to images and descriptions; a dramatic story was replaced with monologues at whose core was the theme rather than the situation.¹ The conflict was shifted inside a character or left on the edge of the story. Here, the conflict lurked for spectators, the post-history, and the prior future which posed both a threat and desired salvation in one. At this point of discontinuity, Slovak theatre professionals approach man as a liminal being with a chance to recover his value system and postpone the heralded end of civilization and of the history of humanity.

The power of humanity and love with respect to the ideology of patriotism (love of motherland and of one's native country) and Communist ideology as a proclaimed instrument of a better future are captured in two productions of autobiographies: *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [War's Unwomanly Face] by Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich (Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin [Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin], 2017, direction Marián Pecko) and *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Once Upon a Time in Bratislava] by Slovak exile Jo Langer (Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin, 2015, direction Patrik Lančarič). Thematically and timewise, these productions are like Gemini building a bridge to the present. Both of them approach complex historical events and preferred ideologies from a woman's perspective. Through a woman's memory, theatre professionals make an appeal to humanist values as the only acceptable value invariables to be applied to the present and to the future. The matization rather than dramatization was deemed important by them, and therefore the study focuses on the themes relevant for a theatre discourse and their theatrical interpretations.

Vojna nemá ženskú tvár captures the period of the Great Patriotic War between 1941 and 1945. Above all, producers focused on the things hidden be-

1 For more details, see: SZONDI, P. *Teória modernej drámy*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1969.

hind recorded history, i.e., on the feelings and confessions of Soviet women, active female soldiers, who personally experienced the war. In fact, it is a dramatized narration of seven female characters named after the real names of the actresses impersonating them. The lines of each character were composed of book-recorded oral history (of numerous remembrances) as *pars pro toto*. There is a connection between the past and the present in the form of the revivification of recorded remembrances and their subsequent comments. Women would act as a compact resounding chorus in one instance, while in the other they act individually to communicate their intimate confessions. It is apparent that in terms of time, means, and the past, their remembrances and comments were not fit for use in drama and theatre. There was a need to bring them forward in time, while being mindful of the epic quality not completely alienating the characters created based on narration and reminiscences from the dramatic effect of the present here and now. There was a dual intention and purpose behind giving the real names of actresses to their protagonists: to disrupt the time line of the past as narrated in the book, thus partly weakening the alienating epic effect (*Verfremdungseffekte*), and to create a timeless female character or woman's voice as a scaled-down history of an ordinary human being. The production structure consisted of four basic thematic segments: The Great Patriotic War – the Beginning, In War, Love in War, and About Victory. The production was focused on temporal periodization and thematic areas as well as on observing opinion shifts, the evolution of motivation, and characters' attitudes. The ambition was to get to know the female history of war through the perception of individual persons, through their personal experience and a shared memory.

The female characters stood up for themselves while jointly creating a mosaic of wartime events, war itself, and the post-war period and feelings. The production very clearly captures the contradiction between what we have heard about war (or seen in men's films) and what we attribute to authentic testimonies through dramatic adaptation from the perspective of theatre-goers with theatrical experience. In the introductory part, the viewer learns that the women enlisted in the army voluntarily. They were eager to go to the battlefield and to fight in combat operations. Some of them fled their homes against the approval of their parents. They were young women between 16 and 20 years of age, and they yearned to be useful and to contribute to a great victory, much like the men.

When military operations moved to the Soviet Union, they regarded it their duty to stand up for their country, defend their motherland, and not

yield an inch of soil to the foreign aggressor. Throughout the production, the idea captured by Alexievich in several women's testimonies is repeatedly highlighted: upbringing towards patriotism and in parallel towards hatred of the foreigner (perceived as hostile) which she has also presented in books. They were brought up with the idea that they and their motherland were one and the same. They felt no fear, just curiosity. The notion of death was remote, it was beyond the logic of a young person's life. Their patriotism was nurtured by various public speeches and statements in the press. With the passing of the years, the female characters comment on it from the stage with a slightly ironic and bitter tone and quote these encouragements aloud. Stalin himself called them to arms, approaching them as his brothers and sisters, thereby appealing to the entire nation to defend their motherland. Individualism gave way to a noble idea of community based on a strictly nationalist approach which was intended as a source of strength and courage at a time of crisis.

Other girls, being young Komsomol members, deemed their participation in war to be their noble duty. Others cherished naive and even romantic ideas of going to the front hand-in-hand with their sweethearts and of becoming a hero, imagining that someone would write a book about them with their names remembered for eternity. They swapped their lives for a notion, for the ideal of a Soviet man who was fearless of death. All of them wanted to live and wished for a happy future. That was yet another reason that made them go to fight. They believed they would return, finish their studies, get married, and start a family. Due to the propaganda then, it was not feasible to perceive war differently from what had been presented to them through stories shown in the movies, which were a rather distorted picture of reality:

“Lucy: We didn't know what war was about. For us, it was a game. We've been raised on the romanticism of revolution, on the ideals of a happy Soviet man. We trusted our newspapers, parents, Stalin. The war will end soon. We'll defend our motherland and go home.

Everyone: Let's go, let's go, let's go!

Let's go, whenever!

Lucy: The war raged for five horrifying years. Sixty months. I'm the only one from our class to have returned home. Why? Why is it me who is alive? I frequently keep asking myself.”²

2 ALEXIJEVIĆ, S. – HORVÁTHOVÁ, I. *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [Unpublished dramatic script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2016, p. 9.

They went to the battlefield furnished with ideas and ideologies contained in poems, songs, and newspaper articles which were explicitly quoted and expressively declaimed by director Marián Pecko on various occasions throughout the production. While in the script one would find romantically devoted statements of women commenting on the meaning of the lyrics of the song *Sviaščennaja vojna* [The Sacred War], which heartened those who left for the battlefield, in the production, the spectator hears it streaming from the loudspeakers at the full volume of the chorus, while the stage is covered with a deep red curtain. That which in the Soviet land was deemed inappropriate to listen to two days after Operation Barbarossa had been launched as it did not comment on a speedy victory but rather a difficult and deadly fight, suddenly changed into a patriotic anthem:

“Arise, the great country, arise for a fight to the death! Against the dark fascist forces, against the cursed hordes. Let noble wrath boil over like a wave. This is the people’s war, a Sacred War!”³

In parallel with the song there are two male characters reciting, or rather loudly shouting, the poem by Ilya Ehrenburg *Zabi ho!* [Ubi ego!, Kill Him!] in Russian and Slovak into the microphone. Although Ehrenburg’s biography and creation are known in Slovakia, the poem, initially published in the *Pravda* daily newspaper in 1942, was not mentioned or analysed in our region and not placed into context with other works by Ehrenburg, which were referred to as antifascist (and, hence, ideologically correct):

“**Man No. 2:** The Germans are not human beings. From now on, the word ‘German’ is the most horrible curse. (...) We shall not speak any more. We shall not get excited. We shall kill. (...) If you think that your neighbour will kill a German instead of you, then you haven’t recognized the threat. (...) If you leave a German alive, the German will hang a Russian man and rape a Russian woman. If you kill one German, kill another – there is nothing more amusing for us than a heap of German corpses. (...) Kill the German – that is your grandmother’s request. Kill the German – that is a child’s prayer. Kill the German – that is your motherland’s loud request.”⁴

3 KUMAČ, V. L. *Sviaščennaja vojna* [Sviaschennaya Voyna]. In *Izvestia*, (24. 6. 1981).

4 ALEXIJEVIĆ, S. – HORVÁTHOVÁ, I. *Vojna nemá ženskú tvár* [Unpublished drama script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2016, p. 11.

The girls' characters admit that the poem turned into a cry for many and justified killing during the war. They knew it by heart. At the same time, the creators put commentary in their mouths, admitting that they did not have the slightest idea that what encouraged them on one side of the battlefield was in fact exactly the same tool serving as anti-Soviet fascist propaganda on the other.

Another important fact was also presented by the theatre makers in the production: girls in war were bound to become soldiers, always ready to fulfil all commands. They were taught to hate and to think about revenge for the death of their brothers, sisters, children, razed villages, mutilated dead bodies, and so on. The producers allocated the most attention to those features of women's narration which (in terms of interpretation) was drawn to a perception of war which was very different to that of previous (past) interpretations. The point was not a heroic killing of men by other men and their victory over a defeated enemy. The history of women in war was focused on details, colours, fragrances, and voices amidst the agony of war and recorded them in their (emotional) memories. Through the words of those directly involved in the war, the characters could not avoid talking about beauty, love, and compassion amidst the raging war. In this way, the production turned into an intimate narration with a humanist message. The characters embodying various women reflected on the war as a stage of life. They recalled it as part of their youth, of maturing, and as a moral experience. Little things prevailed over grand history and ideologies. On a scorched land they would see the beauty of falling white snow, amidst the corpses they recognized the freedom of a colt, and even the enemy was perceived as a human being. They frequently would notice his youth, face, and smile. They frequently would speak of their own dreams and imagination. For instance, they would hate to die in men's underwear, and even when dead they wished to look pretty. It looked as if the women had lived through two wars: one which ended in the victory of the Allies and another without winners, which was full of different feelings and emotions irrespective of the side of the battlefield on which people would be standing. They felt love for the seriously wounded men: they would stroke them, smile at them, and sing a song. They were sad when people got killed or had to take a weapon in their hands. They rejoiced when finding a living person amidst the dead, and it made no difference whether he was one of their own men or a German.

Several women had been looking forward to showing no mercy for anyone once Berlin was taken. Instead they end up searching for a bit of bread

for the children of their enemy and for captives, and they treat the wounds of their enemies:

“Lucy: I’ve inscribed on the Reichstag building that I, Efrosina Grigorievna Bereusova, have come here to kill war. I kneel each time I see a mass grave.⁵

Nadya: I couldn’t do otherwise. Each of us had to decide this issue for herself.

Eva: It can’t be that you have a heart for hatred and a heart for love. A human being has only got one heart. I was constantly wondering how mine could be saved.”⁶

The fact that the war was dramatically different from what many male and female soldiers had thought it to be at the beginning, and that the idea of patriotism was misused by the ideology of the authorities, started to unfold before them during the war and even more so towards its close. The characters could now freely talk about what could not be confessed by Soviet women to anybody. Their motherland had betrayed them. It sent them to war without weapons, food, or means of transportation. Stalin’s orders Nos. 227 and 270 (quoted during the performance) instructed them not to surrender at any cost. They were instructed not to take a single step backwards, not to surrender without resistance, and to attempt to break out from encirclement or to be taken captive. Defensive squads were put directly behind unstable divisions. Comrades were shot down by comrades. Those who survived in captivity were accused of espionage and executed. It was only then that they grasped and internalized fully the value of not killing a man, and this insight was communicated to contemporary viewers by the producers through a fully intact interpretation. In war, people do not think, they kill. They kill in the name of grand ideals, such as motherland, peace, and freedom, or they kill out of fear. Through the mouths of modern female characters, the female soldiers who took an active part in the Great Patriotic War and remember it all are asking and appealing from the stage: What was it good for? Whom did it serve? Why are we killing one another when life is such a unique gift?

“Nadya: We thought that people who’d gone through all the hardships would be nice to each other and that goodness and love would prevail.

5 Ibid, p. 48.

6 Ibid, p. 64.

Zuzana: That they'd be different.

Jana K: We didn't doubt it, not for a second. All people will be brothers and sisters. So, we've been waiting for the day to come!

Lucy: And people... and people... hate other people just as before. They are killing again. Who's doing that?

Nadya: Us... it's us."⁷

In a clear way and through such a finale, the producers allude to the following: the plural changes to singular. While ideologies feed on groups to diffuse responsibility, humanity is a matter of every human being's decision.

The second production, *Vtedy v Bratislave*, depicts Czechoslovakia immediately after the end of the Second World War. It was the producers' response to upheavals in modern Slovak society, in the European community, and in Western civilization, and to the processes ushering in a state of threat, i.e., current unrest, extremist moods, the aggression of power, threats, political delusions and deceptions, and influential demagoguery. On several levels and in several elements, the key component for dramaturge Peter Pavlac and director Patrik Lančarič has been a dialogue between the past and the present with a running commentary, the effort to grasp events, processes, relationships with people, and the attitude towards the country which the protagonists considered their motherland.

The main character is Jo Langer, the wife of the imprisoned Communist functionary Oskar Langer, sentenced in the staged political trials of the 1950s in Czechoslovakia. They were a Jewish couple: Jo came from Hungary and Oskar was from Czechoslovakia. From a distance, the mother shares her remembrances and confessions with her two daughters. She takes stock of her experiences and decisions and places them in the socio-political context. The lines are supplemented by reading out from her diary and by projecting authentic visual documentary material on the screen: the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet tanks, shots of concentration camps, handshakes between powerful leaders, President Tiso and Hitler, inscriptions on banners from May Day celebrations and marches, exclamations of "Long live peace, long live our motherland!" and "Long live socialism!", photographs of the working class President Gottwald and Stalin, the hand of a worker holding a dove, the live address from the staged political trial of the Communist poli-

7 Ibid, p. 66.

tician Rudolf Slánský⁸, and so on). A woman's personal memory on stage was thus given a historical documentary back-up through the eye of the camera.

The story is framed between the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 and the events preceding the Prague Spring, the invasion by the Warsaw Pact troops of Slovakia in 1968. However, the events are not chronologically sequenced but rather told in the layers of memories throughout time. They are discontinued by commentaries, ruptures, digressions, and retrospective narration. Implicitly, the production gives an account of the story of the pursuit of humanity, in the defiance of social events and systems that destroy human value.

Jo Langer was a child of the First World War. The world of her parents laid in ruins. While her parents were learning to forget, her generation was learning to think. She was in pursuit of the truth about the old, shattered world as well as of the new world affected by war. Everyone had their way of accomplishing it. She (a Hungarian Jew), her husband (a leftist intellectual of Jewish origin) and daughter managed to emigrate to the United States, where they lived safely until the end of the Second World War. Here they experienced early marital problems due to a clash of two different personalities and their intellectual and social frustration. The news about the killing of almost their entire family in Slovakia alternated with news of the victories of the Allied troops, the bombing of Berlin and Dresden, and the deaths of 20,000 Germans, over which they rejoiced for some kind of feeling of justice. Every time the character of Jo would catch herself reflecting on the reanimation of past happy emotions, she would resort to the element of time shifting and evaluate past events from a present time perspective. Also, she would give direction to her own motifs from the period to unravel other events she had experienced:

Jo: Must our moral principles change so much to have 'peace to men of good will' rule the Earth? I've wronged, humankind on both fronts has wronged. To me, the non-existence of God or his guilt seemed more certain than ever before. (...) And then the letter arrived. Father was asked to come back home.

8 In 1951 Rudolf Slánský was dismissed from his position, arrested, and charged with organizing a seditious conspiracy. In a staged trial given broad mass media coverage, he was sentenced to death and executed in 1952. In conjunction with this, several other politicians and their families were identically charged (i.e., with starting a fictitious conspiracy group).

The war was over, and he was needed as a talented economist...

Tanya: And a stalwart!

Jo: The letter's been signed by Karol Bacílek, who was appointed minister of State Security several years later.

Tanya: What made you go back?! You had been granted American citizenship by then!

Jo: There was a need to help build socialism that would change those confused and erred people."⁹

Despite their doubts, differences in opinion, and divergent lifestyles, Jo loved her husband for his unshakeable faith in the power of socialism to create a new, better, more equitable, and honest post-war world. Her generation survived the aftermath of both world wars and it realized that it was imperative to undertake a fundamental action for the generations to come. This faith helped her survive the years to come behind the Iron Curtain, by Oskar Langer's side, to cope with the irony and the wrongs of a Communist system which she could never internalize and teach her daughters the love of him, of their father, although his children were never as important to him as his faith in the Communist Party.

Returning from the United States to Czechoslovakia was accompanied by marital and ideological controversies. Jo indulged in sports and poetry; she loved conversations with her friends over a glass of something and smoking a cigarette, and she was not really much good at housework. Oskar was an ascetic intellectual; he did not give credit to poetry without a social message and socialist ideas. To him, physical love and conceiving children was just following primitive instincts. The character of Jo ridiculed these recollections, much like the controversies over ordinances and procedures of the Communist Party and the socialist working morale.

At that time, the Communist Party was at the forefront of the working class. Jo had to cope with her distrust in the ideology of the Communist Party, her cadre's dossier, and the nonsensical planned economy as well as with her urban non-proletarian background. The main female character was the key element of the production through which Lančarič portrayed the transformation of the idea of fair socialism and communism into a dogma of a socialism and communism that punished in a fair way. In no time, the socialist

9 LANGER, Ž. – PAVLAC, P. *Vtedy v Bratislave* [Unpublished drama script]. Martin : Slovenské komorné divadlo Martin, 2015, pp. 7–8.

system which had been built with great expectations turned into a system of terror, fear, denunciation, and the persecution of innocent people whose representative was the character of Jo and her daughters and friends. The monstrosity of this period void of any security and clear-cut rules was accentuated by the producers by using contorted and hyperbolized chorus scenes speaking into the microphones:

“Friend No. 2: And, most of all, the party has no time to carry out subtle analyses of the differences between the wrongs caused intentionally and those that are a consequence of individuals’ mistakes or human fallacies!

Friend No. 1: It’s always better to take a few people put in jail and have them interrogated and released once their innocence is proven than to leave a single enemy unapprehended!

Tanya: (almost cries out because the pressure of uttered words is too strong) That’s enough of that, mum! I don’t believe father has never contested that!”¹⁰

“Voice No. 3: Trust the party, comrades! The party has never let us down, it has demonstrated it deserves our unreserved trust shown by our people.”¹¹

Jo Langer’s husband was tagged as the class enemy of the Communist Party. He was falsely charged and imprisoned for twenty-two years on the grounds of espionage against the state and being part of a group led by Rudolf Slánský. The trial selectively led to the politically motivated executions of the alleged members of an espionage group in which there were several acquaintances of the Langers. The record of the trial was also used in the production for a reasonably long while. The well-known statement about the sentenced prisoners was also uttered in it, namely that they were not human beings. Jo kept moving with her children into constantly deteriorating housing conditions. She was fired by her employer, eventually being evicted from her home in the town, and ended up in the countryside under Displacement Action B. The family property was confiscated and her daughters faced the grim prospect of not being allowed to study. The producers deliberately dynamized the narration through direct encounters of the main character with party representatives and one-time family friends. The reactions of these counterparties portrayed the system as a system based on fear and as a distortion of common sense:

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 44.

“Jo: I lived in constant fear. I feared for my husband, I feared to open the newspaper in the morning and to turn the radio on. I feared the police, I feared I’d be put in prison as an imperialist spy when I went to the post office, to collect a parcel from our relatives in America, I was fearful for you that you’d be expelled from school, I was fearful for Tanya when she started withering right before my very eyes and lost consciousness due to malnutrition.”¹²

The production has the parallelly-running themes of the power and courage of women to endure and defeat the unfree external system, built on the dissemination of fear, by virtue of an inner freedom. It was imperative to take care of her children and explain to her elder daughter (an ardent pioneer/scout) that her father had been arrested and to safeguard her daughters from the assaults of the community, raising them to become honest people and not lose faith in man thanks to kind little gestures she had experienced. The producers put an emphasis on those parts of the novel that captured Jo Langer’s determination not to betray her own moral principles, common sense, loyalty, and support for her incarcerated husband. Their sense of dramatic detail facilitated the softening of tension through sentences filled with humour and irony, such as the reading out of exclamations such as “Salute labour!” and “Long live peace!” at the end of letters notifying the mother and her daughters of disastrous existential impacts and so on.

Once granted amnesty, Oskar Langer spent the rest of his life fighting for his vindication, which came too late and after having devotedly collaborated with the Communist Party. The last task in Jo’s life awaited her after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies during a visit to Sweden (where her elder daughter Susie was allowed to perform as a singer) where she sought to persuade both her daughters to leave their motherland and stay living in emigration. She had lost faith that the situation back home would change for the better and that history would not repeat itself. She wanted to find a safe home for her children and for their children. She understood home to be “a place” everyone has to seek within themselves and within our beloved ones. It was a root that did not belong in the soil but rather to people. Shortly before her first emigration to North America in 1938, she had instilled an idea in her mind that she was only part of the past and of the future; she blended in with the whole world and with everything that lived in it. Influenced by the experiences gained over the many years of her life,

¹² Ibid, p. 45.

the ideas of patriotism and an equitable socialist society were transformed into concrete interpersonal relationships. In Sweden she realized that people there had a sense for every living being, for accepting a foreigner without suspicion, and understanding his desire for a life of freedom:

“**Jo:** Here, for the first time ever, I feel that mankind can improve in a humane way. Yes, for the first time ever I’ve a persistent feeling that life can get better for humanity without having to pay for that with wasted fates and with everything else that makes life worth living.”¹³

At the beginning of the third millennium, with growing extremism and nationalist moods transgressing European borders, Slovak theatre makers have embarked on artistic research into the concepts of motherland, nation, country, and the state. It was deemed important for them to call to mind the values of every human life and of man as a humanistically thinking and feeling being. This gap has widened between the politically- or party-oriented management of public affairs based on a preferred ideology and a human being faced with the consequences of the execution of political or party power in their name. Through theatre, the appeal of memory has become a value alerting to the negative phenomena of the past as well as an appeal to enforce the power of humanity, which is at the core of every individual human being.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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¹³ Ibid, p. 83.

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Biography

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Divergent Subjects: Disrupting the Inherited Lifelines of Global Capitalism in Alice Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (2014)

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Abstract: This paper analyses Alice Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (2014), referred to by Birch herself as her "theatrical manifesto" (Birch, 2017). Radically subversive in terms of form, it is structured into three acts, each comprising different short scenes, which sketch the "affective scenarios"¹ of neoliberal, consumer capitalism and how they shape dominant understandings of love, marriage, romantic relationships, and happiness, among other things. Drawing on Sarah Ahmed's statement, in *Living a Feminist Life*, that "power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orienting bodies in particular ways"², the paper claims that, through its subversive, post-dramatic form, *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* puts into practice a series of affective strategies which aim at inviting spectators to question the dominant affects, or life "orientation[s]"³ and inherited "lifelines"⁴, of patriarchal, neoliberal capitalism. Such strategies, which are the affective emphasis carried by some words, purposefully capitalized, and which can be performed with an affective charge, and the introduction of a character/actor confusion which takes place in critical moments, aim at creating an indeterminacy which may contribute to questioning the objects of happiness⁵ in Western society. Furthermore, it aims to create a divergent type of subject, one who is "dis-oriented" from the life paths and definitions of happiness of neoliberalism, thus also pointing the way to a possible reconstruction of values.

Keywords: Alice Birch, contemporary British theatre, the "affective turn", feminism, Sarah Ahmed, happiness studies

Alice Birch, who started writing, as she herself has put it, "as soon as she could write"⁶, is the author of six full-length plays: *Little Light* (2015), *Many*

1 BERLANT, L. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2011, p. 9.

2 AHMED, S. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2017, 43.

3 AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2006, p. 1.

4 Ibid, p. 17.

5 AHMED, S. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2010, p. 21.

6 Notes taken at the Round Table led by Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch, and Séverine Magois,

Moons (2011), *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (2014), *We Want you to Watch* (2015), *Anatomy of a Suicide* (2017) (for which she received the Susan Smith Blackburn Award in 2017), and *[Blank]* (2018).⁷ She is also the author of the stage adaptations *Ophelias Zimmer* (2016), a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; *Shadow (Eurydyce Speaks)* (2016), based on Elfriede Jelinek's *Schatten (Eurydyke sagt)* (2004), which is a feminist rewriting of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth; and *La Maladie de la Mort* (2018), which rewrites Marguerite Duras's 1982 homonymous novel. All of the above have been directed by Katie Mitchell.⁸ She is also the author of the script for the

as part of the Theatre, Youth and Drama Symposium, organized by Constantin Bobas, Claire Hélie and Véronique Perruchon, which was held at Lille University on 2 February 2017.

7 Birch made this comment at the opening ceremony of the symposium "Youth, Theatre and Drama" which was held in Lille University, France, and where she was the invited playwright. The conference was organized by Constantin Bobas, Claire Hélie, and Véronique Perruchon, and it lasted from 2 to 3 February 2017. It included a Round Table with Alice Birch, stage director Arnaud Anckaert, and translator Séverine Magois, a translation workshop with students led by Magois, and a performance of *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again*, directed by Anckaert. *Little Light* (2015) is Birch's "first full-length script" (see SIERZ, A. *Little Light*, Orange Tree Theatre. [Review]. In *New Writing for the British Stage*, 2015 [cit. 22. 5. 2018]. Available at: <http://www.sierz.co.uk/reviews/little-light-orange-tree-theatre/>), despite it having been staged and published after *Many Moons* at the Orange Tree Theatre, in Richmond, where it ran from 7 February to 7 March 2015, directed by David Mercatali. *Little Light* prompted Aleks Sierz's revealing remark that "[n]ew writing doesn't come much better than this" (Ibid). *Many Moons* (2011), Birch's "first full play to be staged" (Cf. Notes taken at the Round Table led by Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch, and Séverine Magois) was first staged at Theatre 503, where it ran from 20 May to 11 June 2011, directed by Derek Bond. *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (2014), which has been performed in New York, Australia, and New Zealand, and was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company as part of the Midsummer Mischief Festival in the Other Place in Stratford-on-Avon, where it ran from 21 to 29 June 2014, directed by Erica Whyman. *We Want You to Watch* (2015), an indictment on pornography, was developed in collaboration with RashDash, a company founded by Abbi Greenland and Helen Goale, and it ran at the National Theatre Temporary Theatre from 15 June to 11 July 2015, directed by Caroline Steinbeis. Birch's *Anatomy of a Suicide* (2017) also ran at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs from 3 June to 8 July and was also directed by Mitchell. *[Blank]*, her latest play to date, is a National Theatre/Clean Break co-commission, directed by Marianne O'Shea and Alex Fraser, which ran at the Orange Tree Theatre, the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, and the National Theatre, as part of the National Theatre Connections Festival 2018, consisting of a series of sixty scenes, some connected, others less so, about adults and children impacted by the criminal justice system.

8 *Ophelias Zimmer* (2016), a co-production by Berlin's Schaubühne and the Royal Court, conceived by Katie Mitchell and created by Birch, and written in German with English subtitles, ran at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs from 17 to 21 May 2016

acclaimed film *Lady Macbeth* (2016), directed by William Oldroyd, for which she received the British Independent Film Award for best screenplay in 2017.⁹

Her theatre has often been compared to that of Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane, and Martin Crimp, particularly regarding formal experimentation.¹⁰ Her play *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again*, in particular, was endorsed by Simon Stephens and called a “landmark” by Mark Ravenhill¹¹, and the fact that Mitchell has directed her last two plays to date attests to her increasing importance as a playwright. This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute to explore what is arguably one of the most important female and feminist theatrical voices in the UK by focusing on *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again*, one of her most experimental plays to date.

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again has been referred to by Birch herself as her “theatrical manifesto”¹² in terms of how it is representative of the crisis of the values of neoliberal globalization and of the fault lines relating to the neoliberal consumer capitalist construction of acquisitive, individualist subjectivities in hyper-connected, globalized societies.¹³ It contains all of the

after it opened at the Schaubühne in December 2015. *Shadow (Euridyce Speaks)* was first performed at Berlin’s Schaubühne, where it ran from 28 September to 3 October 2018, and then at Théâtre de la Colline, in Paris, where it ran from 19 to 28 January 2018. *The Malady of Death* (2018), a multimedia work which interrogates pornography and the male gaze, ran at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord from 16 January to 3 February 2018 before being staged at the Barbican from 3 to 6 October 2018 with Laetitia Dosch as the woman, Nick Fletcher as the man, and Irène Jacob as narrator.

- 9 Lady Macbeth, a feminist rewriting of Nikolái Leskov’s *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, is about a woman who is stifled by her loveless marriage to a bitter man twice her age and her passionate affair with a young worker on her husband’s estate with the acclaimed actress Florence Pugh as Katherine, Cosmo Jarvis Sebastian as her lover, and Paul Hilton as Alexander, her husband.
- 10 BILLINGTON, M. Anatomy of a Suicide Review – A Startling Study of Mothers and Daughters. In *The Guardian*, 2011. [cit. 22.05.2018]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/12/anatomy-of-a-suicide-review-royal-court-alice-birch-katie-mitchell>.
- 11 Notes taken at the Round Table led by Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch, and Séverine Magois.
- 12 Personal Interview with Alice Birch. Lille (France), 3 February. Unpublished material, 2017.
- 13 In a personal interview with the writer, Birch stated that she considers *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* to be her “theatrical manifesto”, where she set out her aims as a playwright. Birch mentions it was written in response to *SCUM Manifesto* by Valerie Solanas, which she was shocked by. However, she was attracted by “how unapologetic it was”. The *SCUM Manifesto* is a provocative essay which seeks to enact social change and overthrow the government by destroying the male sex. As shall be seen, Act Three of *Revolt. She Said. Re-*

themes that are present in Birch's dramaturgy, such as the sexism that pervades language and relationships, the presence of neoliberal values at work, an unequal world order where Westerners feel "proud of [their] empathy"¹⁴, the passing on or inheritance of dominant gender and neoliberal values in the family, and the possibility of divergence and of interrupting the system through radical resistance or even violence.¹⁵

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again, which is a feminist exploration of language and revolt, adopts post-dramatic strategies, or what Sara Grochala in *The Contemporary Political Play: Rethinking Dramaturgical Structure* calls a "liquid dramaturgical structure"¹⁶, such as the refusal to create dramatic characters, understood as subjectivities, as well as a linear plot, and the dramatization of two different spaces/scenes which play out simultaneously on stage, in order to reflect what Bauman defines as the "fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change"¹⁷ of liquid modernity. Its ultimate aim, as shall be seen, is to contribute to unsettling basic notions and definitions of happiness in Western society, which are based on the dominant narrative of "advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope"¹⁸.

volt Again, where "four women" claim they want to "dismantle the monetary system" and mention the possibility to "eradicate all men", resembles the manifesto; however, like the whole play, which is on the side of gender equality, it distances itself from Solanas's radicalism, producing instead a critique of the modes of the operation of power. See *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*. (Timberlake Wertenbaker: *The Ant and the Cicada*. Alice Birch: *Revolt. She said. Revolt Again*. E. V. Crowe: *I Can Hear You*. Abi Zakarian: *This is Not an Exit*). London : Oberon Modern Playwrights, 2014, p. 100.

14 Ibid.

15 *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* was published in 2014 in a volume entitled *RSC Midsummer Mischief Festival*, comprising four short feminist-themed plays by Birch, Timberlake Wertenbaker, E. V. Crowe, and Abi Zakarian in response to the provocation by historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that "well-behaved women don't make history". It was written after *Many Moons*, after which Birch has claimed she worked "quite quietly for a time and kept thinking about form. Although I was quite frightened about the RSC, I wrote it in three days". Cf. Notes taken at the Round Table led by Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch, and Séverine Magois, as part of the Theatre, Youth and Drama Symposium, organized by Constantin Bobas, Claire Hélie and Véronique Perruchon, which was held at Lille University on 2 February 2017. The volume also includes *The Ant and the Cicada* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, *I Can Hear You* by E. V. Crowe, and *This is Not an Exit* by Abi Zakarian.

16 GROCHALA, S. *The Contemporary Political Play: Rethinking Dramaturgical Structure*. London ; New York : Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 17.

17 BAUMAN, Z. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge ; Malden : Polity, 2012, p. viii.

18 HALBERSTAM, J. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2011, p. 89.

This paper transposes Berlant's affective analysis of contemporary society into the key of drama, since her understanding of the present as a "mediated affect"¹⁹ can crucially contribute to illuminate aspects of contemporary theatre and performance practice. *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* sketches, in Berlant's words, the "affective scenarios"²⁰ of neoliberal, consumer capitalism, presenting a 21st-century society that is loaded with affects which adhere to and shape dominant understandings of love, marriage, romantic relationships, and happiness, among other things, and which appear to "travel along already defined lines of cultural investment"²¹. Indeed, it reflects how relational goods such as love or happiness are, in Ahmed's words and as she expounds in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, "effects of circulation"²², and how some of these relational goods, or "happy objects"²³ as Ahmed calls them, enter "our near sphere with positive affective value already in place", becoming "happiness-causes, before we even encounter them"²⁴.

Departing from Ahmed's statement in *Living a Feminist Life* that "power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orienting bodies in particular ways"²⁵, this paper analyses Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* as a radically subversive play which through a post-dramatic use of form puts into practice a series of affective strategies with the aim of inviting spectators to question the dominant affects or life "orientation[s]"²⁶ and inherited "lifelines"²⁷ of patriarchal, neoliberal capitalism, thus contributing to undoing the internal borders of spectators, which, "as capitalism itself (...) constitute a very real limit to thought"²⁸.

19 BERLANT, L. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2011, p. 4.

20 Ibid, 9.

21 PEDWELL, C. – WHITEHEAD, A. Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory. In *Feminist Theory*, 2012, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 123.

22 AHMED, S. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh UP, 2004, p. 8.

23 *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*. (Eds. Marianne Liljeström, Susanna Paasonen). London ; New York : Routledge, 2017, p. 34.

24 Ibid.

25 AHMED, S. *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 43.

26 AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 1.

27 Ibid, p. 17.

28 *After Globalization*. (Eds. Eric Cazdyn, Imre Szeman). Oxford ; Malden : Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 7. Ahmed's notion of "turning", being "orientated", or "in line" with others builds on Judith Butler's theories of subject formation, which in their turn also recall Louis Althusser's notion of how ideology hails individuals or constitutes them as subjects. The inheritance of "lifelines" is also the main topic and concern of Birch's last play to date, *Anatomy of a Suicide* (2017), which also makes use of the overlapping of scenes/spaces on

Such strategies are the introduction of a character/actor confusion which takes place in critical moments, the affective emphasis carried by some words which are purposefully capitalized in the text by Birch herself, and which can be performed with an affective charge, and the disruption of narrative in Act Four as the previous act is destroyed by a bomb and ends in a feminist revolution, literally destroying the play's form itself.²⁹ These strategies aim at creating an indeterminacy which may prompt spectators to contribute to questioning the objects of happiness³⁰ of Western society and create a divergent type of subject, one who is "dis-oriented" from the life paths and definitions of happiness of neoliberalism, thus also pointing the way to a possible reconstruction of values.

Arguably and from this point of view, the play might provoke what Rancière has called "a transformation in the distribution of the sensible"³¹ by disrupting the obviousness and naturalness of the perceptual and epistemic underpinnings of late capitalism, "effect[ing] new forms of the circulation of speech, of exhibition of the visible and of production of affects, [which aim to create] a new topology of the possible"³². Based mainly on "individual fulfilment", the play implies, such neoliberal values prevent individuals from

stage as a central formal device. See AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, pp. 15–17. As Birch puts it, *Anatomy of a Suicide* asks whether "once the suicide taboo has been broken in a family, does it become easier to repeat later? And I wanted to look at how does one break out of that pattern so the cycle doesn't become inevitable?" See BIRCH, A. I'm Interested in Whether Trauma Can Be Passed On through DNA. [Interview]. In *The Guardian*, 2017. [cit. 22. 5. 2018] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/04/alice-birch-anatomy-of-a-suicide-play-interview>. In this case, the simultaneity of scenes on stage is the play's core of resistance since certain key words are repeated in the three stories, thus encouraging spectators to draw connections between them as well as with the contemporary structures of patriarchal oppression, which in the play are only obliquely dramatized.

29 Such an ending led Dominic Cavendish to call the play "a cluster bomb of subversion". See CAVENDISH, D. *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* by Alice Birch. [Review]. In *The Telegraph*, 2014. [cit. 22. 5. 2018]. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/10917888/Midsummer-Mischief-The-Other-Place-at-the-Courtyard-Theatre-Stratford-upon-Avon-review.html>.

30 AHMED, S. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2010, p. 21.

31 ROCKHILL, G. Introduction. In RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translation Gabriel Rockhill. New York : Continuum, 2004, p. 4.

32 CORCORAN, S. Editor's Introduction. In RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. (Ed. and translation Steven Corcoran). London ; New Delhi ; New York ; Sydney : Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 23.

creating solidarities or rebuilding confidence in our collective capacity to change the world.³³

**Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again as a “Theatrical Manifesto”:
Orientations, “Negative” Globalization, and the Need for Feminism**

This paper focuses on two key scenes of the play – namely, “Revolutionize the Work. (Engage with It)” and “Revolutionize the World. (Do Not Marry)”, which take place in Act One – as well as on Act Four, which presents the possibility of a feminist revolution. “Revolutionize the Work. (Engage with It)” dramatizes the violence of neoliberal values at work and presents a job interview where the interviewer and the interviewee are stuck in an argument because the interviewee does not want to work on Mondays. In this context, Birch makes an actor act as if s/he “has forgotten their line”³⁴, and blurs the distinction between the character and actor in order to take the theatrical situation to a point of collapse and lead spectators to realize “the circulation of everything in the form of a commodity”³⁵ in the context of neoliberal globalization.

In this scene, the interviewers confront the interviewee, who is usually played by a woman, by asking her all kinds of questions in order to discover why she does not want to work on Mondays, which brings to the fore the expectations placed on women by neoliberal logic. At first, they ask her if she wants to “try to get pregnant”, since “women want that”; then, since she keeps insisting that she just wants “more time off”, the interviewer begins to lure her with all types of consumer capitalist seductions.³⁶ Indeed, he informs her that they have “put vending machines in the corridors” and a “bar on the rooftop terrace and we’re doing Happy Hour Fridays, or that they can “organise Spa days” and “do more face masks and pampering”, to which she

33 PENNY, L. Life-Hacks of the Poor and Aimless: On Negotiating the False Idols of Neoliberal Self-Care. In *The Baffler*, 2016. [cit. 22. 5. 2018]. Available at: <https://thebaffler.com/war-of-nerve/laurie-penny-self-care>.

34 *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*, p. 64.

35 NANCY, J-L. *The Creation of the World or Globalization*. (Eds. and translation François Raffoul, David Pettigrew). New York : State U. of New York, 2007. p. 37.

36 As shall be seen, and from now on, whenever specific words from the play’s quotes are capitalized, it is an emphasis present in the play itself. As Birch puts it in the opening stage directions, “the use of upper and lower case letters (...) is all there to help the actor in terms of pacing and the weight of their words”. See *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*, p. 45.

responds that she refuses to recognize the bar as a “real or legitimate space”, thus denying that she has any desire to acquiesce to such offers or that this corresponds to her idea of happiness.³⁷

It is at this point that the play blurs the boundaries between the characters and the actors. Unsettled by her smile and resistance, the interviewer's role begins to collapse – “Do you want a pay rise? Is that it? Do you want to be paid as much as / as the / *perhaps it's not clear whether the actor has forgotten their line, or it is the character tripping over a word* / as the / the – sorry – as the boys? / . / Stop smiling.” In this situation, the girl answers that she is contracted to smile, but there also seems to be a confusion as to whether it is the character or the actor who is responding: “(Again, is this the character or actor?) I'm contracted to smile.” The stage directions announce that “[i]t feels like the actors aren't sticking to their lines, *perhaps*”. Indeed, the dialogue reaches a point of absurdity as social and theatrical roles begin to break down, and the interviewee finally leaves with a victorious “I'll see you on Tuesday.”³⁸

The scene is a critique of the obsession for productivity in the work place that characterizes neoliberal societies and which is one of the tenets of the dominant narrative of happiness. As Lisa Blackman puts it, the dominant definition of happiness is “aligned with success and satisfaction in the work place (...) through the establishment of happy life-skills”³⁹. By taking the theatrical situation to a point of collapse, the play seeks to open what Brian Massumi has termed a “margin of manoeuvrability” in order to induce spectators to a “change in capacity” which might lead them to find “different ways of connecting to others and to other situations”, thus overthrowing the myth of individual fulfilment through work.⁴⁰

In “Revolutionize the World. (Do not Marry)” Birch presents a scene where an unspecified character makes a marriage proposal to another one but utterly fails to convince him/her, as he is repeatedly and adamantly rejected. Since the characters' gender is unspecified, this scene could be played by two men, two women, or a man and a woman. The feminist politics of the play seems to suggest, however, that a man should make the marriage proposal, while

37 Ibid, pp. 64–68.

38 Ibid, pp. 67–69.

39 BLACKMAN, L. Is Happiness Contagious? In *New Formations: Happiness*, 2007/8, No. 63, p. 15.

40 MASSUMI, B. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge ; Malden : Polity, 2015, pp. 3–6.

the woman resists the offer. In the scene, the more the male character keeps insisting on marriage and offering media-ridden, conventional images of happiness and conjugal life, the more the female character brings out a subtext of sexism beneath the external glow of heterosexual marriage:

“-All I said was that I wanted to live my life Next to yours
 -No you didn’t
 -That I wanted to love you forever
 -That isn’t what you said
 -(...) That I want to buy Dogs and then bury those dogs in the back garden we share
 -No
 -I said I wanted to do my online food shop with you and go on all my main holidays with you and
 -Did not hear you say a single one of those words
 -(...)
 -You Essentially said you wanted to reduce your income tax.
 -.
 What?
 -And inherit my pension.
 -I did not
 -(...)
 -That you want me to give up my name
 -You can you can / Keep your
 -/ That you want to turn me into Chattel
 -If I – I just
 -A thing to be traded
 -Can we
 -That I am to become your possession, your property, a thing you own – given to you by a man I don’t really speak to anymore holding a bunch of fucking bluebells and wearing a meringue in some kind of enormous shaming event in which I am supposed to be a Silent Walking Symbol of virginity yet simultaneously be Totally Relaxed about all the sex we are having whilst you get to walk around Doing All the Talking in a suit.”⁴¹

41 *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*, pp. 59–61.

By sheer force of repetition, commonplace images such as “I want to buy dogs and then bury those dogs in the back garden we share” or “I wanted to do my online food shop with you and go on all my main holidays with you”, which are images of romantic love produced by a neoliberal consumerist world and therefore tinged with economic subtext, are foregrounded and then interrogated. The scene thus affectively deconstructs the narrative of romantic love and marriage, prompting spectators to question and reject what Lauren Berlant calls “the good life” and which, paradoxically, is “for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless and at the same time find their conditions of possibility within it”,⁴² and it does so by pointing to a possible “gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience [it]”⁴³, that is, between how the narrative of romantic love circulates and how it may be truly felt.

In a student production of the play that took place in Lille 3 (Lille University) on 3 February 2017, and which was part of the symposium “Youth, Theatre and Drama” where Birch was the invited playwright, the performance tried to bring out the coercive aspect of marriage through an affective *mise-en-scène*.⁴⁴ Birch’s dramaturgy is, indeed, based on affect, and all her plays contain the initial stage directions that “[t]he spacing of the dialogue, the use of upper and lower case letters and the punctuation is all there to help the actor in terms of the pacing and the weight of their words”⁴⁵. In that specific production, the part where the woman infuriatedly claims that she is to become his “possession”⁴⁶ was suddenly uttered not just by the main female character to whom the man had proposed but by a group of female characters at once who began to say the lines increasingly loudly and powerfully, acting in the form of a Greek chorus. They made special emphasis on the words Birch herself capitalizes, and on which the semantic effect of the scene rested, such as “Chattel”, “Walking Symbol”, “Totally Relaxed”, or “Doing All the Talking in a suit”. By suddenly shouting these crucial words out

42 BERLANT, L. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2011, p. 97.

43 *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*, p. 34.

44 This production was directed by Claire Hélie, who was also co-organizer of the symposium “Youth, Theatre and Drama”, together with Constantin Bobas and Véronique Perruchon, and which was held in Lille University, France, from 2 to 3 February 2017. It included a Round Table with Alice Birch, stage director Arnaud Anckaert, and translator Séverine Magois, a translation workshop with students on Birch’s unpublished monologue “Salt”, led by Magois, and a performance of *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* directed by Anckaert.

45 *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*, p. 45.

46 *Ibid*, p. 61.

loud, the performance achieved an interruption of the spectators' affective and cognitive frames, who were made aware of how marriage may in some instances become a patriarchal trap for women.

The student production in Lille thus brilliantly took Birch's affective dramaturgy to its point of paroxysm and, through building a female chorus on stage, it sought to prompt spectators to realize that following the dominant life paths is not "automatic" but that there is a "pressure to make such conversions", since "we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view".⁴⁷

Divergent Subjects, Interrupted Narratives: Resisting the Inheritance of Neoliberal Lifelines

Such a questioning of the lifelines of neoliberal capitalism culminates in Act Three, which portrays the possibility of a feminist revolution.⁴⁸ Indeed, Act Three, where the characters describe enduring forms of sexism and female oppression, such as enforced marriages, or the sexism inherent in many forms of pornography, ends in an explosion as there is a "[l]oud noise. It is cold. It is bright. And then it is black"⁴⁹. The explosion is then followed by Act Four, where four women claim they will "overthrow the government", break up all couples and "eradicate all men (...) as a necessity".⁵⁰

Operating politically "through its form, as well as through its content"⁵¹, *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* thus breaks with any possible narrative as the stage – and by extension the world – is literally blown apart. Thus, the play's fragmented form, which "destroys itself"⁵², enacts and literalizes the refusal to reproduce or inherit the "lifelines"⁵³ of neoliberal, globalized society, interrupting the play's narrative itself. In *The Contemporary Political Play*, Sarah Grochala analyses what she calls the ethics of the "disrupted story"⁵⁴, and claims that the refusal of many contemporary plays to move forward

47 AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, pp. 16-17.

48 The possibility of a feminist revolution is a constant in Birch's plays, and it is particularly explored in *We Want You to Watch* and in the script of the film *Lady Macbeth*.

49 *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays*, p. 99.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

51 GROCHALA, S. *The Contemporary Political Play: Rethinking Dramaturgical Structure*, p. 4.

52 Notes taken at the Round Table led by Arnaud Anckaert, Alice Birch, and Séverine Magois.

53 AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 17.

54 GROCHALA, S. *The Contemporary Political Play: Rethinking Dramaturgical Structure*, p. 181.

through a coherent narrative has an ethical potential. Quoting Jean-François Lyotard, she claims that “narratives play a role in defining the legitimacy of actions” and in “communicating the knowledge of ‘how to live’”.⁵⁵

Since narrative is “likely to condone any harmful act it represents, even if the playwright’s intention is otherwise”⁵⁶, in the context of the neoliberal manipulation of affect, the only response and possibility for change can be a radical refusal to provide any form of narrative. Instead, Act Four seeks to carve a space for affects other than the ones promoted by patriarchal neoliberalism, showing how the current political order is still “evidently and inevitably androcentric”⁵⁷, and from the destruction of the old lifelines it invites spectators to conceptualize a utopia where the political order can be reimagined not just as a structurally unequal “disembodied set of ideals” but as a place where the “bodily origins of men and women have meaning”.⁵⁸

Conclusions

By introducing a confusion or disalignment between the actor and character through its affective dramaturgy, which encourages actors to pronounce specific words with an affective intensity, and by radically fragmenting the play’s narrative by literally destroying its form in Act Four, Birch shows how the “negative affects”⁵⁹ of neoliberalism lead the characters to a point of collapse or even breakdown, and invites spectators to become divergent subjects who may explore “ways of connecting to others and to other situations”⁶⁰ outside the models offered to them by the existing configurations of affect.

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again thus provokes spectators into thinking about the “politics of (...) ‘lifeline[s]’” under neoliberalism and the relationship between “inheritance” and “reproduction” of lifelines encouraging them to inhabit a body which “is not extended by the skin of the social”. Instead, it encourages them to create their own “impressions”, resisting their being

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid, 183.

57 CAVARERO, A. *Stately Bodies: Literature, Philosophy, and the Question of Gender*. Translation Robert de Lucca, Deanna Shemek. Ann Arbor : Michigan UP, 2002, p. 154.

58 Ibid, p. 9.

59 See NGAI, S. *Ugly Feelings*. London : Harvard UP, 2005, p. 3 and CVETKOVICH, A. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham ; London : Duke UP, 2012, p. 3.

60 MASSUMI, B. *Politics of Affect*, p. 6.

“pressed into lines”, and to leave marks which attest, like the play’s form itself, to “the refusal to reproduce”.⁶¹

Most importantly, *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* thus seeks to create a divergent subject, one who might become aware of how “power works through affect to shape individual and social bodies”⁶² and of the tacit norms that structure relationships. As Ahmed puts it, norms become “anchoring points” as power turns us “toward certain objects, those that help us find our way”.⁶³ According to Ahmed, it does make a difference “*which way subjects turn*”, as “different worlds might even come into view”.⁶⁴ Arguably, the play’s strategies of disruption may allow for “intermittent acts of political subjectivization”⁶⁵ in spectators, thus breaking the “[c]onsensus”⁶⁶ over late capitalist definitions of happiness, for them to find new definitions of love, empathy, and happiness, outside the neoliberal, consumer capitalist model.

From this point of view, the play works like an “affective system of change”, that is, as a work that generates new “precepts and affects”, prompting spectators to “think differently, to sense anew and be exposed to affects in unpredictable ways”. The ethical dimension of art, indeed, lies in its “connective, expansive and deterritorializing” character; and in its possibility to function, using Deleuze’s terminology, “as a line of flight, traversing individual and collective subjectivities and pushing centralized organizations to the limit”.⁶⁷

Translated by the author

61 See AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, pp. 17-20.

62 PEDWELL, C. – WHITEHEAD, A. Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory. In *Feminist Theory*, p. 120.

63 AHMED, S. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p. 1.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

65 ROCKHILL, G. Introduction. In RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, p. 3.

66 CORCORAN, Steven. Editor’s Introduction. In RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p. 11.

67 See *The Deleuze Dictionary*. (Ed. Adrian Parr). Edinburgh : Edinburgh UP, 2010, pp. 140-150.

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The Picture of a Family Crisis and the Criticism of Patriarchy in the Works of Director Peter Konwitschny

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Abstract: This article captures selected aspects of the productions of opera director Peter Konwitschny (1945), whose signature style is rigorously characterized by social criticism, political engagement, and moral appeal. Among the themes invariably present in his works are distorted and pathological family and partner relationships, and a critical questioning of the patriarchal arrangement of the world. The analysis of the above motifs present in Konwitschny's production draws on examples from several productions put on European stages: (Tchaikovsky: *Eugen Onegin* [Eugene Onegin]; Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*, *Bohéma* [La Bohème]; Verdi: *Attila*, *La traviata*; Shostakovich: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; Janáček: *Vec Makropulos*, [The Makropulos Affair], *Jenůfa*; Halévy: *Židovka* [La Juive]; Egk: *Peer Gynt*; Strauss: *Elektra*; and Cherubini: *Medea*).

Key words: opera theatre, Peter Konwitschny, the family, partner relationships, patriarchal society

Peter Konwitschny ranks among the most acclaimed and controversial representatives of German opera direction of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His professional beginnings are connected with two big names of European theatre from the second half of the 20th century: Walter Felsenstein, who ranked among the influential creative professionals of Die Komische Oper Berlin [The Comic Opera Berlin] at the time of Konwitschny's studies at Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eichler Berlin (1965–1970), and Ruth Berghaus, with whom he collaborated on several productions of Berliner Ensemble as assistant to the director (1970–1980). The impact of Felsenstein's psychological realism upon Peter Konwitschny's poetics of music and drama is especially apparent from his focus on the singing actor. Working as assistant to Berghaus has shaped his capacity of visual abstraction, reduction, and stylization.

Generally, the productions by Peter Konwitschny are noted for their high level of social criticism, political commitment, and moral appeal. The director deliberately departs from the interpretive tradition of produced theatrical works, which he reassesses and often denies. His perception of opera theatre is that of a space where a creative professional can and is even bound to communicate his perception of society and the values it upholds (or disproves) to the viewer. Peter Konwitschny's value orientation is rooted in his leftist political views. The director openly states his irreconcilable abhorrence of capitalism and consumerism. In opera theatre, this is reflected in his contempt for "culinary opera"¹ and a life-long struggle with "dead opera"². Typically, Konwitschny's productions are not shallow implants of political or ideological themes in opera theatre. According to him, "stories in operas relate to important matters which affect our civilization. As a director, I am bound to show what they are all about. (...) Back in ancient Greece, the fact was that theatre was best positioned for discourses about the fundamental issues of life. I have the impression that today it is the last place remaining for a dialogue"³.

Konwitschny's ambition is that the viewer, in the meaning of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre⁴, does not passively indulge in an aesthetic experience but rather leaves the theatre emotionally stricken, disturbed, and contemplating.

A component part of Konwitschny's leftist orientation is his criticism of a patriarchal society. Unlike his younger engaged peers, he does not construe new social models. He does not even dispute gender equality, and one will not be faced with gender themes in his work. Instead, he questions whether

1 This concept was first introduced by the representatives of the Frankfurt School, headed by the musicologist Theodor Adorno. It referred to operatic art that aspires to be primarily enjoyed.

2 By using this evocative term, Konwitschny repeatedly refers to illustrative illusive theatre without the added value of the message, the goal being the communication of an intellectually indiscriminating experience to the viewer.

3 FELLEGI, J. – KONWITSCHNY, P. Dialóg vedieme už len v divadle. In *Pravda*, Vol. 15, No. 210, p. 23, (10. 9. 2005).

4 The director had been working on the inclination ever since the outset of his professional career, at a time when he worked as assistant to the director with the Berliner Ensemble, and he collaborated on several productions of Bertolt Brecht's works: *Die gewehre der Frau Carrar* [Señora Carrar's Rifles], 1971, directed by Ruth Berghaus; *Turandot oder Der Kongress der Weißwäscher* [Turandot], 1974, directed by Peter Kupke/Wolfgang Pintzka; *Die Mutter* [The Mother], 1974, directed by Ruth Berghaus; *Galileo Galilei*, 1978, directed by Manfred Wekwehrt/Joachim Tenschert

a world ruled by men is workable. Sometimes his doubt is full of pain (*Eugen Onegin* [Eugene Onegin], *Bohéma* [La Bohème], *Madama Butterfly*, and *La traviata*). Sometimes he shares it via sarcasm and irony (*Vec Makropulos* [The Makropulos Affair], *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and partly *Židovka* [La Juive]). His productions are characterized by the dominant position of women who became strong due to the adverse circumstances of life and the incompetence of the men around them. For instance, in Konwitschny's understanding, Eugene Onegin is not a presumptuous young man but rather an unanchored one who is fearful of life and who drowns his insecurity in spirits. Despite Tatyana raising affection in him, he is unable to assume responsibility for their relationship, fearing that love would eventually fall into the trap of habit. He is unable to integrate into society, but he has no courage to challenge it either. His duel with Lensky, which is due to Onegin's childish offended behaviour at a ball at the Larin estate, takes place under the pressure of onlookers yearning for a scandal and prevents them from fixing their friendship. Lensky's death is an immediate consequence of Onegin's inability to stand up against what society thinks, a society he holds in contempt and which frustrates him by its aloofness towards him.

In Peter Konwitschny's interpretation, not even Benjamin F. Pinkerton is a heartless hedonist who ruthlessly tramples the life of a young Japanese girl underfoot. He is to be blamed for his inability to act as a man and assume responsibility for his acts. In the final act, upon his return to Japan with his wife Kate to take away Cho-Cho-San's little son away, he cries his heart out in the aria *Addio, fiorito asil* in an undignified way. He fails to draw the curtain and cover up his disgrace from the audience. The moment of humiliation takes place before the audience and his lawful American wife. By an elaborate *mise-en-scène*, the director questions the functionality of Pinkerton's family; after the event, his wife Kate will never be able to respect and love such a coward. The director's accusation of gutlessness was also directed at another male character, Consul Sharpless. Right from the outset, he had been fatherly, sympathetic, and compassionate with Cho-Cho-San; however, being a soft-hearted and an alcoholic, he failed to protect her from the fate of a "puppet" wife.

In Konwitschny's production of *Bohéma*, Rodolfo is not much support to his sweetheart either. Firstly, when leaving Café Momus with other rejoicing bohemians, he leaves her standing on the proscenium with Mussetta's fur coat in her hands. When she joins them in the final act to die close to her lover, the bohemians' immediate emotion (Rodolfo's not excluded) is the fear of

death. Rodolfo fails this confrontation with human finality; when his friends leave him on the stage with the dead Mimi, he is deranged and has no energy to either join his friends or sink next to his sweetheart's dead body.

Unlike Onegin, Pinkerton, or Rodolfo, who aroused sympathy and compassion, Prince Léopold from Konwitschny's production of *Židovka* by Halévy is portrayed in a distinctively negative light. He is a Christian noble who is passionately in love with a beautiful Jewish woman called Rachel and pretends to profess her religion, but he fails to stand up for his lady in a critical situation and eventually is the immediate cause of her doom. At the time the story of Halévy's opera unfolds (Constance in 1414), sexual relationships between Christians and Jews were strictly forbidden, and breaking the ban was punishable by death. With his identity concealed, Léopold makes Rachel his accomplice only to heedlessly run away from her when the only chance to preserve their love (i.e., by converting to Judaism) is wasted. He finds shelter under the bed of his lawful bride, Princess Eudoxie. The opposites of the cowardly male character are two strong females. In Konwitschny's production, Rachel is dauntless in love, determined in her revenge, and prepared for self-destruction (she accuses Prince Léopold in public with an explosives belt around her waist); Princess Eudoxie fights the hateful world with different weapons, showing her devoted love for the wretched Léopold and compassion for Rachel, which changes to friendship and respect which is unadulterated by religious bias.

The clash between male and female principles has been among the fundamental themes of Konwitschny's production of Verdi's early opera *Attila*. The director believed that the composer's intention was not to hail to the warmongers and that the substance of his artistic interest was the personality conflicts of his characters. He devised a concept based on Jung's theory of archetypes, and as a whole it was committed to pacifism. The production scenes were divided into three segments. The four scenes of the prologue and the opening act were entitled "Kindlich verspielt" (loosely translated, "playful or fanciful like a child"), the second act was entitled "Ausgewachsen infantile" (roughly, "the infantile fully-grown"), and the third act had the subtitle "Immer noch nichts gelernt" ("still have not learnt anything"). In a grand dramatic arch, the protagonists were observed in their pursuit of power, a career, acclaim, and revenge.

The opening scene unfolded on the stage with a mock-up wall, with holes from slings and wooden swords. Adults choir members clad as youngsters in dark T-shirts and shorts decked out in furs and war paint chased each other

with weapons stolen from behind their mothers' backs (wooden spoons, whisks, pins, frying pans, and toilet brushes). The boys' leader Attila stood up on a wooden wheelbarrow with a crop (a wooden spoon with a piece of twine) in his hand, and the gang encouraged him by banging the frying pans. Girls were taken hostage, dressed up in torn white costumes, and were escorted onto the playground by one of the boys. The girls were led by Odabella, who carried the mock-up of a white guitar on her back. This courageous young Amazon warrior maiden impressed Attila, and he cut the twine by which the girls were fettered. The braided Amazon's slap in the face of the boys' chieftain was a witty reminder of the clash between males and females on a children's playground. For being so daring, the girls' leader was given a knife by Attila which was used to set the girls free; then with Odabella as his valuable trophy who is seated in a wheelbarrow, he victoriously left the stage.

The subsequent story line of Verdi's opera is full of scheming motivated by the ambition to murder Atilla, the usurper. Konwitschny's production, similarly to *Peer Gynt* which was staged later on, ends up in a retirement home where the opera heroes live out their final moments of life and fight their ultimate personal battles. The final battle took place in wheelchairs and with rollators. At this point, Odabella is no longer in a position to commit the act of revenge she has been deliberating on throughout the entire opera: she cannot reach out to the lying Atilla from her wheelchair. In any event, there is no need as with the last tones of the opera the old men die a natural death, while Odabella is left swinging the knife in the air like a metronome.

Much like Odabella, Emilia Marty in Konwitschny's production of *Vec Makropulos* [The Makropulos Affair] was a woman who refused to acknowledge the authority of men.⁵ The male territory (i.e., doctor Kolenatý's law office) is not intruded upon by her mysterious mature charm, which is common in productions of Janáček's opera, but rather by her adolescent cheekiness and her showing no respect for men. The space she is given by Konwitschny does not allow for any other attitude: all men in the production are awkward characters, the representatives of a rigid and unviable world. However, it was not just this fact determining Emilia Marty's nega-

5 She was portrayed on the Opera stage of the Slovenské národné divadlo [Slovak National Theatre] by the thirty-year old actress a petite blonde of girlish appearance in the performane *Vec makropulos* (the name of the opera *Věc makropulos* was translated into Slovak).

tive and contemptuous attitude towards them. The trauma determining her future life was her multiple abuse by men in her youth; what else could the experiment from three hundred years ago involving the testing of an elixir on her by her father, an alchemist and physician at the court of Emperor Rudolf II in pursuit of his career, be called? In Konwitschny's production, the unscrupulousness and cruelty of the main heroine was given a moral appeal. It points out how abused and unloved children turn into heartless people.

In the productions quoted above, the criticism of patriarchal society has been achieved by setting strong women against wimpish men; however, the director would occasionally apply an opposing principle: accusing the male world via an image of abused or subdued opera heroines. For instance, in his production of Janáček's *Jenůfa*, Konwitschny opted for the portrayal of a woman as living remorse addressed to the male world that has tragically affected her. The physiognomy of the Kostelníčka (the Sexton's wife/widow of the churchwarden) is rendered by Iris Vermilion, a beautiful, tall, and mature dark-haired woman. Her strapping stiff pose called to mind the irreversibility of an ancient tragedy. Right from the outset, Konwitschny's Kostelníčka was a broken woman, devastated by an unhappy marriage to the late Buryja from which she never recovered. Even though she remained dressed in the same costume throughout the entire story line, her personality disintegrates before the very eyes of the audiences. The neurotic woman who in Act I comes onto the stage with some remnants of her sanity and dignity turns into a shaky, deranged, and unroomed wreck in Act III (after she murders Jenůfa's little boy). Even in the latest Konwitschny production, *Medea* by Cherubini, women do not have an easy lot in a male-dominated society. Their prevalent emotion is fear, aroused in them by Creon. He is a man with the appearance and gestures of an egocentric and sadistic lunatic who makes Medea pay with oral sex for a single day spent with her children in Corinth.

Among Konwitschny's most feminist interpretations is his production of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, which was conceived as a social and critical crazy comedy of the Brechtian type, being stripped of emotions. The main (anti-)heroine Katerina Izmailova is a revolutionary figure in the director's understanding, similarly to Medea, Aida, Carmen, Cho-Cho-San, and Lulu. Among other things, they share an identical end to their lives: they all are killed by "the old male world which has been hostile towards corporeality, freedom, and women for 5000 years (...) in which women are only

housemaids or objects”⁶. In Konwitschny’s interpretation, Katerina refuses to accept these rules of the game as she covets a future free of injustice, perversity, and inhumane treatment. The only way to achieve this by is murdering her torturers: Izmaylov and his sons.

The wife of the merchant Izmaylov lived a miserable existence in a repulsive void space with white tiling reminiscent of a morgue.⁷ Nothing was real and stable; there was no one and nothing to lean on, and the props and persons were brought in and taken away on a conveyor belt. This atmosphere, which was void of life, matched the uniform costumes of the choir in a “mucky” white-grey-black colouring. The protagonists were stood out from an anonymous crowd through the colourwise hyperbolized costumes. Katerina wore a yellow wig and a gaudy wedding dress (the canary yellow was evocative of a caged bird); Boris Izmaylov, the company boss, who bullied his employees with hard hats, would wear a red suit. Katerina’s husband Zinovy was dressed in a bright green suit, and his impotence was accentuated by a womanish blonde hairdo. Katerina’s sweetheart Sergey, dressed in royal blue, instantly evoked dominance and “machismo”. The unrealistic brightness of colours accentuated the dehumanization and bizarreness of characters who moved around in a hyperbolized and convulsive dramatic gesture of anti-psychological acting.

The scenes of voluntary or involuntary sexual intercourse are chillingly factual and beastily straightforward. It was this situation in which Katerina’s position as a victim of the male world was explicitly accentuated by the director. All the men (except for her husband, the impotent Zinovy) perceived her as a sexual object; each of them (Boris, Sergey, the priest, and the chief police officer) abused or used her, or at least attempted to. The rare moments of humaneness were only allowed by the director in connection with Katerina’s yearning for a child. Her yearning was embodied by a little girl, Katerina’s alter ego, dressed in a canary yellow wedding dress.

This brings us to another pivotal theme of Konwitschny’s direction interpretations: the desire for closeness and for fulfilled family or partner relationships and the criticism of their disintegration due to externalities or

6 BRATZ, B. – KONWITSCHNY, P. Fürchte nicht die Toten, fürchte die Lebenden! In *Dmitri Shostakovich : Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* [Programme booklet]. Augsburg : Theater Augsburg, 2016.

7 Set design by Timo Dentler, costumes by Okarina Peter.

internalities. The director admits that the angle of the perception of society was determined by his childhood.

“As a child, I may have perceived a lack of closeness. My father was rarely at home. My parents’ marriage was typical for relationships in Western culture; there were moments of jealousy and moments of passionate love, ultimately leading to a break up. I was the only child, and I had to cope with everything by myself. Having had such a childhood, the yearning for closeness may turn into a constant need.”⁸

A powerful example of Konwitschny’s proclivity for theatrical and psychological analysis is his production of Verdi’s *La traviata*. In this case, the director also offered a non-traditional, internalized, and minutely elaborated view of a well-known story. In Konwitschny’s understanding, the inferiority complex of Alfredo, the main male hero, was a consequence of the strict upbringing methods of his father, which made the boy utterly dependent on him.

Contemporary theatrical producers often show Giorgio Germont in a bad light. For example, Deborah Warner (Wiener Festwochen, 2012) portrayed him as a churlish fellow who has no empathy for anyone and who (more on account of a poor natural emotional intelligence than wrath) tramples his son’s happiness underfoot. In a scandalous production by Andrea Breth (La Monnaie, Brussels, 2012), the bigoted Giorgio Germont almost succumbed to the charms of his son’s sweetheart personality. Konwitschny’s view of Alfredo’s father was far more negative. When he entered Violetta’s house in Act II to make her break up with Alfredo, he was accompanied by his daughter, whose marriage could be ruined by her brother’s scandalous affair with a mistress. The impersonation on stage of Alfredo’s sister was a crucial moment in Konwitschny’s direction concept: indeed, the libretto makes mention of her; however, the composer did not dedicate a separate part to this character. When the teenager, with braids and wearing a beret and a pair of glasses, quite unexpectedly takes Violetta’s side, she is brutally slapped in the face by her father for thwarting his blackmailing tactics. Violetta feels unease at seeing the child exposed to her father’s brutishness and agrees to his

8 Cf. DRÁPELOVÁ, V. Operní režie: Peter Konwitschny. In *Harmonie online*, (26. 5. 2003). [online]. [cit. 1. 6. 2017]. Available at: <https://www.casopisharmonie.cz/rozhovory/operni-rezie-peter-konwitschny.html>.

proposal. Embracing the girl, they both ignore the sadist, who is hypocritically singing “Sì, piangi, o misera” (Weep, weep, poor girl).

The finale has a strictly moral appeal. The moment Alfredo realizes that Violetta’s determination to live will not prevail over approaching death, he gutlessly climbs over the side box and over the edge of the orchestra pit into the auditorium. In an illuminated auditorium⁹, he is awaited by his father accompanied by Violetta’s maid Annina and Doctor Grenvil. In the remaining part of this scene of dying which is charged with emotions, and which would take place in a loving embrace in traditional productions, the lovers are singing while each of them is standing on the opposite side of the orchestra pit. The abandoned Violetta is drowned in the black void of the scene, without any support or genuine compassion, much like many people today who pass away without the touch of their loved ones.

The daughter-parent relationship of the main character of Konwitschny’s production *Elektra* was stigmatized by another pathological type. Richard Strauss composed his opera based on the libretto of Hugo von Hofmannstahl, which was inspired by Sophocles’ version of an ancient myth. The life of Elektra in Sophocles’ and Strauss’s interpretations is motivated by an obsessive idea of her father and retaliation for his death. The director disclosed the roots of this attitude to the audience before the prelude. The viewers entering the auditorium were greeted by a carefree idyllic setting. The father and his three children are frolicking in a large earthenware tub situated on the proscenium in front of the drawn curtain. This magical childhood is abruptly put to an end with the swinging of an axe: the mother and another man run onto the proscenium, the bathing father is killed, and the crying children are dragged into the depth of the stage. When the curtain is pulled open, a big digital chronometer starts a countdown before the climax of the tragedy caused by unhealable (and unhealed) trauma.

Elektra’s pathological craving for revenge has become the pivotal motif of Konwitschny’s production: the tub with the dead father’s body and the axe with which he was murdered do not disappear from the stage throughout the entire production. In the programme booklet, the dramaturge Werner Hintze alludes to an inspiration drawn from Hitchcock’s film *Psycho*, in which a homicidal son acts in unison with his dead mother: the pathological in-

9 Peter Konwitschny frequently resorts to illuminating the auditorium in order to disrupt the theatrical illusion and encourage a sense of togetherness or complicity in viewers.

ability to live one's own life is regarded by Hintze as a symptom of possessed individuals. On the other hand, the father's constant presence can also be interpreted as Elektra's physical desire for shelter against the world against which she has set herself. The psychoanalytical overtone was especially present in the scene in which the mother asks her daughter for advice on how to get rid of nightmares. Elektra and Clytemnestra had a conversation over a bottle of whisky. Elektra reprimanded her mother for the maltreatment of her brother, whom she had raised with dogs and eventually had cast out of the house. As if having had enough of it, the dead Agamemnon got out of the bathtub and now physically present got involved in a family argument. His wife helped herself to one of his cigarettes, which he lit for her. Elektra used this moment of his mother's inattentiveness and attempted to assault her with an axe. The father prevents her from doing so; he then gets back into the bathtub while the two women continue drinking spitefully. Has the time for revenge not yet come? Or was it simply for the fact that the father opposed the idea of his beloved baby committing a crime of matricide? It was his son Orestes who became a multiple murderer by first murdering his mother and stepfather Aegisthus before getting rid of all the witnesses of this crime, including his two sisters. The new dictator barricaded himself behind the walls of a house and the chronometer was reset; however, this time it was counting backwards.

Konwitschny built upon the theme of the disintegrated family in his opera adaptation of an ancient Greek myth in Cherubini's *Medea*. The main thrust of his production was the belief that the biggest dramas take place in our kitchens. This was the place where his Stuttgart production was located. In the kitchen, there is the preparation of Kreus and Iason for their wedding; intoxicated bridesmaids help the bride into the wedding dress, and the bride, rather than rejoicing, drowns her fears, having a bad premonition and remorse in alcohol for having to involuntarily marry a family man. The wedding ceremony also takes place there; the briefcase with "the golden fleece" changes owners and the happy Creon signs a marriage contract with Iason. The bargain deal is concluded, and the daughter is sold. Also, it is in the kitchen that the divorcing parents Medea and Iason have an argument over their children, and it is here that the tragic finale takes place: the murdering of the sons at Medea's hands and the lynching of the outsiders (Medea, Iason, and Neris the maid) by the raging Corinthians.

By contrast, within the context of Konwitschny's production, the punchline of Werner Egk's *Peer Gynt* sounds very positive. Although this work is

viewed controversially with respect to the composer's fate,¹⁰ the creators of the Vienna production addressed the contentious issues in the programme booklet rather than bringing them up on stage. Above all, Konwitschny's *Peer Gynt* is about the clash between an individual and society; it is about seeking the purpose of life and the barriers one has to overcome.

Dramatic theatre is familiar with a variety of interpretations of Ibsen's character Peer Gynt from being a daydreamer to a perfidious cynic. To Konwitschny, the (anti?)hero of Egk's opera is an ostracized misfit who, despite lying on the ground, badly kicked and beaten up by villagers who fly into a fit of rage over his imperious freaking out, is steadfast in the pursuit of his goal. It was not just Peer who was unable to integrate into mainstream society. Solveig was also left on its margins. Ostracization was less painful for her than for Gynt, since as she was blind she could not see the mocking grins of the villagers. While in Ibsen's dramatic poem Solveig goes blind at an old age, in Konwitschny's production she arrives on the stage as a blind woman. In this manner, the producers substantiated the fact prescribed by the composer, namely that Solveig would be accompanied by her little sister Helga at all times, and they accentuated her sensitivity (people missing one sense have their remaining senses boosted).

The girl's blindness was not the only unique solution in the interpretation of the main female protagonist. Of greater relevance was the fusion of the innocent Solveig and the voluptuous Redhead, the daughter of the troll king. In Konwitschny's production, they were acted by the same performer. The bipolarity of the male fantasy was embodied in the universal female: yearning for a devoted, loving, and chaste being who is also a voluptuous, elemental, and rotten hellcat in one. (Peter Konwitschny commented on the dual perception of a woman which goes back to biblical times in connection with *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. In the programme booklet, he refers to the split in the perception of a woman as a prostitute and as a saint, and from that perception the ensuing dual male morale.) In the Vienna production of *Peer Gynt*, the alternated presence of Solveig and Redhead on the stage was

10 Egk's *Peer Gynt* was successfully premiered in Berlin State Opera in 1938. Alongside its author, who was regarded as a follower of Richard Wagner, the viewers who deemed it a perfect "masterpiece" included Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. The words of praise uttered by Nazi leaders accompanied Egk from then on. From 1941 to 1945, he was the chairman of the Composers' Board at the Reich Chamber of Music. Having successfully passed the denazification process (he never was a member of the Nazi party) and until his death in 1983, he had the status of a recognized and appraised composer, educator, and academic.

connected with the specific events of Egk's story and reflected the momentary condition of Peer's soul. Red would occasionally take off her wig and put Solveig's blindman's glasses on: here comes the angel to save Peer from the she-devil. Solveig was not the only woman shielding Gynt. The second one (or, rather, in chronological order, the first) was his mother Aase. Looking for her son, she ran onto the stage uttering: "Where is Peer, where is my son? He who touches him is my enemy." The director puts an automatic machine gun in Aase's hands as an ironizing hyperbole of her smothering love.

Peer's distressful journey to knowing his true self comes to a conclusion in a retirement home. Out on the terrace there is Solveig singing a gentle lullaby. Peer's wish is to stay in a place "where every fight ends"¹¹. After all that questioning, social criticism, a poignant psychoanalysis, and snappish satire, Konwitschny was not the least bit shy to end his production with a catharsis. The retirement home slid off its foundations; it was only Solveig's bungalow that remained on the stage with a loyal woman greeting the squanderer returning to her loyal embrace. She brought two glasses of milk from the house, and in a gentle embrace they sipped it on a bench in front of the house. Peer was now confident that she was the perfect woman for him. The red wig he took out of his pouch served as a mullet in a frivolous bull and toreador game, and Solveig's glasses ended up on his nose; his beloved wife could see. In Konwitschny's own words: "It is not Solveig who is at the end of Peer's journey, but thanks to Solveig, it is himself."¹²

It is obvious that in his cyclic comebacks to the theme of family, Konwitschny is seeking himself. His childhood was affected by the troubled relationship of his parents, who ended up separating, and on the threshold of adulthood, when Konwitschny was seventeen, this was terminated by his father's untimely death.¹³ In one interview he reminisces about his father:

"My father was 'a divine type'; he wouldn't put up with anyone. When I was young, I was his darling. But little did he care for what I would be. I had seven step-siblings. I met some of them for the first time at my father's funeral."¹⁴

11 A quotation from the libretto.

12 BOHNERT, K. – KONWITSCHNY, P. Peer Gynt – das sind auch wir. In *Werner Egk : Peer Gynt* [Programme booklet]. Vienna : Theater an der Wien, 2017.

13 For more about Peter Konwitschny's childhood and youth, see *Peter Konwitschny. „Mensch, Mensch, Mensch!“ Oper als Zentrum der Gegenwart.* (Ed. Andrea Welker). Weitra : Verlag Bibliothek der Provinz, 2015, pp. 11–15.

14 LUEHRS-KAISER, K. – KONWITSCHNY, P. Oper ist kein echtes Vergnügen. [interview].

The director's reply to the question of whether the theatre was the right place for addressing the traumas of childhood was as follows:

"If it were only Peter Konwitschny's problems, then it would make no sense to bother others. But many other people have encountered identical problems. It is a problem of the patriarchal culture in which we live."¹⁵

In another interview, he argues:

"There is something very therapeutic in theatre. The object of an opera will always be the relationship between a man and a woman. It is about how painstaking it is to reach a reassuring conviction that I am not alone, that I have a true partner. This problem is added by everyone; it is the quintessential issue in all operas (maybe with the exception of Schönberg's *Moses and Aron*)."¹⁶

Translated by Mária Švecová

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To the Horizon and All the Way to the Bottom: Ethnographic Theatre in Poland as a Medium of Cultural Memory

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Abstract: In light of the growing crisis of alienation and the uprooting and loss of basic ties with the local cultural community, theatre plays a considerable role. It helps in re-anchoring the viewer's experience in the modern world and in a given place and community by means of traditional stories, rituals, and practices which usually exist today in the form of remnants, traces, and fragments. Such a trend has been called "ethnographic theatre", "theatres of sources" or "ritual theatre". In Poland this is associated with Jerzy Grotowski's theatrical explorations and is represented by the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices; it remains extremely strong today. In this paper, I look at a few examples of this trend in theatre: Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Goat's Song Theatre], Teatr Chorea [Chorea Theatre], Teatr Węgajty [Węgajty Theatre], and Teatr w Sejnach [Theatre in Sejny]. Fragments of the past preserved in various cultural texts which are used in these theatres' performances reveal their performative potential within two areas. One is determined by the need to restore the lost collective memory of a given group, inhabiting a specific territory, with a long history and rich folk traditions. The other scope is defined by the principle of searching for the roots of contemporary culture in the old cultures of Europe, revealing the prefigurations of human fate, *vitae humana*. In both cases, the artistic work of the aforementioned theatrical groups with the resources of old folk culture serves to reincorporate them into the bloodstream of theatre and contemporary culture through remixes, reinterpretations, representations, and reconstructions. The activities undertaken by these theatres, encompassed in a framework and specific aesthetic/axiological/social order, therefore become an attempt to respond to various processes of globalization. They inspire viewers to define their own identity on the basis of memory and their local culture as well as the culture of their ancestors.

Keywords: ethnographic theatre, ritual theatre, theatres of sources, cultural memory, cultural tradition

In view of the growing crisis of alienation, and the uprooting and loss of basic relationships with the local cultural community, theatre can play a profound role. What I have in mind is a specific type of theatre which is referred to by

many as “anthropological theatre”, a theatre affected by ethnology, “ethnographic theatre”, “theatres of sources” or “ritual theatre”. This trend, inspired by Jerzy Grotowski’s theatrical searches, was particularly prevalent from 1976 to 1982, which is a period known as “Theatres of Sources”, when the author focused on archaic ritual techniques and their tools, later represented by the Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice¹ [Gardzienice Centre for Theatrical Practices]. It is still extremely strong in Poland and is continually evolving and branching out. It has certainly enriched the landscape of Polish theatre, and, although it is not mainstream, it has been widely acclaimed by critics and highly regarded by viewers. I would like to discuss this trend using some examples of several already recognized theatres – Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Goat’s Song Theatre], Teatr Chorea [Chorea Theatre], Teatr Węgajty [Węgajty Theatre], and Teatr w Sejnach [Theatre in Sejny], which constitute elements of the proverbial constellation within this trend – and mention a number of amateur rite theatres. Although they all have the same origins, it is through discovering folk traditions, old or dying out, and combining them with the experience and sensitivity of modern man in theatrical and quasi-theatrical performances that they have their own distinct features. In my opinion, this distinctness does not only rely on a variety of aesthetics, a system of work and skills, but primarily on a different way of evoking tradition and offering other strategies for stimulating viewers’ memory and imagination. The mentioned theatres are not folkloric groups. It is difficult to link them with the phenomenon of folklorism, which is generally the case with, for example, amateur rite theatres, although both make references to ancient rites and rituals, exploring folklore in a completely different way. The use of tradition in the mentioned theatres should be viewed in the context of the mechanism determining the life span of the cultural message, as described by Claude Levi-Strauss. By identifying two different types of work within culture, this anthropologist also characterized corresponding attitudes towards using resources of cultural content. He called one of them mythological, applicable to *bricoleur* (an average carrier of folklore), and the other an engineering one,

1 A number of research papers have been written on Gardzienice’s artistic activities. The most significant are: TARANIENKO, Z. *Gardzienice. Praktyki teatralne Włodzimierza Staniewskiego*. Lublin : Wydawnictwo: Test, 1997 and KORNAŚ, T. *Włodzimierz Staniewski i Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice*. Kraków : Wydawnictwo Homini, 2004. Of particular interest is an article by PAWLUCZUK, W. *Wyprawa, opisanie poczynąń Gardzienic*. In *Dialog*, 1980, No. 6, and a monographic issue of *Konteksty*, 2001, Nos. 1–4 and *Konteksty*, 2008, No. 1.

which asks questions of the whole world and uses folklore to achieve individual goals, transforming its resources through modifications, quotations, adaptations, rewriting, and hybridization.² According to Levi-Strauss, a *bricoleur* in his work addresses “the collection of remnants of human works, i.e., a cultural sub-assembly”, and only does what is possible in a given situation with the existing material. A bricoleur’s activity is characteristic of the transfer of cultural content recognized as traditional. Even though an engineer has to make an inventory of information (resources), he creates situations as well as new materials and “is looking for new solutions and purposeful transformations”.³

Using such findings, one can say that the creators of the above Theatres of Sources manipulate a folkloric resource, deliberately transforming its elements to create an artistic work of extraordinary affective power, while amateur rite theatres, staging widely understood rituals, strive to preserve them as a pattern. Amateur actors, who in Poland present themselves primarily at the OFTA All-Poland Amateur Theatre Festival, organized since the 1970s, and primarily at the Assemblies of Rural Theatres (first in Stoczek, then in Tarnogród)⁴, initially tried to faithfully reproduce the traditional farm work and customs which accompanied them for centuries and present unique devices, outfits used as props and costumes, which also had the value of authenticity: “ethnographic faithfulness”. With time, without changing the structure of various rites performed, ranging from baking bread, unveiling and capping ceremonies, weddings, Christmas Eve, and plucking feathers, they began to “inscribe” themes from their own lives; they combined their current experiences with dramaturgy. Today, as was accurately captured by Lech Śliwonik, a great admirer and promoter of such theatre groups, “in rural the-

2 See LEVI-STRAUSS, C. *Mysł nieoswojona*. Translation Andrzej Zajączkowski. Warszawa : Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1969, pp. 35–38.

3 Cf. WĘŻOWICZ-ZIÓŁKOWSKA, D. Replikacja i innowacja. W poszukiwaniu teorii (nie) zmienności kulturowej. In *Badanie kultury. Ludzie, projekty, innowacje* (Eds. Anna Gomońland, Marek Pacukiewicz). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016, pp. 159–161.

4 Sejmiki Teatrów Wsi Polskiej [The Assemblies of Rural Theatres] are a unique phenomenon on the map of Polish theatre. Many theatre groups which present themselves during the assemblies would not be able to go beyond their local environment. This is where they can get to know one another, introduce themselves to others, and confront their own experiences. Their artistic level is invariably very high, as evidenced by the fact that many of them are invited by repertory theatres to give guest performances in front of large audiences.

atres a rite is granted a personal dimension, as it were, and it is transformed into its own dramatic picture”⁵. Thus, using the repository of elements of ancient rural culture, amateur theatres construct a local culture, which is by all means real. They merge the local community with what is known and proven. They protect it against uprooting by making a vertical transfer of the content preserved in native folklore. They can largely be regarded as indigenous, autochthonic theatre. Theatre which does not imitate professional drama theatre but performs its native creative potential, traditions, customs, and values mainly for itself. The strategy applied in this theatre can be described as an attempt to rescue a small-scale history woven from local histories experienced by local people at every turn. It is a history told at home and in the neighbourhood, intentionally constructed with a complete commitment to preserving the idiosyncrasies and distinctiveness of their region (their world) and preserving and cultivating its unique folklore even on a micro-scale, even if it was only in the form of theatrical performances.

Ethnographic theatres and theatres of sources such as the Teatr Chorea and Teatr Pieśń Kozła operate in a different way. They use various forms of ancient folklore, releasing them from their original paradigm and relevant historical and cultural context in order to form an artistically attractive whole, not perpetuating them but out of need recalling them, juxtaposing them anew, and remixing them. These forms can no longer be repeated in a space other than a theatrical one. It is only when filled with actors’ emotions, their voice, body, and energy, that they revive again and intensively affect the audience during a performance and allow the viewer to transcend the boundaries of experiential reality. While this only occurs during a performance, it is intense enough for the viewer to enter a gap in time. In a sense, these theatres become moderators of cultural memory, which, as Jan Assmann claimed, “describes more than the individual memory of a man, because it reaches for the sphere of supra-individual, institutionalized mechanisms of transferring sense between subsequent generations within a given community. Memory reshapes the consciousness of individuals, encouraging their initiation into matters of the past and what a given community decid-

5 ŚLIWONIK, L. To nie jest skansen [interview by Ewa Kędra and Klara Sielicka-Baryłka]. In *Teatr z własnego życia, pamięci, emocji.... Publikacja jubileuszowa z okazji XX Ogólnopolskiego Sejmiku Teatrów Wsi Polskiej w Tarnogrodzie*. (Ed. Lech Śliwonik). Warszawa : Tarnogród, 2003, p. 22.

ed to preserve for crucial reasons”⁶. The spectacles and ethno-performances initiated by these theatres take different shapes and have a different range of influence and scope of penetrating the repository of cultural tradition. Traces of the past, stories told in myths and recycled in dramas, the fortunes of our ancestors, and images preserved in various cultural texts, such as songs, stories, tales, rites, and familiar rituals, are used in these theatres’ performances and shows and are thus reincorporated into the bloodstream of culture and theatre. Composed anew, activated, embodied in the actors’ play, they can reveal both the universal and timeless, which are deeply embedded in the content of our subconscious (“written in our genes”), as well as the peculiarities of a local or regional community which grew out of folk culture, once indigenous and marked by the horizon of time.

All the way to the bottom

Universally there have been theatres such as the Goat’s Song Theatre and Chorea Theatre. Their creators were previously associated with the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices, where they became acquainted with the idea of ethno-theatre, the theatre of sources. Being actors, they participated in the works related to the centre’s performances. It is worth recalling that in the preliminary years their work involved expeditions, the so-called Reconnaissance of villages located along the eastern border of Poland, which is a world of traditional communities. This was where they were seeking “the natural environment of theatre”. The tales, songs, memorized gestures, objects, and details of ancient rituals which they brought from their expeditions provided the material for further work in their performances. It was on the basis of this unique workshop and through contact with authentic traditional culture that this remarkably artistic and avant-garde theatre emerged. Through its references to the marginalized cultural identities of the borderland and a diversity once so common, Gardzienice questioned a monolithic model of culture present in those years. Encounters with the already disappearing tradition of folk cultures, which had only been preserved in the provinces, were primarily a deep, personal experience representative of its autonomy against official sociopolitical life. Such a fascination had nothing to do with the desire to cre-

6 ASSMANN, J. *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*. Translation Anna Kryczyńska-Pham. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008, p. 14.

ate “an ethno-museum”. It was rather about seeking inspiration, essential for theatrical work, about the desire to discover in these old messages and music a trans-historical pattern which is unchanging and permanent.

It was these experiences of Gardzienice that were clearly used by Tomasz Rodowicz while creating the Theatrical Association of Chorea in Łódź. Initially, this was a musical and research project called “Unknown Sources of European Music – Ancient Greece”, which was initiated in 2000 and implemented within three areas: art, didactics, and science. Its main purpose was to recognize the meaning of ancient Greek music in modern times and most importantly to find its references in musical forms and instruments that have still been preserved in the traditional cultures of the contemporary Balkans. By recognizing the Greece of twenty-five centuries ago as the cradle of European culture, participants in the project were seeking answers to questions about the awareness of this legacy in the contemporary world and simultaneously about the attractiveness of the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic models of the modern world which were shaped by this culture. In addition to the seminars, research work, and concerts given by the Antique Orchestra, this project resulted in several theatrical performances, in which they tried to test the condition of modern man by means of a combination of music, dance, and singing. By making a reference to ancient chorea in the theatre’s name, with chorea being a unity of dance, poetry, and music, its creators meant to do more than announce the aesthetics practised by them which were dominated by the abovementioned forms of expression. They were also seeking to express their proactive approach towards the artefacts of the former alienated cultural reality. These artefacts, in the form of old songs, music, and instruments, were found, collected, and reconstructed, but not with a view to making a collection for exhibition in the museum. The ethnographic work carried out by the researcher was the starting point for artistic activity where the collected ethnographic material in the form of images contained in the texts was subjected to “treatment” used in accordance with the sensibilities, experiences, and abilities of the actors. It can therefore be said that they performed tradition in this theatre. There was an act of transgression in contact with the spectator, where the proper order of time was abolished and tradition was brought to life by pouring the new content into the old vessels. The spectacle of *Tezeusz w labiryncie* [Theseus in the Labyrinth] was an attempt to tackle the problem of human disintegration, man being split up into the intellectual, the rational, into what was expressed through words and what was bodily, emotional, and affective.

During the spectacle *Po ptakach* [After the Birds], which was based on Aristophanes, they diagnosed the fear of a man threatened with the ideas of the power that implements state utopias, which were created both in antiquity and today. In “Bacchus” they then confronted various antinomies such as urban-rural, ancient-modern, and aggressive-submissive, believing that the dilemmas of every participant of the culture should be embedded in this diapason. With time, other traditions were included in the aesthetics of their new artistic undertakings: dance in *Taniec Lasu* [Forest Dance], a drama from the repertoire of No Theatre, and a drama by Wyspiański in *Wiatr w sosnach* [Wind in the Pines]. *Sczeźli* [Perished], for example, was inspired by Tadeusz Kantor and Bruno Schulz. In Rodowicz’s Chorea Theatre, widely understood cultural tradition was recognized as a deposit of human experiences written in the ancient forms of music and movement and expressed in classic literary works, mainly in myths. In the theatre’s performances, these forms constituted a code of access to the wealth of the archaic world, to the pain and anxiety shared by every man, to his joy and sorrow, to the need for love and bitterness of rejection. A given performance did not consist of reconstructing well-known stories but in transcribing them into choreic forms. The unity of songs and movement repeated in a variety of configurations served to stimulate the recipients’ imagination based on associations. In this rhythm of repetition, one could discern attempts to imitate ritualistic activities. Natural bodily expression in the codified forms of dance and mimetic movement most fully articulated the conflict between what is known and remembered and what is mysterious and difficult to express. As Małgorzata Jabłońska wrote regarding the performances of Chorea:

“Meanings older than memory involve the body, each word entails a gesture. A song and a gesture as the carriers of memory are manifested in the truth and credibility of the experience of performers: transferred/donated to viewers.”⁷

The Goat’s Song Theatre operates in a similar way. This troupe from Wrocław, also known as an example of ethno-theatre or anthropological theatre, is not keen on mimetic action but rather on music, a vibrating word, and rhythmic movement; these are the forms most capacious for the ex-

7 JABŁOŃSKA, M. Dorastanie do siebie. Stowarzyszenie Teatralne „Chorea”. Tańce Labiryntu i Orkiestra antyczna, Tezeusz w labiryncie. In *Didaskalia*, 2014, No. 64, pp. 76–78.

pression of highly intense emotions. The theatre was founded in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral, an actor from Gardzienice, in order to develop his own programme of a theatre of sources, which, as he claims, is not just about returning to the roots but about remembering them. In his sixteen spectacles so far, which included *Kroniki - obyczaj lamentacyjny* [Chronicles: Lamentation], *Lacrimoza*, *Pieśni Leara* [Lear's Songs], *Portrety wiśniowego sadu* [Portraits of the Cherry Orchard], *Return to the Voice*, and *Wyspa* [The Island], Bral was inspired by classic dramatical texts (Euripides, Shakespeare, Chekhov, O'Neill, and Miller), which he later reinterpreted and transformed. He extracted from them that which concerns man at all times. The figures of human fate pictured in these dramas were not illustrated with continuous action like they are in traditional drama theatre, but with episodes and loosely connected scenes dominated by mostly polyphonic singing, words vibrating with sounds, music, and the movement of actors and dancers. In this way, the creators of the Goat's Song Theatre attempt to stimulate the imagination of the viewer, who is supposed to not so much watch the performance as contemplate and experience it. Their performances, which offer the viewer an experience of initiation into human fate, also their own, can therefore be regarded as a substitute for a ritual. What is of great importance here is the number of repetitions, references, traces of significant gestures, movements, and various sound scales and harmonics which were preserved in the records of ancient Greek, Scottish, Polish, and other cultures and which were often collected with great difficulty. Old patterns and forms filled with the actors' emotions, with their voice, body and energy, are intensely shared by the viewers, who contemplate and co-experience their theatrical meeting. As the critics and reviewers unanimously claim, these performances are hard to describe; instead, they must be experienced.

One could say that both the Chorea Theatre and Goat's Song Theatre trigger thinking about tradition "in the element of beauty". They both use their performative and artistic potential to prove that older culture, which was once invented and is now vanishing, preserves its own identity due to the art of theatre and thorough ethnographic work. All we can do is lend it a voice and breathe life into it. Simultaneously, it guarantees the preservation of the cultural identity of modern man. It is worth noting, however, that the relics of ancient cultures developed in theatres, such as songs, dances, and melodies, though taken out of their natural context, do not lose their power of expression. In order to answer the question of where their strength comes from, one can briefly say that this strength lies in their relationships with

a ritual: a practice resulting from the deep need to tame a situation of the individual (such as death, birth, marriage and separation, war and peace) through actions of a specific structure, rhythm, movement, and sound. Perhaps it is the disappearance of such practices in today's carnival-like world, practices which would make it possible to channel emotions caused invariably by such border situations, as well as the loss of a strong connection with transcendence, with a superior world, that gives such theatre which uses, recalls, and reminisces about rituals (even if it is a form of substitution), enormous attractive power.

To the horizon

An attempt to identify the world by touching on it in the local dimension was undertaken by three theatres: the Węgajty Theatre, the Theatre in Sejny and the Teatr NN [NN Theatre]. It should be added here that they all function within societies that have a wide spectrum of activity. The first one is located within the "Borussia" Cultural Community and operates under the name of the Węgajty Theatre Association.⁸ The theatre was brought to life in 1986 in a village near Olsztyn and was meant to be a form of cultural laboratory, which was crucial in penetrating the local culture and settling in it without having the ambition of colonizing it as a living space. It endeavoured to seek traditional forms of rural culture and rediscover them as inspirations of artistic work, for an artistic experiment, and moreover, for practising them under new conditions. In addition to staging performances, it organizes field ventures (carol singing and alleluia singing [*alilujki* – Pol.] to the village of Dziadówka⁹), runs research projects on traditional and improvised songs (Project Across), initiates academic conferences (e.g., Art over Barriers 2013)¹⁰ and hosts annual theatre festivals and workshops

8 The Węgajty Rural Theatre consists of six people: Erdmute and Waclaw Sobaszek, Małgorzata Dzygadlo-Niklaus, Wolfgang Niklaus, Witold Broda, and Katarzyna Krupka. Most of the performances were directed by Sobasiuk. Apart from a fixed group of Węgajty inhabitants and the members of the theatre group, many people come to participate in the workshops and conferences to read together and perform during the expeditions. There is also a religious choir and a perfect musical band. Music is the foundation and the starting point for any activity recognized as the *via naturalis* of the theatre.

9 HASIUK, M. Odrodzenie pradawnego obrzędu. In *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 2016, Notebooks 1–2, pp. 261–284.

10 They resulted in several publications on the theatre's website available at: <http://teatrwegajty.art.pl/pliki/tresc.php>.

(“The Village of Węgajty” in 2017 under the title of “The Art of Coexistence, the Beginnings”). Since its founding (1982/1986), the theatre has staged a number of significant performances. *Historie Vincenza* [Vincenz’s Stories] and *Doliny Issy* [The Issa Valley] by Miłosz, where it presented an innovative approach to tradition, the multi-ethnic, and the multicultural are both worth noting here. By working on various literary texts, the theatre combined them with preserved or rediscovered songs, customs, and folk tales: elements of the folk culture of the area of Warmia and Mazury, which was a tradition marginalized and depreciated as rural, parochial, and vanishing. In the initiated expeditions, the theatre proposed reviving and re-presenting this tradition, not by means of reconstructing or remixing it but rather by seeking to verify its causative power in practice and establishing contact with the past and ancestors through repetitions of ritualized behaviour in a specific natural space of a country house or a farm: not on the stage using “theatrical means, such as songs, props, costumes” but on the border between quasi-reality (typical of theatre) and an authentic life.¹¹ As Tadeusz Kornaś wrote:

“The creators of the Węgajty Theatre, mainly through music, try to reach out to the core of folk nature and the archaic and religious openness towards people, nature, and the universe which flows out of it. They do not attempt to create a new synthesis. They can enjoy the enormous variety of cultures, humbly gathering their crumbs.”¹²

As he observed, those expeditions, so characteristic of this type of theatre, were treated differently. Grotowski’s activities from the time of paratheatre *Droga* [The Road] could be a part of active culture. For Staniewski and his Gardzienice team, staging performances to the public in villages away from all big cultural centres became a basic element of their work. Staniewski naturalized his performances in the rural space. The Węgajty Theatre treated such expeditions differently, selecting for them the time determined by the rhythm of the traditional rites of the village. Domestic performances, full of singing and simple, ceremonial structures, became in a way the simplest form of interpersonal theatre. Therefore, it can be concluded that Węgajty’s carol

11 KORNAŚ, T. *Apologie. Szkice o teatrze i religii*. Kraków : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017, pp. 87–96.

12 KORNAŚ, T. Wędrowcy z rachmańskiej Krainy. In *Teatr*, 1991, No. 2, pp. 20–21.

singing did not consist of the transfer of rituals on the stage, but on the resumption of the rite.¹³

Another theatre, the Theatre in Sejny was created as a result of a number of activities undertaken by the Olsztyn Ethnographic Laboratory within the Borderland Association. In the summer of 1990, the future Borderland team along with their friends and co-workers set out on an expedition called “Journey to the East”, which aimed to experience life of a province far from the centres. Following this expedition, the team decided to change the scope of their theatrical activity (placed so far within alternative theatre) and enrich it with a new dimension. The association was granted a new space (an old synagogue) and established various educational and artistic workshops there involving the local community. One project that deserves particular attention was Bożena Szroeder’s theatre project, which included a children’s performance entitled *Kroniki Sejneńskie* [The Sejny Chronicles]. This was preceded by several years of work on children discovering the multicultural history of that place from old photographs, legends, and historical documents, and above all talking with their parents and grandparents and learning old songs. The following generations of the authors of the performance and its actors, including young Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, and Old Believers from Sejny, continue to add their own family histories to the performance, constantly enriching *Kroniki Sejneńskie* with new elements. This purely amateur theatre in Sejny offers the local community the possibility of a deep and personal encounter with its memory and the present moment. The theatre’s activities should be considered in the context of a certain concept of culture shared by the creators of the Borderland Association and the moderators of the Teatr w Sejnach. According to them, as Grzegorz Godlewski wrote, culture always belongs to a particular individual or group and is seen through the eyes of those for whom it constitutes the content of experience. It has, thus, human features, the features of particular people, along with their fortunes and the

13 The relationship of carolling at Easter or Christmas with a theatre, especially with the comedy dell’arte – the comedy of masks – was emphasized many years ago by Jan Dorman, the creator of Teatr Dzieci Zagłębia [The Theatre of the Children of Zagłębie] and the initiator of “Herody”, the review of carolling groups organized in Silesia from 1963 to 1975. The tradition of carolling also survived in the Żywiec area in the form of the so-called “Gody Żywieckie”, held every year for 47 years. In 2017 they were included in the UNESCO list of intangible heritage. It should be added, however, that for a few years, the activity of such groups, while coinciding with the festive time of the old and new year, has had a looser connection with traditional rituals and customs. They present carolling rather than actually practice it. Thus, it is a phenomenon of folklorism in its pure form.

voice with which they speak about them; along with the buildings and landscapes which equally shape and colour their fortunes; along with their ancestors – with the graves where they rest and the memory in which they live.¹⁴

The theatres mentioned above strongly connect their activities with the local environment. They primarily serve to facilitate the local identification of members of the group inhabiting a specific territory, particularly necessary for settling oneself in a world of ever-changing reality. This is highly important, since in modern times such identification is by no means obvious; it is no longer defined by ethnic identity and the roots shared by the inhabitants of a given region, such as history, customs, language, and tradition. As Joseph Roach¹⁵ would say, the locality is rather produced with the active participation of this type of theatre, evoking a certain cultural tradition by filling vacancies or filling gaps. The creators of this type of theatre encourage the audience to freely express themselves and interact with their immediate surroundings and the environment, and more importantly they engage the viewers in the creation of the memory of a place, restore their lost collective memory, and provide the means for constructing their own narration. Therefore, such theatre belongs to that of active culture and is inextricably linked to the promotion of culture and educational activities. It is in the theatre and through the theatre that they establish emotional bonds between the viewers, who belong to this environment and are the main recipients of their performances, and the surroundings. Thus, they create affective communities mainly through the intensive work of the viewers' imagination triggered by nostalgic images of the locality in the previous form or meaning of this word and not necessarily related to their individual memory and personal biography. What is more, the locality is meant as a project aimed at facilitating their identification with a specific environment: primarily with the place and the elements of folk culture created there ages ago, which have been revived in their artistic spectacles and performances.¹⁶ One might say that the aforementioned theatres are, so to speak, the third variant of theatre done in the spirit of folk based on the idea of regionalism and on the principle

14 GODLEWSKI, G. *Luneta i Radar. Szkice z antropologicznej teorii kultury*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016, p. 284.

15 ROACH, J. Wprowadzenie: historia, pamięć, performans. In *Didaskalia*, 2014, Nos. 121/122, p. 23.

16 BAL, E. Performowanie lokalności. In *Teatr historii lokalnych w Europie Środkowej*. (Eds. Dorota Fox, Aneta Głowacka, Ewa Wąchocka). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2015, p. 139.

of theatre which is amateur, voluntary, and self-made: theatre from song. And it should be added that folk theatre in Poland has a long history dating back to the 1880s. This is when peasant theatre was organized under the supervision of rural teachers. The most glorious time of its development is the interwar period, when the Union of People's Theatres was established and oversaw amateur groups and promoted performances in a folk spirit. This impulse, emancipatory in its nature, initiated several new forms in the folk amateur movement such as the stagings of rituals, legends, native customs, and songs, and therefore widely understood folklore. As a result of the extensive "propaganda" which aimed at ennobling folk culture, and owing to the Union of People's Theatres and its undertakings, rite theatre started in this period, emanating local traditions and dialects. Of note in this old Polish folk theatre is the use of an ancestor, or even the progenitor, of the contemporary theatre of sources; theatre which appears like new and starts at the grass roots. Paradoxically, such work does not involve any cultural paternalism towards folk/local culture which continues to observe old customs and rites but is rather a desire to transfer and adopt them in modern times to find a place in the world.

Summing up this necessarily brief presentation, since each of the above-mentioned theatres could have its own monograph, it is worth noting that in these theatres of sources, so-called ethno-theatres, traditions are revived in a variety of ways. Mostly by means of re-contextualizing, reinterpreting, and transforming these traditions, using folklore as a resource of cultural content, they transfer traditions, sometimes reorganizing them through a dialogue with the legacy from their ancestors. They replace folklore forms typical of simple folk culture with visualizations and representations in various configurations. This is also evident in amateur environmental theatre in the "grassroots" culture zone, one could say a self-generated zone, which has clearly been revived at the beginning of the 21st century.

Being convinced of a symbolic prefiguration of the fate of humanity, a *vitae humana* which is preserved in tradition, the Teatr Chorea and Teatr Pieśń Kozła deepen the memory of the viewers of their performances and try to unleash associations by their artistic means, shake them, and enter the archetypal stream with them all the way to the bottom. In turn, the theatres of the provinces, of local communities, explore tradition and allocate it to help viewers to settle down in a specific place marked by *the horizon*.

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Biography:

Dorota Fox holds a Doctor of Humanities specializing in literary studies; she also has a postdoctoral degree in the field of culture studies. She has been working in the Department of Theatre and Drama of the University of Silesia since 1988 and is currently an Assistant Professor. She is the author of monographs: *Kabarety i revue międzywojennej Warszawy. Z prasowego archiwum Dwudziestolecia* [Cabarets and Revue Theatres of Interwar Warsaw: From the Press Archive of the Interwar Period] (Katowice, 2007); *Czasopiśmiennictwo teatralne w Polsce w latach 1918-1939* [The Theatrical Periodical Press in Poland from 1914 to 1939] (Katowice, 2014) and several dozen articles about the history of cabaret, theatre, and theatre criticism in the interwar period as well as amateur theatre, popular culture shows, and various stage forms, such as songs and the art of compering. She is the organizer of a series of conferences dedicated to the art of cabaret in Poland. She is a member of the Polish Society of Theatrical Research and the Polish Society of Culture Studies. She is also a lecturer in the Department of Culture Studies at the Faculty of Humanities at the School of Labour Safety Management in Katowice.

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The Image and Legacy of the *Endlösung* in the Productions of Bratislava Theatres in the Last Decade

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Abstract: The polarization of society, open manifestations of antisemitism, and racism have repeatedly raised questions about the division of human beings into “Untermensch” and “Übermensch”, which in the past culminated in the “Final Solution” to the Jewish Question in Slovakia. Seventy-six years since the first transports of Jews from Slovakia, a question has arisen as to how much the theatre can impact young viewers and raise their interest in history (circumstances, storylines) through a theatrically mediated image of that period as seen through the eyes of the middle and younger generations of theatre makers. Is the aim of such projects to stimulate catharsis? Or are they rather intended to indirectly offer caution with a parallel to historical connections, where “Jude” is interchangeable for any other word to denote a race or colour of skin that is not white? At the present time, theatre is not expected to give a stereotyped view of pain, fear, or an enemy, but is rather expected to present a novel perception of connections and signs from the perspective of our times. It is important to know about the past, as it would be wrong to take facts out of European contexts.

Key words: the Slovak Republic 1939–1945, the Holocaust, Slovakia, contemporary Slovak theatre, theatrical productions *Tiso*, *Rabínka*, *Holokaust*.

Introduction

Over the past decade, we have been witnessing the polarization of society in connection with a massive migration wave to Europe from the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. The arrival of refugees from countries affected by war or other crises has raised controversial feelings and opinions. The arrival of a different culture which may change certain European values, such as democracy, equality, the status of women in society, the individual or collective ability to adapt to the majority, and religious tolerance are among the most negatively viewed phenomena. European theatre has responded in a variety of ways to the slowly changing picture of Europe. Among the best-known

projects have been those launched by the German theatre collective Rimini Protokoll.

In the middle of 2018, Czech society was divided by the production *Naše nasilje i vaše nasilje* [Our Violence and Your Violence], directed by Oliver Frljić and staged by Mladinsko Gledališče [Mladinsko Theatre], in Ljubljana, Slovenia. For several years now, this controversial yet acclaimed Croatian director has been addressing and adapting provocative themes (to give one example, Jesus rapes a Muslim woman in the above production) which divide both theatre critics and society at large. The production transgresses social stereotypes and indirectly transcends into politics. Also, the production *Klq̄twa* [The Curse], staged by Teatr Powszechny [Powszechny Theatre] in Warsaw highlighted the issue of a strong bond between the church and the state and the indirect influence of the church upon the political decision-making of legislators, which affected the arts (e.g., the issue of religious censorship and auto-censorship). *Naše nasilje i vaše nasilje* openly raises the issue of a notional and real violence between two (religious) cultures in European territory: the one coming onto the scene through Muslim immigration and the domestic culture, which is manifested through the closing of borders and immersion in a world of wealth which is immune to the violence outside Europe. Frljić's dramatically overexposed portrayal of the present day was rejected in critique, which does not mean that theatre is stripped of the right to present themes on the stage not particularly digestible for a certain segment of people or for the representatives of certain political parties. In this context, the declaration by the Czech Centre of the IACT/AICT contains the following statement:

“Art has the responsibility to reflect critically on society and on the world, and to do so from any political position, even in the form of demystification of religious and other icons.”¹

Individual national cultures cope with current socio-political topics in different ways. Quite often, they would take a position through documentary theatre. More often than ever, past events connected with well-known personalities have been dealt with and previously unknown facts and events have been brought to light which may be of significance to any culture and its national identity.

1 Cf. *Text protestu...* [online]. [cit. 8. 7. 2018]. Available at: <http://aict.idu.cz/text-protestu/>.

In Slovakia, theatre projects which focus on historical themes that even today prompt a review of the actions of individuals and become a significant part of national history have a much greater impact, starting with the followers of Ľudovít Štúr, who were mid-19th century national awakers² through to several 20th century politicians³ and the victims of political persecution of the 1950s and the normalization process⁴ (the early 1970s to November 1989). To a greater or lesser extent, production texts oscillate between documentary materials encompassing contemporary research via oral history and authorial fiction. The selection of events, their adaptation, and the transposition of archival period materials as theatrical devices directly or indirectly convey the political stances of theatre makers.

The theme of the Second World War's Holocaust is still interesting and current, especially within the context of the events that are currently taking place in different parts of the world, where the systematic killing of populations is taking place on the grounds of religious and other conflicts. This does not only apply to Slovakia, as researchers publishing new data from generally known and private archives and the notetaking of reminiscences based on oral histories have been on the rise. Often these sources shed light on the different conduct of fellow citizens. Modern political theatre could be instrumental in coming to terms with the trauma of Europe that allowed the Holocaust to happen, and not just the Holocaust inflicted on the Jewish people.

Tiso: about Slovaks in Slovakia

Every European country where Hitler's troops set foot, or who had a collaboration pact concluded with him, has a "story" of its own. Slovakia has

2 In the first half of the 19th century, the representatives of Slovak National Enlightenment took the name of their most prominent personality, Ľudovít Štúr, who was the codifier of the Slovak literary language.

3 For example, the ex-president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Gustáv Husák, other politicians, and writers in diverse positions and offices.

4 Normalization refers to a period from 21 August 1968, when the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of five countries of the Warsaw Pact took place. Under pressure from Moscow pressure, the leading role of the Communist Party in society was gradually restored, democratization processes were brought to a halt, the representatives of the pro-reformist programme were removed from their positions, and the alliance with the Soviet Union was solidified. Normalization and its ramifications affected the socio-economic life of a great number of citizens in the country.

a personality with whom the complex historical events of the wartime period are associated, including assistance (although initially out of ignorance) in the deportation of Jewish fellow citizens from Slovakia to the territory of the General Government. This personality's name is Jozef Tiso, president of the wartime Slovak Republic (1939–1945), who was tried and executed in Bratislava in 1947.

A theatre production⁵ portraying this controversial personality is a solo play: a fictitious dialogue between a Catholic priest, the would-be president, and the nation. The script, bearing the simple name *Tiso*, is based on exclusively contemporary material which has been published in several book volumes (Tiso's sermons at his parish church, speeches given while holding the position of president, various letters without concrete dates, his defence testimony in court, and other material). It is divided into five parts (Life, Oath, Petition for Clemency, Trial, and Death), whereby the first three parts are the most dramatic. The selection of material alludes to the producers' intent of bringing to light and clarifying certain stages of the actions and thinking of a man whose decisions and inaction had a profound effect upon the solution to the Jewish Question in Slovakia rather than just condemning him.

In 2005 a dramatic image of the individual and of his mindset and actions was presented by Rastislav Ballek, the author of the source text and the play's director, on the stage of Divadlo Aréna [Aréna Theatre] in Bratislava. It portrayed the transformation of an initially indulgent person aspiring to improve the social conditions of his people, who step by step changes into an authoritarian leader. It is the portrayal of a politician and Catholic priest who in the difficult months after the signing of the Munich Agreement (1938)⁶ led an autonomous Slovakia⁷ and was convinced of the need to found

5 Rastislav Ballek: *Tiso*. Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, premiered 14 April 2005. Direction: Rastislav Ballek, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: Jozef Ciller, costumes: Anna Cigánová, music: Peter Groll, musical production and correpetition: Branislav Kostka.

6 In late September 1938, the representatives of four powers (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy) took a decision on the cession of Sudetenland, which used to be an integral part of the territory of Czechoslovakia, to Germany. Eduard Beneš, the president of Czechoslovakia, then stepped down in early October. In early November, Germany and Italy pressurized Czechoslovakia to cede a large territory in southern Slovakia and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. This act is known as the First Vienna Arbitrage.

7 On 6 October 1938, the heads of the most influential political parties in Slovakia signed an agreement on the autonomy of Slovakia. Once the law on the autonomy of Slovakia had been promulgated, the state's name changed to Czecho-Slovakia in November 1938. Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest, member of the National Assembly in Prague, and

an independent Slovak Republic, which was orchestrated by Hitler in March 1939.⁸ At that time, the greater part of the government of the “Slovak Land” (which was the country’s official name at the time of autonomy) as well as its population favoured a declaration of independence. However, some people had anticipated the country’s future subjugation to Hitler.

Tiso was not a radical proponent of the country’s independence under Germany’s surveillance. He believed in an evolutionary progress, but the political context pushed him into becoming the head of state, which for several years was a satellite or puppet state of the Greater German Reich. Being a patriot, he was upset by the annexation of territories together with their inhabitants. His sermons given during the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) and his presidential speeches in support of his own Christian citizens can be viewed in this light, which also applies to his presidential pledge, in which he stated, among other things, that:

“I shall always bear in mind the moral and substantive elevation of the people, I shall lead the state in the spirit of Christian love and justice. May God help me!”

He was frequently confronted with the manifestations of antisemitism which, presumably, stemmed from the different social class and economic backgrounds of inhabitants – for the greater part, shops had been owned

chairman of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, was appointed prime minister of the autonomous Slovak region by the president of the common state. This triggered the difficult evolution of this part of the common state, during which the Slovaks were forced to cede to Poland yet more territories in the border regions. The Germans made it no secret that on strategic grounds Bohemia and Moravia were to be annexed to Germany. Hungary had also long declared its interest in other parts of Slovak territory.

8 Adolf Hitler summoned Tiso to Berlin, tabling two alternatives to him: either an immediate declaration of independence guaranteed by Germany or an unprotected Slovakia, which implied the further fragmentation of its territory by neighbouring countries. Having prior experience with the enforcement of the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Arbitrage, the Slovak National Assembly (parliament) unanimously voted on the founding of the Slovak Republic on 14 March 1939. As early as 21 July 1939, the national assembly adopted a constitution for the newly named Slovak Republic. The following day, a new government was set up. Tiso was appointed prime minister and from October 1939 he became the president of the republic. On 15 March 1939, German troops had occupied Bohemia and Moravia, and a day later Hitler had signed a decree on the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which was then incorporated into the German Reich.

and run by the Jewish people – and from religious differences (the majority of the Slovak population were Roman Catholic). Being president of the republic, he was held liable for all of the state's actions gradually taken against the Jews. The initial measures were the following: in 1939 a government decree was adopted on the definition of a "Jew" and instructions were issued on the number of Jews in certain liberal professions followed by the exclusion of the Jews from military service; in 1940, the promulgation of the first so-called Aryanization law led to the partial exclusion of the Jewish people from Slovakia's economic life (the transfer of Jewish property to non-Jews by applying a "mild form" of Aryanization by qualified citizens or the retention of a smaller share of property by the Jews). Three months later, the national assembly passed another law which stipulated the exclusion of Jews from socio-economic life altogether. When having their property confiscated, the Jews were forced to pay an amount equivalent to the share in the remaining assets that were confiscated from them. In September 1941, a government ordinance entitled "On the Legal Status of the Jews" (the so-called "Jewish Code")⁹ entered into effect; President Tiso was not bound to sign it, but as he did not publicly contest it he in fact approved of its wording.

With respect to theatre projects covering the theme of the Holocaust, which began with the confiscation of property and continued with the transportation of Jews to concentration camps, knowledge of historical connections is essential as through them individual stories and narrations based on oral history and their artistic adaptations will be followed and understood. Knowing these connections is important as they are a memento of atrocities and a safeguard from the potential repetition of the attitudes of a certain group of the population (for instance, with respect to the Roma and migrants). Had Tiso as a priest and president signed anti-Jewish laws in "good faith" and in the interests of the preservation of an independent state, his social and religious antisemitism could not have fully surfaced in 1942. This was at a time when the Jewish people had their businesses removed from their ownership and placed under the control of "Aryanizers", who failed to improve them, meaning that the state was short of income from taxes. There emerged a social stratum of impoverished Jewish people who had nothing to live on. It was then that Tiso declared in a public speech:

9 This ordinance detailed a race-based concept of Jews, and a special legal status was laid down for them which deprived them of civil rights and property. They had to wear the six-pointed yellow star and were banned from attending schools and the like.

“People ask if what is happening now is Christian. Is it humane? Is it not just looting? But I ask: ‘Is it Christian if the Slovak nation wants to rid itself of its eternal enemies, the Jews?’ (...) Loving thyself is God’s command, and this love commands me to remove anything that harms me, that threatens my life.”¹⁰

The director and script-writer, countering Tiso’s defence of these ideas for the nation’s good, had people form a chorus (recitatives and singing). The singing people, who are dressed in national costumes (which was a characteristic feature of the Slovak nation in the past), silently consent to the acts accompanying the anti-Jewish laws and harsh reprisals. A lot of individuals, shielded by the ruling political party, benefitted from all of this and literally yearned for Jewish property, which was officially available in accordance with the law. In parallel, via the chorus, voices pleading for mercy for the eighty thousand victims are heard (in a memorandum from the rabbi of the Jewish religious communities in March 1942). However, Tiso did nothing to prevent the deportations of Jewish people. After three months, the first Jewish transports left the country. An anti-emotional confession by Tiso, performed by the brilliant actor Marián Labuda without employing any theatrical effects, sounded so convincing that the viewer may well have yielded to Tiso’s arguments. (In 2017, the production was reintroduced onto the stage with Marián Labuda Jr cast in the leading role, and it has been in the repertoire ever since.) Tiso feels no regret; he gives arguments, but he gives them from his perspective.¹¹ His retrospective inner dialogue with himself while in prison sheds light on a body of facts and connections, which is especially useful for younger audiences. It explains the founding of the independent Slovak Republic¹² and the relationship between its government and the Roman Catholic Church¹³ (enhanced by stage design, an altar, and a confession

10 BALLEK, R. *Tiso* [Unpublished drama script]. Bratislava : Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, 2005, p. 20.

11 It is a well-known fact that the more radical wing of the government and Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (abbreviation HSĽS, from 1938 with the addition of “Party of Slovak National Unity”) was represented by Alexander Mach, the Minister of the Interior who initiated anti-Jewish acts, as well as Vojtech Tuka, who was one of the organizers of Jewish deportations.

12 In numerous works, the name “Slovak State” is used to refer to the entire period of the existence of the independent state.

13 The Catholic church was very closely connected with the state authorities. Throughout his term in office, Jozef Tiso continued to be active as a priest. There were priests installed in various government bodies, and they accounted for almost a fifth of the members of

booth). In the scenes of the deportations of the Jewish people, the “pests” of the nation, the director projects filmed shots of a concentration camp onto the backdrop which are enhanced by archival radio speeches and contemporary songs, accentuating the aloofness of the members of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party over ordinary citizens (an indirect parallel to the images of the Oscar-winning film *Obchod na korze* [The Shop on Main Street]). Incorporating the scene of Bethlehem messengers, annunciators of the coming of Jesus the Saviour, creates a powerful metaphor to the character of Tiso, who Jews and non-Jews used to turn to with appeals for Jews to be granted economic exemptions and especially with pleas to stop the transports.

The production of *Tiso* by the Aréna Theatre opened the theme of the Holocaust to the public. Although the fates of Jews and non-Jewish citizens have been exposed to a more detailed review in Slovakia since the 1990s, it was not until the launching of this project that the Holocaust was given more extensive publicity.¹⁴ Ethnologists, sociologists, and historians have been researching the diverse aspects of human behaviour under extreme conditions, and undoubtedly this applies to the period when these citizens of non-Aryan origin were ruthlessly exterminated. There are plenty of interesting books containing the oral testimonies of witnesses to events and of members of Jewish and non-Jewish families, historical elucidations, and sociological papers dedicated to research on antisemitism after 1989.

The Holocaust in the theatrical mirroring of Slovak authors

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* in 2012, two Bratislava theatres (Slovenské národné divadlo [Slovak Nation-

the Slovak Assembly. Several of them began to openly criticize anti-Jewish reprisals and deportations, and many of them helped Jews get baptised.

14 In 1987 the Declaration of Twenty-Four Slovak Signatories, who were members of the intellectual community and included six academic painters and sculptors, three music composers, and two signatories to Charter 77, was published. They publicly “distanced themselves from the anti-Jewish policy of the Slovak State fascist regime between 1939 and 1945 and pointed out the share of Slovakia in the Jewish tragedy,” as stated by the political scientist Juraj Marušiak of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Cf. JANCURA, V. Vyhlásenie dvadsiatich štyroch zmenilo pohľad na Slovensko. In *Pravda*, (19. 10. 2017). [online]. [cit. 20. 7. 2018]. Available at: <https://zurnal.pravda.sk/neznama-historia/clanok/445197-vyhlasenie-dvadsiatich-styroch-zmenilo-pohlad-na-slovensko/>. The text of the declaration is available at: [https://sk.wikisource.org/wiki/Vyh1%C3%A1senie_k_deport%C3%A1ci%C3%A1m_%C5%BEidov_zo_Slovenska_\(okt%C3%B3ber_1987\)](https://sk.wikisource.org/wiki/Vyh1%C3%A1senie_k_deport%C3%A1ci%C3%A1m_%C5%BEidov_zo_Slovenska_(okt%C3%B3ber_1987)).

al Theatre] and the Aréna Theatre) staged a cycle of productions dedicated to the deportation of the Jews from Slovakia. The first transports of prisoners from Slovakia to Nazi extermination camps were dispatched in March 1942 and the last ones went on October 1942. Initially, the Slovak government paid Germany 500 Reichmarks for each deported person, assuming they were being sent to work camps. It is important to shed some light on this baffling matter. A serious issue was the acquisition of the property of deported Jews by cunning members of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSL'S) and their relatives, who voluntarily took part in the practices of Tiso's state against their fellow citizens. Another reason was the social situation facing the Jews in Slovakia. They were not allowed to work, there were restrictions imposed on a broad range of professions, and they were deemed an economic and social burden on the state. The Germans came up with a "solution" for the Slovak government: the deportation of Jews to the Reich to work in the territory of the General Government on the condition that Slovakia would pay 500 Reichmarks to cover settlement costs for each deported person.¹⁵ Although government officials were subsequently informed that the Jews were deported to concentration camps, the necessity to get rid of the Jews prevailed over their morality. One part of the citizenry was stripped of its rights and ended up as victims, while another part ended up as wrongdoers (politicians and individuals who executed their orders), and the majority remained silent out of fear. However, let us not forget that a lot of citizens selflessly helped to save (hide) Jews; this is a well-established fact, and the testimonies of rescued survivors support this. It may have been the case that one person went through all these phases, as was pointed out by the ethnologist Monika Vrzgulová. This phenomenon is something intriguing for Slovak researchers who have examined attitudes towards the Holocaust in Slovakia. In the 21st century, the primary focus of the authors of dramatic works has been on the direct victims of the Holocaust and the deportations of Jews to concentration camps as well as Aryanization.

15 The consent of the Germans with the deportations of Jews was conditioned by them being stripped of their citizenship and the payment of the requested amount for each of them. It should be underlined that with the deportation of Jews, Slovakia was complying with an agreement on providing manpower to Germany. As early as 1941, the Slovak government concluded that the country had a lack of manpower to send abroad, which prompted the idea of the deportation of Slovak Jews. See FATRANOVÁ, G. *Bojo o prežitie*. Translation Arieh Fatran. Bratislava : Slovenské národné múzeum ; Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007, pp. 127–131.

Theatre makers have divergent views on the events and personalities of the period which are reflected in their creations. The younger generation has a critical understanding of the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1939 and of its position concerning the deportations of Jews. Knowledgeable of historical (and European) connections, the older generation is more cautious and approaches the issue from different angles, largely because in drama adaptation, unlike the literary nature of films and series, the interpretation of reality may be simplified or may be incorrect due to the time constraints of actual performance. A question crops up regarding the role of the theatre in bringing history to light of whether a theatre production should solely draw on the archival period and credible material (i.e., an inclination towards documentary theatre), or whether the drama adaptation of this material ought to employ as many theatrical elements as possible, especially metaphoric ones (the production of *Tiso* is a good example). To what extent should the author of the text employ fiction in situations and dialogues when he or she simultaneously draws from source materials or from interviews with survivors? Would the form of a play which is loosely based on a book of memoirs written after a longer period of time be more accommodating to the viewer (the interpretation of one's own or mediated memory which is affected by the narrator's selective perception and by the author of an artistic text who transposes selected facts of cultural and political memory in his or her work)?

Is it the aim of authors and theatrical producers to merely expand the information on (our) past or to bring to memory atrocious events and draw a lesson from them? Is the aim a catharsis through ridding oneself of burdening reminiscences or the sins of the past? For example, does *Tiso* prove to be a powerful testimony of the era, of the man, and of society, as it only employs period materials in a minimalist but more powerful dramatic image which combines words, signs, metaphors, choir singing, and shots of concentration camps?

Let us have a closer look at two theatre projects marking the anniversary of the *Endlösung* which are based on the texts of Slovak authors. The first one is a play by Anna Grusková called *Rabínka* [The Female Rabbi], the female counterpart to the male Jewish priest, which is to be understood metaphorically), which was performed by the drama ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre in March 2012.¹⁶ *Rabínka* is a narration about Gisele (Gisi) Fleis-

16 Anna Grusková: *Rabínka*. Činohra Slovenského národného divadla Bratislava, premiered

chmann, a Jewish woman who lived in Bratislava and an acclaimed Zionist and representative of Slovak Jewry during the Second World War.

The theatrical text bears the features of a radio documentary play. Grusková wrote a radio play and worked on a film dedicated to this extraordinary woman. She based her work on various documents (especially letters), conversations with her family members in Israel, the contemporary press, and authorial fiction. At the time when the script and the screenplay were being written, there were diverse materials on the activity of Fleischmann¹⁷, who had worked with the Slovak Judenrat (the Jewish Council, established in 1940 after the dissolution of the Central Chancellery of Jews). Initially, their activity was focused on paperwork related to the travel of Jews to Palestine. Later on, the Council was involved in the mitigation of the effects of government ordinances on the lives of Jewish citizens, especially the ending or discontinuation of the deportations of Jews from Slovakia. To that effect, a working group was set up and Fleischmann became a member of it. Among other things, the group developed a plan (the so-called Europa Plan) aimed at rescuing the Jews in Europe. In the Bratislava office of the Judenrat, it was strongly believed that all Germans were corruptible; therefore, they also tried to raise funds abroad. They relied on the German adviser to the solution of the Jewish Question in Slovakia, Dieter Wisliceny (the main female hero calls him “Willy” in the play). Fleischmann most frequently negotiated with him. Grusková’s play focuses on this particular area of Fleischmann’s activity. She highlights “Gisi” Fleischmann’s unlimited trust in Wisliceny’s promises. The text of the play reflects Grusková’s admiration for a woman who elevated her mission to help others over the care of her own family. This is best seen from the unemotional dialogues of the main heroine with her mother and the selected citations of letters which are incorporated into the play (Gisi begs the Jews abroad for money). Gisi’s femininity is not expressed by the author through her feelings for her husband¹⁸ but rather

on 3 and 4 March 2012. Direction: Viktorie Čermáková, dramaturgy: Matej Samec and Rastislav Ballek, stage design and costumes: Jana Preková.

17 The historian Katarína Hradská researched the fate of Gisela (Gisi) Fleischmann in Slovakia. She published a book entitled *Gizi Fleischmannová: Návrat nežiaduci* [Gizi Fleischmann: return undesirable], (2012). Five years earlier, the translation of the book by Gila Fatran *Boj o prežitie* [The Struggle for Survival] had been published. In it, Fatran sheds light on previously unknown relationships between individuals and organizations, and she reveals intriguing connections using historical materials, such as letters (for instance, on the activity of the Slovak Judenrat) located in Jerusalem.

18 Josef Fleischmann passed away in 1942.

through a bizarre and unidentifiable relationship (is it love or friendship?) with the Austrian journalist Benn Weiser. The play's composition is fragmentary: the cuts and cross-fading of citations, the utterances of the members of the Slovak government deliberating the inevitability of the deportation of the Jews, terse conversations with her mother (who puts her daughter's actions into doubt), discussions about Bratislava and Willy, the interjecting utterances of historians in film, and so on. Gisi slowly distanced herself from her children, mother, and other people around her to help rescue others, and she declined to emigrate with her daughters, who were left abandoned.¹⁹ Her own life was terminated in Auschwitz.

Four actresses perform several characters (on both the German and Slovak sides). In the opening lines, and especially in film injections, the text takes on a scornful overtone with respect to the hostility of the Slovaks towards the Jews and Bratislava²⁰ and a hint of ridicule is expressed through individuals' manners. In the production, anti-illusive elements in places blend with artificial caricatures in the scenes parodying political addresses or bribery. The stage design employed signs: in the middle of a dark space, there is an elevated pedestal with white tiles holding a tiled chair with a blackboard at the rear. The soberness of Gisi's costume (clad in a black costume, a white blouse, and quality white lingerie) deliberately stands in marked contrast to the artificial red fur coat and pair of high-heeled shoes of an identical colour, navy blue top, and turban of the spouse of a high-ranking Slovak official. Gisi helped her, just like she had many times before. She wrote a letter of comfort to her friends in Switzerland, which was seized from Mrs Kosová and triggered a series of arrests.

The insertion of the Old Testament story about the Jewish woman Esther from *The Book of Esther* is metaphorically intriguing; she saved her people from the king, and in the production a parallel seems to be drawn between her and the actions of the main heroine. Gisi's daughter, who gives an account of her own tragedy and her journey to becoming a cabaret singer, is transfigured onto her. However, this does not contribute to the clarity of the scene and the overall portrayal of Gisi Fleischmann on the stage.

19 Their fate was very sad. There was no mother or anyone else to look after them.

20 The author of the play confessed in public that although she had moved to Bratislava twenty years previously, she had failed to form a relationship with the city. See GRUSKOVÁ, A. List pre Gisi Fleischmannovú, písaný 22. 1. 2012 v deň jej 120. narodenín. [A letter to Gisi Fleischmann written on 22 January 2012 on her 120th birthday]. In *Anna Grusková : Rabínka* [programme booklet]. Bratislava : Slovenské národné divadlo, 2012, p. 36.

Diverse caricature elements (a national costume worn by a member of the assembly, mock-ups of sheep, and rakes) metaphorically enhance the crudeness of a nation of a German satellite state at a time of war and they also distract from the thinking and ideas of the main heroine. Gisi's glamour stands in contrast to these attributes; however, in a documentary play with a female authorial fiction, the main heroine does not appear to be a foresighted and experienced social and political worker (in the modern understanding of her task or goal) but rather a naive woman. The play has no conflicts: neither an outer conflict with society nor an inner conflict that would relate to the character of Gisi. Neither the theatrical text nor the production touched upon the "collaboration" between the Jewish community and Hitler's adviser on the Jewish Question to the Slovak government who was supposedly handing Jewish money over to Germany and arranging for the deportations to be stopped. It seems ironic that in Berlin Dieter Wisliceny, who was directly answerable to Adolf Eichmann, would be able to arrange for the extermination of the Jews, which was among the goals of Hitler's programme. The stopping of transports from Slovakia in October 1942 was due to the pragmatic reason of the trains not being used to their full capacity. Almost fifty-seven thousand Jews were deported, while a number of them were granted presidential and other exemptions which were also applicable to their family members. The Slovak Judenrat must have been informed of these facts.²¹ It is understandable that the representatives of the Slovak Judenrat tried to grab every chance for help they got. However, the current artistic adaptation ought to be based on the most recent knowledge of historians²² and on research into newspaper articles in *Slovák*, *Gardista*, and other publications. Was this bribery or a noble deed in the hope that the German adviser's authority would supersede all laws? Or was it the credulity of the Slovak Judenrat members? Neither the source text nor the production asked these questions; all they offer is a little story in the carousel of grand history.²³

21 It is likely that the headquarters in Switzerland had been informed, as funds were not sent to Slovakia in the amounts Gisi Fleischmann had requested. The stance of American Jewish organizations is also questionable, as they did not grant a visa to every applicant when the pogroms against Jewish people first took place.

22 A technical advisor to the producers, Professor Eduard Nižňanský elucidates various political connections in a study published in the production programme booklet which could have served as a source of inspiration for the author when writing the text.

23 *Rabínka* was in the repertoire for only fifteen months; its dernière took place on 13 June 2013.

Another contribution to the *Endlösung* theme was a production by Aréna Theatre in the same calendar year with the simple name *Holokaust* and the subtitle *Príbeh, na ktorý by Slovensko najradšej zabudlo* [The Holocaust: A Story Slovakia Would Be Most Happy to Forget].²⁴ Viliam Klimáček wrote it as a play tailor-made for the theatre. The point of departure for the play were the memoirs of Hilda Hrabovecká, nee Friedmannová²⁵, which were published in a book. The text goes outside the framework of the story of a young girl deported to a concentration camp. Klimáček's intention was to provide a broader picture of Slovak society prior to the war and in wartime rather than just portray the persecution of the Jews. Through individual characters, the rise of Slovak nationalism was captured and manifested in the superiority of the Catholic faith, the division of society into the superior class (Hlinka guard members), the silent and the obedient class (other citizens), and the inferior class (the Jews) through formal propaganda. Klimáček starts in the year 1929 and continues to 1939 (the establishment of the independent republic), which is followed by the period of the promulgation of anti-Jewish laws before working his way up to 1942, when the Jews were deported to concentration camps. Out of the characters' little stories (the coffeeshop owner; her daughter; her female friend; Ambróz Králik, who Aryanised the coffeeshop; the maid; the would-be wife; and others), Klimáček wove a story of the change of sociocultural relationships affecting a rather small group of the town's population against the backdrop of an increasingly anti-humane society. The plot opens with the return to Slovakia in 1991 of a daughter of emigrants, which reanimates an old story of a coffeeshop that was once Aryanized. The story continues with an immoral request by the Aryanizer's daughter for the restitution of their (Aryanized) property which had been seized by the state after the family had fled to South America once the war was over. One strand of the text portrays the transformation of once simple people into rapacious individuals who are greedy for other people's property and do not hesitate to terrorize their fellow citizens stig-

24 Viliam Klimáček. *Holokaust. Príbeh, na ktorý by Slovensko najradšej zabudlo*. Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, premiered on 12 December 2012. Direction: Rastislav Ballek, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran and Zuzana Šajgaliková, stage design and costumes: Katarína Holková.

25 The author of the book *Ruka s vytetovaným číslom* (Arm with a Tattooed Number, 2008) was in the first transport of young girls from Poprad to Auschwitz–Birkenau, where she stayed for four years. After the war was over, she returned to Slovakia. The book portrays life in a concentration camp. The book includes articles from the contemporary press and laws related to limiting the freedom of Jews.

matized by the yellow star by gradually depriving them of little joys (such as going to the cinema and listening to the radio). The other strand features fictitious contemplations over the fates of those who perished and those who survived.

Both the play and the production by Rastislav Ballek employ several characteristic period signs, the most important being the radio, which epitomizes real communication with the outer world and broadcasting as a mirror of a society under transformation. Another sign is the cinema showing Chaplin's films as a place of forgetting. A third sign is the fiction project of the first Slovak film, *Svätopluk*.²⁶ The play profusely employs authentic songs and citations from the contemporary press. To accentuate the diverse human characters, the director thoughtfully employed every costume detail and the stage, including the props, film image, and sound (radio broadcasting). The first part (strand) of the play is presented as theatre, and the second part (utterances, reminiscences) is staged as a documentary drama where some actors are seated in the auditorium and narrate their stories under the surveillance of trained German shepherds, while the audiences, watching from the stage (of history), remain silent.

All three of these productions by Slovak authors (*Tiso*, *Rabínka*, and *Holokaust*) are interconnected with the dramaturge Martin Kubran and the director Rastislav Ballek (twice in the director's role and once as a dramaturge). Their work on the production communicates their civic attitude. All three plays and their theatre adaptations are different, ranging from a documentary drama that employs theatrical devices to a seemingly fictitious dramatic story that employs extensive documentary material.

On a final note

In order to make this overview of productions staged within the Endlösung cycle complete, two more projects by the Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre deserve a mention. The first of these is *Matkina guráž* [A Mother's Courage, film name: My Mother's Courage] by George Tabori, and the second one is *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy* [Der Würgeengel] by Elfriede Jelinek.

²⁶ An important ruler of the kingdom of Great Moravia in the latter half of the ninth century. The film theme may be understood as parodying the national sentiment of Slovaks, much like Králik's poetry.

Matkina guráž is an intimate autobiographical confession of a son, well-known playwright, director, and actor. It relates to the Holocaust in Hungary, where there were seven times more reported Jewish victims than in Slovakia. Tabori's play has been staged by several European theatres and has also been made into a film and published as a story. The Slovak production by director Martin Čičvák (2012)²⁷ is notable for giving the viewer two great experiences: the first one concerns the stage design of alternative theatre space, which is evocative of the Mother's household, of a transit camp, a trip by tram or train, and of a sister's flat. The central part of the stage is dominated by a swastika cross placed in a white circle in the middle which is created by two actors using tiny coloured pebbles during the opening lines. The stove standing on the right side of the stage into which the Mother puts cakes is a metaphor of the transports' terminus. The Mother's narration, interrupted by the Son's comments, is evocative of Brecht's theatre model and is a monodrama rather than a dialogue-based play. The son performs several characters, including a German official who spares her life. During her wanderings, the Mother gradually destroys the symbol of Nazism, literally smashing it into pieces. This dominant sign embodies the rise and fall of Hitler's Germany. The second staggering experience is the acting of the Mother and the Son.

In the production based on *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy* by the Austrian author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (2013)²⁸, director David Jařab staged a theatrically full-blooded portrayal of a sick Austrian-German society which decides to shoot almost two hundred Jews on an estate on the Austrian-Hungarian border for the sheer fun of it. There are several images in parallel tying into one another that take place behind glass, which even today enhances the untouchability of the characters who cannot be heard, but one perceives the monstrosity of their act in the context of their amusement.

27 George Tabori: *Matkina guráž*. Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre Bratislava, premiered on 8 and 9 December 2012. Translation: Peter Lomnický, direction and adaptation: Martin Čičvák, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: Tom Ciller, costumes: Marija Havran.

28 Elfriede Jelinek: *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy*. Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre Bratislava, premiered on 8 and 9 June 2013. Translation: Peter Lomnický, direction: David Jařab, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: David Jařab, costumes: Sylva Zimula Hanáková.

The play does not deal with the Holocaust or the systematic deprivation of Jews' rights as citizens. It is not a mere account of an event which for decades has been kept in silence and whose perpetrators have never been held responsible. It is a memento for the future of the ever-expanding multicultural societies and of the ever-growing disparities between the economic potential of various strata of society. The antisemitism of the modern era is also based on a sociocultural relationship which follows three axes: i.e., material, behavioural, and semantic.²⁹

Conclusion

The above productions capturing the Holocaust have shown that despite a period of over seventy-five years, it makes sense to revisit the events and memories of that time and even today to present a dramatic image containing generational time (the last of the survivors), family time (coming to terms with these events), and social time (a memento for the future). They have been included in social discourse about the Holocaust. Increasingly, collective trauma in the context of individual trauma is not the only thing discussed. The Holocaust on the Jewish population has become a much-debated issue of the 20th century, and over the past two decades, research on this issue is ongoing.

In the autumn of 2013, the new Muzeum historii Żydów Polskich [Museum of the History of Polish Jews] (POLIN) was commissioned in Warsaw. This unique project fulfils a unique role as an instruction and cultural centre that facilitates the broadening of knowledge of the arrival of Jewish merchants into historical Poland (including present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and partially Russia) and encompasses Central and partly Southern Europe. Roughly from 960 the co-existence and animosities concerning Christian and Jewish populations can be observed, which culminated in the 1940s in the devastating pogrom triggered by Nazi Germany.

Slovakia is prepared to accept its collective guilt, but let us not forget that there were numerous Slovak citizens who helped Jews and put the lives of their families at risk. The Radio and Television of Slovakia state broadcaster has developed and broadcast a programme entitled *Encyklopédia spravod-*

29 Cf. VAŠEČKA, M. Sociologický výskum antisemitizmu na Slovensku po roku 1989 v kritickej perspektíve. In *Sociológia*, 2006, Volume 38, Issue 4, pp. 283–311.

*livých*³⁰ [The Encyclopaedia of the Righteous], featuring the authentic testimonies of Slovaks who saved the Jews from deportation. A lot of Slovaks have been awarded the honorary title of Righteous Among the Nations by a commission in Israel; in fact, Slovakia has the highest number of awardees per capita.

It is the social, political, and especially moral responsibility of the theatre to employ the language of the theatre and raise themes that not every viewer or citizen may feel comfortable with. In terms of the Roma Holocaust, there is another huge moral imperative that awaits fulfilment by European Holocaust research and the theatre.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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30 The programme was broadcast every Sunday morning after the live broadcast of liturgical assemblies of individual churches. The programme was wound up in 2015.

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Biography:

Dagmar Podmaková is a researcher at the Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. She specializes in the research of Slovak and Russian theatre. She has written monographs *Peter Kováčik – divadelný dramatik* [Peter Kováčik – Theatre Dramatist] (1998); *Divadlo v Trnave. Ako sa hľadalo* [The Quest for Trnava Theatre] (2006); *Osvaľd Zagradaňnik i ego predshevstennik: dolgaya predystorya spektaklya Solo dlya chasov s boyem* [Osvald Zahradnik and his Predecessors. The Long History of the Performance "A Solo for the Striking Clock"] (2008); and *Pribeh divadla. Divadlo, ktoré nezanišlo* [The Story of a Theatre: The Survival of a Theatre] (2009). She is a co-author of books *Slovackaya literatura XX veka* [Slovak Literature of the 20th Century] (Moscow, 2003); *Globalisation Trends in the Media* (Cambridge, 2006); *Theatre After the Change 1* (Budapest, 2011); *Hodnota zmeny – zmena hodnoty. Demarkačný rok 1989* [The Value of Change, the Change of Values: The Demarcation Year 1989] (2009); and *Gustáv Husák: Moc politiky – politik moci* [Gustáv Husák: The Power of Politics. A Politician of Power] (2013). She is also a co-author and editor of several collections of papers dedicated to acclaimed theatre directors and actors of Slovak theatre as well as more encompassing themes.

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Martin Čičvák and Ondřej Brousek at the Vinohrady Theatre: the Thematization of the Experienced Reality of a Postmodern Contemporary in Modern Drama Productions

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Abstract: Martin Čičvák is one of the most important contemporary Slovak directors. With the actor Ondřej Brousek in leading roles, he staged four productions for the Vinohrady Theatre in Prague. All of them were distinctive interpretations using the approaches of postmodernist theatre, and they searched for contradictions in the experienced reality of postmodern contemporaries. They constitute an outstanding generational manifestation presented on the big drama stage.

Key words: big drama, the interpretation and deconstruction of text, collaboration between director and actor, tradition and the present

Divadlo na Vinohradech [The Vinohrady Theatre] was established 110 years ago on 24 November 1907. Since the 1920s, when director František Fuksa and artistic director Karel Hugo Hilar took advantage of a strike by dissatisfied singers of the local music theatre to empty the building of opera and operetta ensembles, the Vinohrady Theatre has been the largest specialized Czech drama house. It has preserved this position despite the fact that, owing to various building adjustments, the capacity of the auditorium was decreased by half from its original 1250 seats. The theatre was established and is funded by the capital city of Prague and has been its flagship stage. In the spirit of Central European theatre traditions, the Vinohrady Theatre is a repertory type of theatre with a constant artistic ensemble.

During the entire 110 years of its activity, the Vinohrady Theatre has tried to address an essential dramaturgical problem, aphoristically termed by the theatre scholar Vladimír Just as “the Vinohrady round square”. As opposed to the Národní divadlo [National Theatre], the Vinohrady Theatre was built using the funds of the first generation of the Czech bourgeois and urban so-

ciety that tried to materially express its cultural and social self-identification. However, they also considered the theatre to be a form of entertainment. The contradiction between the values the bourgeois community declared by building the theatre and their actual cultural interests and needs was significant and nearly fatal. During the 110 years of the theatre's existence, these declared values and actual interests have kept changing in different ways. This contradiction was successfully overcome only in certain periods which are commonly referred to as the "Vinohrady eras".

This surfaced already in the first two years of the theatre's existence; there were high artistic ambitions and content demands expected of Jaroslav Vrchlický's tragedy in verse, *Godiva*, which ceremoniously opened the theatre's first season. Despite the fact that Otýlia Beníšková galloped through the stage riding a horse "clad only in her loose hair", which critics considered to be highly aesthetic, praising the actress for nudity that was "chaste and without a single hint at lasciviousness", such period-specific high art did not attract that many visitors to the theatre. After a year, another director – František Adolf Šubert – was withdrawn from the post. Šubert had previously opened the National Theatre, the tabernacle of the Czech national revival, and his activity at the Vinohrady Theatre was compensation for his bitter feelings after being removed from there in 1900. His successor Václav Štech tried to refill the emptied box office (the consequence of Šubert's artistic endeavours) by producing light comedies (including his own opuses) and operettas. The first permanent title at Vinohrady was Leo Fall's charming operetta *Die Dollarprinzessin* [The Dollar Princess]. A reviewer in the *Divadlo* [Theatre] journal wrote: "The audience leaves the theatre in the best of moods, singing and whistling the pleasant tunes on their way home: 'Everyone has to like a dollar princess.'" The production was performed over a hundred times and started a series of highly successful shows, which were mostly heavily criticized by serious reviewers, who primarily also scolded the theatre's artistic management. However, without its more than one hundred repeated performances, the theatre would never have survived.

The effort to merge artistic needs and content demand with a packed auditorium and satisfied audience is the essence of the "Vinohrady round square". This is a task for the theatre genre known as "big drama" – the cultivation and development of which is also the responsibility of similar theatre houses in the Central European cultural context. The greatness of big drama does not lie in the dimensions or capacity of the auditorium, even though

they are both favourable and stimulating elements in its creation. Greatness also does not refer to the size of the acting ensemble or theatre personnel. It is actually all about the greatness of issues or the strength of their impact; great issues are works of stage art that correspond with latent and often anticipated rather than articulated content, which is of vital significance for the audience. These are common issues that are relevant for society; they are social issues.

Such big themes are presented by means of interpreting a dramatic text through the images of human acts in an arranged and riveting plot. They are expressed by characters performed by actors who are acting personalities. In relation to big drama, Jaroslav Vostrý's (the theoretician and director) term "the theatre of directed actors" is applicable. In fact, Vostrý uses this very term to describe the work of Jiří Frejka, the director of the Vinohrady Theatre. The effect of a work of art is multiplied by a large audience's collective or the empathetic perception thereof. When these conditions are met, the audience experiences what Aristotle referred to as catharsis. Such a cathartic experience also makes a production attractive for uninstructed spectators.

Big drama was successful in the Vinohrady repertory only if the theatremakers managed to identify "the latent content that unified the society" and thematize the relevant issues in a dramatically strong, inventively staged, and performatively unique work. The latent content is related to what the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka termed "lived experience", i.e., a reality which members of a community do not try to escape from by underestimating it, pushing it away from their consciousness, or ideologically blurring it. On the contrary, the community perceives it as a burden, commitment, danger, and opportunity. The lived experience of reality depends on the struggle for values, which occurs behind and through the scenery of everyday life as well as in the intensity of this struggle and the relevance of the values in question. The state of society, i.e., what some refer to as the spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*) and what Jung calls a "sick collective unconscious", sometimes finds its focus pointed at the epicentre of the struggle for values. Such periods or eras are ideal for theatremakers who are endowed with hypersensitive sensors of subtle expressions of conflict, which contain the latent content of lived experience.

In the Vinohrady Theatre eras, be it Hilar's 1910s, Kvapil's and Čapek's 1920s, Frejka's post-war decades, Pistori and Pavlíček's 1960s, or Dudek and Kačer's late 1980s, the centripetal force of the social movement would always converge with the theatremakers' ability to recognize

it and their willingness, and often also courage, to express it artistically. On the other hand, when issues were forcefully imposed for the theatre to produce¹, for example, during the protectorate, the 1950s, or Gustáv Husák's "normalization" period, big drama became a parody of itself.

After the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the fall of the bipolar division of the world in the 1990s, the enlightened concept of a centripetal society (now enriched by the quest for the identity of national societies in their specific culture, supported by Romanticism) quickly started to erode. Postmodernism disputed the big cultural discourse upon which it had been built and – at about the time the Vinohrady Theatre was established – the form of a modern society and its institutions was finalized. The centripetal force aimed at huge and latent social issues that could be expressed by means of a work of art was weakened in the 1990s by unifying globalization on the one hand and the dispersed plurality of equal discourses and diversification of cultural and social interests on the other. Even the sophisticated and magical marketing was not able to create a single production made by a Czech theatre after 1990, something that previously used to be called and the social consensus was accepted as an "event". What could be done about a "big drama" theatre in such a hectic social situation?

Director Thomas Ostermeier asked himself the same question when he was contemplating about his "concept of theatre in the age of its acceleration". It seems that big theatre houses have once again become just places of entertainment. As if they were able to only sell out entertaining productions and keep drama in small, intimate spaces. Such productions deal with socially irrelevant issues, such as intimate relationships, or focus on various alternative projects which address kindred (clan- or tribe-like) audiences using often idea-based or ideologically tinted messages and subversive social gestures.

But Ostermeier was not the only one to find a solution to this. Owing to the Pražský divadelní festival německého jazyka [Prague German Language Theatre Festival/Theatre], which has taken place every year since the mid-1990s in Prague (with the first events co-organized by the Vinohrady Theatre as the host stage), the model of German theatre and German productions has become a distinctive paradigm that influence a number of authors and

1 Theatre was long mobilized by the power to fight for values that in reality did not create lived experience, and theatre and art were forced to vindicate such values in order for them to become such lived experience.

directors, mostly of the middle and younger generations. However, theatre with socially aware and even engaged political content, using postmodernist means of expression, did not succeed in attracting the interest of large audiences in big theatre houses under the local conditions (as opposed to Germany or Austria). This became obvious after the experience of directors Dušan Pařízek and David Jařab and the ensemble of the Comedy Theatre as well as the attempts of the Vinohrady Theatre, particularly after the praised production of Büchner's *Woyzeck* directed by Daniel Špinar, the production of Kafka's *Das Schloß* [The Castle] directed by Juraj Deák, and the staging of Chekhov's *Vishnyovyi sad* [The Cherry Orchard] directed by Vladimír Morávek.

German society, as was shown in many remarkable productions, cared about the lived experience much more than Czech society. It seemed Czechs wanted to be distracted and entertained. At any rate, a serious sociological survey would be in order, which would either confirm or deny the empirically derived hypothesis that our society is now paying the price for the Zeitgeist of Husák's normalization by being increasingly superficial, consumerist, and hedonistic, having insufficient cultural awareness and resulting limited cultural needs. The cultural interests and needs of today's middle and older generations were shaped in the 1970s and 1980s. Popular and mass pseudo-culture consciously diverted their attention from any real social interest.

The crisis of big drama also became apparent in the almost twenty years of the repertory and dramaturgical struggle of the Vinohrady Theatre during the 1990s and in the early years of the new millennium. The artistic leadership of the theatre – the director and actress Jiřina Jirásková and the artistic directors Jiří Menzel and Martin Stropnický – reacted to the considerable loss of interest in big drama by returning to the so-called “repertory of attractive titles” (in the manner of Václav Štech). It would not be fair to deny the fact that they made an effort to produce big drama. The resulting repertory, however, tried to attract audiences by producing (successful) musicals and staging remakes of famous movies and even television series. This affected the habits and expectations of the audience as well as the shape of the acting ensemble.

This statement does not aspire to be a theatrological assessment; it is rather an opinion of a Vinohrady dramaturge carrying his own burden who returned to the theatre in 2012 to join the director Tomáš Töpfer and artistic director Juraj Deák in offering a programme that showed an effort to draw on the big drama tradition. This artistic leadership no longer in-

cludes productions in its repertory such as musicals or theatre adaptations of famous movies that are professionally impossible to stage dramatically. It has attempted with moderate success to produce all dramatic genres of big drama.

Martin Čičvák has become an important collaborator of the Vinohrady Theatre. Born in Košice in 1975, he graduated from the Theatre Faculty of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno and works as the main director of the Prague-based Drama Club as a playwright and author in Slovakia and the Czech Republic (including at all three national theatres, among others).

Čičvák's journey to big drama started before he joined the Vinohrady Theatre; his previous work was also characteristic for its competence and feeling for working in big stage space as well as for his respect for the staged authors and his ability to cooperate with actors in performing characters. Just like his contemporaries, Čičvák was strongly influenced by the German production school. The source of this inspiration was Čičvák's long-standing collaboration with the dramaturge Martin Kubran, whose legendary hard disk filled with recordings of model productions of German directors of the middle generation became inspirational for a whole lot of fellow theatremakers, mostly in Slovak theatres. Čičvák's other artistic source – positively related to his thinking about actors as co-creators and partners in the process of the making of a dramatic work – is his meeting and artistic wrestling with Juraj Kukura, an actor who has become a true phenomenon. Čičvák's brilliant play *Kukura* deals with the director-actor relationship; Čičvák produced the play together with Kukura in the Drama Club. The novel title of *Kukura* illuminates other factors of Čičvák's inclination to the German production school.

Čičvák's first work at the Vinohrady Theatre was Max Frisch's *Andorra* in 2013. It is a model social play which, in accordance with the dramaturgical intention, the director read and interpreted as a play dealing with the issue of disputable identity and suppressed historical reflection. The production wisely shifted the original interconnection of the play with “the question of the guilt of German – and in this text specifically Swiss – society” to the socially pressing issue of (not) coming to terms with own (Czech) totalitarian past. The production clearly thematized issues such as problematic identity, experience with social inadequacy, and exclusion in relation to postmodernist discourse. The big story that kept the relationships between characters in balance and was part of the self-identifying mythology of “the Andorran community” falls completely apart.

Dramatic circumstances force the teacher of the boy Andri (the father of the protagonist) to admit that the child he pretended was a foundling, a Jew saved from persecution, is his extra-marital son. But under the pressure of the external power that nationalistically declares itself to be anti-Semitic, the community does not believe the teacher's admission to adultery. The love affair between Andri and his alleged step sister Barblin, in fact an intimate story of incest, is confronted with a transformation of society that gradually starts to collaborate with the external power. The entire tragic story is then viewed in retrospect, through the testimonies of the characters who try to assuage the guilt they feel in consequence of their failures. Today, we witness a very similar relationship between our society and its past.

An essential moment in the preparation of this production came when the director met with Ondřej Brousek, the actor playing Andri. The meeting – which both men years later called “a clash of uncontrolled comets” in an interview for the Vinohrady Theatre's monthly – was the result of a lucky circumstance, just like many other things in the theatre. The artistic director Deák and I mentioned to Čičvák that Ondřej Brousek would be an ideal fit for the character of Andri. We sent Čičvák to see Brousek's performance in Karol Sidon's production *Shapira* at the Divadlo na Fidlovačce [Fidlovačka Theatre], where Brousek worked at that time. However, Čičvák did not manage to see the last night of the production, so all that we could do was give him our recommendation.

Ondřej Brousek, born in 1981 into a family of actors, is a conservatory graduate and an exceptional personality of his generation. As an actor, he focuses specifically on staged work (as opposed to many of his colleagues, he does not appear in any of the endless television series). As an active musician, he plays in the popular band Monkey Business. He is an excellent musician and a productive composer of pop songs as well as musicals and stage and artificial music. His first symphony was premiered by the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, and more opuses are being rehearsed.

The meeting of Čičvák and Brousek, generational peers and explosively creative personalities, and their work on Frisch's text turned out to be unique and exceptionally productive. Naturally, Brousek also composed the stage score; a bare live piano would appear on the stage, and alongside Andri the other characters in the play performed on it depending on their capabilities. To the joy of the entire theatre community, Čičvák and Brousek started to look alike both physically and in terms of gestures and opinions. The intense message of the production, however, required that the coexis-

tence of their personalities allowed a thematization of the reflection of the lived experience of intellectuals and artists of the younger middle generation, who clearly do not identify with the return of society to the restored pseudo-values of real socialism and protest against the modern Biedermeier of post-communist townspeople.

The appeal of the production was multiplied by the presence of Ivana Uhlířová, an actress from Pařízek's ensemble of the Divadlo Komédie [Comedy Theatre], which ended its activity at that time. Her personal role in the presentation of the theme expressed by the character of Barblin inspired the other actors of the Vinohrady ensemble to perform their characters with passion. An outstanding element of this production by Čičvák – as well as some of his other work – was the conceptualist set created by his frequent collaborator, the Austrian stage designer Hans Hoffer. The space of the Vinohrady stage was cleared all the way to the back wall and featured an iron gate leading to the backstage space. There was a timer counting down the time remaining to the inevitable tragedy that ends the play, but primarily there was a steel cube that starts growing in the middle of the flat surface of the stage whenever there is the first hint of danger (the first anti-Semitic reference); these elements created an insurmountable monstrous construction which divided the characters both vertically and horizontally. Upstage, a ramp was placed creating the illusion of dividing the seemingly idyllic and untouchable world of little Andorra from its dangerous surroundings. And there were microphones, a necessary prop of the postmodern production, enabling the gradual estrangement (alienation) by using narrative commentaries and plot interruptions.

The production was an example of new-age big drama: a strong story, tense situations, intimate themes developed within a rigorous social framework, a clash of values, powerful emotions, and an outstanding acting performance. The means of direction and stage design were part of the postmodern expressivity. Jiří Stach, the translator of the play and one of the promoters of modern German drama, never came to terms with the fact that the stage was dark and anti-illusional rather than idyllically white as the author himself initially suggested in accordance with the intention to demonstrate how the artificially maintained beauty of Andorra would be invaded and devastated by a dark threat. Čičvák and Hoffer showed Andorra in an already devastated world, where Barblin might be talking about whitewashing houses before an upcoming holiday, but in reality she was only clearing the stage using an exaggerated rake, cleaning the mess left there after a dance party.

In spite of this, the production was not an example of postmodern direction, in which the director takes a very free approach to the author's text; instead of interpreting the work and then staging this interpretation, he stages images of the associations the original work evoked in him. Using a postmodernist expressivity, Čičvák communicated an interpretation of the meaning of a dramatic work. He did not use actors as instruments that would demonstrate his theses as dynamic parts of his stage installations, and he did not allow actors to boundlessly present their self-experience or what would often be dishonest self-presentation. Brousek plays his character with inner experience and can rapidly switch to distance himself from the character and comment on his action. In Brousek's performance, the proportion of the mimetic and diegetic elements, one of the constituting features of a postmodernist production, achieves a rare balance and is always subordinated to the play's theme.

The overall anti-idyllic message of the production and the complexity of its content meant that it never became a title that was popular with audiences. *Andorra* was performed thirteen times and was seen by approximately five thousand spectators. However, it helped win back trust in big drama with those people who had missed it in Vinohrady. In the course of the following years, this trust would return to the theatre, albeit more slowly than was desired.

Čičvák's production of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* with Ondřej Brousek in the leading role had a positive critical reaction and met with great interest from audiences. Even though the inclusion of this title in the repertory was clearly the result of dramaturgical calculation, it inspired both the director and the actor to delve into their artistic skills and go beyond Shaffer's well-written, though slightly trashy, text to reach the levels of Alexander Pushkin's original inspiration by the "little tragedy" of creativity and envy. As opposed to the original concept of Morávek's production of the same title (which never came to be staged in Vinohrady), postmodernist intertextuality is not applied here by using direct references to lines from Miloš Forman's movie. Shaffer's text is considerably shortened in the production. However, the used stage format could express all of the necessary connotations with the movie, Pushkin's play *Mozart and Salieri*, and the modern martyr cult of pop stars. Jiří Dvořák in the role of Salieri, Ivana Uhlířová as Constance, and Ondřej Brousek as Mozart perform a jealous, love, and artistic triangle within a conceptually expressed stage design. The stage design for the production was created by Tom Ciller based on the director's idea.

The plot unfolded partly on an elevated stage (on which one had to “jump”), and partly underneath it, as well as in the orchestra pit and auditorium. The characters of court counsels are doubled; they are embodied by dancers who use mime, expressive gestures, and face play with punchlines leading to static stupefaction. The dancers are “dubbed”, like puppets, by a quartet of actors; they are the Little Winds, included in the text by Shaffer. The anti-illusional nature of this solution does not require the production to include the characterization of auxiliary figures, which are puppets in the story anyway. Čičvák executes this metaphor literally and with a surprising effect. This leaves more space for the audience to focus on the central triangle, the technically brilliant Dvořák as narrator, and the ingenious musician who, in Brousek’s stage interpretation, plays several pianos and cembalos onstage. He plays these instruments like a virtuoso in a circus-like manner strutting his stuff with his back to the keyboard.

Brousek does not need to impersonate the character of Mozart, carried by a self-destructive and asocial current of creativity. It seems to flow out of him of its own volition, like a natural force, overwhelming the audience with sheer musicality. Tangible and obsessive passions which are intimate and erotic, verbal vulgarity, social faux-pas, and embarrassing situations are all momentarily balanced by vital streams of brilliantly played music by Mozart. Brousek also plays the piano live in the climactic scene of the production just before the intermission; Salieri is outside of the stage on the proscenium, cursing God for endowing Mozart with so much talent. The podium then starts rising until it is almost vertical to the stage; even though it is high up in the space and in a position contradicting the laws of physics, Mozart keeps playing. It is a fascinating apotheosis of the freedom of what is an inconvenient talent.

In 2015 Albert Camus’s *Caligula* premiered, once again with Brousek in the leading role. The exploration of the lived experience of a person who has reached the postmodernist stage where everything is relative is fully intentional here. The themes of identity loss and the ambivalent attitude of the world towards a self-destructive star consciously continue with the interpretation of Albert Camus’s early and dramatically problematic text, where the main themes include individualism, hedonism, the disintegration of values, and interpersonal relationships. Brousek’s unhappy Caligula, another variation of Mozart in a histrionic register, interprets the story of “a tragedy after a tragedy” as a story of a crisis of trust which paralyses all social and intimate relationships. Caligula provokes his surroundings to react differently than

just being subordinate ones and abuses his authoritative power to achieve this. For him, an authentic relationship with another human would only be possible if the layer of subordination was removed with a distinctive, authentic expression; otherwise, he is stuck in the formal relationship of a mask to another mask. But Caligula never experiences such a reaction. His story, as presented in the production, is the story of a directed and provoked suicide. Čičvák stages the social panopticon of the senators by employing allusions to the currently powerless political scene, which is incapable of adopting an efficient stance to critical issues in society and keeps drowning in phrases that only create an alibi for its own impotence. The production was merciless, depressing, and poetic, and ended up being performed eighteen times for around seven thousand spectators in total.

The last collaboration between Čičvák and Brousek at the Vinohrady Theatre was Henrik Ibsen's monumental play *Peer Gynt*. While in *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen himself led a creative dialogue with another big work of art – Goethe's *Faust* (from the position of a commencing modernity that would eliminate the paradigm of Goethe's world of classical philosophy) – Čičvák and Brousek try to shift this dialogue to the level of a reflection on the fate of postmodern man. The paradox of great self-images and challenges, as well as the eager effort and vain and empty result in the form of a wasted life, is key to interpreting the production.

Brousek and Čičvák tell us more about the craziness of our lives than feels pleasant. Non-authentic existence, these days feverishly supported by economic and political marketing, expressed by Ibsen in the life philosophy of sub-human trolls and its slogan "Be for Yourself", is unmasked by the lost authenticity of the human attitude to the adage "Be Yourself". (Once again, this is all about Patočka's "self-liability for one's life"; the values that establish the horizon of our life and, if moved from that horizon to the centre of existence to our very stomach and genitals, will bring about the mentioned critical emptiness of emptiness expressed by Ibsen's ingenious image of onion peeling, the onion that should, after all, have a core but simply does not.) The production quotes Grieg's famous romanticizing music but takes place on another anti-illusional stage made by Hoffer. During the entire duration of the production, Gynt does not change his worn jeans and orange hoodie, the authentic mimicry of the insecure Plebeian of today, who comes from the outskirts of some segregated location.

In addition to Solveig's song, a ten-minute musical number titled "Be a Troll" is played, renamed by one of the reviewers to "Rock n' Roll". This

is Brousek's work, identifying troll hedonism with today's industrial, mass-produced pop culture. However, as opposed to the production of *Caligula*, *Peer Gynt* features a strong catharsis, brought in the finale by the blind Solveig who barely recognizes her beloved for whom she has waited all her life. The actress Andrea Elsnerová performs with such a strong feeling and the outstanding thematization of authentic emotionality that her performance fully equals Brousek's act.

A lot more could be said about the four productions I have used here to prove that big drama has been searching for (and perhaps even finding) ways to address today's heterogeneous society. I also believe in this path because it merges the best traditions of dramaturgy which has a theme. The generation of my teachers (who in the best cases were also members of my generation) were pioneers of this dramaturgy who had the responsibility of middle-aged theatremakers and did their best to be more than just entertainers of a hedonist, undemanding audience. And because there is not a definite solution to the "round square" issue, I assume we will have to continue with our work in the future. The first production of *Peer Gynt* in the Czech lands was staged in Vinohrady by K. H. Hilar in 1916. The character of Gynt was performed by Václav Vydra, Sr. Čičvák's and Brousek's *Peer Gynt* is a contribution to the 110th anniversary of a theatre that has never stopped trying to stage big drama.

Translated by Ivan Lacko

Biography:

Jan Vedral is a professor at the Theatre Faculty, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, and as a guarantor of the study programme at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. He has worked as a dramaturge at theatres in Olomouc and Ústí nad Labem as well as for Czech Radio. After 1989, he was the director of Prague City Theatres for four years, and at present he is the chief dramaturge of the Vinohrady Theatre. He has written numerous radio plays, screenplays and dramatizations, and is the author of many staged theatre plays and dramatizations. As a theatrologist, he has published scholarly studies and expert essays. His most recent monograph is *Event Horizon: The Dramaturgy of Order, the Postdramaturgy of Chaos*.

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