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Janko Borodáč, the founder of the professional  
Slovak theatre (rehearsal of Gogol's  
The Government Inspector, 1962)  
photo: archive of the Theatre Institute





## DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ

Dear readers,  
three years ago I would have said that Slovakia was a country with largely provincial and local theatres. Today the situation is somewhat different. Within the past three years a number of seemingly minor changes took place. Yet they turned out to be quite significant. Contemporary Slovak theatre and performing arts have recently awakened from mediocrity, invisibility and inability to face the European theatre at the very least. The contemporary Slovak performing arts scene is starting to look into its history, into the moments with clearly defined positions, to assume objective perspective, and achieve generational detachment by authors. It reflects Slovak mentality and identity, and tries to capture the mind and nature of the peoples. It identifies social problems in Slovakia that had been intentionally omitted within the Slovak theatre for years. Yet one can hardly speak of a defined common trend. Instead the development involves individualistic attempts by directors, playwrights, performers or writers' groups that open and move the theatre in the outward direction, beyond the borders of Slovakia.

Contemporary Slovak theatre and drama is going through transformation that has not yet been theoretically grasped and identified.

From time to time the Slovak National Theatre stages a text by a Slovak or global author that reflects recent history or historical developments that had helped to shape identity. The exception of the last theatre season is recently introduced play *The Carpathian Thriller* by a contemporary Slovak journalist and writer Eugen Gindl. Staged by director Roman Polák it unveils a social and political affair of the 1990s. It involved corruption within the highest ranks of the state apparatus. Similar practice remains in place and has recently been uncovered. The authors have decided to openly and boldly point out corruption and shadow economy. Even though the political play is set in the 1990s, it loses none of its current appeal. This is affirmed by the audience responses, particularly by those who had been directly affected by the play. The shark among the financial groups has raised its voice, defending itself, attacking the play without having seen it. Still, the introduction of contemporary themes as reflected in the texts at the Slovak National Theatre has to be viewed as random and limited. In the recent years, contemporary Slovak texts have been produced by three particular theatres: the Arena Theatre in Bratislava, the City Theatre in Žilina, and the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin. Whilst the state and city theatres are now coming to terms with the 'national' issues, the independent Slovak theatre are, as ever, a step ahead. Reflection of socio-political topics is a well-known territory to them. Currently they focus on joining the international context in terms of both the content and form.

The Bratislava-based theatre SkRAT use the method of the devised theatre. Their recent plays such as *The Trial of a Trial by the Trial* or *The Inside of the Inside* are firmly linked to and inspired by political affairs, to the current day and the recent past. *The Trial of a Trial by the Trial* develops the theme of absurdity of state administration with an emphasis on the judiciary. It is a reference to the affair that took place in Slovakia in connection with a female director. It unveils corruption and mafia practices within Slovak judiciary. The director faced prison for having breached the immunity of judges. The play *The Inside of the Inside* emerged as part of an interesting project at the International festival Divadelná Nitra 2013. The theme was the 20th century through the perspective of the secret police.

The issues related to the search of one's identity, of redefining values, confronting the past bring together Europe's young generation, particularly the young people in the post-communist countries. The Slovak authors and their work are thus gradually becoming part of European theatre.

To conclude, if we were to ask about the state and nature of contemporary Slovak theatre, we can say that it is dynamically developing and seeking its identity.

### introduction

## kód

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MARTIN CIEL

# The Experiment does exist

Viktor Pelevin once wrote that an economy that is only based on mediation gives birth to a culture which prefers trafficking with existing ideas and images to generation and creation of new ones. Until the tools of artistic expression are handled creatively, instead of innovations, we shall only see the birth of banality and variations. It might happen that we will no longer wish to understand and be unable to understand. Regarding a text, or an image, comprehension is only possible in a common network of accepted conventions and indiscernible strategies. When the networks and strategies are created by banality, we will find ourselves lost when interpreting anything that is different and nonstandard. Mankind should be grateful for anything that contributes to the intellectual set of ideas about the world and for the scents, no matter how slight, of avant-garde or experiment. It is after all what helps us think and survive with dignity.

Yet mankind is not and never will be grateful, at least not the majority of the population. A vast majority of people wants to sit by the TV, watching soap operas and stuffing themselves with a bucket full of popcorn or potato chips soaked in emulsifiers. That is how it has always been and it will remain that way forever. Who wants to crack a hard-to-understand metaphor, or symbol? It is easier to pretend that things like experimental art or art altogether do not exist at all. It is a cognitive dissonance: ignoring (pretending that something does not exist) a phenomenon that does not fit our ideas about the world, the ideas that the world is a simple puzzle of verifiable matters that we can see.

The world, however, does not consist merely of matters, but also of meanings which we attribute

to them. Without them we would be ever so poor and shallow. The world would hardly exist without metaphors. Ernst Cassirer used to say that only an object that is created by symbols can be discernible. Friedrich Nietzsche argued that there are no facts, merely their interpretation.

Regardless of the above, we certainly should not be pessimistic. The ratio of people who ignore art pieces and those who seek arts ultimately does not change. Whilst the relative balance of forces shall remain unchanged, the experiment shall never cease existing. It has always been here and it shall remain so, even if it seems to be exclusive to a minority which, however, is evidently the opinion-maker.

All this came to mind in connection with the latest premiere at the SKRAT theatre: *A Trial via Trial to a Trial* [Proces procesu procesom], with scenography and directed by Dušan Vicen. The authors of the text, who are also the cast of the production are Vít Bednárik, Ľubo Burgr, Dana Gudabová, Inge Frubaničová, Milan Chalmovský, Danica Matušovová, Jana Ol'ňová and Vlado Zboroň. It is not exactly an experiment. Yet if we were to set a reference framework within the Slovak drama theatre, it is certainly an unusual and innovative production. Simply speaking, it addresses the issue of law and justice (which are far from being the same). The expressive tools create a great metaphor loosely inspired by Franz Kafka. The dialogues are constructed with precision. The acting is "de-dramatised". Individual scenes contain authentic situations and the storyline is remarkable (given it is actually a narrative decomposition). *The Trial* ... is exactly the type of theatre that works well because of its engagement and formal structure which enables it to attract audience among the (opinion-making) minority. No matter how pathetic it may sound, it can improve the context awareness of the audience. Theatre (or film and literature) cannot make people better or worse. Yet it can make them think about the world from a slightly different perspective. And that is no small feat. 

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in margin



ANNA GRUSKOVÁ

## Has there been enough of the Holocaust?

I have been working on the theme of Holocaust for over seven years. It gave me a lot of new insights into one of the key periods of Slovak history. I do not have any Jewish roots, but I have been immensely touched by the tragedy of Slovak and European Jews. The work has changed my perspective on the culture of my country. Let me illustrate it with two examples. When I watch the opera *Whirlpool* [Krútnava], I listen to pretty music and contemplate: Aha! *Whirlpool* was composed during the first Slovak Republic, commissioned by the state in 1941. The composer Eugen Suchoň chose the novel *At the Upper Mill* [Za vyšným mlynom] by Milo Urban to be the motif of the opera. Since 1940, however, the talented writer was the Editor-in-Chief of *Gardista*, a disgraceful anti-Semitic newspaper. If Suchoň chose Urban's text, it means that he either agreed with the editorial line of *Gardista* or he was simply an opportunist grabbing any opportunity regardless of its questionable background. Yet no one discusses such things.


Last year was the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Jewish transports from Slovakia. To mark the occasion, the major Bratislava-based theatres introduced three plays thematically linked to the Holocaust theme. The Slovak National Theatre produced my play *The Rabbi Woman* [Rabínka] directed and with the screenplay by Viktória Čermáková, and Tabori's *My Mother's Courage* [Matkina guráž]. The Aréna theatre produced *The Holocaust* [Holokaust] by Viliam Klimáček, directed by Rastislav Ballek. The two original Slovak plays had been written by authors,

none of whom is Jewish. In *The Rabbi Woman* I explored the authentic story of the Bratislava-based female activist Gisi Fleischmann to paint a picture of human, female fate within a broader context. One of the key objectives was to introduce to the public a remarkable person who continues to inspire and provoke until these days.

The Holocaust is an absorbing theme full of emotions, human pettiness, betrayal, hatred, pain, but also graciousness and nobleness, courage, and – as shown by Tabori's *My Mother's Courage* – sometimes unexpected humour. You might often find yourself developing an obsession similar to that of a war reporter who cannot survive in the mundane grey world.

Yet not everyone is captivated by the theme. I heard repeatedly from friends and strangers alike: "There has been enough of Holocaust." There are basically two reasons for this attitude: a need not to dirty one's own house, and indifference, superficiality and ignorance. People do not realise the degree to which the old theme continues to affect our lives. For instance, while filming the documentary *The Rabbi Woman* I discovered an Arisator of a small hotel that was originally owned by the parents of Gisi Fleischmann. The offspring of the Arisators are still coming to terms with the trauma.

Until recently the history of Slovakia was written separately from that of the Slovak Jews. Moreover, there was an unwritten agreement that only Jews were to write about the Jews. I am pleased that after the fall of the Iron Curtain it is the theatre artists in Slovakia who show, together with non-Jewish historians, that the Holocaust does not only concern the Jewish minority in Slovakia. It also concerns the majority that actively and silently participated in the Holocaust, but also fought it in some instances.

No, there has not been enough of the Holocaust. It was all part of a long process that began with nearly 80,000 Slovak citizens who only had to die because they were Jews. 

4  
in margin



IVAN LACKO  
translator

Pavol Liška

# Theatre is Missionary Work

When Pavol Liška was not admitted to study at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia in 1991, he left the country for the United States. He first spent some time in Oklahoma and then went to New Hampshire to study at the prestigious Dartmouth College. In 1995, he moved to New York where he has lived ever since producing art and studying the essence of people and theatre. He keeps surprising, confusing and shocking his audiences with theatre that critics and spectators alike claim to be “something you have never seen before”. Pavol Liška is the founder of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma. Its latest work is a sequence of episodes produced under the common title *Life and Times* and created using phone interviews with Kristin Worall – a young musician and sound engineer who told Pavol and his wife Kelly Copper her life story. The Nature Theater of Oklahoma decided to stage Kristin’s life story in a monumental theatre production employing a diversity of approaches and genres. In 2009, the first part of *Life and Times* premiered in The Burgtheater in Vienna and in 2013, the ensemble premiered the fifth episode during a tour to Sweden and the UK.

**Why The Nature Theater of Oklahoma?  
In Slovakia, some people will most likely  
imagine some kind of rural theatre while  
others might think of Franz Kafka.**

The name goes back to Kafka’s novel *America*. I grew up in Slovakia and Franz Kafka was my favourite author. When I came to the United States at the age of eighteen I ended up, quite incidentally, in Oklahoma. There was no Nature

Theatre there, of course. So I had to establish one. But I very much liked the philosophy of a fictitious theatre, just like Kafka made it up – the whole idealistic or even utopian idea that it is a theatre for everybody. The protagonist of Kafka’s *America*, Karl Rossman, eventually becomes a member of the Oklahoma theatre without any experience in theatre making. I was intrigued by this almost Communist idea

photo: archive of The Nature  
Theater of Oklahoma



interview

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that it was a theatre for everyone. We called our theatre The Nature Theater of Oklahoma much later though, around 2005, but I carried the idea in my head from the very beginning when our ensemble consisted of just myself, my wife Kelly, our set designer and a couple of actors. Today, there's about fifteen of us.

**When somebody establishes a theatre in Slovakia (which does not happen every day), it is done either as part of the official, so-called “state culture” that establishes art institutions, or the theatre almost ostentatiously defines itself as an independent, non-state venture whose management and aesthetics are free from institutional influence. How was it in your case?**

There is no state culture in the US so there is nothing to free oneself from, or position oneself against. When we came to New York in 1995, we knew that state funding of art did not exist. So we had to find people who wanted to do theatre for free. But there were other things to think of: we had to pay for the building, find an audience and promote the show to make people come to see our theatre in the first place. And then you have to be lucky to get reviews and coverage in the media. So it is all about survival and the necessity to find people you can work with. There are lots of people like that in New York and when we came there we more or less only copied the model that other artists were already using.

**What does theatre mean to you? And why do many people (including yourself) still do it?**

I ask myself the same question every day. And I don't take it for granted that I do theatre.

6 Our performances primarily try to find an

interview



**Life and Times Episode 1**  
(The Nature Theater of Oklahoma)  
photo: archive of the theatre

answer to this question too. I'm not interested in storytelling, or a specific language, or a particular typology of imagery. The only thing I'm interested in is why we do theatre. And I can't give you a straightforward answer. If I could I'd stop doing theatre. In fact I often stopped doing it in the past – temporarily. But I don't think that theatre is irreplaceable. I personally would surely miss it. At the same time, I don't want to indulge in a selfishly motivated sense for adventure. But when we're working on and performing a new production, I always ask myself why we're doing it and why it's necessary.

**As for the material you choose for The Nature Theater of Oklahoma, are there subjects you prefer or subjects for which you think that the medium of the theatre is better suited?**

I always start by looking for something that is not



all right – something that’s wrong. I deliberately look for motifs and themes that are not suitable for theatre yet – material that is not dramatic as such. We partly do this as a provocation and partly as an attempt to transform something that cannot yet be considered art. We start with material that is not yet drama or poetry. If you work with a text by Chekhov or Shakespeare, or music by Mozart, that is already art, so the journey from the original material to the final product would be very short. And I am trying to make that journey as long as possible. In the past eight years, our material has exclusively been recordings of various interviews which we do not edit in any way. They are sometimes too long, boring, uninteresting and non-dramatic.

**Besides your “epic” titled *Life and Times* and created from interviews with one person (Kristin Worrall), your portfolio also includes a project called *Romeo and Juliet*.**

Yes, we did a project called *Romeo and Juliet*, but we did not use Shakespeare’s original text. We only called a few people and asked them to tell us the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. The responses were incoherent and often very dull – many people remembered the story totally differently, they quoted the lines incorrectly and so on. What interested me most was not Shakespeare, but the function of theatre and its stories. Besides, we did it as a kind of trick to get people to see the show. People always go to see *Romeo and Juliet* and once they’re already in the theatre, I can start dealing with what they expect from the performance and whether they just came because of the title. I want to find out what happens when people do not get what they expect from the performance. This is also why our productions offer audiences an experience which

is often provocative and offensive – but we want to confront the spectators with their own taste.

**Your most recent production *Life and Times*, consisting of five parts so far and lasting more than twelve hours, also deals with the issue of American identity and what it means to be American. This kind of historical, social and emotional “striptease” is not very common in Slovak theatre. Is it important for the theatre to deal with such issues – for example, who we are and where we come from?**

Of course it is. I always like to go back to ancient Greek drama, where the function of the theatre was to create a public space for the entire nation to dream and discuss its existence, not just that somebody’s dog has died, or how they feel after the death of their grandmother, even though these things come up in our productions too. I also want us to talk more about how the function of theatre can be extended and how such discourse should significantly transcend what is written in the script. In this sense, ancient Greek theatre has always been a model for me.

**So this means that even today theatre ought to fulfil a social role.**

Of course! It has no other function. In some things theatre is not very effective – except for its social role which is irreplaceable. Every performance is a social event to begin with. You may be able to tell stories better in prose, images are more interesting in paintings, film or television, but when it comes down to the social aspect, theatre is the No. 1 medium. There’s no other way to do theatre after all, you simply have to make people come to one place where they meet. And then it’s all about how to make use of this social situation.

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interview



**Is there a difference between how this social situation is used by so-called bricks-and-mortar theatres and alternative theatres?**

Yes, there is because what mainstream theatres do on stage is television. They don't go into the essence of the issue so much. At least judging from what I have seen. But I don't go to bricks-and-mortar theatres too often – though I've seen a few Broadway shows. But it's a commercial thing and so it's not that interesting to me. We have collaborated with The Burgtheater in Vienna, which is a conventional theatre, but they supported us so they must have had some sense for adventure and I really appreciated that. We were part of their programme for some time and they let us do things our way, without any restrictions. I don't want to criticize other theatres because I know very well how difficult it is to be inventive and how long it takes to create a good idea. It is hard to be unique and ingenious. Theatre is transforming very slowly, perhaps even way slower than it should. Definitely slower than other art forms.

**In Slovakia, theatres seem to exist in two parallel worlds – one are state-funded theatres that have funds guaranteed in advance, and the other independent non-state theatres which, in order to survive, have to apply for grants. The system of funding defines their aesthetics as well – while the former are conservative and traditional, the latter are more experimental and critical. In recent years, however, it seems that traditional bricks-and-mortar theatres have gradually begun to adopt the aesthetics and attitude of the experimental scene. Is this trend similar in the United States?**

interview

Certainly not in New York and probably not generally in the US either. Quite recently we finished a three-week tour that was all sold out, but it means nothing for our future. It is different in Europe where we spend around nine months every year performing at festivals and on tours. We also get most of our funding from Europe. For example, we get funded by The Burgtheater in Vienna, even though it's a conformist and conventional theatre. There's nothing like this in the US. For the first fifteen years in New York, we were doing theatre for free. We had day jobs, my wife and I, and we rehearsed in the evening. But we would have done it even if we hadn't got any money. In the recent years we have been lucky that funding has found its way to us from Europe.

**How exactly has it found the way to you?**

We performed in Europe once and a couple of sponsors liked it and they invited us to their theatres. Later they wanted to know what we were working on and when we told them about our plans and intentions, they offered us co-production funding from European theatres.

**Slovak theatres often complain about insufficient funds. And when there is enough funding, they complain about too much competition, or corruption, and so on. How does the grant system work in the United States?**

In New York, you can't rely on any city or state funding. Artists organize fundraising events, do auctions, sell hot-dogs or T-shirts, or have to ask their parents for money and so on. Many set up a non-profit organization that can then get financial contributions from individual donors. We don't work like that. The Nature Theater of Oklahoma is a for-profit organization that we established because the system of non-profit





**Life and Times**  
**Episode 3 & 4**  
(The Nature Theater  
of Oklahoma)  
photo: archive  
of the theatre

organizations doesn't work. The system started sometime in the 1980s when grant schemes still worked, but now this source has dried up. Today, many people still think they have to have a "non-profit", but it's no longer true. I guess we work in a totally different way than most theatres.

**You often perform in Europe in relatively conservative theatres, like The Burgtheater that you mentioned. You're an American theatre presenting American themes in a way that is open, free, innovative and playful. How do European audiences perceive you? Are they as conservative as the theatres to which they go to see performances?**

I never underestimate the audience. The management of the theatre may be conservative, but the audience is not. This is why I never accuse the audience of anything. After all, it is my job to take the people on a journey and convince them of something. For me, theatre is like missionary work. I come to a place that hasn't

been converted yet and I try to convince people to believe in a new vision. And I never blame the audience for anything and never think they're conservative. When you ask people if they would rather see radical and experimental theatre, or average entertainment, most of them will tell you that they want a life-changing experience. It is natural that people often leave a performance. Our shows are often too long, sometimes very boring, noisy, often vulgar, but that's what it's all about. I don't want people to love me. I have totally different ambitions. And we've been lucky to be able to do it freely and without compromises.

**If you had to explain in a few words why you do theatre, what would you say?**

We run this radio show on our website called O'R Radio in which we talk to artists from all over the world and we ask them the same question. Some of the answers are very interesting. And why do I do theatre? I do it because I want to find out why I do theatre. I want to know why people go to the theatre. And it's very hard to find a better reason. Sometimes I just don't know. There are days when I want to quit for good, then there are days when the only thing I want to keep on doing is theatre. It's an everyday struggle. Theatre is a very complex medium that cannot be taken for granted. My understanding of theatre is not romantic at all, on the contrary, for me, theatre is dirty, vulgar, clumsy and ugly. And money doesn't make it something pure and beautiful. Money is not enough because it doesn't solve anything. Even if you have enough money, you still have to have an idea, you have to come to a place, meet with people and deal with their nature and their limitations. Theatre as an art form is the least prone to divine inspiration – it is a very rough, heavy and awkward form because you're dealing with people. One day it's like this and the next




it's different. Now, actors are coming here, to my apartment in a few hours. We're rehearsing here because, despite international success, we don't have our own theatre or studio. Global success does not guarantee you a place where you can rehearse. And so I'm nervous and tense – and I'm not looking forward to the rehearsal. That's why I'm giving an answer that is far from romantic. But maybe tomorrow, if I have an epiphany or revelation during the rehearsal, I will say that it's all worth it. Even though such moments account for just about one percent of my experience with theatre, for me it's enough. Theatre is worth it because it allows me to work with material that is initially miles away from what we call art. In the process I turn the material into something that will become art. The journey on which this transformation takes place is what I like most about theatre – for example, how a stupid phone conversation becomes an artistic product. It's not only a metaphor for theatre as

**Life and Times Episode 1** (The Nature Theater of Oklahoma)  
photo: archive of the theatre



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interview

such, but also the reason why I keep doing it. It's because I can work with people who have nothing in common with art at the beginning, but when I use them as art material, I'm able to turn them into something sublime and, at the same time, with their help I can express something I could never do on my own. 

**Pavol Liška** (1973) was born in Skalica, Slovakia.

In 1991, he left what was then the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic for the United States where he has lived since. In 1995, he received a BA from Dartmouth College and established his own theatre in New York (later called The Nature Theater of Oklahoma). With his wife and artistic partner Kelly Copper, Pavol sought new creative forms in which to make theatre. In 2005, he received a master's degree in theatre direction at Columbia University. There he directed classical theatre plays such as *Three Sisters* by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, or *Rasimir and Karoline* by Ödön von Horváth. After 2005, The Nature Theater of Oklahoma started a new chapter of its existence and created its most famous productions. The first among these was *Poetics: A Ballet Brut* (2005) which the ensemble also presented abroad. *No Dice* (2007) premiered at the famous SoHo Rep theatre in New York and received the prestigious OBIE Award. The next creation of the ensemble was *Chorègraphie* (2008) which premiered at the Tanzquartier theatre in Vienna. *Rambo Solo* (2008) premiered at the Kampnagel theatre in Hamburg, Germany. Hamburg also witnessed the premiere of the production titled *Romeo and Juliet* (2008) that received the Prize of Young Directors at the Salzburg festival. The ensemble has been working on the colossal theatre piece *Life and Times* (2009) for over four years now. So far it comprises five episodes and runs for twelve and a half hours. Once finished, the ten episodes of this monumental piece should last twenty-four hours.



DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ  
theatre critic

Juraj Kukura

# Land Is Not Folklore

**His acting talent, attractive appearance, and charisma did not escape the notice of directors such as Jozef Budský or Miloš Pietor during his studies at the Academy of Performing Arts. His career took a very fast start and was gaining quality when he suddenly disappeared and reappeared in German films and theatres. In the early 90's he returned to Slovakia and became the director of the Aréna Theatre, which turned into a distinctive city theatre thanks to his courage, determination, and clearly defined management style. Juraj Kukura.**

**On the marking of the tenth season at the Aréna Theatre, you published a book, for which you had written a very sincere and critical introduction. In it you touch upon many topics that I'd like to discuss with you. One of them is the state in which you found the Aréna Theatre when you joined it.**

I often wake up feeling that what I've done doesn't mean anything to anybody. I've always wanted to turn this theatre into a home of culture. I've never wanted it to be a station where you get on a train, take a short ride, get off, and go home. The Aréna Theatre is the oldest theatre in Bratislava. Such a theatre as the historical building of the Slovak National Theatre can also be found in Hamburg, but it's three times

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interview

photo: archive of  
The Drama Club Prague





larger. The Aréna Theatre is situated on the bank of the Danube River, and because it is where Max Reinhardt started, it has a supranational dimension. In addition, it's a national cultural monument. Any cultural monument is representative of the nation, with everything that belongs to it. Letting a national cultural monument fall into ruin means letting the national culture go to seed and ignoring the trail left behind by our ancestors and the wisdom they left us. Our attitude to personalities of culture is very different from that in the German-speaking countries or the Czech Republic. Not long ago I went to see Roman Polák, the head of the dramatic company of the Slovak National Theatre, who I get on well with. When I asked his personal assistant if she knew that I used to play in the national theatre, in a humorous tone she answered that she didn't, but her grandma for sure did. It may sound funny, but to tell the truth, I was hurt – for Machata, Filčík, Valach, Bagar, Budský, Gregor, Jamnický...<sup>1</sup> They don't have their "grandmas", and they don't seem to have left anything behind despite all the things they'd done. Max Reinhardt is a legend for German speakers. His name is familiar not only to every theatre maker, but also, so to say, to every child. That he started his career in the Aréna Theatre should mean something. The Aréna Theatre should be the pride of this city, and in line with the legacy of Max Reinhardt, it should open up to foreigners. Milan Sládek did a very thorough reconstruction of the theatre, but of course in line with the requirements that he considered important. As a result, there are no stage pulley bars or grids, nor is there a revolving stage. The period in which Milan Sládek came to this theatre was full of ideals. We naively thought that democracy would sort out a great deal of problems, and then it turned out that we'd

**12** received a democracy very different from the one

**interview**

we had been dreaming about. We didn't know that democracy is so closely intertwined and affected by capital. It's our obligation to protect culture and art and thus protect democracy.

### **Why do you think all traces of your employment in the Slovak National Theatre have been – as you say – obliterated?**

I thought you'd tell me. I only know that when I came back to Slovakia and parked my car in the car park of the Slovak National Theatre, because I still felt as a member of its dramatic company, the doorkeeper told me I wasn't allowed to park there. In one official conversation I told Dušan Jamrich, the then managing director of the theatre, that strictly speaking, I was still an employee of the Slovak National Theatre.

### **And what did he reply?**

He said that a notice that has never been delivered is still a notice.

### **Why did you decide to run the Aréna Theatre and return to Slovakia?**

I didn't return to Slovakia because I'd never really left it. I didn't emigrate; I was expatriated. Pavel Kohout was brought out; I was only not let in back. My acting life is slightly different from what's common in Slovakia. I don't do dubbing, I don't appear in daily soap opera shows, but I appear in foreign films and run a theatre. What I'm really proud of is that the people who work under me love doing their jobs. Sometimes I have to go to their office and send them home. Finding such a team was very difficult. If there is a success story, it's this one. You know they say I'm like a virus. People don't learn from me; they can only get infected by me. Our dramaturge returned from a festival in Pilsen

**1** a generation of the actors well known as the 60s generation



2 long-term working as  
a dramaturg of the Slovak  
National Theatre

and reported on Ostermeier's production with the best Russian cast saying, "Several critics of the older generation have labelled it TV trash, so they can be satisfied." This is the virus that cannot be gotten rid of. This is the contagion. The question is if a contagion can be positive. There's an unwritten rule in our theatre: If Martin Porubjak<sup>2</sup> likes something there, we have to start thinking where we've made a mistake.

**What's the role of dramaturgy in your theatre? You have an in-house dramaturge, but you collaborate with Martin Kubran too.**

I think it's right. I went to see the production of *Ľaut* (Slovak National Theatre). Having watched it for about forty minutes, I turned to Zuzana Šajgalíková saying that Robert Roth should be cast as a vampire. Although we hadn't been discussing it since that time, it wasn't left at this. A few days ago she brought a play related to it and said that it was excellent. I told her, "Translate it. We'll do it." So if Robert Roth is interested, he can play a vampire in our theatre. It's not a coincidence. I'm convinced it's going to be a great performance. Our theatre has no so-called "dramaturgy". The world today is much faster than it used to be. At the book launch party of *Desať sezón Divadla Aréna* [Ten Seasons of the Aréna Theatre], we buried things that had been considered state of the art ten years before, for example, a Discman.

The world has changed a lot. Theatre cannot change; theatre is timeless. However, its management must change. Nokia no longer operates although it used to be the most successful company in the world. Theatre must keep up with the times. You can't perform a play about economic boom at the time of economic recession. Our theatre works like this: I run into

an interesting person in the street and ask him, "What are you working on?" And when he says, "Nothing", I'll start looking for a suitable play or role for him. Of course, there are some projects that we work on for years, for example, *Občiansky cyklus* [The Civic Cycle]. Five years ago we decided we'd like to dramatize Marx's *Capital*. I kept putting it off despite the pressure of the theatre makers involved, on purpose. The time has come now. Marx's ideas are resonating strongly with people these days. They are growing discontent. As Jakob Augstein says, in one sentence summarizing what I've discussed in detail in several interviews: We'll have to decide between capitalism and democracy. I'd add that in this fight for the world's future we shouldn't be careful enough not to divert our attention from the real causes and the accountability of those who brought the democratic world to the verge of a financial disaster and brought sentiments, racism, emotions, and nationalism into the everyday life. In Košice there are demonstrations against gays, in Berlin and Hamburg against immigrants, in Russia protesters are smashing the windows of shops and chasing foreigners. In Hungary there is a secret register of Jews.

**Will Capital conclude The Civic Cycle, or are you planning to continue in this project?**

We're working on *Povstanie* [Uprising]. It is going to be a collage of impressions in the form of one-act plays by several Slovak authors who've been asked to write something about the Slovak National Uprising. They include Pavel Kohout or Sláva Daubnerová. Now the collected material has to be put into a blender, and we'll see what will come out. For now it's a puzzle. *The Civic Cycle* also includes the play *Rukura*, subtitled "Capitalism". Theatre is a means of showing reality as it is.

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interview



**My personal perception is that you have both projects of interest for mainstream audiences and plays that are distinct, specific, and engaged, and the combination of these two directions constitutes your theatre's dramaturgy.**

That's true. This is how we work. When we were making *Tiso*, only five tickets were sold for the first repeat performance. However, until today the play has received seventy repeat performances. If *Tiso* hadn't caught on, it wouldn't have been possible for us to do *Húsák*. It's important that we can actually afford to take such risks. Who would have thought that *Holocaust* would be hopelessly sold out? Thanks to this, we can take a chance on other potentially risky works: we're preparing Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *Capital*. Before we did *Tiso*, I'd been warned a number of times that we shouldn't do the play, and now everyone's happy that this topic has been opened for discussion. For example, we cast a Roma actor to play the part of Othello. I found it fascinating, although it, unfortunately, didn't work out so well. It may be related to the fact that we still don't feel guilty about being prejudiced against Roma. When I'm approached by a Roma woman, I catch myself feeling my pocket to check where my wallet is, and then I'm overwhelmed by shame at this "small" racism that I have in my heart without even being aware of it. We might have come up with this topic too early. But as artists, we have the right to err. Theatre is a trial, and we have the right to fail. That's why those who write about it should be humble. They must appreciate that we've tried.

**Did you know the director Rastó Ballek before *Tiso*?**

Not really. Nor did I know Čičvák, Kubran, or Ballek. I don't know Kamila Polívková:

14 I've never seen any production directed by

interview

her. However, now there is one play that I'd like to see done, so I've sent it to her.

**Čičvák, Kubran, Ballek – you cooperate with them, and you even appear in their productions.**

I no longer like acting as much as I used to, let alone acting in the Aréna Theatre. This is not my goal. When they were talking me into becoming the managing director of the Slovak National Theatre, I said that it'd be possible only on one condition: that these boys (Čičvák, Kubran, and Ballek) would come to the national theatre together with their buddies and take seats in the snack bar. So that their views would gradually prevail over what's discussed in the snack bar now. This is what we did when we transferred from the Divadlo na Korze Theatre to the Nová scéna. At first we were told, "It's good to have you here. For quite some time we haven't had people here who'd wear leaves on stage." But then we started dictating fashion trends. If you'd like to change things, you can't do so alone. You must come with a generation of people who have certain views and can make them reality. "Der Ton macht die Musik." This is the only chance for the director of the national theatre. I'm not sure though if the Slovak National Theatre feels like changing something.

**What's the cooperation with Čičvák, Ballek, and Kubran like?**

They love theatre, it's their obsession, but they're horrible to work with. Čičvák always comes up with a brilliant guaranteed low-cost idea that cannot be implemented at all. For example, he wanted to have an arena built in the Janko Kráľ Park for the production of *Capital*. He builds an Eiffel Tower with every performance. I believe one day he'll build it. Ballek is a quiet, stubborn



implementer of the first idea. He believes that it's the only right idea, and adamantly, slowly, in my opinion almost leisurely, he moves forward to the goal. Kubran is an inseparable part of their thinking; he often has his jacket do the work for him. And there's one more who cannot be overlooked. Lomnický. Their reticent "selector" of ideas. And an irreplaceable partner at the bar. All of them use their love for theatre as an excuse to get drunk and spend long hours talking about their great plans of conquering the world. It's in a way amazing that on those nights theatre prevails even over sex. The other day I went to see *Jedermann* in Salzburg, and for forty minutes I felt it was the most boring production I have seen in my whole life. However, the visual effects that had come then changed the performance into a spectacular show despite the fact that there was no change in the quality of acting. We've been talking about *Rosmersholm* with Ballek. He told me that the scene should be a great visual gesture. No furniture, no stage setting. When I heard him talking about it, I knew this cannot be not done. An amazing first idea.

**In your book you write about the theatre in Martin and the Divadlo na Korze Theatre. You say what everybody knows, but nobody says it aloud – that these theatres are a myth now.**

When I could return to Czechoslovakia, I was the most surprised by the fact that everybody kept looking backward. I thought they would look ahead, but they would only turn back with nostalgia to things that were of value in the past, but which were being abandoned elsewhere – for example, understated acting. And this doesn't detract from the quality it once had. It's necessary to look ahead. I saw the film *Medená veža* (*The Copper Tower*) the other day, and I realized

how great Kvietik, Mistrík, and Rajniak were as actors. They made you sense the place they came from. And then, at one event in Vienna, I heard a recording of Dominik Tatarka speaking, and I understood that the 1960s generation has no connection with land. You can't become world-famous when you abandon your roots. This is the reason why they haven't been able to do what they've been dreaming about: to confront the world. When you're reading Márai, it's about the monarchy. When Giora Feidmann is playing the clarinet, he's playing Yiddish. The connection between art and land is the Alpha and Omega.

**Why is it said that actors play differently in the Aréna Theatre?**

Actors keep discussing things with the director. The discussion results from the actor's need to build up his position, defend and smuggle onto the stage what he's good at. The actor needs to find his security. Discussion is the worst thing that can happen in a theatre. Actors are supposed to come and play. In the National Theatre everybody knows how to act, what's good and what's bad. The same in Nitra. We require our actors to play the way the director wants, because every actor comes from a different background. I consider it simply unheard-of that Milan Ondřík wasn't awarded the Dosky Annual Theatre Award for his part in *Holocaust*. I haven't seen Mr. Heriban acting, but it's beyond my comprehension. I equally find it rude that Emil Horváth didn't get the award for *Húsák*. Discussion is a communication struggle for a position and the possibility to establish oneself as good at something in the result. Even though acting is built on insecurity, not on security. Only then can you get where you've never been – if you believe the other rather than yourself. If you pursue comfort only, you can only be a good



actor all your life. There's good acting and great acting. Everybody is good, but some are better and some less so. But you can become truly great only if you leave your comfort zone.

### **You should start teaching acting.**

I have no time for this now. But let me ask you a question. I'm the only Slovak actor who has appeared in such theatres as Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, where Gründgens used to perform, who has had Voss, one of the greatest German actors, as an acting partner, who has acted at the side of Wildgruber in Basel, in the National Theatre in Munich... How come that in the whole time that I've been here, the Academy of Performing Arts has never contacted me to ask me, if nothing else, at least how such theatres work? I don't want to teach; I don't know if I'm particularly gifted to do so. But why have they never been interested at least in how the directors Zadek, Savary, Minks, Dost, and Hollmann worked, or how great theatre managers such as Dorn and Baumbauer worked? Why? I'm a great fan of the production of *The Seagull* in the National Theatre. Some of the actors in the performance don't play what the director wants them to, but what they believe. They make it clear that they don't identify with the director's interpretation of the play. Had our theatre produced the play, it would be an unforgettable performance. Just like Milan Ondřík in *Holocaust*. *Holocaust* is Ondřík's *Mario and the Magician*. Do you know what I told him? "Your bad luck, Mr. Ondřík, is that you'll never give another performance like this" And he wasn't awarded the Dosky Award. What will happen to Dan Fischer? I've never seen such an excellent acting performance as the one he gave in *The Pillowman*. He moves around in the small space of Loft with quiet virtuosity, without big gestures, without making any effort to beguile

the audience, with unparalleled tenderness, minimalist means, and especially with a humbleness that does not demand admiration. He plays a man who makes it clear to us that all genuine values like love, trust, reliability, and fidelity have no chance to survive in today's world. A mentally disabled person who parts with us displaying wisdom that goes beyond common sense. And we see him off on his way to heaven with understanding and with a wound in our soul. Theatre critics say he's "too young", or still "immature" or "one-springed", or he "hasn't got it", or "he hasn't met the challenge of the role". And it's not only about Milan Ondřík not receiving the Dosky Annual Theatre Award. The whole production of *Holocaust*, which is a complex theatrical project not only in terms of dramaturgy and theatrical means, but also in the area of Slovak drama (as Jana Wild writes in her review), has remained on the total periphery of critical interest. Not to mention that the only erudite review of the performance, the one written by Wild, was published in a Czech magazine. It probably has something to do with the meetings held in Martin where critics, chaired by Professor Vladimír Štefko, deal with the media background of Tomáš Mašťalík and the dilemma whether it's alright to use "fuck" in a performance or whether "shit" would be more adequate while discussing our performance *November*. ♡

**Juraj Kukura** is a Slovak actor. Kukura studied acting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU). Since 1985, when he emigrated to Germany, his films were banned by the regime until the end of Communist rule in the 1989. Thanks to his charismatic personality he usually portrayed strong, leading characters. In 2004, he received DOSKY Award for performing *Martin* in *The Goat*, or, *Who is Sylvia?*. In 2003 he became managing director of Arena Theatre.





**LENKA DZADÍKOVÁ**  
theatrologist

**Eva Farkašová**

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# I need quite a degree of freedom

**Stage designer on the road – it can be a nickname for Eva Farkašová, author of stage and costume designs in productions in Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic as well as Croatia, Serbia, Germany, Austria and elsewhere in Europe. Last June she celebrated a major anniversary. Yet the number of productions greatly exceeds the figure that marks her age.**

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## **Where are the beginnings of your art work? What made you study at the secondary school – the School of Applied Arts?**

There was no one in our family who would be involved in fine arts. Only my grandfather who lived in the settlements on the Slovak-Moravian border used to do paint landscapes and still life. I might have inherited some of his genes. As a child I attended an arts course. We lived next door to the School of Applied Arts. When I was picking up my brother from the kindergarten, I would peak through into the School's stone workshops across the street. It was a strange world to which I was intuitively pulled into. I placed the application and was accepted by the Department of Pottery.





**Statek blaznów**  
(Ship of Fools, Teatr Wiersza-  
lin w Supraślu) photo:  
archive of the theatre

### **Having started with pottery how did you end up with puppets?**

I studied with Teodor Lugs, a potter who used to make figurative sculptures. They were tiny statuettes, puppets. All they needed was to bring them to life. Perhaps it was him who set it off, for I had no particular interest in theatre. I only came to understand theatre through the applied arts, not through actors.

### **How do you remember your time at the Theatre Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague?**

I was lucky to arrive for the studies in Prague in the golden era of the DRAK theatre led by Josef Krifta, Miloslav Klíma and Petr Matásek. It was the time that gave birth to the now legendary productions of *Johanes doktor* *Faust*, *Enšpígl*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*

18 [Sen noci svatojánské], *The Song of Live* [Píseň

života] or *Ralevala*. They had a decisive influence on the poetics of puppet theatre. A text became the pretext for variations, improvisations. Didactics gave way to verbal and stage metaphor. A puppet became an equal partner to life actor. The projects that emerged then were courageous, provocative and artistically challenging. We watched with awe every step of the theatre. Within the vibrant artistic life of the culture centre I reaffirmed my belief that puppet theatre could be done differently, interestingly, poetically, with a morale and imagination. I no longer doubted my choice, even though I had no idea about the direction in which my path would follow.

**From 1975 to 1982 you worked at the State Puppet Theatre in Bratislava. Yet you made most your works as a freelance artist. Is that a result of how matters turned out or was it your intention not to be attached to institutions?**

interview



I need quite a degree of freedom. It might be because of my personality: I feel no need to be attached. I need constant change, provocation even at the cost of risk. To be a freelancer gave me wider choices. Yet I ought to acknowledge the other side of the coin as well: the constant physical and mental transfers can be exhaustive. They steal the time which one can spend with family and friends. The free time simply dissolves somewhere in the constant wandering from theatre to theatre.

**Puppet theatre, drama, opera, television sets, set and costume designs for children and adults in Prešov and Bratislava. Your work has quite an outreach and range. What is closest to your heart?**

Everything is a challenge to me. I do not differentiate between individual jobs. I have more experience in some areas, whilst elsewhere I have to work harder, search, labour, experiment. It certainly brings along some uncertainty and doubts, mistakes and pains. That, however, is probably the case in all creative work. I sense the degree of responsibility equally at work for children and adults. I make no difference between the jobs.

**You have been working with a number of directors. Their poetics differ significantly. Can you tune to the work with Ján Uličiansky as much as to Marián Pecka?**

I have known them both well and for a long time. The working partnership would not have been possible without our mutual understanding, trust and proximity of views. Each of them goes for different themes. They have different creative principles and work methods. I like to

have space for some improvisation, experiment, adventure. They both give it me. They are sensitive, perceptive, and sometimes quite temperamental. Yet in the end each of them heads elsewhere. Ján with his cultured humour heads towards harmony and consonance, whilst Peco with his expressive provocative gesture leads to destruction and a scream in pain.

**Can you identify their different approach to puppets? Do you see it as an artist?**

Peco often uses a puppet as a symbol, to express broken inner emotions of a character. Sometimes intentionally he suppresses the professional lead of a puppet. He is capable of physically breaking or humiliating it. He tries to talk about the soul of the character through the material. Ján believes in a puppet as one believes a life human. He sees it as an equal life partner and treats it accordingly. He accepts even a more challenging stylisation, though he always retains its human dimension and respects the childlike needs to identify with a puppet. He works with it sensitively and respectfully.

**What was it like working with Blaho Uhlár?**

That was during the totalitarian regime. At the time Blaho's discontent and revolt against the state of theatres was already rising. He was desperately seeking themes within drama or own dramatizations. He was trying to combine children's productions with a serious message for adult audiences. We made together a few productions (*About the Great Karbus Barbus / O veľkom Karbusovi Barbusovi*, *About a Drummer / O bubeníkovi*). Yet the intense need for his own message and theme eventually led him away from the brick and mortar theatre to alternative theatre.



**Your ties to the Polish theatre are particularly strong. You work with, inter alia, the theatre company Wierszalin led by director Piotr Tomaszuk. He is yet another of the major directors.**

Twenty years ago Piotr Tomaszuk founded, together with the major Polish playwright Tadeusz Słobodzianek, Towarzystwo teatralne Wierszalin w Supraślu (now Teatr Wierszalin). It is a settlement near Białystok on the borders of Polish and Belorussian influences. That has affected the repertory and poetics of the company. It is a blend of cultural heritage, Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic faiths, the East and West. The theatre has a strong artistic profile with a characteristic rough, raw aesthetics. Its productions have received a number of awards at the Edinburgh festival and some major awards in Poland. The critics compare the theatre to such phenomena as the Grotowski Laboratory Theatre or Kantor's Cricot 2.

I came across Piotr and his theatre when he was the artistic director at the Banialuka theatre in Bielsko-Biała. He approached me about cooperation for a puppet theatre and later also for Wierszalin. Our partnership never started from a finished text. At the beginning it was just a theme, a sketch, a motif that was developing through further dialogue. The work carried on during rehearsals and everyone took part – actors, artists and a musician. Everything progressed simultaneously. It required utmost flexibility by everyone involved. The stage in the ancient wooden building in Supraśl had limited space without any backstage. Yet it was the genius loci that created the unique atmosphere of all scenography. There was the old wooden floor, its scent and squeaking, narrow staircase leading to the attic filled with marvellous items there were

20 often enough for our productions. Everything was

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authentic with traces of time and its own life.

As a director Tomaszuk thinks in images. The artistic metaphor together with music is very important to him. He works on it from the very first moment of rehearsals. Everything is simplified – all the way to the austere artistic shape. That enables to reach the bare heart of the matter. The productions are distinctively unpretentious. They are filled with music, songs and expressive acting. We made together a dozen of interesting productions, including Boccaccio's *Cyrk Dekameron*, Wyspiański's *Curse*, Weiss' play *Marat/Sade*, Brant's *Ship of Fools*, Sophocles' *Saint Oedipus* or *God Niżyński*. The latter depicts an unusual image of physical and mental pain of the brilliant dancer of Polish origin, the protagonist of the Diaghilev ballet that mesmerised Paris with Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. The production received a number of awards, such as the Grand Prix at the 2007 Festival of Contemporary Polish Arts, and at the international festival Toruńskie Spotkania Teatrów Lalek in 2006.

**How does your the cooperation with directors look like? Who has the last word?**

I tried to speak with the director as much as possible. We define things, discuss the story and how to interpret it. We seek together ideas and inspiration, choose strategy, offer and accept impulses. It is an intimate process that requires our mutual trust and respect. Once we have solved the issue of space that is to be the construction of a production, we discuss the costumes or puppets. Sometimes it is quite difficult to work out who brought what input into the production. In any case it is the director who has the ultimate responsibility. Who has the last word? It is perhaps the viewer.



**Statek błaznów**  
(Ship of Fools, Teatr Wierza-  
lin w Supraślu) photo:  
archive of the theatre



**In addition to the permanent cooperation with directors you are often within a set circle of artists (Ján Zavarský, Pavol Andraško). Do you feel a generational bond with any Slovak or Polish artists?**

I do not sense it as much generationally, but rather in opinions. We have to sense the joint poetics of a theatre, to be on the same wavelength, to listen to and complement each other. Pavol is humorous, pragmatic and business-like. Ján is theoretically erudite, analytical and rational. And me ... well, I try to make good coffee to go with it all.

**Having worked in all three countries, you have an opportunity to compare Polish, Czech and Slovak theatre culture. Can you name the differences?**

The Poles are a nation of 40 million people. Their history has been far more complex than ours. Culture and arts have always been their support

pillars. Great artists such as Kantor, Grotowski, Szajna, Mandzik worked with theatre and have radically affected the European cultural context. It was a fertile soil that gave rise to a generation that continues to be dynamic, creative, open and self-confident. A number of new festivals and theatre companies keep emerging despite the continuing recession in Europe. The critique is ever-vibrant, drawing upon specialist literature. Simply, the Poles are aware that culture creates their national identity, represents them globally and is their greatest export item. Culture is part of their life. It is natural for them to attend cultural events. That is why theatre plays a different role and performances are sold out in Poland.

Though we share with the Poles some of idealism, we are more reserved, closed and cautious when it comes to making dreams come true. The fragile and shy Slovak culture hits the lacks of courage to change anything; it runs into the problems of cultural policy, limited



funding and education. As I work mostly in Poland at the moment, I find it difficult to comment on the situation in the Czech Republic. Yet I think that the Czech puppetry tradition has lost none of its appeal. I often come across such names as Zákostelecký, Hubička, Krofta, Nosálek in Polish theatres. These artists are still in great demand.

**You are an immediately discernible author also because of the wide range of your work. What makes you, however, instantly recognisable (particularly in works with Marián Pecko), are the cabaret costumes elements (braces, berets ...) and the combination of black and white. Where do such poetics spring from?**

Pecko uses the colour across the entire space. With him I tested the artistic and psychological effect of colour which I use programmatically. Colour can enhance narrative clashes. It can typify and clarify the characters. Together with light colour can activate feelings. It speaks of emotions and defines space. The cabaret form is typical for Pecko's productions. We discovered it for the first time in Dickens's *Christmas Carol* for the Warsaw-based theatre Lalka, and later used it in Gogol's *Foolish Notes* for the theatre in Martin, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* for Pardubice or Gombrowicz's *Ivona, The Princess of Burgundy* [Ivona, princezna burgundská] for the theatre in Opole.

**You were co-author of puppets for the popular satirical series at the Slovak television on the 1990s, *Dumpling – Political Cuisine Where Virtually Everything Gets Cooked* [Halušky – Politická kuchyňa, kde sa varí takmer všetko]. Together with Vojtech Farkaš**

**you created caricatures of politicians such as Jozef Moravčík, Béla Bugár, Milan Kňažko, Peter Weiss, Vladimír Mečiar, Michal Kováč, Pavol Kanis, or Viliam Soboňa. Unlike the Czech *Rubberheads* [Gumáci], that used puppets made with an English licence, you devised your own craft. How do you remember the work?**

It was quite an exciting and pioneering period. It was not merely a test of our professional skills, but in part also of courage in the tense political climate at the time. We were learning to live in freedom. The puppets were first introduced in an art show opening as busts of politicians. We placed the stands across the room, with the heads covered in white cloth. When we removed the cover in front of the politicians who were unaware of what was to come, one could feel the silence stiffen the air. The only reaction was a quiet sincere laughter of a foreign diplomat. The Polish television got interested in similar project. In team with Piotr Tomaszuk we launched it some two years after the Slovak premiere. The audience rates and popularity were high at first, but people gradually tired of the political situation and lost interest in political cabaret.

**You have received a number of awards. Is there any that you treasure above all?**

Awards are always a nice surprise. One ought to talk about their significance in a number of contexts. At this point I rather feel an urgent need to thank the man without whom I would have never received many of the awards: the director Peter Nosálek. I am indebted to him for the many long and inspiring conversations in which he modestly kept on opening his vast spiritual world to me, for his advice and encouragement, and all the wonderful cooperation. Shortly after our last premiere in Białystok he left to the backstage forever, entering the eternal land of silence.



**You have been teaching at the Faculty of Puppetry at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava for over fifteen years. Is there any hope in Slovak puppetry for potential leaders?**

Flair and talent cannot be taught. I am trying to pass my own experience to the students. I try to point out to them everything that they ought to anticipate in practice, what to avoid, how to work with workshops and scene organisation. Particularly though, I am trying to enthuse them for their own search and interpretation. A number of talents that graduate with us often encounter the challenges of finding the place for their talent and background. Over the past years no major directors have arisen who would have otherwise enabled the puppet artists to continue in tandem in making the profile of their own theatre generation. As a teacher I face a professional dilemma. On the one hand we try to pass on as much as we can, we appeal to the young talents in culture and creative arts for children. On the other hand we cannot provide them with any guarantees of finding a relevant job after graduation. Many end up in business. Unless they are stubborn and persistent enough, they give up.

**Do you have any unfulfilled dream or a frontier you wish to reach in your art?**

My only dream at the moment is to fill the deficit of daylight and family.

**What do you have in store for the 2013/2014 season?**

I am to work on four productions. One of them will be at the Bratislava Puppet Theatre and the other three in Poland. I also received an interesting offer from Krystian Kobyłka, director of the Opole Puppet and Actor Theatre in Poland. They are working on a major international project

*Odysseus and Penelope* that will bring together a team of Poles, Finns, the French and Italians. It will be a non-verbal open air theatre. The premiere is scheduled for 2014 on the Greek Islands. ♣

**Eva Farkašová** (1953, Martin) studied puppet scene design and technology at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (1977). In 1975–1982 she had an engagement at the State Puppet Theatre in Bratislava (now the Bratislava Puppet Theatre). She has been teaching at the Department of Puppetry Arts at the Faculty of Theatre of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

In the early 1980s Eva Farkašová worked with director Ján Uličiansky in the Puppet Theatre in Košice and with director Blaho Uhlár at the Trnava Theatre. The 1990s launched her long-term working partnership with director Marián Pecko. Together with stage designer Ján Zavarský and Pavol Andraško they put together a number of interesting and awarded projects. In recent years we can come across Farkašová's works particularly on the Polish stage where, in addition to drama and puppet theatres, she works with the theatre company Wierszalin led by director Piotr Tomaszuk.

Farkašová's participation in local and international productions accounts to over 300 productions. Her work exceeds the borders of Slovakia reaching to Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland, the former Yugoslavia, and Taiwan.

Eva Farkašová regularly presents her works at international exhibitions. She is laureate of a number of international awards, such as the Puppet Project Price (Stuttgart, 1990), The Golden Mask for Set Design for the production of *Decameron* (Bielsko-Biala, 2003), the ASSITEJ Price for lasting excellence in work with Polish theatres (Warsaw, 2008), The Price of the Minister of Culture.



**ZUZANA BAKOŠOVÁ-HLAVENKOVÁ**

theatrologist and professor at the Academy  
of Performing Arts Bratislava

**Szidi Tobias**

# More than Ten Commandments of actress Szidi Tobias

**Szidi Tobias is among the most noteworthy members in her generation of actors. Her universal acting is as impressive in the major complex and multifaceted dramatic characters, as it is in the comic or tragi-comic ones. After years spent with the Bratislava-based Theatre Korzo'90, later ASTORKA Korzo'90, Tobias moved her talent to the drama company of the Slovak National Theatre.**

**Let me begin with the first moments and years of the actress Szidi Tobias in Bratislava. You came to Bratislava as a grown up acting hopeful. Many consider the city to be unwelcoming and unfriendly. What has been your relationship to Bratislava and its theatres having previously worked with the scene and audiences in Prešov and Spišská Nová Ves?**

I came to Bratislava from Spišská Nová Ves where I mostly played fairy tales for children.

I love the old, historical Bratislava. It is beautiful.





Even our academy at Ventúrska Street was beautiful and friendly. I come from a small town and grew up in the countryside. In Bratislava I was afraid of missing my tram stop. I am still afraid of crowds and a big city. When I came to Bratislava for the entrance exams, I promised myself to be courageous in order to be accepted. I shall never forget the smile on the face of actor Pavol Mikulík in the corridor of the Academy when our eyes met. It was an encouraging smile. I phoned my mother right away to report it.

I remember you as a student of acting at the Faculty of Theatre of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. You were already impossible to overlook. Not only because you went to school with a tiny dog, but also for your alto and deep laughter that often filled the court of the Faculty at Ventúrska. The court has been since silent, being turned into a parking lot. How do you remember the golden years at school?

You remember Žofka?! I bought the dog in the dorm for a beer! Everyone at the Faculty fell in love with her. She could laugh: she was showing her teeth and kept spitting. It was a wonderful dog. We used to take her to rehearsals and performances. She was ever so obedient, except for the performance when we were all shouting and she was howling along. I apologise if I disturbed anyone laughing in the court. But it had such wonderful acoustics that, whatever was said at the well, could be heard in the Dean's office. I am ever so sorry that the school is no longer ours.

**I remember that, in the early 1990s, we visited with your colleagues and teachers our partner theatre academy WSPTU in Krakow. The Dean at was the popular actor the time Jerzy Stuhr. The distinguished director Krystian Lupa taught directing. At the Cricot 2**

**theatre we saw the play *I shall Never Come Back Here Again* by Tadeusz Kantor. Sadly, it was already without his inimitable presence. Do you think such touches with abroad are of benefit for new actors, or are they just among the many ephemeral experiences?**

We were thinking of it recently with my schoolmate Attila Mokos. We were a lucky class for we visited a lot of places and festivals. The one you mentioned was among them. Such trips cannot be forgotten. On the one hand the teachers kept on emphasising the uniqueness of the event. Led by Pavol Mikulík, Božidara Turzonovová and Vladimír Strnisko, our class wanted to stand out. I still recall an actress who was totally still on the stage for a long time. She was so still that I doubted she was live, wondering it might have been a figurine. Yet she blinked her eyes. It moved me. I particularly remember the performance for each character having their own part; they were all disciplined. Every details or look was accurate, no one did anything superfluous. Along with everything else it gave the performance a sense of order. Even though I did not understand every word in Polish, I did understand it all.

**You started at Theatre Korzo'90. What did the theatre mean to you then and what does it mean today when it is more-or-less a closed chapter?**

It still means a lot to me: I grew up there.

**Already in your first decade as an actress some of your characters at the Astorka theatre have left a permanent imprint in the memory of the audiences and theatre artists alike: Betulya in Pitinsky's *Mother* (1993), Martirio in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Sally Bowles**



**in *The Cabaret*, Aksiusha in *The Forest* or Eli in *Casimir and Carolina*. These characters are already among those that had entered the history of Slovak theatre as major accomplishments, along with the Angel or Archangel Gabriel in Sloboda's plays *Armagedon na Grbe* and *Stepmother* [Macocha]. Which of the characters from your first decade at Astorka is most special for you?**

It is certainly the Angel in *Armagedon na Grbe* which was written for the theatre by Rudolf Sloboda. "The world ends, the history ends. The new world is about to begin after centuries of struggles, wars and squabbles ..." Sloboda's Angel and my Master's thesis – it was quite an experience! I came to see Sloboda with [the actress] Zita Furková in Devínska Nová Ves. He talked and laughed a lot. They spoke with Zita about religion, love, food and drink, lovemaking and, of course, *Armagedon*. I wanted to remember it all and write in the thesis, but I forgot almost all of it. Being with Sloboda I thought of myself as being very uneducated, just as the Wife asks the Farmer in *The Farmer's Blood* [Gazdova krv]: "Am I really stupid?" Well, I was for I had forgotten everything. All the plays and characters you mentioned were special to me and each made me happy. Even if it comes across as sentimental, to me it was the most beautiful period at Astorka, in the old venue at Suché Mýto.

**In your second decade at ASTORKA Korzo'90 you started to play not only complex characters and those particularly defined in their character. Moreover, you naturally grasped a range of age categories. What is often a problem for a young actress did not seem to be and perhaps shall never**

**be an issue for you. You play with equal passion young women as well as those who had seen the limits of their might, even witnessing the shady sides of human existence. How do you see this issue in light of your current engagement at the new scene, in the very centre of the Slovak theatre world – the drama company of the Slovak National Theatre (SND)?**

Thank you. I hope the dramaturgy at the SND hear you! And that it won't be a problem to any of us.

**The last character at the Theatre ASTORKA Korzo's 90 is, virtually symbolically, one from Rodolf Sloboda's *Blood* [Krv] dramatized by Ondrej Šulaj. You play the Woman. The character has a number of biographical features of the author's partner. How did you approach such challenging role? It earned you the Best Actress Award in the 2011 DOSky.**

I knew Rudolf's wife in person. Yet it would not have been enough to draw just from that. Ondrej Šulaj had written a beautiful play. I fell in love with the Woman during the first reading rehearsal. I kept telling myself that, if I learn it, I can do nothing but simply be her in the evening. Her every thought, her way of thinking that is so uncomplicated, human, often simply wise, grabbed me as if by magic. It was this very shape we gave to the Woman with the director Juraj Nvota.

**Your new stage, the prime scene of our professional theatre, the SND Drama Company, is a dream for most actors. What made you leave what was until recently your home stage at ASTORKA Korzo'90 to settle at the Slovak National Theatre?**

It was the change and new challenges. The entire process evolved gradually. The ASTORKA Theatre



**The Elephant Graveyard**  
(ASTORKA Korzo '90 Theatre)  
photo by P. Breier



broke into smaller communities. It was no longer the same to me. Director Rastislav Ballek approached me at that time. I was offered excellent conditions and went for the change. It was not a simple decision, as it is never easy to leave after twenty years. I am completing some performances and continue to see the people whom I miss. Meanwhile I look forward to new acting partners, and I naturally hope they look forward to me, too.

**Your first character at the SND stage is Pallas Athena in the trilogy Oresteia by Aeschylus. To what degree has working with Rastislav Ballek and the character met your expectations?**

First of all, I was a bit afraid of the large stage. A number of people kept calming me, pointing out that one ought to pay attention to comprehensibility here and there. I am getting used to it. I feel like a child that is learning to

speak. These seemingly minor concerns kept preoccupying me. That is perhaps why I was a bit diffident in finding my place in the director's concept. The character of Pallas Athena is to bring peace to the stage, to save Orestes from revenge and to convince the people that the court would be incorruptible. Yet "who among the people can be obedient and unafraid?" It is a topic like from our current news reports. Still, it could be a solace to the public after the murders and revenge. I am like a contemporary viewer who watches the news. Sometimes I believe it, as I vitally need it, while sometimes I cannot believe it. It is the same with the audiences. Some find the performance a delight, but there are some who do not accept it in its artistically and expressively underlined form.

**It is the first time you came across an antique character in your repertoire. How do you relate to the great tragedies**

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**Tolstoy and money**  
(ASTORKA Korzo '90 Theatre)  
photo by P. Breier

**within the global repertoire? Do the characters in tragedies require a different acting approach and new interpretation? Or is it enough to grasp the requirements of perfect declamation as had been the case in the literary theatre in the past?**

Oresteia embraces a number of current themes. Practically nothing has changed since her days. Murder is paid for by blood and the virtual court of the wise is not fair even today. People have not changed. We shout, cry and promise to be better, but keep on failing at it. That is why I think the production has its raison d'être. The verse in which it is delivered is a test of language proficiency. It is nice to listen to actors speaking in verse naturally, as if they were not actors. Yet it is not nice to hear the verse delivered with great emphasis, for such an actor

**28** soon loses the attention of the audience.

**interview**

**In the recent decade you entered the mind of those viewers who come to the theatre to penetrate, aided by actors, the conscience and subconscious of a character. Which of your creations do you consider the closest to you and the viewer?**

Rudolf Sloboda is now bound to smile from heaven, but it is Woman in the Farmer's Blood [Gazdova krv]. Yet I find it hard to say whether the viewers find the character to be equally close to their heart.

**You also sang in Casimir and Carolina and later in The Cabaret and Summer Guests. Theatre song has different dimensions than singing repertoire which you have been actively building over the recent years. Where do you see the difference?**

I can hide behind the singing character in the theatre. Yet in our songs I can only hide behind the microphone. And it is indeed what I do.



**To what degree are you happy with or concerned about the current state of theatre and acting in Slovakia? Can you compare it with the efforts of theatre artists in Hungary or the Czech Republic where you after play or have concerts?**

Some theatres in Budapest are closing down. It is inexplicable for a country that so prides itself in its culture. In the Czech Republic, regular visits to theatre are a matter of prestige. The performances that I saw were always full. Even our concerts in the Czech Republic are always sold out. The Hungarians, Czechs and Slovak viewers are perhaps confused when they come to see a character from a TV series and suddenly they do not know how to take the character which their favourite actor plays that evening. A viewer who goes for the title is also confused because the character is trying to convince him that it is not the one from the TV series. Perhaps the viewer comes to the theatre precisely because his or her favourite actor is with them at home every day. Every actor fights for their own truth. I can see it as a viewer. An actor, who sells himself to a character in a never-ending TV series, will need some time to wash it off.

**Where do you see your future as an actress and singer? What takes up most of your time these days?**

I can only wish for my future, but no one knows how it turns out. I want to be a happy actress, grateful for the characters, directors, acting partners, for a production that is well received. I want to be happy with the music band and to release a new record. I want to continue the concerts not only in the Czech Republic, but also at home in Slovakia. I always focus intensely on what I do. If I have to do both things at the same time – singing and acting – I think I do not do it intensely enough. ♪

**Szidi Tobias** (1967) is a theatre and film actress, and a singer. She studied acting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (1989 – 1993). Between 1993 and 2012 she was member of Theatre Korzo'90, later ASTORKA Korzo'90 in Bratislava. In 2013 she accepted an offer to join the drama company of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava.

Her most significant characters include Elli in *Casimir and Carolina* (1992), Angel in *Armagedon na Grbe* (1993), Martirio in *The Hosue of Bernarda Alba* (1993), Sally Bowles in *The Cabaret* (1994), Betulya in the *Mother* by J.A. Pitinsky (1997), *Aksiusha* in the *Forrest* by Ostrovsky (1997), Chloë in the *Elephant Cemetery* by Daumas Daumasovom (1998), Baroness in the *Tales from the Vienna Woods* by O. von Horváth (1999), Kaléria in *Gorky's (Polák's) Summer Guests* (2004), Svetlana in *The Strange Afternoon of Zvonko Burke* [Čudné popoludnie Zvonka Burkeho] by Ladislav Smoček (2007), Sofia Behrs-Tolstaya in *Ján Novák's Tolstoy and Money* [Tolstoj a peniaze] (2009), Anna Vojnická in *Platonov* by Tchekhov (2010) and *Woman in the Farmer's Blood* [Gazdova krv] (2011), in the production of the play by Ondrej Šulaj (dramatization of Rudolf Sloboda), and recently *Pallas Athena in Oresteia* by Aeschylus (2012).

In 1997 Tobias was nominated for the Best Actress Award in DOSky for the character of Aksiusha in the production of Ostrovsky's *Forrest* directed by Roman Polák. She won the DOSky in 2011 for the character of *Woman in the Farmer's Blood* directed by Juraj Nvota. She is also a multiple laureate of premium awards by the Literary Fond. She received the Igric Award at the Art Film 2004 festival in Trenčianske Teplice for the character of Eva in the televised series *Long Short Night* [Dlhá krátka noc] by Peter Krištúfek. She acts in radio plays, is popular on TV screen and particularly as a singer.



**DÁRIA F. FEHÉROVÁ**  
theatre critic

**Dano Heriban**

# The Joy of Creating Is the Most Important

Daniel, aka Dano, Heriban is known mainly as a musician although for six years he has been a member of the theatre company of the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin, where his musical talent is being increasingly put to use. Despite not pushing forward as an actor, he tries to take advantage of every opportunity. His part of Creon in Sophocles' *Oedipus* made a ripple in the still water of theatrical life in Martin. However, it was his next role as Ján Rozner in the dramatization of *Seven Days to the Funeral* that truly showcased his artistic maturing. The characters that Dano Heriban portrays oscillate between intellectual prudence, melancholy, and childish playfulness. Therefore, he appears both in fairy tales (*Zvedavá rozprávka* [*A Curious Tale*], *Muflón Ancijáš* [*Hellion the Moufflon*]) and dramas on figures of national importance (*Čím tichší tón, tým lepšie* [*The Quieter Tone the Better*]; [www.narodnycintorin.sk](http://www.narodnycintorin.sk) [[www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)]). He also combines music and poetry on stage (*Ginsberg v Bratislave* [*Ginsberg in Bratislava*], *Ľzrafel alebo Cúvanie do pamäti* [*Israphel, or Moving the Clock Back*]).

*Hamlet* (The Slovak Chamber Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný



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1 For the role of Ján  
in *Seven Years to  
the Funeral*, produced  
by the Slovak Chamber  
Theatre in Martin.

**In 2012 you were awarded the Dosky Annual Theatre Award for the best male performance of the season.<sup>1</sup> What does this award mean to you? Some artists do not recognize or value it; others don't hesitate to hang it on the wall.**

The Dosky Award sent my spirits sky high! Definitely at least for a few hours. My heart really jumped with delight, and the award gave me immense satisfaction. Whenever I am on the stage, I try to give the best of my abilities despite various technical shortcomings and, in particular, despite the bizarrely low incomes actors earn. Indeed, there are things to improve, theatre criticism not excluded, but... Yes, the award hangs well on the wall.

**Which theatre has had the greatest moulding effect on you? Where did you find most freedom and in what?**

I'm rather choosy about job offers, but when I make a decision, I don't usually regret it. In this respect, every new experience moulds me. For example, the six years in Martin have been like studying at another university. One learns a lot in the everyday rush and grind. Genrewise and contentwise, I have been offered the most varied work there. Although I have been appearing as a guest actor quite regularly in different places since I was a student at the Academy of Performing Arts, I consider these periods as breaths of health, excursions into known or new territories. As for freedom, it is difficult to find in a brick-and-mortar theatre – that's obvious. Of course, there are also occasional exceptions to the rule, but an actor must sometimes grin and bear it, adapt, and hold on – like other people. Or change the working environment in hope for better things to come.

**Does an actor need freedom?**

For me music is real freedom. Everyone listens to music once in a while. An actor does so in the breaks between living and doing theatre.

**In the breaks between living and doing theatre? Does it mean that music is not life?**

I "compose" it in the breaks – from lived experiences. Music may reflect life, but it is not everything in itself. However, unlike theatre, music is my natural element. It is part of me. Theatre came later and has become part of my life, but music has always been with me.

**In the past you worked in Túlavé divadlo (Wandering Theatre), the GUnaGU Theatre, and the Radošina Naive Theatre. Now you are with the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin. What are the differences in working with an independent and a brick-and-mortar theatre?**

I have explored several working environments in the past few years, but the differences – I have never really thought about them. No matter if you work in a brick-and-mortar or an independent theatre, you work with people who mostly would like to leave some good work behind them. Thick books could be written about differences in working conditions. In an independent theatre you often have to wash and iron your costume and make props yourself. It seems to me that also time is often used more efficiently in such conditions.

**Isn't working in a brick-and-mortar theatre more convenient then? All these things are done for you, and you can focus only on creating.**



I don't perceive it like that. Before the performance they will ask you anyway if you've checked everything. It is as if they asked me whether I'd gone through all texts. But it's not what it's about. The more comfort, the more boredom and laziness. Or, as you say, quite the opposite: more peace and quiet to concentrate on creating, or on your performance. If you want to do alternative theatre, you don't think about the different conditions that you as the artist suddenly have. After all, theatre is about people no matter if they are employed or paid by the hour. I don't work in Martin because it's more convenient.

### **What do you do to fight boredom, not to become lazy?**

My brain does not show any signs of laziness yet. I like getting down to brass tacks while creating. The living organism of theatre often requires one to point out what can be improved, or on the contrary, what can't be done, but without adopting an unnecessarily haughty tone. If some problems come up, it is important for people to become aware of them at their beginning stages and prevent them from being repeated. Quite often people have been employed with one employer all their active life and they are difficult to "re-educate". The strong sense of social solidarity in Slovakia in particular does a disservice here. But we have to at least try. We are part of a bigger whole, we are interconnected, and if one component doesn't work well, it's not very likely to work well as a whole. A good team is very important, because if one part "jams" too often, there may not be any energy left for the joy of creating.

### **Do you prefer a more intimate environment, productions that**

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[www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)  
(The Slovak Chamber Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný





**provide you with some room for improvisation, to bigger stages such as the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin or the City Theatre in Žilina?**

A more intimate environment does not automatically translate to an environment for improvisation. Technically speaking, the smaller the theatre hall, the better or more comfortable I feel on stage. I prefer detailed work, contact with the audience... and the improvisation, which you've brought up, is, of course, possible only exceptionally. I personally need both – or all three of them.

**It cannot be overlooked that you often play the role of a sidekick to the protagonist, his best friend or mentor (*Misanthrope* – Philinte, *Oedipus* – Creon, *Hamlet* – Horatio). Is it not in conflict with your acting ambitions?**

I've never been asked a similar question yet. My ambitions are fulfilled. Moreover, I don't think I'm short of interesting work, and this is what matters to me. The feeling of satisfaction is more important to me than a dull list of roles that would look great on the paper. Another thing that matters is the possibility to make progress and learn new things. Of course, there are great characters that I'd like to play, but who knows what's going to come. I'm not pushing it. That's my motto. I don't want to come across as someone in need of a role, but I'll wait for an opportunity. And when it comes, I'll take full advantage of it, not that I'd let it rob me of my voice or drain me of my energy. I'll take full advantage of it, being aware that this is where I'm supposed to be tonight, that I know what I'm saying, what I'm playing, and I'll be enjoying it. It's not about showing off.

**How do you think you persuaded the theatre that you would be a better Rozner than Marek Geišberg, who plays most of the leading parts in the Slovak Chamber Theatre?**

I don't want to get down to bare facts, which of us plays more parts, or end up enumerating them. Moreover, Marek and I have often been acting partners since school, and not only in Martin. There are no small roles indeed. Viewers still like to remember some of my "mini-roles" that they associate with positive experiences. I let my work speak for myself. Rozner was my destiny – just like everything before and after him.

**How does the musician and singer in you perceive theatre and acting? Do you separate these identities, or do you perceive a dramatic text through music? Can it be somehow voiced, or does each of the identities live an independent life? Perhaps it's more clear-cut in the productions that rely on verse or poetry such as *Oedipus* or *Tsraphel*, or *Moving the Clock Back*.**

Since both of these worlds inhabit me, I don't think about it. Music is in you and cannot be separated from the surrounding world. Since I write both poetry and lyrics, verse drama is perhaps even closer to me. Either you have it or you don't. My greatest delight has always been in composing music for a performance and appearing as an actor on stage. This explains a lot.

**You've been acting in contemporary dramas or in contemporary interpretations of theatre classics. What themes do you think theatre should be addressing today?**



In my opinion, there are themes available. Classic texts still contain a great amount of quality material, and I don't think that contemporary drama suffers from a shortage of it either. It's rather about how and why to deal with a certain theme. People haven't changed in their essence for centuries. The periodization of history is what works no matter if we write text messages or have fingers stained with ink. Theatres struggle with much more prosaic problems on a daily basis: how to attract audience and how to survive while not detracting from quality too much. I warmly congratulate those who are successful in doing so without suffering much damage.

### **Is Martin successful too?**

There have been attempts to "attract" viewers, but fortunately, they have always resulted in quality performances. Also the play *www.nationalcemetery.sk* could have turned into a mundane, average production. This is one of the reasons why I'm in Martin. I feel that despite circumstances and pressures we are doing good theatre there.

### **Even though *www.nationalcemetery.sk* was rehearsed in a few days?**


Yes. It is about the team and their qualities. I think such productions would be difficult to make elsewhere. There are few theatres that keep on trying to provoke.

### **Is there a personality in your professional life who moulds or makes you move forward?**

I like not feeling alone when looking around. This means there are people around me who view life and creative work the way

I do. We can inspire and motivate each other. It's not about one personality I'd look up to or depend on. There are such people, both in theatre and in music. Thank heavens!

### **People say you're not "clearly defined" as a musician. How do you view yourself as an actor?**

This is not how I've described myself. Someone from the outside has referred to me like this. So someone on top of things should be asked this question. I'm not the type who gets used to something, discovers something and calms down, resting on laurels for a few years. I love the colourfulness of life, all the unexpected changes and surprises, and this is also what I like about my work. Insecurity is an exceptionally productive emotion. At least for me. Nobody has ever won an eternal victory. 

#### **Daniel Heriban (1980)**

He studied the accordion at the Conservatoire and acting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He has worked with the GUnaGU Theatre and the Radošina Naive Theatre, and he has appeared as a guest actor in the Aréna Theatre, the Nová Scéna Theatre, the TÍCHO a spol. Theatre, the Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads in Banská Bystrica, the City Theatre in Žilina, and in the Wandering Theatre. He has been involved in many productions not only as an actor, but also as the author and performer of incidental music. As a musician, lyrics writer, composer, and singer, he has released two solo records: *Leporelo* (Board Book, 2007) and *Na jeden dych* (In One Breath, 2012). He has been a member of the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin since 2007.



# Breaking the Rechnitz Wall of Silence in the Slovak National Theatre

The young countess Margit Batthyány threw a party at Rechnitz Castle situated on the Austrian-Hungarian border. The party got out of hand and turned into a boisterous celebration. The invited guests included SS officers and her lover Franz Podezin among others. The party, however, resulted in unrestrained blood orgies, during which approximately 180 Jews lost their lives at the hands of the inebriated guests. It happened in the night from 24 to 25 March 1945, four days before the arrival of the Soviet Red Army. Most graves have not been found until now, the eyewitnesses have been killed, and the culprits have never been brought to justice. There has been silence about this event as if it never happened.

The audience who came to see the production of the play *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy* [Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel] by the Nobel prize-winning Austrian author Elfriede Jelinek in the Studio of the Slovak National Theatre were shown a projection of a similar news-like story about the real event. It was neither a piece of documentary drama nor an artistic reconstruction of the described event as it could seem at first sight. In the spirit of the original (non-) dramatic play, the eponymous staging brought a socially engaged and disquieting stage form marked by both visual tension and tension of ideas, and tension between what we know

happened historically and what the characters voice or remain silent about on the stage.

Jelinek originally wrote the play for Müncher Kammerspiele, and three years ago audiences could see it in a vivid production by Theater Akzent during The Wiener Festwochen. Slovak theatre makers have been staging her texts only sporadically. After the Ján Palárik Theatre (*Service Area* or *They're All Doing It*, directed by Viktor Kollár) and the State Theatre in Košice (*What Happened after Nora Left Her Husband*; or *Pillars of Society*, directed by Ján Šimko), the Slovak prime theatre introduced *Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel* at the end of the theatrical season of 2012–13 within the cycle titled *Endlösung*.

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**Rechnitz – The  
Exterminating Angel**  
(The Slovak National Theatre)  
photo by A. Balco

It is a planned cycle of theatrical productions that aim to commemorate the transports of European Jews to concentration camps in the period of 1942–1944. Hopefully, it will not be the last attempt at such socially engaged dramaturgy made by the Slovak National Theatre, and apart from the Jewish theme, they will be able to identify other important issues which need to be discussed through theatre.

The dramaturge of this production, Martin Kubran, fortunately, did not allow the emotionally laden theme of the Jewish massacre to overshadow other, equally crucial themes of the play. *Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel* is not only about one particular massacre of Jews, about the inability or impossibility of talking about it, coming to terms with it, “assuming

36 personal, civic, or political responsibility for it,” or

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about Austrians and the Nazi era. It is also about the current division of the world into “us” and “them”, about a world that is out to cruelly punish any otherness, about knowing and thinking, which, despite the canons of humanism and religion, founder on the irrationality of decision-making and action bordering on insanity (which often results in brutality), about the relativity of human morality overpowered by circumstances, and especially about the denial of reality, as if justice could be achieved through the period of limitation.

Apart from the richness of ideas, *Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel* possesses an interesting, yet production-wise demanding post-dramatic textual structure similar to a poem created by the method of postmodern collage. Jelinek used a whole range of literary, cinematic, and journalistic sources that she interprets and combines, be they



Apart from the richness of ideas, Rechnitz: The Exterminating Angel possesses an interesting, yet production-wise demanding post-dramatic textual structure similar to a poem created by the method of postmodern collage.”

in the form of citations, paraphrases, “borrowed” elements, or allusions (counting on the audience’s familiarity with their meanings in the original context), with her own text to create a compact, unsegmented inter-textual structure without a cause-and-effect plot. The theatre production crew tried to compensate for the absence of the plot by creating imaginary units, further divided into the characters’ lines that aimed to make the story more comprehensible and give the impression of gradation (for example, recitation, the characters’ address to the audience, stimuli to “narrate” the story, and the brutality of the massacre). The hierarchization of the text at the same time helped the actors portray their characters. All the crew consciously worked with the illogicality of fragmentarization.

Actors’ lines constitute the building and discursive material of the play, in which textual units are put into various mutual relations through the aesthetic construct of utterances of five messengers. It blends several idiolects smoothly, but recognizably; a change of one word often leads to a reversal of the meaning of an original source.

Of course, such an authorial approach places demands on direction, acting, and translation, to whose challenge Peter Lomnický is trying to rise. It is evident that he could not choose the literal translation method. He managed to translate some parts well and proposed good solutions to some tricky language problems; however, some parts of the text are less adequate. For example, “hollow men/hohlen Männer” is translated as “dutí muži” in some places, yet in others as “prázdni”, which seems to be a more accurate translation meaningwise: “prázdni” in the sense of being stultified and emotionally numb, or in the sense of being starved and as if non-existent given the silence surrounding their tragedy. It must be, however, noted that it is not easy to find

equivalents to some puns and onomatopoeic words in Slovak, for example, to hohl – höhl.

The visiting Czech director and stage designer David Jařab changed the messengers to five members of a three-generational family (Grandmother, Mother, Daughter, Grandfather, and Father), who tell, watch, comment on and create the story (of Rechnitz and of themselves) “here and now”, and produce variable tensions between each other and word meanings.

Jařab divided the stage into two equal acting spaces, in which two stories run parallel to each other. One space represents the period interior of a hunting salon reminiscent of an intimate boudoir, in which characters only mime. The figures of the countess, her guests, and servants, dressed in historicist costumes, replay the party at Rechnitz Castle and its tragic ending with a light tinge of perversion. This acting space is separated from the other one, a modern living room of the 1990s, in which characters only speak, by a soundproof transparent wall. This is evocative of an old silent movie or a picture securely placed behind glass, which actually isolates us from it. It could be said that the spaces represent the past and the present (in which the past is retrieved) as a state of relativization of reality and time, as a state of suppression of unpleasant truth or guilt. These spaces are expected to confront and communicate with each other, and supplement or deny the processes going on in the production. The goal might have been achieving the contrast, or an impression of the pathological nature of the rendered events, between the mimed orgies and the verbally described massacre, between the almost emotionless rendering of the entertainment (the past) and the presentation of relativization of atrocities by the broken moral compass of society (the present).



The scenes behind the glass were, however, too aestheticized and insufficiently contrasting with the ideas excellently rendered by the actors in the foreground, which attacked the motionless viewers of this “theatre of banal evil”. The directorial intent might have been obscuring things and leaving up to the audience to picture the atmosphere and the emotionality of the people involved before and after the commission of the crime. Despite that, the rendering was insufficiently provocative in terms of visual aspects and acting to cooperate with the exceptionally strong potential of the front stage. The actors in the role of the family members are subject to self-control and keep distance from motivated and displayed emotions, which evokes all the more of them in the audience. The director did exemplary work with individual textual layers and the multi-level metaphor (Father’s padded belly, a frightening severed arm, gorging on cakes, a quartet of musicians also playing the Jewish victims, moving in time from one acting space to the other, a reproduced human voice, and music which occasionally goes awry), and updating (radio news about floods, ba-na-na-na-hey! graves, the crooning of the Slovak anthem, which suggests that the division into “us” and “them” is a deception).

The actors playing the family members rely on an understated acting style, sensibly working with moods while saying the lines, and verbally and non-verbally entering into mutual dialogues (or perhaps metadialogues), as if putting together the puzzle of social and individual attitudes, which have affected the interpretation of the events and the theme of Reznitz in the course of time. They change the tone from neutrality and seriousness through irony and grotesqueness to a chilling shout to verify the functioning

38 of tragic registers in the wording of news stories,

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while keeping distance. However, there is no sympathy; only fear seems to be abundant.

Grandfather, performed by František Kovár, is ironical about everything and is able to lighten and give a humorous tone to the most awful information; on the other hand, he does not hesitate to rape his own granddaughter. Father, played by Richard Stanke, is strictly matter-of-fact and rational, as if he possessed no emotions. No wonder, he carries around a huge padded belly – he is empty and overstuffed at the same time; any emotions are absorbed in the digestive tract. Emília Vášáryová’s character of Grandmother brilliantly disguises her true face as well as the face of the truth. She makes ironic comments and oscillates between nervousness and aggression, convinced that the cause must be outside herself. Holding a lit candlestick, she searches among the audience for the person who painted all windows and doors with blood. Mother, performed by Szidi Tobias, gradually abandons sympathy and compassion and desires a sufficiently thick shell to be protected from pricks of conscience: they were only Jews, and it happened in the long-gone past. Zuzana Porubjaková’s character of Daughter is curious, and she is the only poetic voice of conscience, or an awakening consciousness, in the play. However, she is still too young, and as a result, her effort to have her own opinion is complicated by her need to confront and verify it with the others or literature. It is therefore symptomatic that it is her who recites T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men” in English in the introductory part of the performance. It is its point of departure. Although also Jelinek often leaves Eliot’s verse untranslated, using the same approach in a theatre production requires meeting a few criteria: the knowledge of the English language, or the content meanings and the contexts of the poem on the part

” The actors playing the family members rely on an understated acting style, sensibly working with moods while saying the lines, and verbally and non-verbally entering into mutual dialogues... “



**Rechnitz – The  
Exterminating Angel**  
(The Slovak National Theatre)  
photo by A. Balco



of the audience, and a perfect stage presentation in the foreign language on the part of the actor. Although the production by the Slovak National Theatre meets the first requirement, the second one remains unfulfilled. The question must therefore be raised as to why the director chose this approach if he could use an older translation by Ján Buzássy or, as we learn from the brochure for the performance, also a more recent translation by Peter Lomnický. He would have avoided the slightly embarrassing beginning.

A bad beginning, a good end, they say. In this case this saying rings true. The dynamic end of the performance brought an everyday broadcast about the banality of evil, about what is typically German and Austrian, but also one eyewitness, a “living dead” (one of the musicians, a Jew, survives until the end) as a metaphor

of the fact that getting rid of something for good is only an illusion and self-deceit. A part always remains present in us in a latent form, as a stigma lurking deep below the surface. ☿

*Elfriede Jelinek: Rechnitz – Anjel skazy*  
**(Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel)**

translation **P. Lomnický** dramaturgy **M. Kubran**  
direction and stage design **D. Jařab** costume  
design **S. Zimula Hanáková** music **P. Haas** music  
performance **V. řariřský** cast **E. Vášaryová,**  
**S. Tobias, Z. Porubjaková, R. Stanke, G. Tóth,**  
**P. Brajerčík, I. Kuxová, F. Kovár, A. Palatínusová,**  
**D. Herich, J. Vajčovec, M. Vilhan, P. Žařkovský**  
premiere **8 and 9 June 2013, The Studio**  
**of the Slovak National Theatre**

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MARTINA MAŠLÁROVÁ

student at the Theatre Faculty, Academy of Performing Arts

Róbert Mankovecký, Dodo Gombár

[www.narodnycintorin.sk](http://www.narodnycintorin.sk)

# A National Sitcom or Theatre Textbook of History

Thinking about *The Cosby Show* through *The Big Bang Theory*, and dozens if not hundreds of others, it is safe to say that TV situational comedies, or so-called sitcoms, are certainly the most rewarding and popular television formats. Recently, our television stations witnessed a true boom of original Slovak sitcoms (though in comparison with the international shows these were rather rookie projects and were only rarely well produced). However, the devised theatre sitcom project [www.narodnycintorin.sk](http://www.narodnycintorin.sk) ([www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)), whose first two episodes were “broadcast” by the Martin Theatre in the 2012–2013 season, is – by our standards – a unique undertaking. The show can be perceived as a loose sequel to the production *The Štúrs – Concert Cancelled* in which director Dodo Gombár and dramaturge Róbert Mankovecký once again sought to find inspiration in our national history.

It would be too bold to assert that the effort to use the power of the sitcom is what makes *The Cemetery* a unique or ground-breaking event in our theatre history. As opposed to the first attempt at a series, titled *Fun(e)brak*, written by Peter Pavlac and performed only in one episode at the Bratislava City Theatre in 2003, this time the idea became reality and turned out to be very successful. Especially the first episode evoked critical curiosity among the audience that was devoid of irony and expressed a desire to experience the promised novel performance.

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Surprisingly enough, sitcom and theatre are very close. The production bulletin mentions that *Friends*, one of the best known sitcoms all over the world, found its way to television from the theatre stage (a little factual note here: producer Kaufmann mentioned in the bulletin is in fact a woman, Marta Kaufmann). There are several intersections between sitcoms and theatre. For example, sitcoms almost never use detailed shots, or, conversely, wide shots. Formally typical sitcom features include shots in which the characters and their environment are

”Gombár and his Martin theatre ensemble break the traditional understanding of personalities we learned in school.”





[www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)  
**Episode 2** (The Slovak  
 Chamber Theatre)  
 photo by B. Konečný

1 <http://truestory.sk/post/11135907990/trapnost-je-fajn-da-sa-nou-nahradiť-nahraty-smiech>

completely visible – a similar sector of the wider picture is seen in theatre. The inseparable laughter (or applause), sometimes live, but most frequently canned (the dictate of the sitcom laughter is an unusual phenomenon – filmmaker Miro Šifra wrote an interesting blog<sup>1</sup> about it), makes the impression that there is an audience, somewhere outside of the picture, and that we are part of it. In the past, recording sitcoms with live audiences was very common.

Sitcom plots usually take place in the everyday environment of people who know each other (family, friends, colleagues). Gombár's and Mankovecký's sitcom features a group of people who – in accordance with the title of the play – are “the dead inhabitants” of the National Cemetery in Martin. The “gang” we meet in the first two episodes are exclusively personalities who took part in the national liberation and revival movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though the cast of characters includes also the passionate firefighter, journalist and publisher Miloslav Schmidt, even a dog called Bača

(Shepherd). The characters include important personalities as well as people whose tracks in our history have been nearly obliterated by time and only very few teachers mention them even marginally. The list is completed with people who have been fully forgotten and are completely insignificant. Because they are sitcom characters, they undergo almost no development and are only a familiar element and the link between individual episodes. The freak show includes prissy Elena Maróthy-Šoltésová with rigidly thin eyebrows and harmonious consonants (Zuzana Rohoňová, guest appearance); similarly starchy, ever elegant and taciturn Karol Kuzmány (Karol Čičmanec); ardent but slightly verbose and crude Milko Schmidt (Marek Geišberg); libertine and unpretentious Anička Jurkovičová, the first Slovak actress (Lucia Jašková in the first episode/Henrieta Jančíšinová-Kolláriková in the second episode); Janko Kráľ, both sarcastic and sensitive, always inebriated (Dano Heriban); simple but common-sense Bača, a dog from a farm (Dominik Zaprihač). All of the characters confirm that the world is not made up of personalities only and that even after death we are all equal, even the greatest poet of the Štúr generation and a shepherd's dog.

Gombár and his Martin theatre ensemble break the traditional understanding of personalities we learned in school. The historical personalities are toppled from the thrones of their textbook glorification. And yet they are not ridiculed – only instead of busts and statues, people made of flesh and blood are shown. Though the creators draw on more or less known facts, the chosen genre allows to stage situations that are very unlikely and absurd. Once we admit that there is a world beyond the grave, a world in which historically impossible meetings can take place and the events can oscillate between several



time layers, we also have to admit that the laws of physics and logic can also be transcended. Particularly the second episode features several such transgressions – the flirt between the speaking Dog and the Mayoress who fall into the afterlife from the real world, the posthumous pregnancy of Anička Jurkovičová, or the arrival of the Janko Francisci whom everybody expects to be exceptionally handsome, but whose spirit is, in spite of all the others (and in spite of people's expectations), at retirement age.

The focal point of the first episode is the current phenomenon of a devaluation of historical values and national memory. The Developer (František Výrostko) tries to convince the Mayoress of Martin (Nadežda Vladařová) to approve a project of the construction of a motorway that is supposed to go through the National Cemetery. The plot can be understood in two ways – literally, as a method to point out a very real problem of highway construction (where history is only a business component and an obstruction to “perfect” business plans, such as those resulting in the demolishing of the Cvernovka building in Bratislava – the yarn factory), and metaphorically, as a rendering of our attitude towards our history. “If you asked a group of high-school students who Elena Maróthy-Šoltéssová was, there would be maybe two or three who'd know the answer,” says the “host” of the first episode Róbert Mankovecký. Although we are reluctant to believe this generalization, a web survey (commemorating the anniversary of St. Cyril and Methodius) in which Slovak politicians were asked about the circumstances in which the Greek brothers came to our territory, sadly proves the opposite. Two large doves suspended above the stage allude to the often used metaphor

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[www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)  
**Episode 2** (The Slovak  
 Chamber Theatre)  
 photo by B. Konečný

about the holidays of other nations than their own and who bow to foreign authority while ignoring authorities at home. Looking from above and commenting with a hint of irony, the doves observe everything that takes place in the cemetery.

While the issue of highway construction (which the spirits from Martin wanted to prevent in the first episode) is hardly present in the second episode, the need to remind people of the important moments in national history (as well as rustic habits and customs – the second episode premiered just before Easter which is also when the events in the second episode take place) has become the primary focus. This is done partly through the character of the Mayoress who suddenly finds herself in the hereafter and gets to know the locals there, but particularly through the character of Francisci who wakes up after a hundred year's sleep and has to take a crash course in the most important events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I would like to disagree with the opinion of some of my colleagues who assert that the second episode is, when compared with the first one, only a collection of jokes and



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“

has no unifying theme. Granted, several motifs that appear in the plot end up breaking it down, however, the bearing beam is solid – it is just not the one we thought to be the bearing one in the beginning. Again, this draws on sitcom principles – one episode does not have to continue where the previous one left off (this, however, does not mean that the following one will not draw on it) and all episodes need not be of the same quality. Even if the second episode of *The Cemetery* is weaker (watching the premiere I also thought that it was clapped up – though the feeling partly faded away later), it seems the creators still have a lot to say as the original plan to produce three episodes has now been extended to ten.

Despite my slight defence of the production it needs to be said that the mosaic of ideas presented on stage still has a few blind spots. The opening speech of the “cabaret entertainer”

and musician Mankovecký, presented as a sort of sound bulletin, introduces the creators’ intentions. In an overly simplified and pathos-filled exposé, the introduction imposes a series of instructions about how the audience should perceive the show. The audience does not really need such instructions. It might be useful as a didactic section for performances organized for schools. Otherwise it is superfluous because it only verbalizes what the audience can gather from the production. The other pitfall in both episodes is humour – besides great jokes, exceptionally funny moments resulting from slightly hyperbolical performative stylization (enhanced by conspicuous masks), and sarcastic, but spot-on topical allusions, there are many cheap laughs, particularly in the exchanges between the Developer and the Mayoress. In another example, the zoophilic love affair



[www.nationalcemetery.sk](http://www.nationalcemetery.sk)  
**Episode 2** (The Slovak  
Chamber Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný

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between the Mayoress and Bača the Dog is beyond the limits of good taste. Besides, Vladařová's affected way of portraying the character of the Mayoress – though a consciously chosen means to depict a bird-brained politician – is not always under control and often goes over the top. The same applies to Výrostko in the role of the servile entrepreneur. Dano Heriban, on the other hand, proved his acting abilities when he convincingly oscillated between the carefree and rebellious register and the serious tones used to reveal Janko Král's traumas. But also Marek Geišberg whose Schmidt alternated between the a proud and strict man in a uniform and a likeable twerp. Rohoňová's focused performance is also a surprise – although a rookie in a well-coordinated ensemble, she played the role of Šoltéssová as meticulously as her colleagues. It seems that Zaprihač's role was the one that fitted best (no mocking or insult intended) – Bača the dog is definitely one of his most interesting performances. It is commendable that despite the fact that the genre may tempt the performers to go over the top in some of the grotesque scenes, most actors (with the exception of Výrostko and Vladařová) managed to avoid crossing the subtle line between what is comic and what is exaggerated.

Even though in this case good acting is the most important criterion for the fulfillment of the dramaturge's and director's ideas, the good impression the production makes also owes a great deal to the hilarious set design. Hana Knotková's metaphorical depiction of a cemetery was made using several "tomb-like" cupboards and matching chairs. At the beginning of every episode, the chairs are covered by the Slovak national flag which is used as the backdrop for a brief introductory sketch featuring a little figure and a sitcom jingle, and simultaneously indicating

a time shift (winter vs. spring). A distinguishing feature, as well as the agent that binds the elements into a whole, is the original music by Robert Mankovecký, Dano Heriban and Marek Geišberg. When the characters start to sing on stage, one cannot stop thinking about the Radošina Naïve Theatre – however, in this case all the variety show passages become a turning point in which the sitcom becomes almost like a political cabaret. The song lyrics also interconnect supra-personal, national themes with intimate ones – these are carried by the individual characters and their history. It is specifically the music that makes [www.narodnycintorin.sk](http://www.narodnycintorin.sk) more than just very interesting theatre – at the same time, it is a history textbook that is not dull and annoying, but a source of pleasure and entertainment. As opposed to the less successful adaptation of *Hamlet* (prepared by the dramaturge and director simultaneously with the first episode of *The Cemetery*) this is a production offering the audience theatre that is not only alive and meaningful, but also educational in many respects. The producers have also succeeded in creating something all sitcoms aspire to – make the viewers want to see more. It is only a shame that in theatre the time between two episodes is longer than just a week. ☘

„The song lyrics also interconnect suprapersonal, national themes with intimate ones – these are carried by the individual characters and their history.“

*Róbert Mankovecký, Dodo Gombár:*  
[www.narodnycintorin.sk](http://www.narodnycintorin.sk) (1st and 2nd episode)

dramaturgy **R. Mankovecký** set and costume design

**H. Knotková** music **R. Mankovecký** directed by

**D. Gombár** performers **L. Jašková (1st episode),**

**H. Jančíšínová-Kolláriková (2nd episode), Z. Rohoňová,**

**N. Vladařová, M. Geišberg, D. Heriban, K. Čičmanec,**

**D. Zaprihač, R. Mankovecký, F. Výrostko, J. Barto**

premiere of 1st episode: **15 December 2012**, premiere of 2nd

episode **28 March 2013, Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin**



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Team of authors  
**The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial**  
(You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!)

# Judiciary Scum at the Pinnacle of a Moral Crisis

The ensemble of the SkRAT Theatre has been through an uneasy period. It spent a long time fighting for its home in the former V-Club, then intensely looking for a new space, followed by a reconstruction and settling in, in the underground floor of the YMCA building. After all these escapades, the group finally premiered its new production. It became an indirect theatrical response to the ensemble's bitter experience with an infamous public tender. In *The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial (You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!)* SkRAT is calling for justice. Their new production might present itself as a loose adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, however, it digs deep into the dirt of Slovakia's current judiciary system which is unashamedly perched on the very throne of the society's moral crisis. Just like the biblical Abraham, director Dušan Vicen's production team is vainly seeking for at least ten righteous people and is rightly asking how God will punish the Slovak Sodom.

And yet the play does not seek to criticize current court cases. The individual clip-like scenes of *The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial* feature various archetypal creatures that unscrupulously feather their tiny Slovak nest – the arrogant and smug judiciary oligarchs, spineless lawyers, or “simpletons” who never saw nor heard anything. In short, everyone just needs to “eat, drink and fart” – or else some heads will roll. Rumour has it that the mafia-like practices in this so-called

democratic country are the work of the Man With a Moustache. The even more powerful people, however, find him funny and ludicrous. SkRAT uses such hidden allusions to make a statement about the present decline of our country, thus participating in the creation of a sad parallel with the former censorship-stained regime.

*The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial* is a continuation of SkRAT's long-term dramaturgical effort to reflect on the spiritual emptiness

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of society in the third millennium. Similarly to *Mrtvé duše* [Dead Souls] or *Ňapichovači a lízači* [Stabbers and Lickers], director Vicen uses an atmosphere of hopelessness to prophesize people a black and bleak future. His gloomy labyrinth of crooked mirrors, where water keeps dripping onto our foreheads (music by Rado Chrzan and Dušan Vicen), is strikingly reminiscent of the world of Franz Kafka. There are several characters like Josef K who set out on their Way of the Cross, which leads to resignation, adaptation and – in the worst scenario – even to death. The play makes a strong statement about an alarming oddity – the only righteous ones today are only individuals like an investigative journalist or a just judge. And gentlemen, the gender incorrectness against the “weaker sex” is no coincidence in this case!

The mistrusting characters cannot enter into any other than very formal relationships. The director interestingly likens this current tendency to interpersonal isolation to a voluntary

inner prison. To do this, monologue phone calls behind claustrophobic Plexiglas are used. In terms of stage design, however, the production makes use of the traditional SkRAT-esque principle of dividing the stage into several sections – in this case, the stage is split by projections, lit platforms and revolving mirrors used by the minions of the judiciary apparatus to set off tried-and-true office chaos. Dubious judiciary mechanisms are played out *ad absurdum* not only by grotesque conversational scenes, but also by making the present overlap with an apocalyptic vision of a dehumanized future in which one of the punishments is “eviction from your own body”. But there are only few such moments in the play and so the production creates an awkward “no time” zone. The classic skyscraper projection by Boris Vitázek is not helpful either because it stands and falls on the slightly silly idea to use language variations of Josef K’s name. Overall, *The Trial* uses stage design ornaments (lit-up tables, matrix shadows)

”Dubious judiciary mechanisms are played out *ad absurdum* not only by grotesque conversational scenes, but also by making the present overlap with an apocalyptic vision of a dehumanized future in which one of the punishments is “eviction from your own body”.



**The Trial, of the Trial,  
by the Trial**  
(SkRAT Theatre)  
photo by G. Zigová



**The Trial, of the Trial,  
by the Trial**  
(SkRAT Theatre)  
photo by G. Zígová



which fall short of the much richer and more dynamic design of *Stabbers and Lickers*.

But the topicality and urgency of its statement, the originality as well as social and critical significance make *The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial* an unrivalled production in Slovakia. Still, as mentioned above, the production does not criticize the omniscient rule of heartlessness, self-interest and aggressive primitivism using the most elegant theatrical means. The show seems to suffer most from a tendency to get tangled in endless dialogue – the majority of which does not propel the plot forward. I understand the effort to point out the current phenomenon of language deformation; however, such stage loops are created using a single idea and end up drowning other, very pertinent situations (vox populi with a microphone, or the Roman sauna). At the end of these scenes, both the characters and myself had to ask: What was the initial question? Besides the mentioned chattiness, the other scenes lose their sting also owing to shaky punchlines

(e.g. throwing up into the face), half-hearted humour, clichés (mirrors, shooting into the air), or moments when the boundary of moralizing is lightly transgressed (the unfortunate fate of an innocent abused woman a.k.a. the abuse of personified justice, or the raised finger pointing at the possibility of judgment day). The tiny skeleton that suddenly replaces the convicted Josef K. in an electric chair is also a source of embarrassment. As an obscure *memento mori*, as if borrowed from a B horror movie, the skeleton was unnecessary and did disservice to the ending. The production photographs make it clear that many scenes did not even make it into the final version and that a dramaturgical condensation might be worth a thought even now.

Some excellent moments ought to be praised though. In the Roman sauna mentioned above, half-naked potbellied judges (Vít Bednárik, Ľubo Burgr, Milan Chalmovský and Vlado Zboroň) do not fan their faces with laurel leaves, but with simple fir tree branches. They wear their ever-present starch-stiffened white collars that

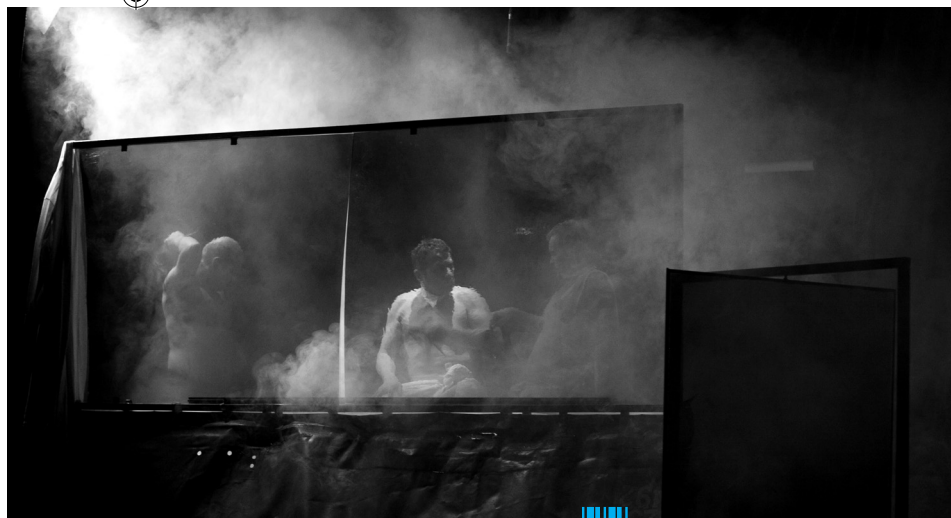


shine like haloes around their necks. The legs of a hanging man are a warning and memento as they dangle above the head of a committed journalist (Jana Ol'hová) who is planning to publish a critical article. And, of course, the brilliant and meaningful joke with the sunglasses that I will likely remember until the day I die. But I don't want to spoil the show for future spectators in the A4 club in Bratislava with further details.

In this project, SkRAT's traditionally civil performers confirmed their reputation of excellent observers. Their slimy big-shot judges or professionally twisted lawyers give a true picture of the primitive mud of a society pretending to be sophisticated but in reality feeding the conformity of the common people. The mentioned party of judges is particularly entertaining and chillingly threatening at the same time – most of all the brilliant creation of the smiling aggressor played by Ľubo Burgr. The core of SkRAT's actresses (Inge Hrubaničová's performance was, as usual, of standard quality, and Daniela Gudabová again typecast as a conformist matron) was extended in *The Trial* and the cast was joined by Jana Ol'hová, a fresh new member of the Drama Department of the Slovak National Theatre. After she left the Martin theatre we can hope to see her more in other Bratislava-based independent projects. In terms of acting ethics, Ol'hová is still untouched and so she can freely mock her fellow actresses in Ballek's *Rukura*. In *The Trial*, her character of a justice-seeking journalist has convincing moral authority. Even though Ol'hová usually dominates the stage, and not just in comic performances, in this production she keeps a low profile – perhaps even too tactfully. Owing to a more sensitive work on the part of the actors who timed the individual situations better during the production's premiere than during the preview performance, there was

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**The Trial, of the Trial,  
by the Trial**  
(SkRAT Theatre)  
photo by G. Zigová

much less awkward tempo and rhythm. This made the continuity of the individual episodes much more transparent and the statement much more powerful. This improvement in quality proves that the producers are still capable of developing the show – because they can work on the text and because the play's composition is not chronological. The chilling and apprehensive mood, now still missing, might therefore only be a matter of time. An appropriately cheeky production of *The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial* (*You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!*) thus offers, despite a tongue-twisting title, appealing and highly meaningful theatre that might make a few dubious officers fly into a rage. **o**

**Team of authors: The Trial, of the Trial, by  
the Trial (You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!)**

script, direction, set design **D. Vicen** visual

cooperation **B. Vitázek** music **R. Chrzan, Ľ. Burgr**

text and performance **V. Bednárik, Ľ. Burgr,**

**D. Gudabová, I. Hrubaničová, M. Chalmovský,**

**D. Matušovová, J. Ol'hová, V. Zboroň**

premiere **25 February in A4 – Space for**

**Contemporary Culture, Bratislava**



DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ  
theatre critic

Jana Bodnárová  
**Cradles**  
**Epic**

# BB – two stories with two endings

**The physical theatre group Debris Company is a dance-theatre ensemble with a unique position on the Slovak theatre scene. This is the result of the company's long-standing and intensive work as well as the ability of its members to avoid stagnation and keep transcending the boundaries of their creativity, poetics and style. The artwork of the Debris Company relies on a combination of music, dance, lighting, set design and a strong message, as well as – perhaps even more importantly – on a harmonious coordination thereof.**

## Wobbly Lives

In the ensemble's two latest premieres – *Kolísky* [Cradles] and *Epic*, the Debris Company opted for the narrative form which consequently led to a change in the artistic team. Dancers were supplemented by dramatic actors – in *Cradles* there are even more actors than dancers.

Jana Bodnárová's original play *Cradles* is subtitled "battlezone" and presents, as mentioned by the author in the programme bulletin, a "metaphor of polarities". Four characters – Young Woman, Old Woman, Man and Mad Soldier find themselves enslaved by

the contradictions of life. They live in the present (but cannot get rid of the past), in their birth, but also in the experience of death, youth and old age, as well as of hope and disappointment. Their basic characters are determined by their belonging to the male or female worlds, by their inclination to love and hate. The Debris Company kept only these two fundamental content lines from Jana Bodnárová's extensive text. The play was considerably shortened and adapted for the required stage form. Some time ago, the same approach was taken by dancer and choreographer Peta Fornayová who was the first to produce a text of Jana Bodnárová's play. In the adapted play *Dievča z morského dna* [A Girl from the Sea Bottom] (Studio 12, Bratislava, 2010), Fornayová succeeded in transforming the symbolism and metaphorical nature of Bodnárová's text into a dance-theatrical form. At first sight, it may seem that this type of text is too complicated for dance productions. And yet, it is the very imagery and the broad extent of what remains unsaid and is only indicated that creates a challenge for the dancers. In both cases the original dramatic text was considerably adjusted and adapted for an almost non-verbal dance performance.

In *Cradles*, director Jozef Vlček and choreographer Stanislava Vlčeková set in motion the essential situations in the play. Their intention determined also the set design by

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Tom Ciller, and the projection by Alex Zelina and Matej Černušák, both of which helped fill the empty stage. Projection in *Cradles* does not work as a formal, colourful element. It is certainly spectacular and visually impressive and, as opposed to the empty stage, it exactly mirrors the characters' action. Light installations indicate the positioning of the characters and imply changes in relationships. The first part of the performance takes place in semi-darkness – precise points are lit up on stage one by one, allowing the audience to meet the characters. The light points are the only reference points providing certainty in the very uncertain lives of the characters of *Cradles*. In the second part, the stage is lit alternately with a clear and green grid projection – a net that underscores the confined and restricted atmosphere. But in certain situations, nets can bulge out and fall apart. The light points on the stage indicate spots where the man and the woman meet, as well as places where they are alone.

Stanislava Vlčeková managed to take advantage of the physical talent of the actors

and dancers. Marta Maťová seems to be the most flexible one from the entire cast. Mária Breinerová was the most confident one in scenes that were based on expressions and words.

Despite the fact that the first half of the production went off to a rather slow start and seemed to be losing on tempo and rhythm, the second part is more balanced and dynamic. *Cradles* offer a pleasant aesthetic and inventive musical experience (Jozef Vlk and David Koller). The performance of the Debris Company makes the production a soft and sensitive probe into the life of a woman and a man, even though there is no happy ending.

### That what is not, is possible

The work of Bertolt Brecht is something theatremakers like to go back to – *The Threepenny Opera*; *Mother Courage and Her Children*; *Baal*; *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *Life of Galileo*, among others. Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, however, is very little known (in Slovakia the work has not been translated yet). *Lehrstücke* became the inspiration for

**Cradles**  
(Debris Company)  
photo by K. Križanovičová





”  
The language of  
communication  
in *Ἐpic* includes  
stylized and  
expressive  
movements,  
gestures and facial  
expressions – not  
only between the  
characters, but  
also between the  
performers and  
the audience.  
“

the new production of the Debris Company titled *Ἐpic*. The ensemble did not work exclusively with Brecht's *Lehrstücke* – *Ἐpic* is an homage to Bertolt Brecht's and Kurt Weill's work, and a polemic about the function and meaning of theatre today. The Debris Company thus returns to the essential question, originally posed by Brecht: "What is today's theatre like and what is its social significance? Can it still convey social criticism? Could it be a voice of the 'oppressed' majority against an elite minority?" (quoted from the programme bulletin). Brecht sought to answer these questions with his theatre and work – but how did the creative team of the Debris Company face the challenge?

In order to be able to lead a relevant discussion with theatremakers or the audience, the artists had to go back to fundamental basics. These were found in Bertolt Brecht and his *Epic* theatre, in the principles of film montage used in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in theatre and film, and in the laws of Meyerhold's biomechanics.

The four characters, wearing pale, expressionist make-up, introduce a story about wealth and poverty, the examined life and superficial life, as well as about classical values and a shift in values in general. The two couples represent two worlds – the world of ordinariness and poverty, opposed to the world of wealth, manipulation and emptiness. Jack and Eva (Daniel Raček and Nikoleta Rafaelisová) have love, but no money. Jack is forced to go over to the other side of the river, to work in a factory. The genuine love between Jack and Eva is expressed through movement and suggestive choreography. Every morning, when they part, Eva starts to fall forward and backward, and always ends up on the floor. Jack tries to hold her up, pick her up, carry her, cuddle up to her. In the end, they say goodbye and he leaves.

On the other, opposite side, a totally contrasting situation takes place. Two absurdly acting characters, as if taken from a circus or cabaret, or even David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* act humorously and crazily, fuelling uncertainty and communicating terror. The limping, fatalistic Cat smokes a long cigarette and wears a tight dress. She is a typical femme fatale – mysterious, irresistible and demonic. She throws newspapers and tiny balls to factory owner Bar, mounts him and fastens a dog-collar to his neck – she treats him like a dog. To regain his position and importance, Bar controls his employees.

On the sides of the stage, there are two tents – a small and a large one. The tents are the homes of Jack and Eva, and of Bar and Cat. Throughout the performance, exterior and interior details of a simple rural house and of a factory are projected onto the surface of both tents. The film montage emphasizes the characterization as well as the environment in which the characters are located and in which they act. It allows us to simultaneously follow two people, two worlds and two realities. We see Jack who is working hard and, at the same time, we can follow Eva who is at home trying to put her baby to sleep.

This bipolarity and contradiction is also expressed in the visuals and choreography. The river in the middle creates a divisive line – it is represented by a white stripe running across the centre of the stage. It divides one group of people from another, only to be able to reconnect. The river becomes a mediator, a *pars pro toto* in a world where "you are not better than me / we are the same".

The story takes place over a period of into seven days. The days are distinguished by interludes with Bar playing the main role, but ceasing to be a factory owner. He now becomes a master of conferences with a megaphone



in his hand. He comments on the performed situations, decides about when the day is going to change, sings songs related to the plot, and entertains the audience. Juraj Hrčka's dramatic mien is as expressive as his voice.

The stereotype of the first half of the week is suddenly disturbed on the third day. Jack meets Cat and cannot resist her charm. They lean towards each other – she is bold, he is timid. They keep enough mysterious distance to let the energy of attraction flow between them. Cat plays a game with Jack – she passes him a cigarette from one side, then from the other. Jack plays along. They move from left to right, he jumps around her, trying to accommodate her demands. At that moment, Eva starts moving on the other side of the river. She is alarmed. Her movements are uncertain, restless. Sadness appears in her face. Jack decides to leave for the other side of the river in the hope of a better life. Eva tries to hold him back, but cannot. In the morning, she finds a suitcase in front of the door. A few days later, however, Jack returns. His return is accompanied by Bar's song about the need for a change, about the futile suffering of people, about how we waste our time in life looking for happiness where we cannot find it.

The language of communication in *Épic* includes stylized and expressive movements, gestures and facial expressions – not only between the characters, but also between the performers and the audience. The movement and gestures are in perfect accord with the visual, dramatic and film techniques that influenced Bertolt Brecht in the 1920s and 1930s. The atmosphere of the production is strongly reminiscent of expressionist movies. This is underscored by the actors' performances and the stylized movements. Stanislava Vlčeková's choreography

52 draws on principles similar to the fundamental

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rules of biomechanics (and simultaneously shifts them to an original, contemporary dance form). She works with stiffness, bipolarity, decomposition and composition of movement. In *Épic*, the characters receive stimuli to move, but they get stuck unexpectedly, they stop in order to rebound and continue in their fluent movements. This gesture and choppy stylized movement is both tragic and humorous, even grotesque, endowing the production with a tragicomical dimension. Dano Raček, for example, as the hard-working and exhausted Jack, hunched and with knees bent, walks by means of funnily extending his legs while remaining diminished.

All male actors transcend their creative limits. Words are the greatest challenge for Dano Raček, while dancing and singing scenes confront Juraj Hrčka. Stanka Vlčeková and Nikoleta Rafaelisová only confirm their universality and versatility. Both are precise in their movements and – despite the choppy choreography – they move on the stage with grace and smoothly transit from one dance position into another.

The production makes use of exact rhythm, defined by the stylized, arresting and thoroughly selected music. During several of Bar's scenes and commentaries, Kurt Weill's songs are heard – in cover versions by various current musicians. *Tony Solomon Song* by Young Gods, *Alabama Song* by The Doors, or some of the musical gems by Tom Waits. The banging of the machines, wailing sirens and the crowing of the rooster



**Épic**  
(Debris Company)  
photo by K. Křižanovičová



”  
With this  
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Debris Company  
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Slovak theatre.  
“

**Epic**  
(Debris Company)  
photo by K. Križanovičová



supplement the music and perfectly harmonize with the songs. The theatricality and the cabaret style of the selected songs corresponds with the overall directorial concept of the production.

With this production, the Debris Company succeeded in shifting the boundaries of contemporary Slovak theatre. **Epic** comprises everything that makes theatre what it is – there is so much to “see”.

Form and content are well balanced, music, visuals and performance (both dance and acting) correspond to the created style which, when the authors know how to use it, becomes exceptionally playful and statement-relevant. Bertolt Brecht’s questions about theatre are thus answered with an extraordinary piece of theatre that authenticates the theatricality of the medium.

Finally, a little and subjective remark – for me personally, not counting a couple of exceptions, this is theatre that is fun to watch and allows you to discover new contexts. **♣**

### Jana Bodnárová: **Cradles**

translation **P. Lomnický** dramaturgy **M. Vannayová**  
directed by **J. Vlk** choreography **S. Vlčeková** set design  
& props **T. Ciller** projection **A. Zelina, M. Černušák**  
costume design & masks **K. Holková** music **D. Kollar,**  
**J. Vlk** lighting **J. Vlk** performed by **M. Breinerová,**  
**J. Jurčíšin - Kukl'a, Š. Martinovič, M. Maťová**  
premiere **20 October 2012, elledanse – T&D House,**  
**Bratislava**

### Jana Bodnárová: **Epic**

script **T. Ciller, P. Lomnický, J. Vlk** directed by  
**J. Vlk** dramaturgy **M. Vannayová** choreography  
**S. Vlčeková** costume design **K. Holková** music  
**J. Vlk** set **T. Ciller** animation **M. Piterka,**  
**A. Zelina** lighting **M. Piterka, J. Vlk** performed by  
**J. Hřčka, D. Raček, N. Rafaelisová, S. Vlčeková**  
premiere **18 December 2012, elledanse**  
– **T&D House, Bratislava**

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SOŇA ŠIMKOVÁ

theatrologist and theatre historian

# The original route of Sláva Daubnerová or the magic of theatre Ingenious way

**"The realists do not take the photograph for a "copy" of reality, but for an emanation of past reality, a magic, not an art". Roland Barthes', *Camera Lucida*.**

Rather than moaning that with regard to contemporary art production, we can still be considered as slightly lagging behind the western world as a consequence of the slow cultural development since the communist years, we shall celebrate the positive examples that defy this reading. Among them is Sláva Daubnerová, the founder of the PAT collective (Platform for Contemporary Theatre). Typically, her productions take the form of autonomous solo performances, but she also works collaboratively, most recently in *Polylogue*, *Some disorder interior geometries* or *Illuminations*.

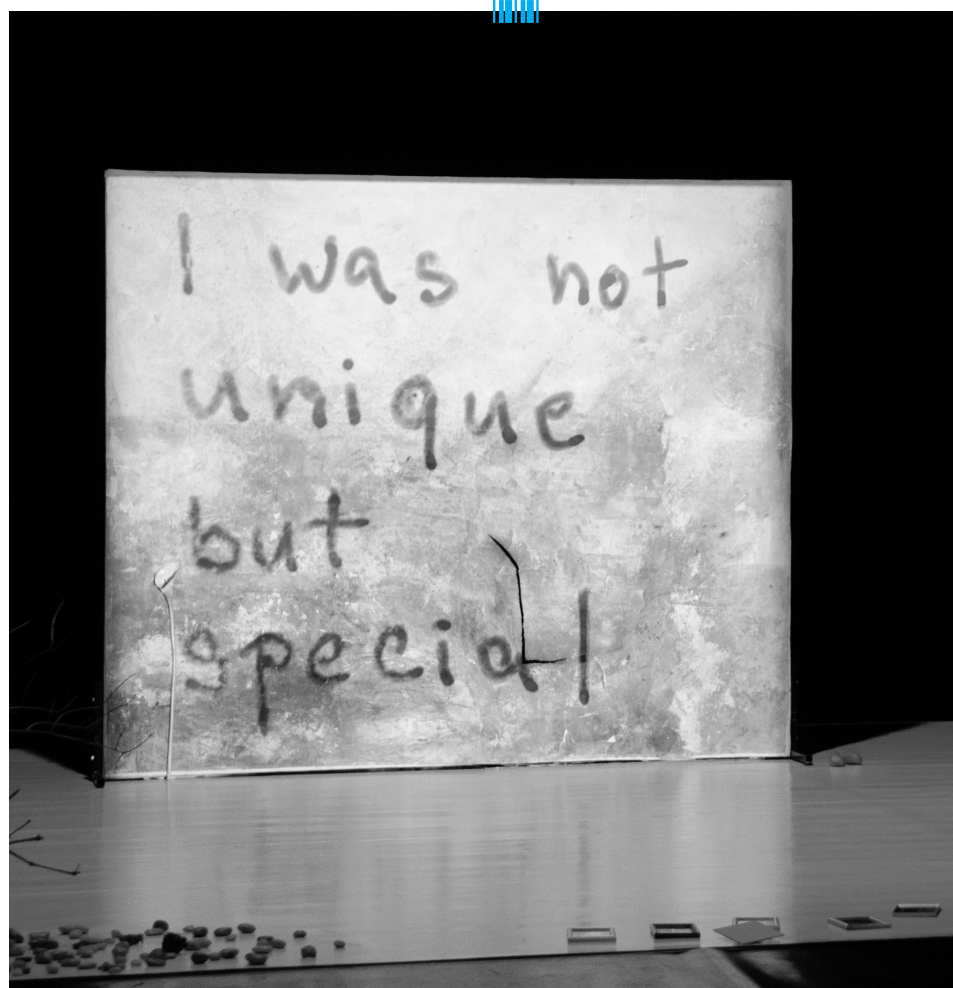
Whilst traditionally, in a narrower sense, performance art takes as its subject matter one's own, original material, Sláva Daubnerová

54 has forged her own way of working within this

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Sláva Daubnerová  
**Untitled**

**Untitled**  
(P.A.T. - Platform for  
Contemporary Theatre)  
photo by S. Trnka







**Untitled**  
(P.A.T. - Platform for  
Contemporary Theatre)  
photo by S. Trnka

„  
Her most recent  
solo performance,  
inspired by  
the work of  
the talented  
young American  
photographer,  
Francesca  
Woodman, is  
characteristic of  
Daubnerová's  
method of seeking  
the maximized  
cohesion of  
expression  
through an  
original form.“

performative art form. Her performances do not take as departure point her own personal experiences, traumas and desires, but they access them through delving into the life and work of others, artists living and working before her.

Often they are fellow artists, such as the French-American artist and sculptor Louise Bourgeois in *Cells*, the Norwegian painter Lars Hertevig in *Polylogue* or most recently the American photographer Francesca Woodman in *Untitled*. Or prominent cultural figures, such as the wife of German playwright and poet Heiner Müller, Inge Müller, whose fate was served as an inspiration for *Some Disordered Interior Geometries*, or Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, the first lady of Slovak Theatre direction, whom Daubnerová immortalised in her production *M.H.I.*

Having graduated from Cultural Studies at the Comenius University in Bratislava, rather than studying drama and acting, Daubnerová can be seen as an autodidact in terms of her own art practice. Perhaps, hence the fascination with the destiny of fellow artists. It is as if

she conducts a dialogue with fellow artists, looking for the answers for her own agonizing questions around creativity as well as human existence as such. Inspired by their artwork, she articulates her own outlook, through authentic means of expression. Through her performative compositions she queries and explores the notions of identity, the limits of life, our relationships, loneliness, being an outsider or the redeeming power of art, in a moving and innovative way.

Her practice and working method seems to be rooted in a ritual, as she enters the realm of her own through the medium of others. Her performances afford at once a space for a form of therapy as well as an experimental laboratory. To get a sneak peek into this space is always a reward for those who enjoy discovery and the poetry of space.

Her most recent solo performance, inspired by the work of the talented young American photographer, Francesca Woodman, is characteristic of Daubnerová's method of seeking the maximized cohesion of expression through an original form. An insight into Woodman's life immediately reveals some affinities with the author. Has Daubnerová found her alter ego? This proposition sounds grim as we know that Francesca Woodman decided to end her life at the age of 22. Can experiencing the trauma of others, though only on an imaginary level, serve a form of 'exorcism', or rather, to face one's own demons? An incentive to overcome the life hurdles they had succumbed to? A transformation of a negative experience into a positive one..? To be more specific, into an intense and aesthetically powerful artwork..?

It feels strange, almost disturbing, to recognize the face of Daubnerová on the photographs of Francesca Woodman. But this is still only a visual affinity, on the level of similar



physiognomy. Looking closer at Woodman's photographs and through secondary material we find deeper and more personal correlation between the two artists. The art critic Sean O'Hagan, reviewing Woodman's show at Victoria Miro, in London in 2010, commented: 'It is as mysterious and elusive as any of her later nudes or performance photographs, and tells us that, even at 13, Woodman had found a way to hide in front of the camera, and, in doing so, had also found her abiding theme. Nearly 30 years after her death, she is still hiding from us in full view, as elusive and beguiling as ever.' <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/nov/21/francesca-woodman-photographs-miro-review>

The will to expose oneself to the pervasive camera view, and the desire to escape, to take refuge are two opposite gestures, both paradoxically deeply rooted not only in our social behaviour but also within the act of artistic expression. We can see how Daubnerová plays out this dichotomy in various mise-en-scènes: first the photographer adjusts the camera on a tripod, then she enters the frame, undressed, crouched in an embryonic position, making tiny movements she shifts around the space. The cautious, minimalist movements serve as innocent means to protect her naked body from the gaze, whilst enabling her, though painfully contorted, to reach the small canvas screen on the other side of the stage, to hide behind. However, the panel flips over and we can see her again. She continues to struggle to conceal her body from the gaze of the audience and the camera's viewfinder, but various events keep thwarting her efforts and keep exposing her and shed light on her body. The body that she strives to hide, is a beautiful one, a body of an art model, as becomes

56 obvious in an uncontrolled, fleeting moment.

#### analysis and review

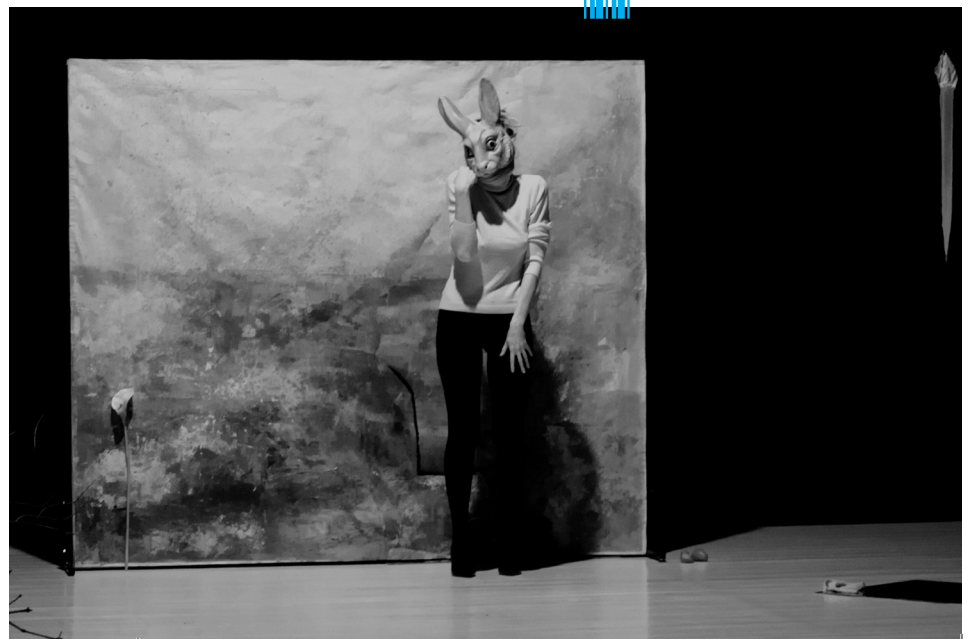
This game of hide and seek is played out on the stage in many different ways. It is perhaps the wittiest and formally most sophisticated when the performer is standing in front of the canvas using the back video projection she veils herself in the virtual layers as they offered a protective cover. Her effort to cover herself is finally successful thanks to this playful technical trickery.

A whole sequence of the performance, which has a very well paced/balanced dynamics, is dedicated to the play with clothing, and getting dressed and undressed in the most unexpected ways (with the use of projection technology again). I wish I could change my mind as easily as I change dress, we read on a side board panel, the place providing the only textual element of the play, in the form of projected simple comments, in an uncomplicated English, reminiscent of comic strips speech balloons.

There are many fine and powerful performative details to be appreciated and enjoyed within the overarching composition of the performance as a whole with its clear structure. Daubnerová masterfully conjoins her roles as a performer and director, creating visually

” There are many fine and powerful performative details to be appreciated and enjoyed within the overarching composition of the performance as a whole with its clear structure. “

Untitled  
(P.A.T. - Platform for Contemporary Theatre)  
photo by S. Trnka







**Untitled**  
(P.A.T. - Platform for  
Contemporary Theatre)  
photo by S. Trnka

fascinating and emotionally charged mise-en-scènes filled with meaningful action. Every day gestures, actions and moves are organically developed into dance, in the style of modern and post modern choreography (devised by Stanislava Vlčeková). In regular intervals these moments punctuate the fluid dynamic of the sequences of individual mise-en-scènes.

These sequences are contrasted against each other, thus contributing towards an interesting dynamic and rhythm of the performance. Some of them are based on the female nude, whereby the performer exercises in front of our eyes familiar positions observed from authentic prints, created with the use of long exposure. At other moments, the play of objects takes centre stage, elaborated to the level of shadow theatre. When we see a pair of nylon stockings hanging on the line, waving in the air. Or when the performer creates various natural scenes with stuffed birds, a fox in the genre of natura morte and then prostrates herself to sleep there, on the beautifully red lit scene.

The pensive photographer, continuously playing a game of hide and seek, does however reveal her various faces. And that is what

this performance captures so well. Alongside the favourite, uptight Victorian likeness, suddenly we get to glimpse different types of images of women, as we know them from famous works by Edgar Degas, Toulouse-Latrec, prostitutes with their hair tied up in a bun, wearing lingerie with garters as the only piece of clothing. *'Woman is a mirror for a man'* reads aptly one of the statements on the panel. In this context it is clear why the performer then enters the stage dressed as a bunny with long white ears and hops across the pink-lit stage.

Whilst at the beginning of the performance, shyly curled up in a fetal position, at the end we see the performer, having proceeded through various scenes and guises, parting her legs clad in black underwear, like arms ready to embrace the audience. Then she makes her way from the proscenium towards the screen at the back, and she slides in through the cut opening as if into the mother's lap. Or, perhaps like Alice through the looking glass. Who knows.

This performance reveals Slava Daubnerová's unique voice and tells us a lot about the roots of her very own creative gesture. We get a glimpse of her motivations to merge with her subject matter. Delving into the personalities of other artists, she finds a refuge, a perfect place from which she can express herself authentically. As for the viewers, they are offered an opportunity to witness an ingenious form of exploring existential issues driving artistic creation at its best. ♡

#### Sláva Daubnerová: **Untitled**

concept, director, performer **S. Daubnerová**

choreography **S. Vlčeková** dramaturgy and technical

cooperation **P. Graus** light design **S. Šmálik**

production: **P.A.T. platform for contemporary theatre**

premiere **10th December 2012, SLUK Theatre**

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# Report – Divadelná Nitra theatre festival

**Ref.: A detailed report from the monitoring of the Divadelná Nitra theatre festival with a focus on the project titled *Parallel Lives – 20th Century Through the Eyes of the Secret Police*.**

In late September and early October, the city of Nitra hosted the 22nd international theatre festival Divadelná Nitra. For some years now, the festival dramaturgy has used the concept of one central theme for the entire event. The festivals introduced disquieting themes in the past, as their titles suggest: 2011 – (Don't) Tell Your Secret, 2012 – Guilt/Innocence, and finally 2013 – Purged? The concept of a theme focus was enough for us to visit the festival for its entire duration and to monitor in great detail all of the presented productions. After all, the focus on one theme can, dangerously enough, invite the visitors to start looking at issues analytically. Our theatres have more or less avoided this so far. Even more alarming, however, is the festival's ambition to introduce a new activity – a project with the cheeky title *Parallel Lives – 20th Century Through the Eyes of the Secret Police*.



## Suite No. 1 “ABC” for 22 Performers and a Conductor

**Risk:** medium

**Category:** N/A

The opening show of the festival focused on human language and its use in common and uncommon situations. A total of twenty-two actors, led by a conductor, performed a well-rehearsed and mathematically precise collage of sounds, film scenes, political meetings, sport broadcasts, language teaching and dance. Human language was expressed in all its depth and beauty, as well

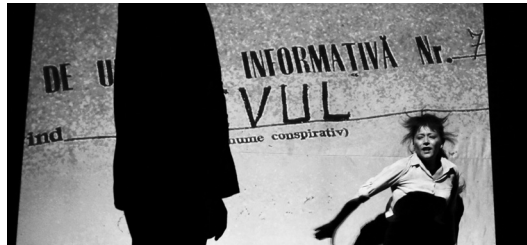
photo by C. Bachratý  
and Bluebeard's photo  
by E. Kudláč



as banality and comicality. Because too many western languages were used in the production, we thought it was important to pre-emptively sabotage the subtitles and the handing out of the information bulletin. We succeeded. Even though the production does not pose an ideological risk, it is problematic in how it focuses on the capitalist culture (a speech by American President Barack Obama, a scene from the movie *E.T.*, a song by the band Jacksons 5, amongst others). Only two scenes are dedicated to allied cultures (how to speak English with a Russian accent and a child learning Chinese).

#### **Conclusion and suggested action:**

In a broader context, the production is harmless. However, we recommend that precautions be taken and director Joris Lacoste be monitored. He is certainly aware of the fact that many joint voices are stronger than one.



### **Typography Majuscule**

**Risk:** high

**Category:** Parallel Lives

This is an exceptionally problematic production and we were convinced of the risk it poses before we saw it. Romanian actors from Bucharest-based DramAcum and Odeon theatres produced the story of rebel Mugur Calinescu. Directed by Gianina Cărbunariu, the show was presented as part of the Parallel Lives project. In early 1980s, Mugur Calinescu flagrantly threatened Romania's security when he used chalk to write

on walls of buildings such anti-government slogans as: "Freedom! We want human rights to be respected!" The Securitate did a great job when it successfully removed the 16-year-old saboteur. It is reprehensible to stage a similar case in theatre and, what is more, to use modern means in the process, such as projection, direct recording of faces and fast cuts and edits. In addition, the creators did not focus only on the political dimension of the case, but deliberately appealed to emotions by introducing a mother-son relationship into the story. This resulted in a disquieting production which resonated strongly with the audience and shed a very hostile light on the Securitate. We did our best to foil the effort of the performers but, despite our vehement action, the ensemble managed to present it, though with a delay of several hours.

#### **Conclusion and suggested action:**

The production poses a high risk. We suggest the creators be followed and monitored.



### **The Seagull**

**Risk:** low

**Category:** N/A

The Croatian Zagreb Theatre of Youth's production has been chosen by the festival's dramaturgy board to relieve the heavy theme. We have to admit that, after the strenuous operations to sabotage the running of the festival, we very much appreciated this. Improvisations of scenes from Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, in particular from the first and third acts (which the ensemble



**60** Aleš Březina's documentary opera, directed



## Interior of the Interior

**Risk:** high

**Category:** Parallel Lives

This contribution of Slovak theatremakers to the Parallel Lives project was made by the SkRAT Theatre. The production was presented with the insolent subtitle *Rummaging Through the State Police Archives in Two Separate Parts, with an Intermission*. While the first part (*Interior of the Interior*, directed by Ľubo Burgr) was supposed to present a grotesque report on the internal processes in the State Police, the second part (*Paranoia Querulans*, directed by Dušan Vicen) was based on the case in which secret priest Přemysl Coufal was removed.

The original assumption, namely that owing to the well-known “poetics” of the ensemble we expected the first part to be the problematic one, while the second one would end up rather vague because the tracks were erased and the archives inaccessible, turned out to be wrong. The formal and technical insufficiencies in the first part verged on an inability to perform the scenes well enough. This perfectly diverted the attention from the content that sought to point out the sordidness, alcoholism and corruption among the employees and agents in the entire history of the State Police.

But the second part of the production is much more problematic. Formally, technically and content-wise, it in no way draws on the first part. The creators used the available material of the Coufal case – most of which was destroyed in order to make his death appear as suicide. Unfortunately, several inconsistencies were found during the investigation. The creators also used the deranged statements made by people who – to their own detriment – nosed about the case. The production took advantage of expressive visual stimuli, such as masks

and projections – it is worth mentioning that for the entire duration of the performance all actors who appear on the stage are wearing masks. The only exceptions are actors who appear in the projections and quote from *Hamlet*. We consider this to be the utmost insolence. SkRAT wanted to perform to the audience the famous Mousetrap scene from *Hamlet* expecting that the culprit was sitting in the audience!

**Conclusion:** The second part of the production poses a risk. We recommend the producers be taken to a psychiatric ward. They will find the environment and themes there to be very familiar.



## Bluebeard (Hope of Women)

**Risk:** low

**Category:** Slovak section

The City Theatre Žilina production was entered into the festival programme outside of the Parallel Lives project. At first sight, the show has no political background; however, one needs to remain alert. An intimate production with minimalist direction not only makes use of poetic and symbolic language, but also interprets a text written by a contemporary German female playwright. Because director Eduard Kudláč is known for his effort to make a focused statement, it is important to be careful and watch if his use of metaphorical stories does not propel him to take on more noticeable political and social themes. The statement the production was trying to make at the festival was minimized also owing



to our preventive meddling with the acoustics of the theatre. As a result, only spectators sitting in the front rows could hear the full text.

**Conclusion:** the production, and its creators, do not as yet pose a serious threat. We could make use of their artistic skills. We suggest they be approached and offered collaboration with us.



## Follow Me

**Risk:** medium

**Category:** Parallel Lives

The new theatre from Krakow contributed to the Parallel Lives project with a production mixing fiction and reality. We find it worrying that the show discredits Józef Schiller, a top agent of the secret police. The production depicts him as tied to a wheelchair and confusingly interrogating stripper Ada Grudzińska, daughter of a dissident and emigrant. The interrogation is shown in “non-standard” conditions. Ada is pole-dancing while Schiller keeps swearing at her – it is not clear who is mentally and physically superior. The production has no aspiration to tell a story directly and presents themes such as manipulation and abuse. Director Radek Rychcik endorses the vulgarity and brutality of his characters who never met in real life – this is done in order to make the audience deduce that interrogations and overall operation of the secret police were similarly vulgar and brutal. We saw through this dishonest intent of the creators, even though the production

62 deliberately used decomposition. The quality

festival

of the production is best characterized by the fact that the Polish Institute of National Memory spontaneously disassociated itself from the show.

**Conclusion:** although the production itself is outrageous, it poses no greater risk – mostly because the creators chose to convey their ideas in a way that is not very communicable.



## 25,671

**Risk:** high

**Category:** N/A

It is very unpleasant to see that Divadelná Nitra allowed ideologically dangerous productions to enter its festival stages, even outside of the Parallel Lives project. Slovenian production 25,671 is precisely the kind of “engaged” production that would pose a threat regardless of what it dealt with. Slovenian theatremakers from Prešern Theatre in Kranj chose to discuss the erasure of former Yugoslav citizens from the registry of citizens of Slovenia, thus making them *de facto* people without identity. Director Oliver Frlić used all means to make the spectators feel what it is like to have no identity. The audience could enter the theatre only after they handed in their IDs, the actors led discussions in which they explained details of the issue, they emotionally attacked the audience, collected money from them and, in some cases, even destroyed their official identification cards. The high point of the show was a direct confrontation with a family that lost their son



as a result of the registry erasure. The danger the production presents lies in its mobilizing energy that not only forces the spectators to feel compassion, but also makes them think.

**Conclusion:** productions like this pose a threat even though they do not directly relate to our issues. On the other hand, it can give us inspiration as to how (and how easily) citizens can be deprived of their personal identification.



### My File and I

**Risk:** medium

**Category:** Parallel Lives

The German production *My File and I* at first worried us, but our concern turned out to be unfounded. Director Clemens Bechtel, whose work focuses on documentary theatre, chose real people and their life stories to be actors in this production. So, nine people ended up on the stage, out of which eight were “victims” of persecution by the Stasi and one was a 25-year-old Stasi collaborator. The small stage of the Studio at Andrej Bagar Theatre was filled with shelves of archived files of the state police. This claustrophobic environment was thought to intensify the individual stories told by the actors. The director hoped that such a formal and simple retelling of the events, with no emphasis on action or performance style would boost the statement and content to such an extent that it would render insignificant also the static and somewhat lengthy and tedious presentation. But that did not happen.

**Conclusion:** we consider using authentic witnesses and, most of all, collaborators of the secret police to be highly problematic. We recommend an agent be used as one of the actors.



### Reflex (Meltdown)

**Risk:** medium

**Category:** Parallel Lives

The Hungarian production was made possible through the Parallel Lives project. From a theatrical point of view, it was one of the most conventional and most relaxing productions of this year’s festival. The Budapest-based sailing company Sputnik presented a play about a psychiatrist who ended up hospitalized as a schizophrenic. The Hungarian producers, led by director Dániel D. Kovács were reasonable enough to keep a foot in both camps and never gave a straightforward answer to the question whether the doctor was really ill or whether she was put into the mental institution “preventively”. The production was great in both movement and acting, played with the spectators and puzzled them in several ways. There were visually impressive scenes during which the audience was not sure whether reality or hallucination was being depicted – moving walls, falling objects, characters often seemingly speaking from a dream. This was all made lighter by humour that left room for truly chilling moments.

**Conclusion:** we appreciate that, as opposed to the majority of productions presented



in the Parallel Lives project, the show did not insolently depict the secret police as the obvious culprit. Nonetheless, the producers should be preventively monitored. Just like their colleagues from Žilina, we should approach them and offer them collaboration.



## Rechnitz – The Exterminating Angel

**Risk:** high

**Category:** Slovak section

The Slovak National Theatre has initiated a challenging experiment using the text of the provocative Austrian playwright Elfriede Jelinek. The production introduced the issue of the Nazi massacre in Rechnitz using monumental set design (David Jařab was awarded the DOSKY Prize) and employing unpleasant and creepy atmosphere. All in all, this is a production that demands a concentrated and knowledgeable audience. The creators divided the stage into two sections: the rear one, featuring a soundproof wall, was the location of a Nazi party with a disastrous outcome. In the front one, three generations of a family, which had to bear the consequences of the party, are discussing the party and passing the buck in the process. Therefore, it is in order to talk about the threats posed by the production. On one hand, there is nothing in the subject matter that we would find directly threatening, but on the other hand, the production uses

64 means of expression which could be easily used

festival

to smuggle pernicious topics and opinions into the theatre piece. One has to be vigilant also because the production makes a moral appeal.

**Conclusion:** We recommend director David Jařab be preventively followed. His approach to theatre is too much affected by the western theatre tradition which is why his work can be counterproductive for local audiences.



## Uncertain Ground (Intraspecies Aggression)

**Risk:** high

**Category:** Slovak section

In spite of all the effort to silence director Blaho Uhlár and his STOKA Theatre, we submit our resignation. Uhlár is like a hydra – when you cut off one of its heads, it grows two more. After the demise of the STOKA Theatre, Uhlár established S.T.O.K.A., drawing on the foundations of his aesthetics and defiantly shifting them even further. It is hard to believe how the sketches of two young actors, their open aversion to authorities, and the interconnection of such themes with suicide motifs still resonate with the audience. The sequence of scenes interwoven with texts by Jack London, the aesthetics of poor theatre, and the song *Szomorú Vasárnap* – a suicide anthem – are all held together formally and thematically thanks to the omnipresent aggression.

**Conclusion:** We submit Uhlár's case to be investigated further. Again.





## Holocaust

**Risk:** medium to high

**Category:** Slovak section

As the title suggests, the production deals with the horrors of World War II – in particular with the deportation of Jews from Slovakia. We are not happy to see that such unpleasant chapters of our history are being reopened. What is more, the production – commissioned by the Aréna Theatre – alludes also to our recent past and appears to blur the division between the victim and the criminal. Author Viliam Klimáček revived the nearly forgotten issue of the deportations of Jews to concentration camps and the subsequent expropriation of their property. Klimáček based his script on the true story of Hilda Hrabovecká. Following substantial dramaturgical adjustments, Rastislav Ballek directed the production. Despite the fact that the production meets all the requirements of professional theatre – in terms of acting, visuals and direction – it is not until the second act that the audience can understand the essence and true tragedy of the lives of the characters. The character of Ambróz Králik, excellently portrayed by Milan Ondřík, paradoxically seemed to outshine the other characters and thus also the message of the text and the production.

**Conclusion:** The production and its creators pose some risk also because they attempt to reopen problematic chapters in the history of our country.

Divadelná Nitra commissioned six productions from six different countries and types of theatre. All theatre “institutions” were asked to document cases from secret archives. At the festival, all productions presented were international, often even global, premieres. It should be noted that this project accounted for nearly a half of the total number of productions presented at the festival. Quite understandably, we find this high number rather worrying. Divadelná Nitra took chances trying to make its artistic and civic “courage” visible and in full force. Divadelná Nitra has gone too far. It is evident that Ján Šimko, curator of the project, quite consciously divided the selection into diverse theatre institutions and invited not only experimental and alternative theatres, but also representative national stages (!). Each theatre approached the theme differently, chose different means of expression, different stories and methods. But they have one thing in common – they are provocative. There is no other project like this – as far as its extent, theme and especially audaciousness are concerned. Although we tried to technically sabotage several shows, we have to say – digesting the feeling of defeat – that the festival reached its goal, not only in the Parallel Lives project, but also through the selection of productions. ♣

### Divadelná Nitra

22nd international theatre festival

27 September – 2 October 2013, Nitra

[www.nitrafest.sk](http://www.nitrafest.sk)

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festival



# Touches and Connections – On the Truth and the Problems of Slovak Direction

**The ninth year of the Touches and Connections Theatre Festival signalled one important thing: the foundations seem to have been laid for a tradition. This tradition is what theatre makers, critics, and theatre scholars have been calling for for several years. After all, the awareness of the absence of tradition stood at the beginning of this festival. It had the ambition to renew dialogue between theatre makers, and between theatre makers, critics, and the broad culture-consuming public. The organizers always remind us about one of their priority objectives: to create opportunities to discuss theatrical productions and the broader theatrical and social context, and as the biggest presentation of Slovak theatres, to be the mirror of the theatrical season. For the past several years current theatrical trends have thus been presented in one place.**

The structure of the festival has crystallized into a relatively constant form in the past nine years. This year's programme consisted of thirty-two performances of different kinds and genres and five music concerts. There was also a choice of accompanying events: Dramatically Young 2013, a competition for the best dramatic text by authors under 18, Critical Platform, scholarly discussions about the previous day's performances, and creative workshops for children.

The first (pre-) festival day was dedicated to Touches and Connections JUNIOR, within which  
**66** third-year students from the Faculty of Performing

**festival**

Arts at the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica gave a performance of *Goldoniáda* (*Goldoniad*, dir. Ľuboslav Majera). Martin Porubjak's play did not garner much success when first staged in Slovakia, and it seems that history repeated itself.

The promising beginning that had introduced relations between individual characters, hidden meanings, or theatrical paraphrases in the end disintegrated into a series of more or less interesting and well-performed acting studies. The now graduates of the Faculty of Theatre at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava did slightly better with their performance





**The Jurga Brothers**  
(The Slovak National Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný

of *Gas Light* (dir. Andrea Bučková and Michael Vyskočáni). Although their production did not display any signs of invention or originality, they rendered this story with detective elements and a psychological conflict at least with lucidity, imitating characters well-known from TV shows.

The children's programme consisted of the productions of *Drevený tata* (*Wooden Daddy*, Bratislava Puppet Theatre), *Pes (pri)tulák* (*Cuddle-Tramp the Dog*, PIKI Theatre), *Buratino* (Theatre of Spišská Nová Ves), *Polepetko* (Jozef Gregor Tajovský Theatre in Zvolen), and *O troch grošoch* (*The Riddle of the Three Pennies*, Malá Scéna STU Theatre in Bratislava). In 2013 organizers did not manage to have critics discuss and evaluate the children's performances. It is quite unfortunate because theatre for children is becoming increasingly marginalized and is only occasionally taken into consideration by theatre scholars and reviewers. As Lenka Džadíková, the dramaturge of the festival's children's programme, mentioned, stagnation also marks

the production of theatre for children. The choice of the performances at the festival was, according to her, a result of many compromises. Out of the twenty-five productions that premiered between April 2012 and April 2013, it was simply difficult to choose five representative ones.

The main programme consisted of fifteen performances which had been selected according to some criteria set by the dramaturges of the festival. Two of them proved to be dominant: productions of original authorial dramatic texts and attractive productions of drama classics. This caused that theatres from Trnava, Zvolen, Spišská Nová Ves, and Košice did not present any performances for adult audiences. Their repertory in the past season may not have displayed sufficient quality or remarkableness. (However, within the context of the festival's dramaturgy one could question at least the non-inclusion of *Mariša* written by the Mrštík brothers, directed by József Czajlik, and produced by the State Theatre in Košice.)

The theatrical sitcom *www.narodnycintorin.sk* (*www.nationalcemetery.sk*), produced by the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin and directed by Dodo Gombár, became the crowd puller as expected. Its makers brought back to life figures of national

**The Bald Soprano** (The Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra)  
photo by B. Konečný





importance buried at the National Cemetery and explored the question if it was possible to combine the national with the grotesque, if it was sufficiently “Slovak”. The result was a visually and musically impressive performance with very good acting, detached from the tragic perception of Slovak national destiny. The dramatization of Ivan Horváth’s *Bratia Jurgovci* (*The Jurga Brothers*, dir. Ľubomír Vajdička) from the production of the Slovak National Theatre was also related to Slovak literature and the search for one’s place in this world and one’s identity. The director and his crew seemed to have at times too much respect for Horváth’s prose at the expense of drama, but in their staging form they did not succumb to excessive illustrativeness. They tried to bring to the stage the poetics of the original work and portray the lives of male members of one family through a theatrical reading of literature on stage. *The Bald Soprano*, produced by the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra (dir. Vajdička), revealed once again our difficulties in staging absurd drama. The basic rule that an actor should behave concretely in an absurd situation and employ elements of realistic acting remained as if forgotten in this production. Equally forgotten was the fact that it is not enough to bring a thesis to the stage, but the performance should either confirm or refute it. If we encounter the idea of language which does not function as a means of communication, we could ask why and why nowadays.

Similar problems also marked the productions of *The Petty Demon* by the Alexander Duchnovič Theatre (dir. Eduard Kudláč), *Fat Pig* by the Jonáš Záborský Theatre (dir. Jakub Nvota), and *November* by the Aréna Theatre, directed by Martin Čičvák. They were connected especially with the choice of the text for staging and its

68 interpretation. Even the more serious motives

festival



**November**  
(The Arena Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný

which, at least to some extent, offered the director the possibility to make these dramatically flat texts more dramatic vanished in a series of gags, anecdotes, and time-tested acting registers. Compared to these, the production of *Tonight Neither Hamlet* by the DPOH City Theatre (dir. Michal Vajdička), despite its comical tone, managed to underline the less witty subtexts and motives of the story of an aging theatre actor through the particular action of the actor in a concrete scene.

Another group of performances was composed of remarkable interpretations of drama classics. *Crime and Punishment* by the City Theatre Žilina was the director Eduard Kudláč’s second attempt at staging this novel. This time, Raskolnikov (Michal Režný) was not torn between whether he had done a good deed or committed a crime. He was in the society of absolute decay, so there was nothing else left for him but to writhe in pathological rage, neurosis, and insanity. The performance sharply divided critics. One camp held the opinion that what we had seen was a genuine drama of relationships



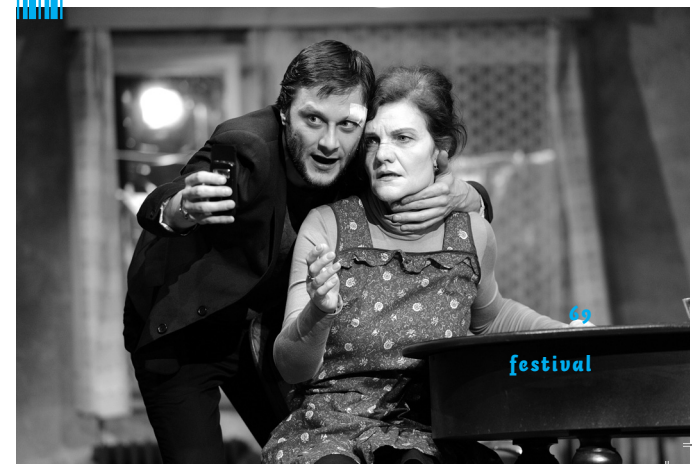
with Kudláč's recognizable directorial style. The other, more numerous, camp criticized the production for the absence of cause-and-effect links and characters' motivations. They also reproached the director for his work with actors: instead of placing them in mutual relations, he confined them to solo appearances. The director Martin Huba's interpretation of *Richard III*, produced by the Jókai Theatre in Komárno, put the scheming and morally tainted Richard on an equal footing with the others around him. As a result, the truth and justice are difficult to find. Each of the characters in the play, including children, seems to be playing their own game of chess, neither of them having enough moral strength to resist. Despite indisputable positives, the performance, however, did not avoid several weak points: elements chosen for exaggerated effect. *Hamlet (príbeh rodiny)* [Hamlet: The Story of a Family], Dodo Gombár's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin, suffered from similar weaknesses. The traditionally excellent acting by the Martin ensemble was slightly tarnished by the occasionally debatable use of theatrical signs. Gombár's *Hamlet* is, first and foremost, about the search for the truth and about the gradual discovery of how relative it may be. The director decided to work with the classic text as if it had been written by a contemporary author on a contemporary theme. Of course, this approach may provoke different responses, but in the end it makes us reflect on and discuss what forms contemporary theatrical updating can take and what contribution it makes to the social and artistic context.

The production of independent theatres, despite the late hour at which it was programmed, was the most interesting and distinctly different face of Slovak professional theatre.

Independent theatres focused exclusively on new authorial texts and mostly sought a non-stereotypical expression and form for important themes. The stage design, as a metaphoric and expressive means, was put on a par with other components (text, music, acting, and direction). One could sense the mutual affinity between the theatre performers involved as well as their belief in the meaningfulness of expressing their personal views. The SkRAT Theatre's production *Proces procesu procesom: Pôjdeš do basy? Hajzel!* [The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial: You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!] was a performance oscillating between documentary and an artistic rendition of press or TV news, which was supposed to create an illusion of currency and an analogy with known news information and propose a generalization, for example, about the overall absurdity of present-day life.

The metaphor of entering the gate of justice, inspired by Franz Kafka, as rendered by the actors of the SkRAT Theatre, brought neither the victory of the truth nor a sufficiently dramatic analogy of the court and legislative system as presented in the media. The search for the truth, faith, and determination to act according to one's convictions also characterized *Bartimejove pašie*

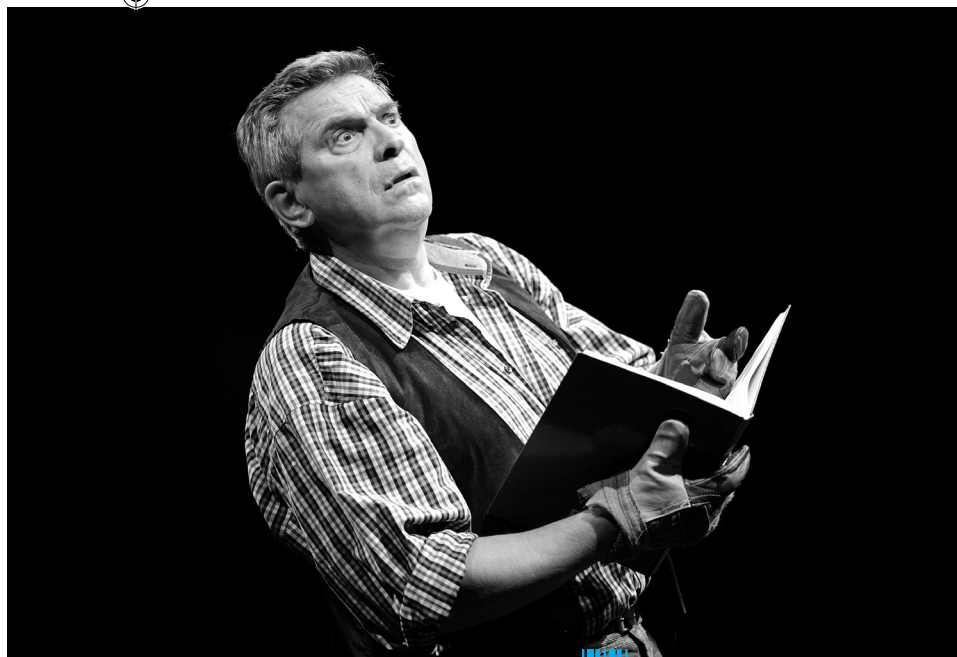
**Hamlet: The Story of a Family** (The Slovak Chamber Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný






[Bartimaeus' Passion] by the trio of authors Martinka, Kalinka, and Mikuláš. Its form was reminiscent more of scenic oratory than of the well-known Easter Passion play, but thanks to its unusual work with music and lighting, and its depiction of what happened with the eyewitness and living proof of a miracle, Bartimaeus, after Christ's passion, the performance became one of the strongest experiences of the whole festival. A second, equally impressive highlight was the production of Miloš Janoušek and Viki Janoušková's play *Dějà vu* (Ticho a spol., dir. Róbert Horňák). This magical fairy-tale play about materialization of human desires and distillation of time, which would enable us to rectify our mistakes, allowed space for a virtuoso performance of the actors in the lead roles, Jana Lieskovská and Pavol Plevčík, and a creative play of imagination beyond the grey average of Slovak theatre. The Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads captured the audience's attention again with their distinctive visual and acting concepts, this time incorporated into the performance entitled *Diagnóza slovo* [Diagnosis: Word, dir. Iva Š.], but especially with their poetics of engagement. Their theatrical diagnosis of a word, whose unmarked meaning can easily turn into an expression of aggression or violence, relied on research and brought humour and surprising creativity on the part of both the actors and the director in the area of gender sensitivity. Compared to these productions, *Mutanti* [Mutants] by the GUnaGU Theatre came across as a typical bizarre tragicomedy about gays and their position in our society. Several controversial issues, such as gay adoptions, confessional affiliation, and partner problems, were only poorly outlined and further not elaborated on.

The 2013 Touches and Connections brought several findings. While until recently festival



**Tonight Neither Hamlet**  
(DPOH City Theatre)  
photo by B. Konečný

we thought dramaturgy was the weakest link of Slovak theatre, now it is direction and acting: the ability to stage plays, directorial work with actors, the motivation of characters in space and with comprehensible theatrical signs. The dramaturgy of individual theatres, in contrast, brought important themes, such as the search for Slovak identity, the truth, and justice, power manipulation, and positive and negative manipulation. It is gratifying that many productions turned away from excessive entertainment and sensationalist tendencies. Theatre makers respond to current social affairs and perceive man as their theatrical anthropological invariable, and not only in the biological but also in the spiritual sense. 

### **Touches and Connections**

9th Festival of Slovak Theatres  
25 – 29 June 2013, Martin  
[www.dotykyaspojenia.sk](http://www.dotykyaspojenia.sk)



# KioSK 2013: From The Goldberg Variations to The Elf King

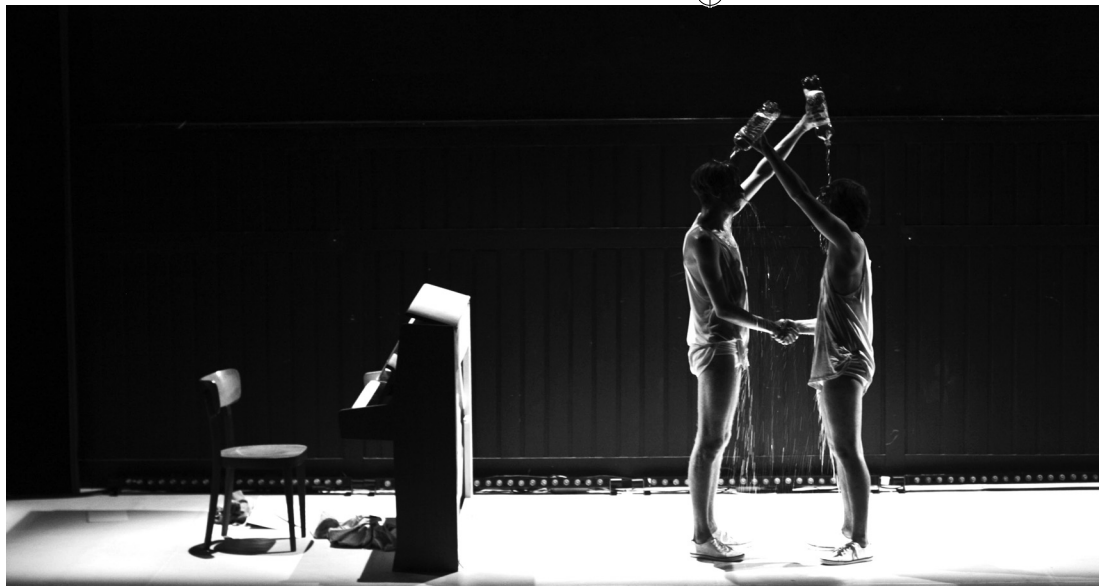
**The KioSK Festival is a living form on the Slovak scene. In the six years of its existence it has had several subtitles (for example, Festival for the Bold Audience, Festival of Independent Theatre and Dance), focused on different themes (lighting design, the boundary between an actor/dancer and a performer, urban legends, etc.), devised the programme as a dialogue between Slovak theatre makers working abroad and in Slovakia, or provided theatre makers with different spaces for the presentation of their work (from the pedestrian underpass connecting the centre of Žilina and the Žilina – Zázriečie Station to the Považie Art Gallery). This ability of organizers to perceive the festival as a living form, which is not “dependent” on the quality of theatrical productions only, is a crowd puller: getting tickets for individual performances was again more difficult than the year before.**

The sixth year of the KioSK Festival, subtitled *No Dramaturgy, No Responsibility?*, took place from Thursday, 25 July to Sunday, 28 July 2013. The festival was this time focused on the role of dramaturgy in independent theatre. It was, of course, also the topic of public discussions moderated by Romana Maliti on Friday and Pavel Štorek on Saturday. Although it is not very common at other festivals in Slovakia, KioSK offered exceptionally meaty and matter-of-fact debates. There is probably nothing that could please a person accustomed to the theatrical reality below the Tatras more than a discussion

which does not end in bemoaning the shortage of funding, does not have a million digressions, and also actively involves the audience.

The discussion raised several questions: Is the dramaturge a “God” who is always right and bears all responsibility for the communication between the stage form and the audience? Is there dramaturgy without a dramaturge? How different is dramaturgy in independent theatre from dramaturgy in independent dance? And where is the boundary between “brick-and-mortar” theatres and independent theatres? Without false illusions, it must be





## Shifts

(Peter Šavel, Kamil Mihalov)  
photo by N. Zajačiková

openly admitted that similar discussions hardly ever answer the questions raised. They are, rather, a platform for exchange of ideas and knowledge; they cannot have the ambition to find the universal truth. All the more if their focus is a concept as wide as dramaturgy or as unstable as independent theatre.

This year the main programme of the festival consisted of ten theatrical productions and performances. *Akvabatolárium* [Aquatoddarium, Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads, Banská Bystrica] and *Hodně malá čarodějnice* [A Really Small Witch, Light Dance Studio], intended for children, had a specific aim. Both of them relied on a high degree of interactivity and clear communication with the audience. Especially the performance of the Banská Bystrica theatre, meant for toddlers, showed that a clearly defined stage form with a simple theatrical sign can capture even the attention of viewers who have not mastered human speech yet.

Audiences were, however, focused on the remaining eight plays in the main programme. It would require a separate analysis in order to determine which of these projects could be

labelled as performances and which as theatrical productions. However, since each of the stage forms bore several signs of performative theatre, I will further refer to them as performances despite the fact that detailed analysis and more precise assessment would question this labelling.

The theme of the festival had been selected based on the experience from the previous years. It was not rare to see at the KioSK Festival performances which seemed to ignore communication with the audience and were formally and thematically introverted. A logical outcome was the question to what extent a director or a performer are able to look at their work from a distance, and if it is not the dramaturge's task to keep an eye on the comprehensibility of the prepared stage form, among other things. In this context it is interesting to note that all the theatre productions that appeared within this year's KioSK were easily understandable. They always managed to combine comprehensibility with the distinctiveness of their poetics.

Although there is very low probability that it was the intention of the festival's

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festival



dramaturges, all performances, except one, were connected through considerable intertextuality and inspired by the works and lives of other artists, philosophers, and art historians.

The first festival performance clearly took inspiration from Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Goldberg Variations*. In their work *Shifts*, Peter Šavel and Kamil Mihalov used Baroque music to explore displays of emotions and their physiological causes. Peter Šavel had used Bach's music in his work before. He had also analyzed human emotions (see, for example, *Much to Much*: "Once you go US, you can't go back", or *Could We F Lie Together?*). *Shifts* is also a scenic dialogue between a dancer and a musician. It must be appreciated that *Shifts* is neither a dancer's solo dance nor a musician's solo performance. Mihal's transitions from the piano into the space come across natural and unforced. From the viewpoint of dramaturgy, this performance can be seen as solid average both in the context of the festival and the artist's work.

The whole first day of the festival could be described as standard, because also the second performance of that day, *The Trial, of the Trial, by the Trial* (*You'll Go to Jail? Asshole!*), produced by Bratislava's SkRAT theatre can be considered solid average in the context of this theatre's work. Its authors allude to Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*. A journalist (Jana Ol'hová) struggles through the labyrinth of Slovak judiciary to discover all its obscurities. The play's gloomy, nightmarish atmosphere is an apt portrayal of our judiciary system. It is clear that the affairs that have surfaced in the past ten years are only a tip of the iceberg. However, knowing of them is enough to evoke serious doubts in the mind of a rational-minded person as to the existence of a rule of law in the Slovak Republic. No moral values, no backbones, only blatant lies and His

Honour Štefan Harabin hovering above them all. It cannot be denied that SkRAT succeeded in portraying the no-win situation that our society and some of our judges had found themselves in. When the judiciary does not stand above crime, let alone politics, on which it is supposed to check, it is very easy to empathize with the feelings of Kafka's protagonist caught in a cleft stick. *The Trial* is, however, drained of its power by generality. The affair surrounding the film (*Ne)moc tretej moci* [*Dis(ease) of the Third Power*], the tragic end of the judge Lauková, or the peculiar sense of humour at a lawyers' meeting in the Bonanno bar are topics that could each provide enough material for a separate film. I understand the authors' ambition to piece together a complex picture of our judiciary, but this superficial handling of the individual cases weakens the story. The audience receive nothing but the information that they are already familiar with from the media. Well, and what one commonly reads in newspapers does not have the same power in a theatre.

The second day of the festival offered, among other things, a performance that gave KioSK 2013 its subtitle: 121 directed by Lucia Repašská and produced by the D'EPOG Theatre. Besides other things, the play deals with the role of the dramaturge and dramaturgy in contemporary theatre. 121 uses as a primary point of departure a quotation by a British street artist Banksy, "So much time and so little to say." D'EPOG created a stage form that raises elementary questions about artistic work – both from a formal and an ethic point of view. Who is an actor, a viewer, a dramaturge, and a director? What is their responsibility, role, or mutual relationship? What is real in theatre, and what is an illusion? What responsibility does an author have for his work and his communication with a recipient?



Four characters, together with the director, who leaves the theatre hall approximately after the first third of the performance, keep relativizing and questioning the authenticity of theatre, theatrical clichés, and itself. This all happens through a form composed of a variety of diverse appearances, from a rendering of a song from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* to a conversation of the actors with the director sitting in the auditorium. The D'Epog Theatre's research into the topic of a stage form and its recipient undoubtedly has an exceptionally strong theoretical backing. Irrelevant is also the reproach that the themes that this performance reflects are nothing new and have been dealt with by theatre scholars and artists since the beginning of theatre. After all, research is about searching, and it may, logically, draw on questions raised a long time ago. The fact, however, remains that a viewer sees through the basic concept quite quickly, and the success of the rest of the performance essentially depends on how the audience receive individual jokes. Of course, in an era when grant applications must contain "copious" formulations about marginalized minorities, cross-border cooperation, or interculturality, a very strong message is sent when three of the play's four characters are called Dumb, Pregnant, and Idiot. For a while this joke is entertaining, but after an hour it becomes boring. The same happens to other thematic lines and jokes.

*Edge* is the exception that did not work with intertextuality, which I have mentioned. The choreographer Lucia Kašiarová and the director Petra Tejnorová worked with a group of "old-agers" from Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Besides being elderly, all performers had an artistic past. An actor, a choreographer, a puppet actor, and a dance instructor meet on stage and experience

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festival



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(D'EPOG Theatre)

photo by N. Zajačiková

a comeback. It is true that this concept is not very innovative and exceptional: the most recent variation on this theme is currently on at Brute in Vienna (Doris Uhlig: *Come Back*). Also considering the artistic past of the performers, *Edge* is closer to what could be simply called aestheticized mainstream in independent theatre than to a raw authentic statement. This definitely is not a rebuke, because the authors formally succeeded in producing a working form, which blends, in the right proportion and order, humorous passages with more serious ones and which also functions flawlessly at the level of tempo-rhythm. Therefore, if I write of mainstream, it is in the most positive sense of the word. Covering up the calculating mind behind a project so that the audience will not notice it during the performance is no doubt art.

If I have described the first day of the festival as standard, the second one could be given the attribute 'Czechoslovak'. 121 by the Czech D'EPOG Theatre had been directed by Lucia Repašská from Slovakia, *Edge* had been produced by the Prague association Alt@rt, and its choreographer and author (as well as the director of Alt@art) Lucia Kašiarová is Slovak. *Animalinside* by Jara Viňarský et al. is also a Czech-Slovak co-production.

Viňarský's latest project draws on the eponymous book by László Krasznahorkai. One of the most memorable performances of the festival was characterized by formal and content purity, the power of the story, and quality of interpretation.



*Animalinside* is a story about the primal innocence of mankind, the awakening of animal instincts in man, about the beginning and the end, and about the eternal struggle between us and in us. During an hour's performance the audience walk the way from birth (of man/the world/ matter/energy) through the period when we were only one animal species to contemporary society. The authors managed to create strongly meditative passages on one hand and incorporate understated acting appearances on the other. In essence, the performance is a scenic dialogue between the spirituality and corporeality of the human kind. Special attention should be paid to sharp cuts between these opposites. It must be appreciated how the performers Jaro Viňarský and Marek Menšík drastically and deliberately interrupt the atmosphere and, within a second, destroy what they have built up. In this context, their performance can be seen as a perfect union of emotional and rational use of their bodies and acting expression. Equally interesting is their play with the audience who can choose at each cut if they are going to accept it, or if they are going to refuse this "violation". *Animalinside* unobtrusively and without false pathos raises seemingly elementary questions

of existence and eternal struggle arising from the dualism of matter and spirit, body and soul, animal and man, individual and community, etc.

Although the programme of KioSK continued with a discussion and a children's performance on Sunday, Saturday represented the climax of the festival.

The first performance on this day, *Rôzne kapitoly tej istej knihy* [Different Chapters of the Same Book], was given by the Prague-based Non.Garde Theatre. It is based on the concept of visual theatre, and one of its plotlines alludes strongly to the traditional Japanese Kabuki theatre. Intimate testimonies of performers (Lucia Čarnecká, Jana Šturdíková, and Juraj Hubinák) and variations on the theme of fear were reinforced by a visual dialogue based on the black – white and light – dark principle. The concept bears a significant potential. No Slovak theatre ensemble currently pursues this type of theatre which communicates with the audience primarily through visual signs, so the Non.Garde Theatre fills the gap and brings a different kind of work with the theatrical sign and the perception of theatre. On the other hand, this performance did not sufficiently develop individual formal motifs. It is good to know that the Non.Garde Theatre can, contentwise, work with micro themes and use them to create an intelligible stage form, because our visual theatre often lacks comprehensibility. The authors also proved to be capable of keeping distance from their own work and alternating light-hearted scenes with more serious ones. However, to make *Different Chapters* an unforgettable experience, they would have had to elaborate on the formal aspects of the performance, especially the work with the dark – light, black – white principle, as well as the theme of fear.

In terms of dramaturgic development, the P.A.T. Theatre occupies an exceptional position 75

festival





in our independent theatre. Except for their productions *Hamletmachine* and *Tluminárium*, which focused on the phenomenon of spiritualism, although through the lives of several authors, this theatre company deals with the lives and work of selected artists. Having covered the life of a painter, a director, or the Müllers, a married couple of writers, the P.A.T. Theatre turned to the work of the photographer Francesca Woodman in *Untitled*. This American conceptual photographer, who focused on the human body, committed suicide shortly before she was to turn twenty-three. Her life thus offers suitable material for theatre: besides her tragic end, it is especially the performative character of her photographs. *Untitled* is particularly interesting for two aspects. The first is a formal link between photography and theatre. It is not that the performance quotes Woodman's photographs through mise-en-scenes; it is rather about the interconnection of the structure of performing art and photography in terms of tempo-rhythm. We are thus speaking of the same features that are typical of Woodman's work, but from "the opposite side". As a result, the closed structure of individual scenes gets in dialogue with the concept of the performance's stage form as a whole, and both of them influence the dynamic and static image. The second strong aspect is Sláva Daubnerová's work with emotion. Not long ago this performer was criticized (not always rightly) for the coldness of her acting expression. In this context *M.H.L.* meant a turning point because the more repeat performances the play received, the more emotionally diverse Daubnerová's acting became. In the long term it seems that the P.A.T. Theatre's production is positively affected by their cooperation with choreographers. In *Some Disordered Interior*

76 Geometries they worked with Matej Matejko;  
festival

in this case they established cooperation with the choreographer Stanka Vlčeková. In both cases the choreography shifted Daubnerová's movement expression to a higher level in terms of plasticity.

P.A.T. and the Debris Company are two of the theatre companies that make the most extensive and thoughtful use of multimedia and lighting design in their productions. In this context it is paradoxical that although brick-and-mortar theatres have much more stage lighting instruments at their disposal and especially work in their "own" space, they significantly lag behind independent theatres. Having the ambition to promote lighting design, the KioSK Festival has been awarding POUČN prizes for lighting design for three years. This year the P.A.T. Theatre's production *Untitled* was awarded.

*The Earl King, Štós*, "a contemporary opera in the German language and the Mantak dialect" authored by two great artists J. W. Goethe and Marek Piaček in cooperation with the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, and especially with the wind orchestra from Štós,<sup>2</sup> was the last item on the main programme of the festival. At the same time it was one of many examples at this year's KioSK which confirmed that independent theatre is not introverted theatre for a handful of enthusiasts. Its appeal rests especially in the diversity of messages. *The Earl King, Štós* allows the audience to have a great time seeing opera clichés and Romanticism and its ideas parodied, listening to covers of Rammstein and Michael Jackson, or laughing at the character of Horse

- 1 The Mantaks are one of the German minority groups living in our territory whose dialect is based on German. The village of Štós is one of the villages with the highest representation of this group.
- 2 The programme bulletin of the 2013 KioSK Festival.

**Different Chapters  
of the Same Book**  
(Non.Garde Theatre)  
photo by N. Zajačiková





portrayed by Martin Ondriska. In other words, the audience did not have to recognize allusions to Bach's music in *Shifts*, László Krasznahorkai's eponymous book in *Animalinside*, or to Goethe's poem or Schubert's song *Erkönig* to communicate with the works. In addition, the director Marold Langer-Philippsen and the librettists Marek Piaček, Martin Ondriska, Stano Beňačka, and Marold Langer-Philippsen succeeded in doing what is not very common in Slovakia: they managed to create a work with a tinge of humour which did not lapse into embarrassment or shallowness. The audience watch a parody, and those who perform it have the ability to interpret the original well, which is the bottom-line. Naive theatre is not mistaken for amateurism and incompetence. And in addition, immense respect for the Mantak community is displayed.

The sixth year of KioSK definitively confirmed that the festival is one of the most significant theatre events in Slovakia. Its dramaturgy offers the audience the possibility to follow the work of some theatre makers over a longer period and discovers new talents every year. Of course, we could always have a discussion about who was missing this time. Last year it was *Napichovači a lízači* [The Stabbers and Lickers]; this year it was the Debris Company. The fact, however, remains that besides organizational and logistic restrictions, the festival's dramaturges must also be aware of the fact that inviting the same theatre makers every year does more of a disservice than it does good to the festival. On the other hand, the festival provides Slovak theatre goers with the possibility to meet Slovak theatre makers working outside Slovakia. Peter Šavel, Matej Matejka, or the whole community of our dancers and performers working in the Czech Republic do not depend on the recognition by the Slovak expert and lay public. Therefore, KioSK has an



**Untitled (P.A.T. - Platform for Contemporary Theatre)**  
photo by N. Zajačiková

irreplaceable role in our culture because it offers a basic overview of our independent theatre makers' work. The greatest advantage of this festival is, after all, especially the variety of academic and cultural backgrounds that festival guests and invited theatre ensembles come from. The performances and productions, but also the discussions at the festival, often affect a diametrical change in the perception of theatre as a medium in the eyes of both theatre makers and audiences. Thanks to this, KioSK is also about an erudite and beneficial dialogue between festival participants. Touches and Connections or Nová dráma/New Drama, which mostly present the work of brick-and-mortar theatres, can be particularly envious of one aspect of this festival: while for brick-and-mortar theatre people it is mostly unthinkable to sit their distinguished backsides in auditoriums watching their colleagues' performances or take part in discussions, at KioSK it is taken for granted. ♡

## KioSK

6th Year of New Slovak Theatre and Dance Festival  
25 – 28 July 2013, Žilina-Záriečie Station  
[www.kioskfestival.sk](http://www.kioskfestival.sk)



## Getting used to Light: A Sad Hero or You move me so ...

**In the early 1990, in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution (some call it the second coup in reference to the first and inauspicious one of 1948), at the Theatre Na rázcestí (Theatre on the Crossroads) in Banská Bystrica the playwright and dramaturge Iveta Škripková and director Marián Pecka decided to remind the public of the contribution of the writer and thinker Dominik Tatarka. Born in Plevník-Drienová, originally a teacher, then first and foremost a writer and essayist, Tatarka was a unique thinker who affected the entire second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Slovakia. With his activities, particularly the art of living and above all with his civic attitude he reached out beyond the borders, to the Czech lands and even further, to France (his Promised Land). Tatarka did not live to see the second coup, the velvet gentleness of the revolution. He passed, faded away, departed, as he himself would say, in the spring of 1989, on the 10th of May, aged 76. Don Antonio (Fr Anton Srholec) accompanied him on his last journey.**

One of Tatarka's age-mates, Vladimír Mináč, called people of his kind the Undergrowth. Mináč was to become the ideologist of normalisation. He used to refer to himself as the Undergrowth – someone who outgrew their birthplace and relatives.<sup>1</sup> I remember the memorable year of 1968 when Dominik Tatarka was already a celebrated author of the *Demon of Consent* [Démon súhlasu, 1963], *One Season in Paris* [Prútené kreslá, 1963] and *The Fairy Lady* [Panna záračnica, 1944]. The latter was put to film by Štefan Uher in 1966. Uher was by then quite a prominent director and co-author of the Slovak cult film *The Sun* in a Net [Slnko v sieti, 1962]. The film defined my

generation and marked the entire decade. It was perhaps because the comrades at the Central Committee of the Communist Party considered the blind mother in the nonconformist film to be the symbol of the Party. "Certain unnamed comrades – intellectuals" (a precarious nickname at the time, a label worse than the stigma of a witch in the middle ages) allegedly considered the Party to be blinded by power for some time. I recall it was Dominik Tatarka who, during the week of student strikes, toured individual Faculties of the Comenius University in Bratislava. He did it together with the actor Jozef Kroner, already famed in Slovakia and abroad for his Oscar-winning role in *The Shop on*

The study was presented on 11 December 2012 at the Department of Slavonic Studies, Masaryk University, Brno at the 16th Czecho–Slovak conference entitled Dominik Tatarka within the Context of Global Literature (Language – Style – Poetics – Politics). It was hosted by the Department of Slavonic Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, together with the Literary Information Centre in Bratislava, the Czech Association of Slavists, The Frank Wollman Slavonic Society, the Central European Centre for Slavonic Studies, and AOSS – The Club of Independent Writers. The publication of the study marks the 100th birth anniversary of Dominik Tatarka.

<sup>1</sup> The term was coined by Vladimír Mináč in a TV Youth Club [Televízny klub mladých, Bratislava, 1996].



2 The Faculty students laid everywhere – on the benches in the lecture hall. In their teachers' rooms – straight on the floor in their sleeping bags or merely covered with their coats and jackets to manifest their support to what Jan Palach stood for.

3 Transl. note: On 21 August 1968 Czechoslovakia was invaded by Warsaw Pact troops.

4 TATARKA, Dominik. *Demon of Consent* [Démon súhlasu]. Bratislava: Archa, 1991, p. 13.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

6 Transl. note: D.S. as in *Démon súhlasu* – the *Demon of Consent*.  
7 ŠKRIPKOVÁ, Iveta *You move me so ...* [Dojímáte ma veľmi ...]. (A bulletin for the production). Banská Bystrica: BDnR, 1992.

8 In a documentary by Kamila Kytková *Demon of Consent according to Dominik Tatarka* [Démon súhlasu podľa Dominika Tatarku] (STV Bratislava, 1999) sister Jozefína Tatarková remembers her brother Dominik.

9 *Ibid.*

the Main Street [Obchod na korze]. Kroner was a multiple laureate of awards internationally. In his own special way, Tatarka was sharing with the student community his attitude to the societal upheavals and particularly to the tragic event of the time – the protest self-immolation of the student Jan Palach in Prague. Tatarka then markedly defined the attitudes of most students. It was the time when all doors and windows opened wide and our generation set out to explore the world. I saw Tatarka and Kroner at the Faculty of Philosophy (as a student at the Faculty of Theatre at the Academy of Performing Arts, I was spending that night with my friends, psychology students). The two arrived in the middle of the night among the students of humanities – psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, and languages – who were occupying the Faculty of Philosophy in Bratislava on Gondova Street. They spent 48 hours there, non-stop.<sup>2</sup> Our Faculty of Theatre had different spokesmen of the new attitude, Milan Šimečka and his and Tatarka's friend Ludvík Vaculík, the author of the novel *The Axe* [Sekyra]. Tatarka spoke of the student movement (which was by then a movement, not a mere random protest) as of the major attitude, the voice that screams its truth. The students carried him on their shoulders outside the Faculty to the improvised tribune to address the student crowd (the makeshift tribune was actually the bay in the colonnade at the Faculty of Law which now carries a memorial plaque for the victims of the events of 21 August 1968).<sup>3</sup> Tatarka spoke with his inimitable, suggestive, even mystical manner of the 'Carpathian shepherd'. He addressed the hero of our times with his *Demon of Consent* – with its very first sentence: "I am shipwrecked. [...] Against my own consciousness, but also in the name of a sacred

belief, I first publicly acknowledged and then confessed to the authorities that I was a traitor to the people. I then went even further than my prosecutors in convincing them that I was a treacherous enemy."<sup>4</sup> He went on: "I, Bartolomej Boleráz, originally a writer, once said to be the conscience of the people, I went along with the Zeitgeist, on the wings of times like a balloon or a bubble. I understand, now I understand that I could not go on like this. I was captured by a sharp storm that threw me to the ground."<sup>5</sup> The name Bartolomej [Bartholomew] used to be one of Tatarka's favourite names, once as Bartolomej Boleráz, then as Bartolomej Slička. He was also Bartolomej in the production of the Puppet Theatre on the Crossroads [Bábkové divadlo na Rázcestí, BDnR]. This Bartolomej was hiding behind the initials D.T. that is in contrast with the character D.S. [*Démon Súhlasu* - The Demon of Consent], his alter ego, the ever restless, self-questioning, conscience, always tempted and tested by the Demons.<sup>6</sup>

### **You move me so ... A few remarks on the production by the Puppet Theatre on the Crossroads in Banská Bystrica**

The production *You move me so ...* was introduced by the BDnR in the 1991/1992 season (set design by Ján Zavarský, puppets and costumes by Eva Farkašová, directed by Marián Pecko). It is characteristic that the pastiche of Tatarka's life story and his works was introduced by a puppet theatre. No other drama company, no national or less-so-national theatre dared embark upon the task.

The author Iveta Škripková chose the motif for the screenplay from an excerpt from Tatarka's line *You move me so ...*



She added a defining subtitle: *Fragments from the life and work of Dominik Tatarka*. The piece consisted of five fragments: Fragment I – Semblance of Childhood; Fragment II – On Meaning, Senses and Sensuality; Fragment III – An Elegy about a Word – scenic reading; Fragment IV – A Variety about a Talent of a Writer within a Nation; Fragment V – An Elegy about Solitude. The fragments were complemented by the poetry by Jan Skácel – the poem *What is left of an angel* [Co zbylo z anděla] and *Elegy about the death of Otakar Horký* [Elegie na smrt Otakara Horkého]. The premiere was preceded by intensive meetings of the author and dramaturge Iveta Škripková and the director and co-author of the screenplay Marián Pecko with Martin M. Šimečka, Eva Podlipná, Miloš Žiak, Zlata Solovajsová, and Iveta Mojžišová. The bulletin also served as the poster for the production. It contained unique photographs of Dominik Tatarka and some key texts by Desanka Tatarková, Sabina Bollack, Michaela Jurovská, Martin Šimečka, and Milan Šimečka. It read: “The production is a theatre fiction. It cannot and does not aspire to being an autobiography of Dominik Tatarka. It is not to document, but to inspire interest in his works. Friends, do come and spend some time with us! Try to experience with us a little of his life. This minor theatre convergence might take you to Tatarka, or perhaps to us or elsewhere ...”

The BDnR production emerged over two years. It involved two years of searching (and, no doubt, the worries of searching), two years of conversations, reading, contemplation, learning, touching and sensing the traces left by Tatarka. The traces are now increasingly

covered in the dust of time, becoming more difficult to decipher, and thus ever more insistent. They contain loud solitude. We decipher Tatarka’s legacy as if it were hieroglyphs or our predetermination, our fate, our lack of readiness to be his followers – also in martyrdom. Iveta Škripková and Marián Pecko decided to enter this inimitable river in the waters of childhood. Surprisingly, not only did they take Dominik as a companion, but they also brought in another lead character to the story, none other than the D. S. – the Demon of Consent [Démon súhlasu] along with an entire crowd of demons. Dominik Tatarka talks with the Demon of Consent. The two are protagonists of this bitter-sweet or rather sad and creepy narrative intertwined with snippets of authentic reality and excerpts from Tatarka’s works.

The first fragment (Fragment I) focuses on Tatarka’s birthplace, childhood and the relationship with his mother Žofia. Dominik is an only son among five daughters. As a toddler he contracted pneumonia. In despair his mother put him in a warm pigsty. Miraculously the resilient Dominko got well. Ever since then he walked through life with determination, full of energy, sensitive to any wrong and injustice, but also convinced of his own truth and his right to life. He was being spoiled, but also punished by his five sisters, but a favourite of teachers and priests who left in him a lasting imprint. It was in them that he searched for a male role model. Was that to no avail? Who knows? He was born with a strong masculine gene. The seal of manly nobleness helped him face many wrongs: he was generous to others, kept seeking the better in them, their graciousness and generosity, the good which he so desperately kept reaching for throughout his life. Even though he sensed the other side in them and even experienced it,

**10** ŠKRIPKOVÁ, Iveta: *You move me so ...* [Dojímate ma veľmi] (Script). Internal document. Banská Bystrica: BDnR, 1992, p. 22.

**11** LEHUTA, Emil: ‘Tatarka as a Theatre’ [Tatarka ako divadlo]. In *Javisko*, 1993, 25.1, p. 6.

**12** The Theatre behind the Railroad gave rise to a number of now famed theatre artists such as Jozef Bednárík, Ľubomír Vajdička or Dušan Jamrich.

**13** LEHUTA, Emil: ‘Tatarka as a Theatre’ [Tatarka ako divadlo]. In *Javisko*, 1993, 25.1, p. 6.

**14** Actor Ján Kožuch played the role of Dominik Tatarka. At the time Kožuch was member of the Theatre of the Slovak National Uprising in Martin and guest starred at the BDnR. Today he is one of the major actors in the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin.

**15** The character of Jozefka as played by Viera Dubačová is an inspiring woman, a muse. It was no accident that Jozefka was



the namesake of Tatarka's favourite youngest sister Jozefína.

**16** The production *You Move me So ...* was recorded by the Slovak Television in 1993 because of the award it received at the Nitra Theatre Festival.

**17** Ján Zavorský has been working with a number of theatres. Today he is mainly the artistic director and set designer at the Ján Palárik Theatre in Trnava.

**18** LEHUTA, Emil: 'Tatarka as a Theatre' [Tatarka ako divadlo]. In *Javisko*, 1993, 25.1, p. 7.

**19** *Ibid.*

**20** GLOCKOVÁ, Mária: 'Come to the Feast of Words'. In *Smer*, 11 June 1993, p. 5.

**21** POLIAKOVÁ, Blanka: 'Once upon a Time There Was a Boy' [Bol raz jeden chlapec]. In *Práca*, 20 April 1993, 48.90, p. 7.

**22** PREDMERŠKÝ, Vladimír: 'Restless theatre' [Nepokojné divadlo]. In *Loutkář*, 3.1993, p. 53.

**23** OLOS, Rado: 'An Opportunity Missed' [Premárnená šanca]. In *Kultúrny život*, 1993,

having been stabbed in the back on more than one occasion, he believed that the humanistic side is stronger than the evil. It was also in love that he sought the bond between our roots and what is above. He was a darling of women – after all, he was raised by women only. That is perhaps why the State Police chose an appropriate cover name for his file: Seladon (in the Czechoslovak context a name similar to Casanova). The playwrights thus began with Tatarka's childhood: there is the mother Žofia and his first love Jozefka, the favourite sister. Among the five sisters one has either no choice or so much of it that he gets carried away. Simply, Dominik was particularly close to his sister Jozefína also because she was of similar age and even looked after him to the end (though with only sporadic visits). She was the only one to outlive him. In the documentary about Dominik Tatarka she remembers him: "Dominko – that is how we called him, our Dominko has not left, it was no faithlessness."<sup>8</sup> This was said in reference to Tatarka's confession that he had left the Church (František Mikloško suggests it happened in 1949). Before death Tatarka asked in a letter to have a Church funeral, even though, as he admitted: "I did make a mistake, but please sing *Circum dederunt mé* for me."<sup>9</sup> The production does not only have a single Demon of Consent, but Demons as a crowd, demons that constantly pull on Dominik's trousers and on his leg, pinch his nose, strike his face, but also sing him songs and recite poems: "Demons: A man of the Stalinist era no longer has to be silent in despair, our man sings!"<sup>10</sup>

Theatre critic Emil Lehuta only decided to write about the piece when faced by a gauntlet thrown down by other critics, who pronounced the production to be the best of the past season. It brought him directly to the BDnR in Banská

Bystrica. He wrote about the production as of a complete, valiant and challenging theatre project that might refer to itself as "fragments from life and work, [...]" but it actually attempts to present the viewer with an abridged personal portrait and a profile of the life of an exceptional man, someone who had been concealed from the youth as a 'disobedient' writer."<sup>11</sup> Emil Lehuta, a seasoned and stern diagnostician of the time and its theatre, also recalls an attempt to turn Tatarka into a theatre play that was made years earlier, in the early 1960s. At the time the Bratislava Theatre of Poetry behind the Railroad [Bratislavské divadielko poézie Za rampami] introduced Tatarka's *A Cock in Agony* [Kohútik v agónii]. It was a prose to which Tatarka was particularly close, even tender. The director of "the fairy tale short story", as Lehuta put it, was someone among the budding theatre fans.<sup>12</sup> Following the performance, the producers invited Emil Lehuta, along with the author himself, Dominik Tatarka, to a discussion with the audience.

It would not be Lehuta had he not questioned the effort by the authors. Though he received the project *You move me so...* well as a whole, he "would have preferred a more real – though, dramatically no less rewarding – and exciting struggle with oneself as the prototype of an intrepid hero who always wins over anyone except for death. Tatarka would have been better than this mythical knight. For he was someone errant, forever troubling himself with the anguish of search. The contemporary politicking writers only read and think of Jaspers, though they have no sense of guilt. Yet I respect and understand the desire of the young puppetry generation to find itself, to name and give face to an ideal that stood strong in the Trying Days."<sup>13</sup>

Theatre critics particularly commended



the production 'You move me so ... for the authors' approach to sources, the means of using the motifs and documentary sources (oral history or quotations from works and biographical sources), and the use of testimonies of the times and of Tatarka in the play starring Ján Kožuch as Dominik,<sup>14</sup> Viera Dubačová as Jozefka<sup>15</sup> and Jozef Šamaj as the Demon of Consent. Even the paradox of a puppet theatre did not come across as such a paradox when one is aware of the efforts by Iveta Škripková and Marián Pecko, knowing intimately their innovative approaches to production that exceeds generational limits and falls into the out-of-genre and extra-generational, or rather multi-genre and multi-generational theatre of the 1990s marked by experiment and major input by authors.

Director Marián Pecko used in the play puppets as well as masks, symbols and signs offered by set designer Ján Zavarský. Pecko works with them so effectively and convincingly that a viewer spontaneously gives into the power of the moment, its experience, energy and the existential presence of Dominik Tatarka. Zavarský as an eminent set designer used the stage to define the production in such a way that it remains until these days an interesting and impressive concept and production. It particularly applies to its visual and connotation message. Its legibility and exceptional effect strikes the audiences.<sup>16</sup>

What is particularly remarkable is the outreach to other contexts, namely art theory, religion, social and political sciences. The production can be thus seen as a historical document about Tatarka and his work. It is delivered as a piece of art with historical and factual values of the man and his time. Ján Zavarský<sup>17</sup> created a stage space for the narrative

**82** that consists of elements – wood, water, stone,

theory/history/critic

canvas, straw, and leaves. His colleague, the costume and puppet designer Eva Farkašová highlighted the context of the time and historical photography through details in costumes and props. In Fragment IV (A Variety about a Talent of a Writer within a Nation) she put Tatarka into red boots. They are loaned to him by a Russian guerrilla soldier, holding a machine gun, in exchange for his shoes. He removes the moccasins from Tatarka (Ján Kožuch) and forces him to accept his hideous shapeless massive boots. Oafishly, Domino is learning to walk in them. First he wears just one boot whilst limping with the other bare foot at a gun point, to ultimately give into the pressure. "Yet the boot of a stranger soon becomes a symbol of his personal and wider societal adaptation to the prickly existence – faced by many more than just writers – in an imposed uniform working and living while marching. He eventually runs in an obedient trot," Lehuta comments on the scene.<sup>18</sup>

Lehuta considers the most impressive of the fragments to be the Fragment V which he describes as "pure in expression". It is an image of true "enchantment by Paris". He considers it to be the main platform among all the fragments. "Although it is merely an elegant chansonnière as she stands on the floor spotlight coloured in the French tricolour and sings a Piaf chanson. The enchanted young Dominik, in a shirt and barefoot, orbits the space in utter carefree bliss."<sup>19</sup> Those less aware of the history of the time and of the more complex connotations were more critical about the production. They expected greater dynamics than the stifling facts that do not let go. One of the post-premiere interviews is even entitled 'Come to the Feast of Words'.<sup>20</sup> The critiques were contradictory. Blanka Poliaková in newspaper *Práca* is positive about

25, p. 1.

**24** POLIAKOVÁ, Blanka: 'Once upon a Time There Was a Boy' [Bol raz jeden chlapec]. In *Práca*, 20 April 1993, 48.90, p. 7.

**25** Quoted from a recountal by Bernard Noël in the documentary by Kamila Kytková *Demon of Consent according to Dominik Tatarka* [Démon súhlasu podľa Dominika Tatarku] (STV Bratislava, 1999).

**26** Transl note.: By playing with street names of regions, cities and countries the text builds a metaphor of longing for the then virtually impossible travel, and refers to police interrogation and Siberian gulags. *Sibírska* refers to the headquarters of the State Police – as part of the Ministry of Interior – on *Sibírska Street* in Bratislava. The subsequent street names refer to further places and cities: *Pražská* – Prague Street, *Francúzska* – French Street, *Brnenská* – Brno Street.

**27** Quoted according to the documentary by Kamila Kytková *Demon*



of Consent according to Dominik Tatarka [Démon súhlasu podľa Dominika Tatarku] (STV Bratislava, 1999).

**28** PATOČKA, Jan: *Heretical Essays* [Kacířské eseje]. Prague: Academic, 1990, p. 70.

**29** ŠKRIPKOVÁ, Iveta: *You move me so ...* [Dojímáte ma veľmi] (Script). Internal document. Banská Bystrica: BDnR, 1992, p. 29.

**30** ŠKRIPKOVÁ, Iveta: *You move me so ...* [Dojímáte ma veľmi] (Script). Internal document. Banská Bystrica: BDnR, 1992, pp. 30–31.

**31** BAKOŠOVÁ, Zuzana Anna. 'Zabudnuté básne. A belated note to Dominik T.' [Zabudnuté básne. Oneskorená správa Dominikovi T.] In *Proměny. Čtvrtletník československé společnosti pro vědu a umění*. Basel, Switzerland, 1990, p. 81.

the piece: "There is no stage curtain in the arena governed by elements – fire, water, air and soil and the fifth element – Dominik Tatarka. From the reigning light spans the arc camber of his life."<sup>21</sup> Yet the *Loutkář* magazine is more critical about the acting, such as in reference to Jozef Šamaj as the Demon of Consent: "The denotation slides on the surface of the text."<sup>22</sup> A review entitled *An Opportunity Missed* [Premárnená šanca] by Rado Olos published in *Kultúrny život* highlights such arguments.<sup>23</sup>

"One closes eyes, and the image recedes turning into a dream," said fine artist Vladimír Kompánek at the funeral of the 'Carpathian shepherd' Dominik Tatarka. Over the grave Kompánek reflected the uniqueness of the writer: "Dreaming is also about reminiscing and dreaming is also of this world. You know, Dominik, young men are now carrying you across the hills and valleys somewhere to the peaks. You should see it yourself. So light as if you weigh nothing, you seem to be floating with them, slowly merging with the countryside like a song. Indeed, that is how we should bury you. We should carry you across the countryside on the foothills of the Tatras which you loved so, across your Tatrana. Or we should plant your seedlings across the entire country, your courage, your freedom and fairness, so that it grows root. We should bury you in the height of which you dreamt so often and called it the place of worship, the most treasured of places. We should raise a protective column behind our heads – a wooden post of the awareness of our culture, an oak pillar as a symbol of worship of our ancestors."<sup>24</sup>

Dominik Tatarka, the mythical hero, is not an invented myth or a futile pathos of reminiscence. He is a pure fact of human existence. Having entered literature and emerged through

literature, he belongs to the entire European culture, as suggested by French writer Bernard Noël in a document on Tatarka. "There is something of his being between a dream and reality in the poetics of the *Wicker Chairs*, and something Orwellian in the *Demon of Consent*."<sup>25</sup> It is precisely why we continue to remind ourselves that he belongs to the European culture as its integral part. Yet Europe is left to learn of him in mere fragments and slovenly. Better times are coming hopefully. We recall, remember and reminisce in the *Search of Light*, trying to resuscitate Memory and recycle the waste of lies through critical judgement. It is perhaps time to strand straight and remind ourselves of the last sentences in the piece that was directed by life itself: "Dominik Tatarka: I received a letter again. The letter fell into my Interior. The authorities are summoning me to Sibírska."<sup>26</sup> Not my bodies. Their Bodies. Their Interior is at Sibírska. The Slovak interior. Nutria's den. It has a lot of nests for dormouse, flies and other bugs [...] so good to nest in, listen to, listen to in a specialised manner, listen to selected answers. Some answers can buy a ticket to the world. Paris! Even Prague would do ... Yet I cannot even peep. So I told myself. I am three hundred years old, merely rolling towards death. I should be peeping. I would rather pee. There, on Sibírska ... Perhaps one day they invite me to Pražská ... or Francúzska ... or Brnenská. Once, maybe, it won't be the Siberian artery to lead to these places. I am just rolling towards Death and am as boring as an ordinary day."<sup>27</sup> Thinking of Nietzsche, who argued that "The truth means an absolute sense,"<sup>28</sup> we can say that, to Tatarka, such an absolute sense remains his true ambition. As he says in the play: "The spiritual genocide of today started shortly after 1948 when they removed virtually the entire intellectual



elite of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Shhhhhhh! (A leaf falls.)<sup>29</sup> The Demons of Power and Darkness who appear, together with the Demon of Consent, in the *You move me so ...* highlight unwittingly, spontaneously and implicitly the mystery and mysticism of Tatarka as a phenomenon. It keeps reminding us that not only do we have someone to reach to, to believe in and follow. We should indeed be resolutely reminding ourselves of him so that he does not disappear from our conscience as a voice in the dessert. He should be focusing our mind to what we like to forget: the memory of context is the only bond that we have with the past and the future. In conclusion, to use Tatarka's words in the play: "Once it will happen forever, without a chance of recall, fatally, unquestionably sensing the link between the borders that do not exist even though they are there PRO DOMO SUI GENERIS. Oh Lord, they do not exist indeed! Siberia will not be the border or the stake. The entire world shall be a stake on which you immolate yourself, burst in flame. Your sparkle skips from one man to another. It will be us again, the authentic ones, the original humans, ancestors, the keepers of the eternal flame. [...] They all renounce themselves, their fire in exchange for a mere bowl of lentils! They keep bloating. My friends keep bloating. The stench. [...] I have been wandering alone all my life. I say a mot there and I say a mot there. A word, a word ... Pour m'éterniser (to eternalise myself). No one will write a word about me. It will be impossible. You won't manage that. Experience is non-transferrable. I vouchsafe to be a human who addresses you in Slovak ... baptises you with Slovak, a word and a deed. May God chastise me. I shall kill our shared inside. [...] Our soul and our body are mystery. They challenge us to demystify ourselves. They call

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upon us to have courage in the struggle. And we respect the calling to create a space of greater opportunities for ourselves. God respects it."<sup>30</sup>

Two decades later, the BDnR production about Dominik Tatarka *You move me so ...* of June 1992 remains to be a witness, a legacy, a message from the past. Furthermore, it is alive and speaks despite of and across generations. The greater silence we sense about and after Tatarka, the more unrelenting the legacy becomes.

Post scriptum: The poem, written as homage to Tatarka, was read on the first anniversary of his passing at the Refectory of the Franciscan Church in Bratislava in presence of his friends – writers, painters, artists, musicians and many others.

*You move me so...*  
(Puppet Theatre on the Crossroads in Banská Bystrica)  
photo: archive of the Theatre Institute





## A Belated Note to Dominik T.

Perhaps less so  
Than the others  
And perhaps even more  
You have etched in us  
The sense of guilt  
Perhaps less so  
Than the others  
And perhaps more  
You make us  
Pay for  
The guilt of our fear  
The guilt of silence  
The guilt  
Of which you do not  
Free us  
Though you had forgiven  
Though you had understood  
That to survive  
Meant  
Growth inward  
Deep  
As the pain  
Teach us  
To grow  
And despair  
And the frost bite  
Of the harsh  
Bitter times

Perhaps less so  
Than the others  
And perhaps even more  
You taught Repentance  
And faith in earth  
Where standing straight  
And staying  
Meant to outgrow  
Oneself  
You taught Faith  
In oneself  
When to be  
Was carried like a stone  
Heavier than anguish  
Not to be  
Perhaps less so  
Than the others  
And perhaps even more  
You knew of Solitude  
And the grief of Guilt  
Perhaps less so  
Than the others  
And perhaps even more  
You reproached us  
For our mortal sins of  
Faithlessness  
Hopelessness  
Lovelessness

(Z.A.B., 14 March 1990, *Forgotten poems*)



**ANNA GRUSKOVÁ**

theatrolgist and playwright

## Theatre Secrets in Old Photographs

**Today, when we talk about theatre photography we mainly mean the documentation of the theatre productions. Theatre productions have only been photographed since the 1920s when the photography technology became more readily available. Before that time, photographs that would capture the theatre performance as it happened, or would document the stage design or lighting, for instance, were very rare.**

One of the oldest photographs capturing a theatre production in Slovakia is of the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Dmitri Shostakovich at the Slovak National Theatre in 1935, and it is now archived in the collection of the Slovak Theatre Institute. We do not know anything about its origin or author. What we can tell from the photograph though, is that it documents a theatre direction style which tried to avoid illustrative naturalism, following instead the inspiration of the Russian and Czech avant-guard which emphasized the equal importance of different expressive means such as lighting, sound and movement, bringing them to par with the play itself. But the photograph also captured something else, less specific, but still tangible, the magic of theatre.

The photography collection at the Theatre Institute in Bratislava, has been made possible and now accessible to the wider public thanks to the European Photography project whose aim is to locate and collect historic photographs. Most of the photographs in the collections though, capture an entirely different style of performativity. This type of performativity can be seen in the portraits of actors and actresses, theatre ensembles,

in the theatre costumes, stage sets and stage designs as well as theatre buildings; but also in the photographs documenting various forms of social life both in the city and the country.

Traditional ceremonies and cultural holidays celebrated in the cities have had and still have a strong performance character and structure: a specific script, stage design, director, stage designers, protagonists and performers, speakers and so on. This performance must have visually, been very attractive for photographers who



N. Leskov - D. Shostakovich:  
*Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (The Slovak National Theatre, 1935) photo: archive of the Theatre Institute, Bratislava

**86** of actors and actresses, theatre ensembles,

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set out to document those lively events. Theatricality as a manifestation of public life at the turn of the 20th century was a common aspect of culture prevalent during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. A well documented example is the visit of the Habsburg royal couple Charles I of Austria and his wife Zita on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1918 to Bratislava, at the time still known by its German name Pressburg or its Hungarian name Pozsony.

Since the territory of contemporary Slovakia was at that time still part of Austria-Hungary, its proximity to the metropolitan Vienna influenced the life style of its multinational population. Theatre played an incredibly important role in the cultural lives of European city dwellers at the turn of the century. When Henrik Ibsen wrote his most popular play *A Doll's House* in 1879, better known under the title *Nora*, polemical discussions on whether the heroin was right to leave her husband or not reached the pages of the local newspapers.

Stefan Zweig, in his famous autobiography *The World of Yesterday, Memories of a European*, captured the theatricality of his era with these words: „It was not the military, nor the political, nor the commercial that was predominant in the life of the individual and of the masses. The first glance of the average Viennese into his morning paper was not at the events in parliament, or world affairs, but at the repertoire of the theater, which assumed so important a role in public life as was hardly possible in another city. For the Imperial Theater, Burgtheater, was for the Viennese and for the Austrian more than stage upon which actors enacted parts: it was microcosm that mirrored the macrocosm/.../ The Minister President or the richest magnate could walk the streets of Vienna without anyone's turning around, but the court actor or opera singer was



The visit of Charles I. and Zita in Bratislava on the 16th of July 1918, photo: Bratislava City Museum

recognized by every salesgirl or every cabdriver. (Stefan Zweig: *The World of Yesterday, Memories of a European*)

However, the Burgtheatre in Vienna was not the only example of a space where the macrocosm reflected the microcosm. We can safely assume that theatre was the most popular past time after sport between 1839 and 1939, only it was more accessible than sport. One of the reasons that this theatricality was seen as offering an alternative to the mundane banality of every day life played was also perhaps down to the crises of faith and religion, the process of secularization which was reaction to the inability of the Christian religion to fulfill the spiritual needs of the masses. Theatre, for long without the competition of any other media, became the main platform for and provider of entertainment and education and became an influential institution. Theatre was a democratic space open to and popular with the aristocracy, as well as the lower classes, men and women, young and old. The huge popularity of theatre was also due to the vast network of amateur ensembles active across the entire Habsburg Monarchy. It was the amateurs and their theatre families who had very high expectations when it came to





The theatricality of the Slovak Republic,  
photo: Slovak National Archive

theatre productions and who in turn played an important role in the development of professional theatre. When travelling through the countries of former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, I was surprised to see the size and number of old theatre building in almost every small town.

Today, in our globalized world saturated with all forms and kinds of entertainment and distractions, the old past, 'the world of yesterday' suffused with and united by theatre, seems like a lost paradise. On the other hand, the reason for this fascination with theatre and theatricality was rooted in denial, in a desire to escape into the world of illusion to avoid the confrontation with hard reality. A disillusioned attitude that brought on the failure of the European society and caused two world wars. Looking at theatre during the interwar period, the form hasn't changed, but the content and motivation was very different.

The main agenda behind the large number of theatre events and festivals at the end of the 30s, not only in Austria

**ss** after the Anschluss, but also in Bratislava,

**theory/history/critic**

the capital city of the first Slovak Republic which sadly was a satellite of Hitler's Germany, was the effort to demonstrate power.

What we start to notice in photographs from this period, is a strange overlap of the urban and the rural elements. There is evident, an appropriation of certain rural theatrical aspects such as aesthetically attractive and artisan costumes, folk dress, folk dance and singing, as well as various rituals and ceremonies. This 'appropriation' was part of the process of instrumentalisation of rural culture for the purpose of propaganda. The photographs document and capture precisely this incongruous merge, created in an unnatural manner - from above.

Photography, since its inception, had to overcome many limitations. The technological possibilities at that time (the exposition time, the limited focus, the sensitivity of the emulsions, the size and weight of the camera etc.) required that the object in front of the camera was static. Therefore the scene before the camera had to be staged. This tendency can be seen in the cabinet cards, photographs which were taken in photo salons and were obviously staged with the use of costumes and props in order to best present certain specifically desired scenes.

The necessity for the photographed subjects and objects to be static was utilized in ingenious ways most notably by the Slovak photographer Pavol Suchan, who ran a photographic salon as well as the photographer and ethnographer Karol Plicka.

Suchan applied his previous experience as a theatre director and playwright to his photography too. His photographs were very popular, widely published and distributed in the form of postcards. In some of them, the playwright afforded his 'protagonists'



a few lines which would emphasize the theatricality of the whole scene.

Plicka, on the other hand, focused on capturing the disappearing world of the folk culture, trying to photograph as much of it as possible, producing a huge body of work. Within the overwhelming quantity of images, are his best photographs in which he managed to capture something that goes beyond the ethnographic documentation.

Perhaps we could refer here to the well known categories defined by Roland Barthes. We can photograph 'gestures' or a 'set of gestures' but we cannot capture what is behind them, the 'framing narrative – the gestus'. By the same token we can photograph the outcome of a tableaux vivant which was created by ladies and gentlemen grouped and positioned so as to present a live scene which was then immortalized just after the curtain was raised and dissolved as soon as it was dropped. But we cannot photographically capture its potency, something to which Barthes refers as 'pregnant moments'. Tableaux vivant with its theatre curtain, a theatre form also used by Bertold Brecht, Bob Wilson and others, can be likened to the photographic process, when

the shutter opens, the photosensitive emulsion reacts to light and then the shutter closes.

Thus these old, staged photographs offer their potency to be explored further, artistically or in terms of art theory. But until now they have rarely been the focus of theatre theory research. In most cases, a couple of photographs have been chosen to simply illustrate historical research. What might make us cautious to use these photographs for theatre research is perhaps exactly what makes photography so exciting - its complexity. The analysis of theatre photography requires not only the knowledge of theatre history, art history and history as such, but also certain sensitivity, the ability to perceive, with Barthes' words, the gestus and punctum of photographs. The magic of photography... And for that, one needs both sense and sensibility.

Theatre, for long without the competition of any other media, has become the main platform for and provider of entertainment, education and simply became to be an influential institution. Theatre was a democratic space open to and popular with the aristocracy, as well as the lower classes, men and women, young and old. The huge popularity of theatre was also due to a vast network of amateur ensembles across the entire Habsburgh Monarchy. It was those amateurs and their families who were a very active and had very high expectations when it comes to theatre productions and had great effect on the development of professional theatre. When travelling through the countries of former Austro Hungarian monarchy, I was surprised to see the size and number of old theatre building in small towns.

Today, in our globalized world saturated with ubiquitous LAKADLAMI and attractions the past presiaknuta theatre seems like a lost paradise. On the other hand, the reason for







Karol Plicka's photographs were usually rigorously arranged. photo: Slovak National Museum Martin

this fascination with theatre and theatricality was rooted in the escapism into the world of illusion, skewed perception of reality, one of the reasons of the failure of the European society, which caused two world wars. The form hasn't changed, theatricality was still present, but the content was different.

The infinite number of theatre events and festivals at the end of the 30s, not only in Austria after the Anschluss but also in Bratislava, the capital city of the first autonomous Slovak republic which was unfortunately also a satellite of Hitler's Germany, was the effort to demonstrate the power.

We can see the overlapping of the urban and rural culture, appropriating/utilizing its theatrical aspects such as aesthetically attractive and artistic costume, folk dress, folk dance and singing, and theatricality of various rituals and ceremonies. In reality, this was a process of instrumentalisation of the rural culture for the purposes of propaganda. And photography documents and captures precisely this discrepancy which has been  
90 created in an unnatural way, from the outside.

theory/history/critic

Since its inception photography had to overcome many limitations. The technological possibilities at that time (the exposition time, the focus, the sensitivity of the emulsions, the size and weight of the camera etc.) require that the object in front of the camera was static. Therefore the scene before the camera had to be staged. That is why we have also included several cabinet cards or photographs which have been taken in photo salons and are obviously staged with the use of costumes, props or capturing a specifically staged scene.

The static character of photographed objects and subjects was well captured by talented Slovakian photographers such as Pavol Suchan, who ran a photographic salon, or photographer and ethnographer Karol Plicka.

In his photography, Sochan applied his previous experience as theatre director and playwright. His photographs were very popular and published and distributed in the form of postcards. In some of them, the playwright added the characters a few lines which emphasize/underline the theatricality of the whole scene.




Tableau vivant  
St. Elizabeth, Bratislava  
atelier "Mindszenty", 1907



In Plicka's photographs, he focused on capturing the disappearing world of the folk culture, trying to photograph as much of it as possible. In his best photographs though he managed to capture something beyond the ethnographic document.

Perhaps we could refer here to the well known categories as defined by Roland Barthes. We can photograph gestures or a set of gestures but we cannot capture what is behind them, the framing narrative – the *gestus*. By the same token we can photograph the outcome of tableaux vivant which was created by ladies and gentlemen who created a live picture and which was formed just after the curtain was raised and dissolved as soon as it was dropped. But we cannot photographically capture its potency, something to which Barthes refers as pregnant moments. Tableaux vivant, a theatre forms also

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Thus an old, staged photography offers its potency to be utilized further, artistically or in terms of art theory. Until now it has rarely been a focus of theatre theory research. In most case, a couple of photographs have been chosen to simply illustrate historical research. An obstacle for using photographs for theatre research is perhaps exactly what makes photography so exciting, its complexity. Analysis of theatre photography requires not only the knowledge of theatre history, art history and history as such, but also certain sensitivity, the ability to perceive, with Barthes' words, its *gestus*, *punctum*. The magic of photography... And for that, one needs both sense and sensibility. 



KATARÍNA CVEČKOVÁ

Student, Faculty of Theatre, Academy of Performing Arts, Bratislava

# Art enables us to comprehend the philosophy of life

Lucia Kašiarová studied dance in Slovakia and the Czech Republic where she also found home. She has been living in Prague for nine years, working as dancer and choreographer, and running an independent culture centre called Studio ALTA. In June 2012 she received the Dancer of the Year Award at the Dance Prague festival (the winner in the category Dance Production of the Year was *How Much Does Your Desire Weigh / Kolik váží vaše touha*, in which she participated). We met the talented and energetic Slovak at the 2013 Small Stocktake [2013 Malá Inventura] festival. The festival audience could see her in a number of productions.

**You studied at the Banská Bystrica conservatory and at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. What brought you to Prague?**

Bratislava was good for me because of job offers and the community of people involved in dance and theatre with which I socialised. The city itself, however, did not suit me and I knew I never wanted to live there. It was already during my studies at the Academy that I travelled to Vienna for different

projects. Yet I did not want to stay there either. It was simply the phase in life when I did not know which way to go and what to do with myself. At that point I got to Prague where I worked on the project *Sapro-Agapé*. Though I still returned Bratislava for school, the very next day I packed my bags and left for Prague for good.

**You are behind the foundation of and running the independent space Studio ALTA. It has been gradually transformed from a simple rehearsal studio into a professional chamber theatre. By now you offer space to a number of independent artists. How did the idea emerge?**

When Jaro Viňarský lived in Prague, he wanted to do a project for which he needed a grant. That was the first impulse to set up a non-profit organisation Alt@rt. We then had an idea to turn an old abandoned warehouse into a theatre rehearsal studio. Even though we worked at the time without running water, heating and in overall adverse conditions, paradoxically the site was of great interest. Furthermore there were always people to be found who wanted to rehearse there. I realised the deficit of independent spaces for creative artists in Prague. And so I decided to take a risk and find better premises. Over time we saw some 200 venues. As soon as I entered what is now the Studio ALTA, I knew it was the right place. It was only after I signed the contract that I realised what it all meant for me realistically and financially in particular, and that, naturally, I was unable to finance it all by myself. I applied for a grant which we received. Ever since then Studio ALTA has been running, even though we never received any grant with the full requested amount to cover all the rental and running cost. Studio ALTA is now available to anyone – dancers, theatre artists, fine and multimedia artists. There is no set dramaturgy. We

92 the Academy that I travelled to Vienna for different

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give an opportunity to everyone who wants to be creative and who accepts certain rules – to look after their own performances and the premises, to run workshops, etc... It is a kind of punk space that chooses those who will make it their home.

**Not only are you a dancer, but also a choreographer, producer and the head of a theatre. Which of these jobs is closest to your heart?**

I cannot do just one thing. Yet I also think that, if one does not do something to the fullest, he or she cannot be good at it. That is why I decided to do a number of things to the maximum. When I am just a dancer, I tend to blame myself that it does well only to me. Then I think that it is not enough and I should be taking care of someone. And so I decided to look after artists and give them the space to express themselves.

**You not only make dance productions, but also work on movement theatre. What are the limits between dance and theatre?**

Any definition is nonsense. When we do something that carries an idea, has a telling value, it does not ultimately make any difference whether it is a theatre or dance. The only difference I see is that dance brings much more imagination to the stage and something that does not require detailed explanation. Dance leaves a lot of things a mystery. It tends to work more with man's inner self which he cannot

verbalise. Working with words, theatre employs far more the ratio. Dance works with the rest.

**You worked with a number of major dancers and choreographers. Which of them left the greatest imprint on you?**

Over time I came to realise that I am most affected by people who improvise and do not make a concrete production. They think a lot. Such people did not only teach us about dance and movement, but also about life. That is what I am particularly grateful for. To me it remains the point of dance and art itself. Art enables us to comprehend the philosophy of life. We address such questions as why are we here at all. What do we bring to the world? That is what I express through dance. And I do it because I want to learn something more. Presentation on stage is nice, but it is not the key thing to me.

**How do you find working with Czech colleagues? The production *Much more than nothing*, that was part of the programme at the 2013 Malá Inventura. It hints ironically on the challenges of such cooperation and the differences in mentality of our two peoples.**

The Czechs are truly different from the Slovaks. For instance, they are far less self-deprecatory and thus more honest. They do not tell you everything that comes to mind. I always take as a benefit: it is me now to be the cheek who can say something straightaway and the Czechs will always somehow get over it. In Slovakia I would end up in a quarrel right away. Yet when I tease someone here, they think about what I said, change their approach or, on the contrary, leave it and ignore me. But that is alright. On the other hand, whilst I enjoy working with the Czechs, I sometimes miss the Slovak spontaneity. I think it

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**Boxesque**  
photo by V. Brtnický





is far easier for the Slovaks to step in space and start rehearsing just like that. A Czech, before he begins, always thinks everything over.

The *Much more than nothing*, which you mentioned, is a production that perfectly fits the space at Studio ALTA. Although we received no grant for the project, everyone whom we approached agreed. In the end it became one of the major dance productions in Prague, since we are seven to dance in it. As the project received no funding, we set the production schedule at fourteen days when we had fun and worked hard at the same time. I was looking forward to every rehearsal, as I knew that we all worked together to the full wanting to achieve something together. It was a lovely combination of professionalism and playfulness. The concept was brought to us by Stano Dobák and Peter Šavel. At the very beginning of the rehearsals it was the Czecho-Slovak connection rather than rivalry that became apparent as the core idea. We also realised that we were a generation of thirty-somethings who experienced Czechoslovakia. We started to work with everything that brought us together. For instance, we used pop songs of the times, such as the *Sweet Temptation* [Sladké mámení]. It was first just a joke when we used the Slovak and Czech anthems at the end, only to realise immediately that nothing else could be used instead.

**In June 2012 you received the Dancer of the Year Award at the Dance Prague festival. What does the award mean to you?**

Honestly, it surprised me, even though I was first a bit haughty about it and ridiculed the award. Yet when I stepped on stage, held the award and looked in the audience filled with my colleagues, I realised that it was not

94 just about the award as such. Its value grew


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the very moment I realised that I also received the Dancer of the Year Award as a Slovak expatriate living in Prague. It was as if I sensed for the first time from the outside that my home was here.

**What keeps you busy at the moment? What projects are you working on?**

I focus on the *Edge* project (*A Probe into the Lives of Artists in Their Fifties / Sonda do života umělců po padesátce*) that was recently premiered. It is a crazy project, one that takes a person altogether. I worked on it with people in their fifties. Gradually I came to realise that it is a really tough job, not only as the movement itself is quite taxing for older people. It is also because each of them is a strong personality. All of them have lived their lives and know what to think of it. At the same time, however, their childlike playfulness arouses. Yet the older people don't listen to you as the children would. Whenever I think that I am ready for everything, they surprise me. When working with professionals one always complains about something. It is also because of the project that I now know that we have nothing to complain about. Everything is simple in reality.

**What are your plans? Are you thinking of a specific project that you wish to complete?**

At the moment I really look forward to the 25<sup>th</sup> May which will be my first real day off in a long time. I will be able to spend it with my family. For now I am working on a new production in Germany to be followed by one in Prague. Along with all that I have to look after Studio ALTA. It may sound incredible, but I have no specific ideas, dreams or objectives. I have no themes which I would feel a need to interpret to anyone. Life goes on and I merely respond to what it brings along. I tend to perceive the impulses from the outside. Everything I do somehow happens by itself. 



DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ  
theatre critic

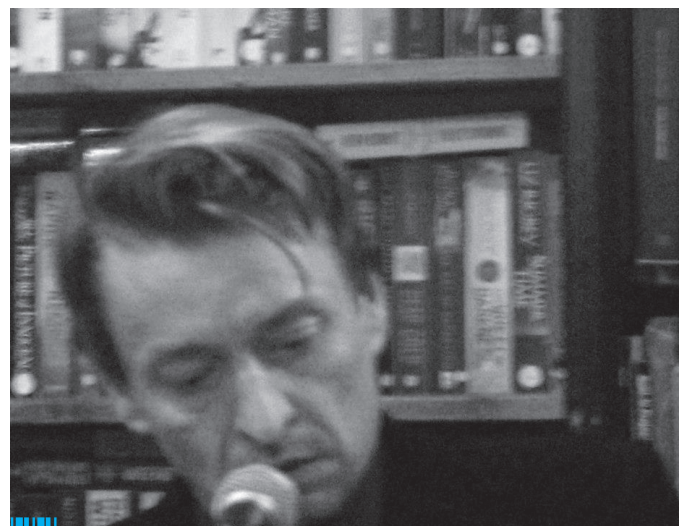
## Art as a space for an open dialogue

From 10th May until 16th June 2013, Slovak theatre professionals will have a chance to encounter the latest international theatre productions as well as prestigious theatre directors thanks to the Wiener Festwochen theatre festival. This year's edition with its motto 'Here' is also the last edition under the leadership of its longstanding artistic director Luc Bondy who is leaving Vienna for Avignon, in France.

The main theme was inspired by questioning the differences between 'here' and 'there'. The special section of the program, called *Unruhe der Form*, will explore the form and how it can be utilized, for instance to express and articulate political subjectivity, whether through the medium of installation or performance. Among the artists invited to present their work in this section, is the Slovak artist, curator and singer Boris Ondreička.

**This year's Wiener Festwochen offers a rich programme of performances and events, including the section entitled *Unruhe der Form* which aims to consider the role of art in contemporary society, and how this relates to its function and form. What will you present?**

I was invited by the curatorial team to give weekly readings from a selection of my own



Boris Ondreička

texts. This event will take place in a gallery space for the duration of two months, altogether six sessions of one-hour long readings accompanied by the presentation of my image archive in the form of a power point slideshow. At the beginning the image archive served to illustrate the readings. Later on it became an autonomous collection of images. Each new text I write brings about a selection of images to be added to the archive which keeps growing and I keep building it as a universal visual background for any reading. The event is called 'Entoptic & Tacit'.

**Wiener Festwochen is a very popular theatre event that provides us with the opportunity to see the highest quality contemporary theatre and performance art. How do you feel about being invited to participate and how do you see the festival?**

In many ways, this is not an entirely new



experience for me, as I had previously collaborated with some of the curators as well as institutions who participate in this project, such as Secession, TanzQuartier, Akademietheater or Kunsthalles Wien and I have also worked with several of the participating artists, many of whom are also good friends. I am genuinely excited about this project and interested in the themes it sets out to explore, its dynamics as well as the challenge of performing for the Wiener Festwochen audience and fulfilling their high expectations.

**There is a political underpinning in your works, how do you see the power or the role of art today? Can art change anything or play a role in today's society?**

I work around the notions of normality and normativity, reality and illusion, hallucination and imagination, content and form, written and spoken word, the private and the public. I see the private as part of the public sphere – the spaces that are separated only by 40cm of a wall or a 5cm thick door. So privacy is also political. Art is a unique space for an open dialogue, where the conflict of the freedom of expression and political correctness is not as evident as it is in other open disciplines. Art has the ability and the potential to connect through the means of metaphor different disciplines into a meaningful dialogue. Art has a real potential of creating an active space, space that Hakim Bey describes as Temporary Autonomous Zones<sup>1</sup>.

**Performance art is a form that has often been appropriated by theatre. Whilst in an international context it is seen as a vital part of theatre practice, within the context of Slovak theatre it is not the case. How and**

**why is performance important or interesting for you as a visual artist?**

I would say it is the other way round, as it was the visual art that appropriated the forms and techniques of theatre. The contemporary performance art dates back to Cabaret Voltaire, the renowned Dada nightclub in Zurich, founded by Hugo Ball and fellow poets and artists. The same way as contemporary art is constantly evolving so is theatre. We can mention Rudolf von Laban, who was born here, in Pressburg (Bratislava) or the Ontological Hysterical Theatre of Richard Foreman and many others. Perhaps not many people will know that the founder of the wonderful Nature Theatre of Oklahoma in New York is Pavol Liska, also from Slovakia.

**In your own practice, some of your projects, such as *Symposium* in 2011, take the form of performance. What is it that you find interesting about performance and why did you choose it as a mode of expression?**

Apart from my own art practice, I also hold the position of the Curator at Thyssen Bornemisza Contemporary Art and am a singer with Kosa z Nosa. Performance is not a case of conscious choice for me, when I start working on a project, I am not thinking about whether the outcome will be a performance or something else. Performance happens to be the ideal medium for certain projects or works as they develop and take their own form. What matters to me is the inter-subjectivity, the inter-personal and emotional level of communication. To me it comes natural to express myself through text, whether written, read or sang, it has to afford room for subjective interpretation. The study of the subjectivity is my great topic, starting from the research and theory through to the physical aspects/endurance of the performance.

<sup>1</sup> (T. A. Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism)




**Entoptic & Tacit**  
(Unruhe der Form, Wiener  
FestWochen, 2013)  
photo by WFW



**In *Symposium* you reference ancient Greek theatre. During Classical Antiquity art served as a platform from which the artist/playwright/philosopher would propose and discuss their worldviews, politics and current affairs. It was the space where the formation of the subject took place and where the function and role of an individual within society was proposed. Are there any parallels with our contemporary situation?**

The *Symposium* was a curated project where I closely followed the content of Plato's text, inviting fellow artists, curators and theorists to deliver an 'encomium', a short speech, in the praise of love. The difference was that, unlike Plato, I invited women as well. I am not specifically focused on exploring Antiquity as such, what drives my work is the study, almost obsessive, of the background, the hidden

underpinnings and causation of events and things, their own etymology. This often leads me to study of the source materials, and historical texts. Surprisingly, this makes me realize how things change within the course of history, and paradoxically they change for worse, or rather, become more rigid despite living in a, relatively speaking, liberal times. 

**Boris Ondreička** (born 1969) is an artist, singer, and a guest curator at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna where he curated the *Ephemeropterae, Tomorrow Morning Line*. He conducted extensive research on contemporary Colombian art scene and held the position of Trazit.SK (2002–2011). He also curated *Being The Future* at Palast de Republik, Berlin; *Symposium* at The Event, Birmingham, and was a co-curator of Manifesta8. Ondreička lives and works in Bratislava and Vienna.



**INGRID HRUBANIČOVÁ**  
writer, performer, linguist



First off, we need to understand what “European” means in this case, for it is a word that leaves a lot of room for interpretation. If we add to it other continents and their respective derived adjectives, e.g. American, or Asian, our understanding deepens, and a clear cultural and geographical essence gives meaning to the term. The city of culture is thus a human settlement, that appears, to its inhabitants and visitors alike, to be inclined to support culture (art being only one of its aspects). A city like that is established naturally, it cannot be formed by an external decision, like “here, we will build a city of culture”.

Clearly, a European city of culture should, in the long run, spontaneously raise awareness of Polish, German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Lithuanian etc. cultural values, history, art, philosophy etc. We need to be alert, so that the effort to build „potemkin“ villages, and even cities, is not confused with the project

98 of the European Capital of Culture.

**ZORA JAUROVÁ**  
expert for cultural policy



Confidence, based on a critical understanding of its past and present and a vision of the future of the city in Europe. A critical body of motivated inhabitants. And primarily, a will and determination to exceed the boundaries of provinciality.

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**What makes  
a city the  
European  
Capital of  
Culture?**





# 2

What makes  
a city the  
European  
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Culture?

**PAVEL GRAUS**  
dramaturge



A theoretical answer – the decision of bureaucrats.  
A practical answer – lobbying and money.  
A Slovak answer – politics.  
A European answer – politics.  
An Easterneuropeanslovak answer –  
unusual marketing and fireworks.  
A musician's answer – well, that it's  
"kind of like the Slovak New York!"  
A utopian answer – culture itself.

**SILVESTER LAVRÍK**  
director, playwright



Even though the grand opening and „lighting“  
of the Dome in Košice left a lot to be desired, I  
believe that everything will turn out fine in the  
end. I dearly hope that it will. Because infantile  
self-worship is definitely the wrong way to present  
ourselves as a confident and self-aware culture.



# DIVADELNÝ ÚSTAV BRATISLAVA THE THEATRE INSTITUTE

The Theatre Institute (1961) is a modern European institution under the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and its mission is to provide the Slovak and international public with complete information service about theatre. The priority of the Theatre Institute is its documentary activity – a systematic compilation, editing, preservation and public access creation to collections. At present day, the Institute also carries out services deriving from its special status as the Public Specialized Archive and the Museum of Theater Institute, both administered by the Department of theater documentation, information and digitalization.

Similarly, the Institute performs an information-promotion purpose including the task of regularly informing the public about its own activities as well as various theater related events organized in Slovakia or abroad. It provides information about theaters, prepares statistics on Slovak theaters and analytical papers within the field of cultural policy.

The Theater Institute actively participates in organizing cultural and educational events – either individually or in cooperation – while utilizing its own multimedia space The Studio 12. It organizes the festival New Drama/Nová dráma) and the competition 'Drama' for the best original play in Slovak and Czech language. Another major agenda of the institute's activity is its productive publication platform.

The scientific and research activity of the Theater Institute includes the research of the Slovak theater since the founding of its professional stage in 1920 up till

present day. The institute takes part in other research activity of partner institutions in the field of theater culture in Slovakia and abroad, while significantly engages in organizing professional symposiums, seminars, conferences and other forms of presentations focusing on research, monitoring or on evaluation of the Slovak dramatic production.

By way of joining the network of international and non-governmental organizations – ITI, ENICPA, IETM, Culture Action Europe, FIRT, SIBMAS, AICT – the Theater Institute strives to foster its professionalism and integrity into the European context, too.

The modern and regularly updated website, the [www.theatre.sk](http://www.theatre.sk) offers not only information on programs, projects or the Theatre Institute's activities, but provides the most comprehensive overview of the theatre culture in Slovakia both in a Slovak and English version.

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