

IATC Symposium for Experienced Critics
In the framework of the Baltic House Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia
October 9, 10, 2006

Topic:
“DO YOU FOLLOW ME?”
or
THEATRE GENERATIONS AND THEIR WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

Are there generational divides when it comes to communicating ideas from the stage and from the page? How does this help or harm a theatre-maker or a critic in building up their audiences? What actually makes us different and what makes us alike? Does age really matter in the realm of the only art which by definition dies young? How do the lessons of the ageless classics and the fast-aging of the modern help us bridge and narrow the divides?

The first Symposium day was carried out in the shape of a “closed-door” discussion in which only the international participants took part, presenting their written and oral opinions on the topic. (The written papers are down below.) On the second day the discussion was public and evolved as a dialogue between the international participants and Russian theatre-makers, critics, students and the general audience. Due to the interest both discussions went on much longer than scheduled. Both of them were chaired by Nikolai Pesochinsky and Kalina Stefanova.

Participants:

Brent Meersman, South Africa
Carmen Stanciu, Romania
Choon-Hee KIM, Korea
Handan Salta, Turkey
Matti Linnavuori, Finland
Miroslava Kortenska, Bulgaria, Society of Independent Critics
Raymond Bertin, Quebec, Canada
Vladislava Fekete, Slovakia
Nikolai Pesochinsky, Russia, host-organizer
Kalina Stefanova, Bulgaria, Society of Independent Critics, Director Symposia IATC

PAPERS:

DEMOCRACY AND THE THEATRE CRITIC IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Brent Meersman

Why should what happens to the arts in South Africa be important to anyone else in the world? On a stage, two seventy year-old, black men are arguing. The unlucky one is faced with a choice – either, he must swallow his dignity and suffer the humiliation of assuming the identity of a man they have found lying dead in a gutter, or he must face starvation, possibly jail. He no longer has an official pass to live in the city, he faces unemployment and prison. His fault was to be born black. The audience watching these two men perform is almost all white, and the performance is taking place in a theatre in Cape Town earlier this year. These two elderly black actors – who are now venerated by our society – were personally subjected to many of the shocking degradations this play relives from apartheid’s ugly past. For performing these same roles, they were briefly jailed by the authorities 30 years ago. This despite the fact that the year before their arrest, they performed the play on Broadway and received a Tony Award and international acclaim. For decades, the most performed playwright in the world, after Shakespeare, was the author of this work, the South African Athol Fugard. On the same stage last year, a 6-meter high giraffe towered above a group of South African and Sogolon puppeteers from Mali. The real giraffe they depict inspired a young man in Paris in the 1820s to design the Eiffel Tower. This true story of a

giraffe captured in Sudan and sent by the Pasha of Egypt as a gift to Charles X in Paris – an epic seven-thousand kilometre journey across land and sea – is a proud reclamation of the influence of Africa as a source of inspiration, spiritual and aesthetic renewal for Europe. On the stage exactly where the giraffe stands aloof and graceful, I witnessed the live, ritual sacrifice of a chicken, during an eclectic theatrical performance that incorporated African legend and post-modern storytelling. At a performance of this same director's work at the National Arts Festival, the actors burnt herbs to ward off the evil eye. Another theatre critic, a colleague sitting near me, and ill disposed towards the production, was driven, spluttering from the auditorium, when the fumes of this potion caught in his throat. Upstairs, on another stage in the theatre complex, an entire play was performed by three actors who speak only in whistles, a code language they developed as members of the self-defence units of Katlehong township during apartheid's final phase of brutal repression.

These theatrical gems are the products of the miracle we call the new South Africa. The artistic potential that is starting to emerge from the unique set of circumstances that have created the new South Africa, seems unlimited to me. We have a confluence of Western and diverse African art forms, – deep, sophisticated and with rich histories, in a country that is comparatively wealthy and uniquely resourced, unlike any other in Africa.

Since I am here in St Petersburg, I think it appropriate to reflect that the coming of democracy to South Africa cannot be seen in isolation from the Cold War. In 1948 at the time of the Berlin airlift, the Afrikaans Nationalists took power in South Africa and systematically institutionalised racial segregation, the infamous policy of apartheid. In 1990, over forty years later, within three months of the Berlin wall coming down, Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years of imprisonment. There is no doubt that the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union gave the apartheid regime the courage to unban the liberation movements and the South African Communist Party. Although the African National Congress (ANC) was never communist, it used Marxist-Leninist rhetoric as a mobilising force; it had prominent communists on its executive; and it promised to bring about a socialist revolution.

The National Party regime it opposed was fascist in its sympathies. Many of its founding figures had links to Nazi Germany. South Africa existed as a totalitarian state in which no one was free, but some – those classified as whites – were freer than others. The secret police tortured and executed enemies of the State, whether black or white.

Art was subject to draconian censorship. Many publications and films were banned. The news media was either directly controlled or heavily restricted by the apartheid regime. As a university student, I secretly listened on shortwave radio to the state run propaganda broadcasts from Radio Moscow. We were that desperate for other perspectives! It was an offence for which I could have been arrested. I never dreamt then that I would actually one day openly be in Moscow and here in St Petersburg.

Both our worlds have changed greatly. The change in your world has reached even a far corner of the African continent, from where I have come. The fear of an expanding sphere of Soviet influence certainly abetted apartheid. The South African state was engaged in a Southern African regional struggle and clandestinely bankrolled by the Western democracies.

The coming of democracy has brought a radically different cultural world for South African artists. Under the nationalists, the officially sanctioned performing arts were of Eurocentric cultivation in which white cultural chauvinism dominated. From the perspective of a youngish South African, living in a broader cultural context today, much of the cultural life of that time looks parochial, colonial and schizophrenic to me. Essentially, psychosis and censorship started at the front door, as theatres were for white people only.

A handful of independent theatres, like The Market in Johannesburg and The Space in Cape Town, tried to buck the system. Black artists were forced to function on the periphery of official

culture without resources. Yet, against all the odds, there emerged black actors and writers and some great works. Most poets and playwrights were understandably preoccupied with protest theatre and “conscientising” the masses. Many of our best writers were banned or forced into exile.

The Nationalists pursued a particularly narrow-minded form of Calvinism. Images of nudes in painting or sculpture, even such icons as Michelangelo’s statue of David, were censored if shown on South African television under the supervision of apartheid’s cultural Gauleiters.

When the newly elected ANC government finally came to power and made its first public announcements regarding the arts, many of us were stunned. It seemed a dream had come true. Members of the new leadership were urbane, enlightened, eloquent, and philosophic. We marvelled at the fact that we now had people in government who knew which way up to hang a Picasso; if not a Kadinsky. We had been living in the dark ages.

Now we gained a new Constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech and expression, with a specific clause in the Bill of Rights – the only one of its kind in the world as far as I know - that implies that artistic expression has greater latitude. Even though the nation had many desperate needs – massive poverty, a huge housing shortage, millions of its citizens without medical care, education, piped water or electricity – the Mandela led ANC grasped the important role that culture plays in the quality of human life, not least in the reconciliation of black and white.

Under the nationalists, the performing arts were funded directly by the state through five monolithic, whites-only Provincial Performing Arts Councils in the service of the regime’s gleichschaltung – I will refer to them from here on as the P A Cs. Indigenous culture was not supported, except of course Afrikaans, and even Afrikaans writers were censored.

These PACs were incredibly well-resourced centres with state of the art facilities, and permanent resident companies within these institutions for drama, ballet and opera and even their own orchestras.

When the new government came in, the broader arts community outside of the PACs were understandably enthusiastic about a prospective change. The truth is that the old Performing Arts Councils were perceived as undemocratic institutions that played a role in cultural oppression. The criticism of them was firstly their inefficiency, secondly their exclusivity, and most certainly – though this was not officially articulated – ideological reservations about their ‘Eurocentrism’.

I recall the debates. I was one of the people saying that these indulgent, self-satisfied bodies, paying themselves high salaries and self-censoring – should get out into the world. These places had never mounted the kind of radical and subversive theatre The Space and The Market Theatres had put on and for which they had been punished and many artists suffered. As an alternative, the new ANC government created the National Arts Council (NAC). Any artist anywhere in the country can now apply to this body.

Not only under economic pressures, democracy placed the existing cultural institutions in a battle for legitimacy. You had a similar battle here when many were saying that the ballet was a bourgeois institution to be abolished and Anatoli Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Enlightenment replied: art "creates human types and situations, which will live on from century to century and which are real to millions of people". Our symphony, opera and ballet companies have had the same fight on their hands.

Presently, in Cape Town, the ballet company is poorly managed and in bad shape – both artistically and fiscally, while the Cape Town opera is thriving artistically, but battling financially. Somehow, they still manage to put on large-scale classic operas by Verdi, Puccini and Mozart. But today the singers are almost all black, many coming from impoverished backgrounds and despite great obstacles. Over 200 singers have been trained in the past ten years, and some are

already set on international careers. But despite this transformation, increasingly the opera relies on overseas tours. As I speak, they are touring Sweden with Porgy and Bess, and have been invited to perform for the Berlin opera season in 2008. I think you have had similar experiences here with the Mariinsky which tours London as the Kirov ballet.

Faced with drastic funding cuts the PAC bodies axed their drama departments. None of those drama companies survived, and with them we have lost the collegiate benefits these companies offered, along with a logical career path where graduating students would audition and be taken up through the ranks. I can think of only one repertory theatre company with permanent salaried employees today, and that survives through a wealthy private patron. Dramatic groups form on an ad hoc project for project basis. The result has been to the detriment of black actors, new stars who could have risen as these institutions also transformed.

After the repression of apartheid, black artists who were happily freed to tell their stories, who finally believed it would be their turn to get the resources and to take to the main stage, have come up against major obstacles. On the one hand, the ultimate censor – commercial imperatives. On the other hand, fully funded work often happens in a performance vacuum. Sometimes no attempt is even made to attract an audience, as the overhead is guaranteed and there are often no surplus funds for advertising. I have seen work performed to empty seats purely to please the faceless bureaucrats administering subsidies.

This cannot be said about a group of four young, black choreographers I met at this year's National Arts Festival. Their work is remarkable by any international standard; in fact two of them survive off their European tours. One of these was Nelisiwe Xaba's witty solo Plasticization – performed entirely from within a large plastic bag. Four 'characters' emerge, each represented only by a leg or an arm with a shoe: a ballerina, a gumboot dancer, a chorus girl, and a man (or a woman) doing township pantsula. These young choreographers complained that they are often disqualified for funding purely through bureaucratic process.

It is confounding that after such an optimistic start, and with such an obvious surfeit of talent, there can be such a careless attitude from not only government, but also our theatre managements. They appear to be at sea about their role and the direction they should take: are they cultural institutions with national responsibilities? or are they simply venues for hire? If they are the former then surely they need production budgets and artistic vision, like the National Theatre in London?

The cultural boycott has meant that the performing arts in South Africa was disproportionately influenced by the United States. Television especially favours American product, and increasingly I can see its influence on the scripts and play we see from young playwrights. The lifting of the boycott has however meant many influences from elsewhere in Africa are enriching local endeavours – both by black and white artists. The result is an extremely diverse cultural landscape both in form and content.

In drama several themes have emerged. Exile during the apartheid years and the return to a new South Africa became the logical entry point to explore the moral complexities of the historical struggle, a changing society and disappointments with post-apartheid South Africa. Much of the conflict is as much generational as racial.

Most dominant are social issues, such as the collapse of traditional African values through urbanization, often idealizing rural life. HIV AIDS, unemployment and its co-habitants, crime and alcoholism, are the new arenas of artistic activism. Black artists have started to unlock themes previously taboo, circumcision, homosexuality, black xenophobia, witches and the tacit complicity between traditional African beliefs and its expression as violence against women in a deeply patriarchal society.

Through its funding agencies, government is trying to promote work, which celebrates diversity and highlight social ills, although this agenda is sometimes pursued to a fault by over zealous functionaries. A play about Muslim women *At Her Feet* by Nadia Davids, which received major critical acclaim, was turned down for funding on the basis that it wasn't representative. It was suggested to the author that she write in some characters of different ethnicity!

We live in a cultural environment where not always the best writers and artists, but certainly the best funding proposal writers are rewarded. Last year, I saw a performance by an all-male black troupe dressed as Zulu warriors doing synchronised Indian Bollywood dances. Was this a vivid celebration of our diversity or national funding policy taken to an ultimate absurd conclusion?

Although European formats, with proscenium arches and a reticent audiences still dominate, theatre practitioners are eagerly importing traditional African story-telling techniques, music and dance. The difficulty is to do this as an integral part of the work, not as a kind of Afro-Disney tokenism.

Capitalism and globalisation go hand in hand reducing indigenous arts to copycat commercial formulas, impoverishing local culture, and producing results that lack integrity, such as the highly financially successful *Umojo* dance extravaganza recently seen in London. This is export, performance-curio art.

Among the many hangovers from apartheid is the enormous economic discrepancy that still exists between black and white. But as arts become increasingly valued in terms of their commercial success, it simply entrenches the cultural status quo created by apartheid. It's a vicious circle. Theatres – for either subsidy or legitimacy – are expected to be both commercially viable and develop a black audience, when black patrons have no buying power. When theatres do drop their ticket prices to encourage black patrons, we get a wonderful influx of white patrons wearing diamonds and driving SUVs.

Black artists in the townships still lack infrastructure. Community art centres promised in the RDP have not got off the ground. How can we expect audience development when we are still trapped in the architecture of apartheid?

Culture is the orphan constituency. The cultural industries have fallen foul of the only art politics knows – the art of the possible. Left largely to their own devices, they muddle along. We need a revision to take place in the context of the overall political economy.

So where does the theatre critic locate himself in this often bewildering environment? As I have suggested we have extraordinarily talented people and highly accomplished works. Yet, we also have a raft of emergent productions of a very low and crude standard, sometimes promoted rapidly for reasons outside of merit. Our audience expectations built on limited exposure means they are far less demanding than audiences in the capitals of the world. It means that the critic has different cultural responsibilities, and must also take care; he or she can all too easily come across as culturally chauvinist. The kind of poses struck by many of my international colleagues, would be quite misunderstood in South Africa.

Many of the older critics are failing to relate to new work, which is often predicated on cultural environments they know very little about. Given the radical segregation of cultures in the history of South Africa, this is not surprising. And it will be increasingly the case as more and more works are performed in African languages. On the other hand, the younger critics lack critical tools, a vocabulary, frames of reference and experience.

Let me conclude by saying, I cannot think of a more exciting and vibrant place to be practicing as a critic right now. The most interesting work is occurring in a yet to be defined space somewhere between dance, installation, performance art and multimedia visual art. South Africa must be one of the few places left in the world, where a good critic can still claim to have a guiding role to play in the cultural genesis of a nation.

Brent Meersman (born 1967) is a performing arts critic and cultural commentator. Born in Cape Town, South Africa, he read philosophy and literature at Rhodes University. Meersman has served the theatre in several capacities. Throughout the 1990s he produced numerous plays. During this period, he also acted as artist's and touring manager for several leading South African performers. Since 2003, he has been the performing arts critic for the *Mail and Guardian* covering theatre, opera, ballet and dance. He runs the authoritative Cape Town theatre web log on www.realreview.co.za. Interestingly, Meersman had a brief career in a different kind of theatre – he was the Campaign Manager of a political party in the 2004 General Election in South Africa.

THE LONELY TRAVELER

OR

WHAT DOES AGE GOT TO DO WITH THIS?

BY CARMEN STANCIU

I have to start with a negation: there are no generations when it comes about theatre criticism! At least if, when we use this concept, we have in mind a group of people who share the same ideas (theorists), the same "vocabulary" (journalists), or follows the same current (historicians). Of course, there are periods of time in which we can identify names of people that seems to be at the same time in the same place... However, this does not make them part of a generation. A theatre critic is a lonely traveler...

Roland Barthes was the first who claimed, in the name of all the critics, the statute of an artist. The *storyteller* has become *homo semnificans*. Half a Century after, there is still some people who believe that writing about theatre is like making a checking list. And it is about an attitude, not about the age, the educational background or geography. The other critic I have in mind is Geroge Banu. He turned the back to conventional, boring and adjectival articles about theatre. His chronicles are, in fact, essays that give significations to the relation between author and his creation, and, in the meantime, help the reader to understand not what the text says, but what is said by the text.

Now, it is time for a positive attitude: although there are no generations, in theatre criticism communication is fundamental and really exists. Like any artist, the theatre critic needs to share its experience. The difference between him and the others is that the response of the "audience" it is not immediate.

Nevertheless, the most painfully condition for a theatre critic is that while actors, directors, set designers or other categories of theatre makers always working as a team, the critic must have the attitude of a solitary. You have to leave the proximity of the "congregation", and find a perspective that aloud you to see and understand the performance. Only after this lonely dantesque trip you can write you're "opera". You must never forget that a theatre critic makes a "new" opera from an old "one" and he is responsible in front of his readers for the meanings he gives to the original opera.

A performance takes us through a series of transitions. First, there is the impact of the beginning, which is followed by an analytic period – where we translate in our minds what we witness to ourselves. This moment is followed by expectation, for we are conditioned to suppose that some inconsistency or surprise will alter our original impression. (The occurrence of this first surprising development or revelation in a drama is known as *the rousing moment*). If this expectancy is not fulfilled, then boredom may set in. As our expectancy is rewarded by events, we become intrigued, and, finally, **catharsis** occurs.

But a critic is a hypereceiver, a metaspectator. That gives to him a scepter and a throne.

Or this could be a great problem. Now, you feel yourself totally free and that's why a lot of critics cannot stop themselves for writing in the most ridiculous combination of lyric and auctorial

attitude, boring stories that never reveals the mechanism behind the performance and always gives ridiculous answers and verdicts in a dusty, old fashion way. Is no need to see the Identity Card of this person – what age having to do with this? Is just a bad Theatre Critic. Not to understand that the purpose and the beauty of your work - that is to give to your reader clues, to make them questioning, wandering about the performance, to make visible the living reality of a show - is a consequence of an unhealthy attitude of some critics. They have no respect for their own written word.

Why happens that? Let us see.

There are some methods to corrupt (or self corrupt) a theatre critic. Many times chronicles are perceived like an interrelation media. Some critics enjoy writhing about the performances of the people that they would like to be connected. Or, worst, they write about artists with whom they shared together many bottles. Majority of these articles are, in fact, an illustration of the relations that exist between their author and the person(s) about he writes. Is easy to realize that if we think about how many arts magazines are just an interface of some subcultures. A review published by those magazines means nothing except “the actress is a nice person” or “the director is one of us”.

Another corruption form in theatre criticism is “the indolence”. Many artists are complaining about that. Even you cannot get rich by writing theatre chronicles; you must try your best.

The most spectacular form of corruption form is the “preciousness”. Very few of those who are currently writing about theatre have the cultural authority to descifrate and chose a diagnosis for a theatre performance. Therefore, all the other are just pretending that. That is why many chronicles are written using a ridiculous slang. Is the identifying mark of those critics who understands nothing about the theatre. For some pervert pleasure, they enjoy to make waves. Some indigested theories, a condescending tone and a false objectivity – the fake critic strikes again!

A good critic is not a dead critic, but a generous one. You may not be a perfect critic – with an sharp eye, solid knowledge of theatre and arts history and theories and a gifted pen – but you always have to find a correct motivation for you're article. You have to be unequivoc and brutally correct, even if this attitude bothers. We pretend from the artist integrity. Shouldn't we ask the same thing from the critic?

It is a well-known fact that for an artist we can identify periods of excellence in activity no longer than 10 years. Why do we pretend to the critics to follow and write about two or three generations? It seems more common sense to me that when a critic loses his determination or his interest to fallows such an dynamic art like theatre, he must write about the immediate future of his excellence from the point of view of an theoretician or a esthetician. As about the generations problem – the true value of a theatre critic is not a consequence of the historical or psychological identity with a cultural pattern, but a result of the verosimilarity of what he writes, the power of his convictions, the credibility of his arguments and his love for t he theatre. It depends of each of us if, when we get into the performance hall, we buy a ticket for a trip to The Inferno or to The Paradise.

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'GENERATION GAP' AS A LIFE OF THE THEATRE—DIFFERENCE AND ITS CONTINUITY
By Choon-Hee KIM

If Max Reinhardt was “an essential link”¹ between the generations, the ‘link’ between theatre generations is an essential concept in establishing an interpretative perspective on the theatre of the past and the present, even of the future. Then, how the question of ‘generation gap’ could be explained with relation to the ‘link’ between generations? Here, I need to define key terms for my argument on the topic.

We talk about ‘link’ in general on the assumption that there is a certain ‘gap’ between two or more things. I’ll discuss the term ‘link’ adopting the term as a way to describe two forms of generational link: ‘sympathetic link’ and ‘conflicting link’(certainly with gradations). The ‘gap’ in this context becomes a matter of degree. There is not a complete rupture between generations, because the rupture might become equal to the disavowal of life itself. A world of no generation gap does not always mean a world of ever-growing, ever-continuing since a world without gap is a static, dead one.

When we talk about ‘generation gap’ in general in theatrical production, we tend to discuss it on the authority of ‘artistic merit’. And an attempt to distinguish art from commodity in the theatre tends to be brought together with the question of ‘generation gap’, and runs up to the discussion on the artistic and the inartistic. Consequently, the contrast between the familiar, already established form, and the unfamiliar, therefore unreliable, might raise a question of moral crisis of artistic mind itself. The very unfamiliar, in this way, might be considered as an obstacle to the communication between generations, or between different artistic attitudes. This kind of generational context is not just the question of our age, but it has always existed in the history of the world. Then, what’ll be the most clear and pertinent way to specify and ‘generation gap’ in the theatre of multicultural age?

Here, I propose a communication system of the theatre in terms of ‘link’--sympathetic link’ and ‘conflicting link--for my argument on the topic.

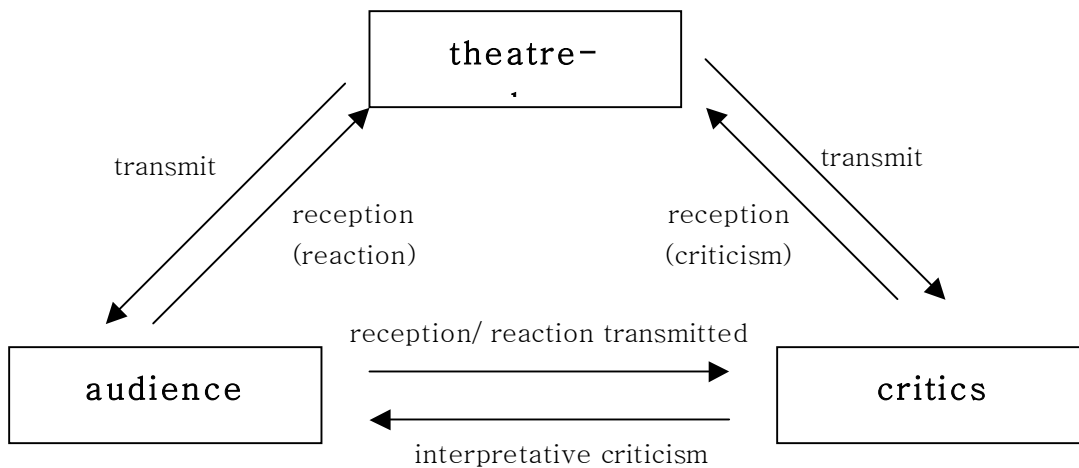


Figure 1. Communication system of the theatre

According to the Figure 1, theatre-makers’ transmission tends towards spectators of two groups: the audience in general, and the theatre critics. Firstly, the relation between theatre-makers and

¹ E. Bentley, “Drama Now”(8) appeared in *Partisan Review* (Spring 1945), in *What is Theatre?* New York: Atheneum, 1968, P. 362.

the audience is established as that of transmission and reception. This transmission-reception relationship constitutes three kinds of 'link': 'sympathetic link', 'conflicting link' and 'sympathetic-conflicting link' (sympathetic and conflicting links mixed). Secondly, the relation between theatre-makers and critics is made up by the same transmission-reception as described above except for certain differences in their social, aesthetic role. The critics should interpret performances clarifying the characteristics of the 'links' to which they are related. Thirdly, the relation between spectators and critics is the one in which theatre-makers are not included. The critics offer criticism before or after performance catching or losing audience's interest while the spectators can judge critics' performance criticism. Their relation as spectators, excepting the theatre-makers, does not show itself since it's not an explicitly direct relationship—as we've seen in those two relations above—but an indirect one.² Works for the most pertinent discussion on the 'generation gap' set forth by this communication system might be Greek tragedies since a known element of the mythic theme in Greek dramas provides a good starting point, even for the avant-garde experimental theatre, in communication between theatre-makers and audience and critics. Look at, for example, how Peter Brook and J. L. Barrault worked on mythic theatres and avant-garde search at the same time: "Each pursued avant-garde theatrical exploration at the same time as continuing to work with classical material (with Brook returning to Shakespeare, Chekhov and even opera—Bizet's *Carmen*—during his search for mythic theatres that would restore drama to its primal 'roots'.³ We can find in them a certain desire to establish links between avant-garde theatre and classical material.

The 'sympathetic link', the conflicting link', and their co-existence are made not only in the form of transmission-reception relationship between those three groups of the theatre, but also, for example, in the theatre-makers' experiment itself. Each group, or each society categorized is not homogeneous, but consists of different attitudes, or of different generations. It means that there may be 'sympathetic link' and 'conflicting link' between theatre-makers, between audiences, or between critics. Here, I feel a certain need to draw up a different communication system of different dimension from that of Figure 1.

Now I'll transform Figure 1 into Figure 2 to observe communication system not only between three groups of the theatre but also between different generations of each group at the same time.

² I use the word 'direct' for designating a relation with spectacle itself.

³ Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre. 1892-1992*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993. p. 201.

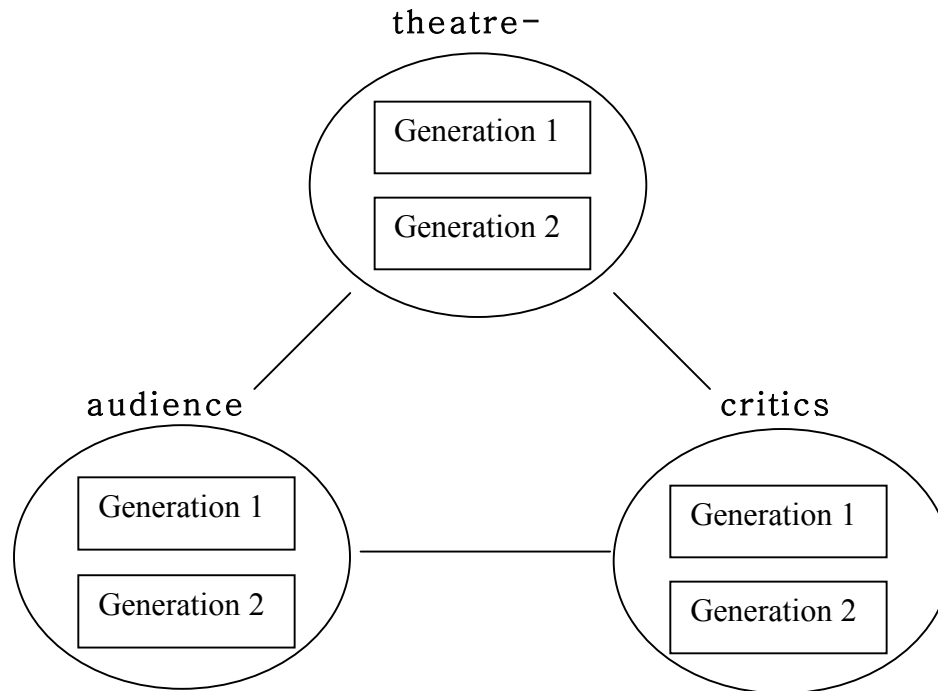


Figure 2: Communication system between different generations of different societies of the theatre

A 'logical' assumption about possible relations between three groups is as follows according to the Figure 2:

1. Relations between theatre-makers and audience
 - 1) theatre-makers 1--- audience 1
 - 2) theatre-makers 1--- audience 2
 - 3) theatre-makers 2--- audience 1
 - 4) theatre-makers 2--- audience 2

2. Relations between theatre-makers and critics
 - 1) theatre-makers 1--- critics 1
 - 2) theatre-makers 1--- critics 2
 - 3) theatre-makers 2--- critics 1
 - 4) theatre-makers 2--- critics 2

3. Relations between audience and critics
 - 1) audience 1--- critics 1
 - 2) audience 1--- critics 2
 - 3) audience 2--- critics 1
 - 4) audience 2--- critics 2

The above logical assumption does not necessarily mean that those relations really exist in the theatre society (especially in the case of the relation between audiences and critics). And another logical assumption, more interesting in theatrical production, is the one about the relation between different generations of each group:

4. Relations between different generations of each group

- 1) theatre-makers 1--- theatre-makers 2
- 2) audience 1--- audience 2
- 3) critics 1--- critics 2

However, the most important and interesting relationship in theatrical production must be the one between different generations of theatre-makers since this relation creates either sympathetic or conflicting link during the whole process of theatrical production.

If there are conflicts in the world of the theatre, it means that the theatre is still alive. Everything exists by way of 'link', sympathetic or conflicting. So everything 'co-exists' even though that co-existing condition spreads out from the sympathetic to the conflicting. But do we need to try to make them harmonize? Is there any problem in that conflicting link?

Eric Bentley, making reference to 'art' says that "Art is also [...] a matter, not of cognition, but of recognition: it does not tell you anything you didn't know [...] it tells you something you 'know' and you realize [...]."⁴ I need to make a conclusive argument with E. Bentley about his comment on 'art'—"a matter, not of cognition, but of recognition."

Art as recognition assumes a certain 'sympathetic link' between theatre-makers, audience, and critics. If we consider art only as recognition, there'd only be a repetition of recognition in the theatre art. This repetition may shape a chain of 'sympathetic links' between different groups or between different generations. In that case, it becomes very difficult to lead the audience to a new cognition of new things. I'd rather say that 'link' without conflict implies the end of the theatre. Creating a discordant 'conflicting link' rather than preserving an assimilative 'sympathetic link' must be the creative way to link 'generation gap' as the life of the theatre. And that's the way how differences between different groups, between different attitudes, between different generations should continue in its vitality.

¹ E. Bentley, "Drama Now"(8) appeared in *Partisan Review* (Spring 1945), in *What is Theatre?* New York: Atheneum, 1968, P. 362.

² I use the word 'direct' for designating a relation with spectacle itself.

³ Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre. 1892-1992*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993. p. 201.

⁴ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, pp. 53-54. My empahsis.

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THE PORTRAIT OF A CRITIC AS A TURK

By Handan Salta

Much has been said on the identity of a critic and the function of criticism in theatre. Position of a theatre critic has always been a controversial one when different aspects of theatre –director, actor, audience and the media- are concerned. However theatre, being a very powerful element of expression, a rich source of enjoyment, a beautiful means of communication can not be

⁴ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, pp. 53-54. My empahsis.

considered without its most experienced, faithful and dedicated audience, the critic. There are times when a theater critic could have a critical role to play so long as there are people to read what s/he has to say.

However, is theatre losing its effect on daily issues? In a world where there are loads of things to disagree with, there are many things theatre can do as it did in the past. Lets see what is happening on the theatre front in Turkey, but before doing so it is better to have a short look at the history of theatre and criticism in history.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Turkey started to turn to the west. Theatre performances started during the "Tanzimat" period with adaptations from western theatre literature and with the foundation of the Turkish Republic stage performances became common. In the first years, adaptations were being criticized of imitating the west in structure and concept but just changing the names of the characters. Being civilized and modern was taken as a synonym for being a part of the western world and adopting western way of thinking. Thus, theatre as a super structure was a novelty in this country and had to be nourished.

First Turkish play was "Marriage of a Poet" written by Şinasi in 1860 which was followed by other original plays. After 1923, the new republic attached special importance on the function of theatre because it was an indispensable part of the new way of thinking. Theatre troupes were going from one to another town and performing plays. Due to a new legislation brought in then Turkish women were allowed to appear on stage, which was a large step in giving women more freedom.

During the first years of republic, 1920s, criticisms of plays appeared almost in every newspaper and centered around below mentioned matters. There were informative articles about the functions of theatre, what theatre should afford, how it should present its subject matter or whether or not theatre should be given priority over other artistic forms of art. The main concerns were the educational aspects of the theatre, the role it would play in shaping individuals. A lot of playwrights were encouraged to write plays dealing with contemporary issues, daily concerns of Turkish people (mainly urban population) and about the clashes of old and new values. These plays were performed in big cities and also taken to smaller towns to help introduce this form of art and offer a new taste to the community.

When it comes to western classics the criticisms were more informative than critical as the audience were not familiar with those plays. Muhsin Ertuğrul, a director and an actor played a great role in introducing the western plays to the Turkish audience. He staged and encouraged the performances of plays by great writers like Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoy, Schiller and Shakespeare. This was another point for discussion and criticism as many critics thought that though it was not a mistake to stage these plays, they were just copying the western approach and reshaping those standards. In 1936, a practice, which would soon turn into a tradition, started and since then each theatre season has started with a play by Shakespeare and the criticisms on classics changed in time. In thirties and forties they were either informative or impressionist. In thirties and forties the approach towards classics changed and they were accepted as the vital part the development of theatre in Turkey as well as the crucial factor to bear in mind and to consult to in order to develop a theatre in Turkey. The classics were an important factor in developing a taste for theatre and in inducing an understanding of theatre in Turkish audiences. Some critics claimed that Turkey needed playwrights to write original, down to earth and tailor made plays to meet the needs of the country.

Starting in 1959, theatre groups in Istanbul began to emphasize the importance of Turkish playwrights and staged those plays more often. Almost all newspapers spared some columns to inform about those plays. Theatre critics in spite of being not professional or academics produced enough criticism in the press to help people develop a sense of awareness of the theatre.

In late fifties, these classics were staged because most of them were accepted to be and still are timeless and full of contemporary issues. However, the objective was not to introduce these plays to theatre audiences as well-written examples of theatre literature but to reflect present-day issues.

The production of Brecht's plays in the late fifties enabled Turkish audiences acquire a new awareness and approach to theatre in general. One of these productions –The Good Person of Sezuan- in the city theatre was banned because of its leftist content/message. Critics protested against this ban and one critic compared Turkey to the USA during Mc Carthy's term of office. For several years until the late seventies, several Brecht plays were staged which enabled critics realize that Brecht need not have traveled all the way to China as a source for his drama and they saw several parallels between Turkish and Chinese theatre. Soon there were lengthy discussions about what Turkish theatre should be like; traditional, western or a combination of both.

The wind of rebellion and demand for freedom in the sixties had its impacts on Turkey. At the time Turkey was not the mecca for hippies, political protesters wanting sexual freedom, legal soft drugs and abortion, but yet the people did want and ask for democracy and human rights. These demands were made alongside protests against American policies. As far as a national theatre was concerned, Turkey had a long way to go. At one point discussions reached a conflict. On the one hand, establishing a local theatre would be seen as abiding by the principles of the conservative approach of the fifties and on the other hand taking a western approach towards theatre would underestimate all the playwrights and thus deny the benefits of the republic. One major criticism was that only the examples of dramatic theatre were being staged and other forms were being ignored. In fact theatre had never been an independent foundation until then. Theatre was financed by the state and made available for masses of people by the state as long as it was the spokesperson, the voice of the state. It was considered to be a tool for educating and shaping new generations by using and taking for granted the principles of western culture.

Above-mentioned influence of 1968 in Turkey had its impact on private theatres most. Political concern of every kind found an echo in theatre and theatre began to be regarded as a means of political propaganda. Youth and workers voiced their opinions and problems, which had been ignored until then. Trade unions and student organizations had their interest in theatre as well and wanted to express their concern through theatre. Soon theatre was serving a purpose and became a widespread form of expression. Although those voices and images were a rough copy and a badly expressed version of the whole picture it still splashed color and a fresh form on theatre in the sixties and seventies. Changes in social structure and expectations resulted in a parallel change in theatre criticism. Soon there were magazines offering criticism and reviews of performances, not just brief pieces of news about gala performances. These new publications offered detailed analysis of performances; giving detailed information both on the written text and the stage performance viewing things from the point of view of aesthetics as well. Critics' favorites were the theatre companies performing political plays with a high level of sophistication whereas the agitprop companies/ groups were criticized severely. The critics generally had socialist/ Marxist point of view and method in those days. Soon critics and criticism were inseparable from the understanding of theatre.

There were examples of theatre of the absurd, which brought about highly informative criticism due to the language, texture and message of these plays.

Towards the end of seventies television had already established itself on people's daily lives and considering the social turmoil and gunfires in the streets, it had made the potential theatre audiences stay at home. Another reason for the decrease in the number of performances was the lack of financial support given to private theatre companies.

The military coup in 1980 had an inevitable impact on the quality and quantity of theatre performances. Theatres sponsored by the state had to make changes in their repertoires and attach more importance to the "glorious" history of the Turkish nation and the Ottoman Empire. Thus people would be protected from the "harmful" effects of dangerous political movements and "at a time when the whole nation needed solidarity most" theatre would bind the nation. Things were even bleaker for the private theatre companies; they had no financial support and most of the plays they chose for the stage were banned. The audience, who were once terrorised by the political unrest before the coup and then by the hangings, censor and imprisonment after the coup, had no time or concern for any sort of intellectual activity. In an era when books were burnt

before the cameras people were encouraged to take theatre as a form of entertainment only. This inevitably decreased the number of amateur theatre companies a great deal and theatre became something to be watched only. Soon, cabaret, vaudeville and musicals were in the limelight. Criticism was centered around daily politics and the news about censorships, prohibitions. Many of the newspapers and magazines that used to provide theatre criticism had to give up the habit because in their opinion there was no theatre worth criticising. Since those days only one newspaper, namely the Cumhuriyet, has continued to provide its readers with theatre criticism regularly by employing two eminent critics of Turkey all over these years. Apart from this paper, there is little publication offering reviews and criticism and one of them is the magazine "Tiyatro ...Tiyatro" offering a monthly selection of criticisms on the plays mostly staged in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir.

In brief it can be said that the post-coup era has been degradation in the quality and quantity of the Turkish theatre and this degradation, reflects itself on the post- coup generation as well. Children who were not taken to theatre to see children's plays and parents who were too scared to accept critical thinking in any form of art all added to this degradation. The ideals of the first years of new republic, "catching up with the standards of the western world" were replaced with new seeing and measuring civilisation with how much you consume. In twenties and thirties many young talents were sent to Europe for education and they came back and started to teach in the remote towns of the country. The eighties on the other hand, introduced the USA as the country to study in and soon it became the destination for the young Turks who would not come back. Globalisation came to Turkey with the so-called democracy after the coup and the constitution made by the generals. Movie halls, which had been closed down a long time ago, were re-opened with financial support from American film companies and distributors and they became the popular form of entertainment. Similar discussions on the need of a local point of view in cinema were voiced again.

In such a chaotic turmoil, theatre had lost most of its vital power and influence on life. We know what happened to the audiences but what happened to the theatre makers? Many actors of sponsored theatres were already paid well and they did not feel the urge to refresh or renew their techniques and understanding of theatre. Apart from some actors/actresses and a few directors they seemed to have disregarded the intellectual aspects of theatre. They continued to be well-paid actors/ officers and to dub for television. In the last ten years the television-film boom made acting popular again and some studios were opened. Many professional actors are now acting in those television films.

Accordingly, there has been an increase in the number of theatre groups making theatre though they lack audience in abundance; amateurs get together in university clubs, trade unions or private foundations. These small groups operate within the limits of a small repertoire; they choose absurd plays by famous playwrights, short sketches from short stories or folk tales, comedies or tragedies that have a close link to the present day. Unfortunately those off-productions cannot reach the masses as they are only introduced in some certain websites but not in mainstream newspapers or other forms of media.

In fact, the works of these amateur groups stem from the searches for a new language and expression in theatre by some playwrights, private theatre companies, directors and actors in the last fifteen years. Against all odds, some playwrights still continue to write plays (epic, dramatic and absurd) narrating or displaying the vital problems of the country and the world; women's rights, wars, traditions. Hot topics like migration, collapse of the family values, generation gap, suppression of women, clashes between east and west, individual loneliness as well as social alienation, corruption were brought on stage. There are also experimental productions, which underline the voice of the director and aim at shaking the audience. Ancient tragedies are still being staged with a new understanding of aesthetics and interpretation. There are now publishers printing plays, theoretical works and research, which provide easy access to information.

As for criticism, with the opening of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy department at University of Istanbul, young critics are now more encouraged to see and write about plays as well as learning

the theory of drama. There are two other schools in Turkey –Ankara and İzmir- teaching theatre criticism. Though it is not the main concern for mainstream media to publish theatre criticisms, websites offer reviews, news and criticism by different critics and about the plays being staged all over Turkey. Still, being a critic is not considered to be a full time job, and in many cases it is regarded as a hobby, and those who wish to write criticisms have to work elsewhere to earn a living. Most of the critics in Turkey are either academics or journalists/ freelance writers. As critics live in big cities namely Ankara and Istanbul, printed criticism in Turkey has not gone beyond these two big cities. As a result, not only the stage performances of the above mentioned amateur or avant-garde groups but also the ones of the state theatres in cities further from big cities are not very well known to the public neither in the whole country nor in the city where they are performed. Despite the fact that State Theatres have stages in thirteen cities in Turkey, critics can't see those performances unless they go on a tour that, in fact, requires an established tradition of criticism, a need to find out about theatre and an atmosphere of communication and interest.

The problems of theatre criticism in Turkey are closely related to the structural problems in society. There is the risk that laws, legislations borrowed from west may not fit into the Turkish social structure or vice versa. Education should include critical thinking and freedom of expression, which are relatively new concepts in Turkey. On the same token, criticism is trying to find its own way. Parallel to different generations of critics, there are various approaches to theatre criticism; considering theatre as a practice for thinking and evaluating plays according to that standard, applying different views on stage performances (perceptive or Marxist approach, structuralism, semiotics etc.) or fusing them are the methods the critics follow. Due to the hard work and academic concentration on criticism even when it does not cover many pages in national papers and that the audience generally rely more on suggestions than criticisms that they usually ignore, it is considered as an important issue in the eyes of writers, directors, and some private companies.

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THE NEW BERLIN WALL: THE *MATRIOSHKA* DOLLS OF RESTORATION VS THE ATTEMPTS AT CHANGE

By Miroslava Kortenska

Three years ago, Andrey Zholdak held a casting in Sofia for a production of *Revizor [Auditor]*. This was a project of the Satirical Theatre, where 40 years earlier (in 1966), this piece by Gogol, directed by Metodi Andonov, the outstanding Bulgarian director, had been an outstanding cultural event. Today, too, this is an emblematic title on the Bulgarian stage from the socialist theatre period. Standing out at that time were the striking talents of the actors and actresses of the Satirical Theatre, now doyens of the Bulgarian theatre stage: Georgi Kaloyanchev, Stoyanka Mutafova, Vassil Popov.... Appreciated not only on the Bulgarian stage but also at guest performances in Russia and Serbia were the energy of unmasking, the laughter through tears, and the intricate Aesopian language of the Satirical Theatre company, addressing topical messages by way of Gogol's classical work. What has dropped out has been the psychological approach, the lifestyle descriptions and the unambiguous narration, and the Satirical Theatre actors have devised a new kind of language: metaphorical, brilliant and synoptic. At the start of the new age Zholdak decided to co-relate that outstanding production, featuring his own specific satirical style, to his present-day interpretation of *Revizor [Auditor]*. That theatre director and Bulgarian artist Kolyu Karamfilov arrived at the idea of dividing the stage into two parts as if by an

imaginary wall. The historical production of *Revizor [Auditor]* was to be situated in one part, with the stage settings, costumes and the actors and actresses of the 1970s, now well advanced in years, presenting the performance as it had been more than 40 years earlier. In the other part Zholdak wanted to unfold his present-day version of Gogol employing young actors and actresses, who were to be selected by a casting. According to the director's conception, these were to be actually two simultaneously performed versions of *Revizor [Auditor]*, divided by a conventional partition. This partition has actually been the new Berlin Wall, the new division between two periods: the totalitarian and the post-totalitarian, between two types of theatre – that of the Aesopian language, and the present-day theatre of Aristophanes' way of expression: extreme, striking and unbridled. The mixing up of the two worlds, going across the imaginary partition, entails chaos and tastelessness. I am referring to all this not only because, unfortunately, Zholdak's idea was not realized on the stage of the Satirical Theatre in Sofia, but mostly because it outlines in great detail the problem we have been discussing today: the relationship between the generations in the theatre.

It is clear to all those present that the specificities of developments at the end of the 20th century were adding another feature to the typical processes, taking place at the turn of every century: the usual striking of balances, the reassessments and, as far as art goes, the emergence of new ideas, new forms and new trends of search and development; a new theatrical language. The question is what is being born today, during the first decade of the 21st century; what are the specific features of the change in the profiles of the new leaders on the stage? There is no doubt that the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) ushered in a new period in modern history. This was the end of the Cold War, of confrontation and the Iron Curtain. Political changes began in Eastern Europe; totalitarian regimes were overturned; new energies were set free; a serious displacement began of the social strata; ownership passed into private hands; some processes started to unfold now defined as a complicated and tortuous post-totalitarian transition. Some 15 years later we could state that this had been a whirlpool, where the euphoria of change had been substituted by the hardships of restructuring the consciousness and society, by the hardships associated with the daily survival... A small group took shape of newly rich people, whose capital moreover had doubtful origins, and a big stratum of people just living on the brink of survival. This transition made useless a large social group, which was left to live its days on its own: the people in retirement, those who could not adapt to the change and reached the bottom.... Large groups left their homelands and became economic emigrants – guest workers; the young and educated also emigrated en masse. That emigration wave encompassed one million, for Bulgaria's population of 8 million. The philosophy of survival, the lack of prospects, and the culture of poverty became dominant in the former socialist countries. This turned out to be the reverse side of the change that had been initiated. It was no longer necessary to have a good education, to read books or to have a serious profession in order to attain a good social status. The new elite that the mass media have been multiplying consists of the newly rich, the fashion models, and the folk singers. The intelligentsia – the educated and sensitive portion of society found itself overshadowed....

This is how a cross section of what has happened during the last 15 years in the former socialist countries looks like, probably with some small differences for each one of them. While watching the performance of *Long Life* by Alvis Hermanis and the New Drama Theatre of Riga – that sad "reality" of the existence of people in retirement - I now come to the understanding that the painful social issues have not been resolved even in the countries of the former socialist camp, already members of the European Union. From the plays by Macedonian playwright Goran Stefanovski and the acute satires by Dushan Kovachevich from Serbia, I get the conviction that the post-totalitarian problems are common. All this also leads to the profile of the post-totalitarian theatre of today, confronted by the hardships and the dramas of the change. The new theatrical language, rather than being decoratively experimental or incomprehensibly conceptual, is combined with an acute modern range of problems

The generation, associated with the change in Bulgaria, carrying traces of the restrictions of censorship and extreme experimenting with the form (Ivan Stanev, Vazkresia Viharova), that I call

the displaced generation, is part of our recent history. Their rebellion and their innovation were synchronous with the early years of change, with the enthusiasm at dismantling a system of values of communism and with giving up the means of expression of the preceding generations in the theatre. These theatricals, having rejected the uniqueness and hegemony of psychological realism, brought about a liking for authors like Beckett and Ionesco, which had been banned until not long ago, and later on, for Pinter, as well. They began to teach the young a new technique; they awakened the interest of the audiences in various forms: a street theatre (the La Strada theatre of Stefan Moskov), the post-modern rendition of tradition and classicism (Stoyan Kambarev, Vazkresia Viharova and the Elisaveta Bam troupe of Boiko Bogdanov). With the passage of time, however, some of these theatricals managed to fit in and became leaders of theatrical structures, associated above all, with traditional theatre; they were also tempted to stage purely commercial performances, which made them on a par with the average statistical "*modus vivendi*" in the theatre. This implies work using the old recipe – something for everyone, a performance for the broad public, alongside some problem performances. It has turned out that the author's theatre, passionately upheld at the start of their careers and created by people of one mind controlling a new stage technique, has today proved to be a forgotten maxim.... The rebels of yesterday, the experimenters, the new leaders of the contemporary Bulgarian theatre stage are today part of the conventional theatrical apparatus. The alternative creative personalities, having come out of the state structures and their regulations and taste, are today the face of precisely these representative institutions like the Bulgarian National Theatre or the big theatre stages in the capital city. Apparently, a cycle of the post-totalitarian change on the Bulgarian stage has wound up. Now it is more diversified; the language of theatre is richer. Alongside the realistic performances, there is a dance and visual theatre, post-modern collages, a street theatre... Yet, the new rebels are not there. There is also a restoration of the cultural landscape, in which there are no alternative spaces, no new challenges. This is the profile of the contemporary theatrical reality in Bulgaria. Even the Sfumato experimental theatre company, set up by stage directors Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev, is state owned. This seems to be a remake of the State Satirical Theatre under socialism, or of the typical absurdity of what has been recent past for us, when the authorities in power maintained a theatre in order to control by censorship the extent of its criticism. Today self-censorship is more powerful, because the interests of the audience are more targeted at entertainment; the general taste is lower; the culture of poverty mostly feeds on commercial products. The censorship is economic; even Bulgaria's brilliant creative workers try to find shelter in the state theatres...

In this way the revivals of cultural infantilism and the aggression of the theatrical university professional have taken shape; fake innovation has come to the fore. The replacement of the familiar faces by new ones, the renovation, at any cost, of leading personalities in the theatre has exposed serious theatre companies to failure. Another part of the pushing young has decided to get the upper hand by self-defining themselves as innovators (Lili Abadjieva, Yavor Gardev). Moreover, they have tastelessly mixed up their efforts at innovation with the convenience of the secured big theatre stages: a rational, but untenable step of the theatrical university professional. It becomes clear from the above that today the cultural situation in Bulgaria is in stagnation. The described metamorphoses and relapses in the theatrical landscape are actually the uniform *Matrioshka* wooden puppets of restoration. Expected and pending are the new radical reformers, who are to put in motion the new theatrical change.

After this past 15-year long cycle of post-totalitarian transition, the maxim indubitably stands out whereby the realization of the connection between the theatrical generations is not in the adaptation of the innovators to the taste and rules of the conventional theatrical companies or in heeding to the preferences of the audiences "here" and "now". The relationship between the theatrical generations is in the possibility of existence of two worlds - the one of yesterday and the other of tomorrow, connected by the present day. And since the theatre is an art, existing "here" and "now", the theatricals of the different generations have to acknowledge their relations precisely in this manner. In art the relationship between the generations is implemented not by way of subordination and enforced coexistence of fathers with their children, but by preservation of the fundamental principles as the right to a path of one's own and non-interference in its

realization. The relationship between the generations is a leap-like graphic, which connects the quests and dreams of creative workers, who have, in different periods of time, been capable of breaking the existing rules and imposing others, another taste, and new trends. The connection among innovators is actually a connection between the generations.

In conclusion, I shall give an example from the early 1980s, when I was specializing in Moscow, which has left a deep imprint in my mind. At that time Efros told me that when the censorship was trying to edit his performances, Yuriy Zavadski, the well-known actor, a theatrical of another generation and with other aesthetics, lent him a hand. Being a creative personality he had come to the conclusion that new talents had to have space of their own for expression. In this way Efros received support for his theatrical company on Malaya Bronnaya and for the unfolding of his rendition of classical theatrical pieces. Such an act can only come from a genuine creative worker. Because this is not just a matter of ethic. These are rather cases of creative work, which is always associated with renovation, moreover not only with what you can do, but also what someone different from you can do. In this sense the numerous different languages are in the creative atmosphere, guaranteeing the generation of new ideas and of new theatrical worlds.

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21st CENTURY IN SLOVAK THEATRE WITH THE EMPHASIS ON DRAMA → GENERATION MIX

By Vladislava Fekete

Summary

Today Slovak theatre and drama look for a new face and their way onto European stages. Among well-proven names of theatrical professionals of older or middle generation there exists also the young generation but we could not speak of striking differentiation in their poetics (in directorial and dramaturgical techniques, or in compositional techniques in dramatic texts). Some specific feature of Slovak theatre lies in a figure of a director – dramatist. The most interesting names of directors of today's Slovak drama are also the most interesting names of Slovak dramatists (Viliam Klimáček, Silvester Lavrík, Roman Olekšák, Ľubomír Burgr, Laco Kerata, Miloš Karásek, Janko Štrbák, Dodo Gombár...) who write for their home theatres but also for other stages. Deepened and more interesting dialogue between generations in Slovak theatre almost does not exist. The representatives of the older and middle generation try to keep their sovereign position and due to this they very often reach for the "coolness drama", which they place into repertoires of their home theatres. Not to mention that the expressive means they use in their directions are those of the 1980s. On the other side, the young generation does not present a coherent and in any way a spirited movement in Slovak drama. Pursuing its commercial interests the generation of young theatre professionals is focused on profitable genres (musicals, commercial theatre) or its representatives leave theatre for good.

Drama

The forming of Slovak drama has brought many polemics among professionals and from the 1980s almost all of them have patiently and thoroughly pointed out to an absence of original texts and unsystematic presenting of them on stages.

There do not exist drama centres in Slovakia which would educate their own dramatists and distribute new drama directly to theatres. There is probably no right time for such a model but thanks to the Theatre Institute Bratislava a few anonymous competitions called *Dráma* (Drama) and *Artúr* (dramatic texts for children) have been held for some years, and from May 2005 there

has been also the *Nová dráma - New Drama* festival of Slovak and foreign drama first year of which showed the hidden qualities and specifics of new Slovak drama. Moreover, from 2002 the Theatre Institute in its independent project *Nová dráma/New Drama* (the above-mentioned festival developed from its initiative) has presented and supported contemporary drama of European countries through lectures, dramatic readings or discussions with invited guests and theoreticians. From 2003 the newest texts by authors from Hungary, Spain, Poland, Scotland, the USA, Serbia and other countries have been presented in the Studio 12 (a specialized multimedia space of the Theatre Institute). One of the most important aims is to get to know new drama from abroad and at the same time, inspire and support authors from our country.

The Dráma Competition

In 1999 the Theatre Institute launched an interesting project called *Dráma – A Competition of Original Dramatic Texts*. The idea of the competition emphasises the connection between drama and theatre because the main prize is a presentation of the winning play in one of Slovak theatres. This has proved to be very attractive for young but also older dramatists, and therefore the net of Slovak dramatists widens every year by interesting names and dramatic forms. The form of a presentation of the final texts is designed as the Theatrical Triathlon – a dramatic reading, meeting with a dramatist, a producing team and a critic in order to show theatrical qualities of the winning texts. Among acclaimed Slovak dramatists (Viliam Klimáček, Silvester Lavrík, Miloš Karásek) the competition introduces dramatists not yet known to Slovak stages (Eva Maliti-Fraňová, Michal Ditte, Roman Olekšák, Peter Pavlac, Jana Bodnárová, Marek Godovič...) who immediately found a theatrical space for their presentation.

Contemporary Slovak Drama

The edition called *Contemporary Slovak Drama*, which has been published by the Theatre Institute for 6 years, presents the best pieces of contemporary Slovak drama in English. The *Contemporary Slovak Drama* is the only publication of its kind in Slovakia. By its distribution abroad many contacts have been arranged with particular theatres which are interested in presenting Slovak drama on their stages. The play *Dom, kde sa to robí dobre (Frankie is OK, Peggy is Fine and the House is Cool)* by Martin Čičvák was staged in the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Serbia and Montenegro, its dramatic reading took place in Romania; *Stolička (The Chair)* by Tomáš Horváth was read at the Interplay in Australia; Dodo Gombár's text *Hugo Karas* was staged in Great Britain and the Czech Republic; a play by Zuzana Uličianska called *Citová zmes (Emotional Mix)* was presented as a radio play in Germany and Poland; Viliam Klimáček's play *Nuda na pláži (Beach Boredom)* was introduced in Motovun, Croatia; a dramatic reading of the play by Rudolf Sloboda *Armagedon na Grbe (Armageddon in Grba)* took place at the Rozmanitosci Theatre in Warsaw, Poland. The Slovak plays are regularly presented in Slovak Institutes in Budapest, Prague...

The Story of Contemporary Theatre and Drama

According to already mentioned facts it is clear that the story of contemporary theatre and drama is complicated. Apart from the Theatre Institute which continually focuses on new theatre and new drama, follows trends and makes Slovak theatre a part of all-European networks, there is almost no other institution (theatre, school, public house, university, independent association) that would, like the Theatre Institute, work on making Slovak theatre and drama known in home culture milieu and abroad. There is a question: What place does its Slovak variation have in the imaginary map of new theatre? Is there anything what Slovak dramatists can offer to Europe? I think there is. But there is one thing that can not be forgotten and that is an elementary trust in Slovak drama and its presentation on stages. This is the only way how Slovak drama can present itself out of local areas.

Some Important Names in Slovak Drama

The names of dramatists I would like to speak of in this article represent a wider generation and stylistic diapason, and the plays I would like to focus on were written during one decade (1995 - 2005). It is a period of gradual incorporation of Slovakia and its culture into European coordinates and of following new trends and techniques. On the other hand, though, we can speak of some

kind of accumulation of national culture and a radical renewal of quality of Slovak drama. The conventional techniques of building up a play (classical Aristotelian type) are challenged by new models of fragmentary dramaturgy and the range of topics broadens. Plays reflect a new social situation (the independence of Slovakia and its later accession to the EU), processes of globalization, pop-culture and consequences of the above-mentioned changes in an every-day life of an individual. It is mainly the middle generation (Eva Maliti-Fraňová, Viliam Klimáček, Miloš Karásek...) who critically reviews the time of so-called normalization. Eva Maliti-Fraňová (1953) reacts to concrete historical situations, her characters are therefore bizarre figures who try to find their way in the labyrinth of social morals and hurdles which are put in front of them as a result of new reality. Through personal stories she expresses her opinion concerning the faith of the country and society. Her play *Jaskynná panna* (*The Cave Virgin*) was awarded the second prize in the Dráma competition for the best dramatic text held by the Theatre Institute. It followed her successful début *Krčeň nesmrteľný* (*Krčeň the Immortal*). *The Cave Virgin* is an original metaphor of soc-realistic reality which is, paradoxically, interwoven with biblical motifs. The play bears motifs of a political farce set in an absurd world, but later it changes in order to give a message about pursuing one's own happiness and fixed values.

Viliam Klimáček (1958) belongs to the most distinguished personalities of Slovak drama. In 1985 this physician co-founded the GUnaGu Theatre in Bratislava which has acted as one of the most important alternative theatres in Slovakia since. Most of his plays have been written for the theatre where he also makes directions and plays. His work is specific for a variability of genres, themes and forms as well as for surprising easiness by which he creates his dramatic situations and dialogues. As far as the expressive means are concerned, the plays from the recent period are very close to new drama. Nevertheless, Klimáček remains a profound critic of society (socialist or post-socialist) who keeps his sense for poetic language, exaggeration, humour and stylization. The main character of his play *Gotika* (*Gothic*) is a Russian colonel, who, after rising from the death, wanders around Bratislava and the current situation makes him feel frustrated and aggrieved. In a combination with other characters (a journalist, alcoholic, banker...) Klimáček creates a black comedy, generation conflict and atmosphere of moral and spiritual chaos.

The three authors I would like to mention in the next paragraph, Anna Grusková (1962), Miloš Karásek (1960), Laco Kerata (1961), are connected not only by a generation feeling but also by a strong feeling of authorial theatre or conceptual creating. For some time Miloš Karásek and Laco Kerata co-operated with today almost cult performer and co-founder of the STOKA Theatre Blaho Uhlár. Karásek designed many experimental projects, created theatrical manifestoes in which he and Uhlár showed their inclination to the principles of decomposition, super-subjectivism and anti-traditionalism. Their theory of decomposed theatre was based on improvisation and absolute artistic freedom. Karásek used similar dramatic technique also after the splitting up with Uhlár. His theatre plays are typical for the arbitrariness of the author, he does not follow strict rules of building up of a dramatic text and chooses themes relativising a life of man. He characterises his play *Perón* (*The Platform*) as a search for identity in 19 fragments. He deals here with searching for new God showing us eccentric images of life full of absurd scepticism. Similar experience had Laco Kerata. In 1991 he together with Blaho Uhlár and Miloš Karásek founded the above-mentioned STOKA Theatre – a non-conformist fringe theatre in which he acted as an actor, director and author. Later he went independent and founded the MED Association within which he has presented his own work, although most of the productions are the results of collective and individual improvisations. Kerata's plays are dramatic miniatures with the crux in a dialogue in which he introduces various situations and brings them immediately to a punch line. One of the main motifs in his dramas concerns a man and a woman and their relationships and conflicts, a confrontation of man with civilisation and society, and the questions of human behaviour in today's society. The play *Na hladine* (*On the Surface*) was originally written as a radio play in which Kerata uses a parable of the shipwrecking of Titanic interwoven with the motif of biblical disaster. It is a kind of Strindbergian's dance of death on the deck of the ship which is sinking with all its passengers who are presented as various types of people. Anna Grusková is known mainly as an outstanding theatre theorist. In recent period though she has presented herself as a sensitive and perceptive author. She works with mentally challenged

actors, homeless people and social workers, she also works as a director, dramaturg, author of plays and translator from German. In 2005 she initiated foundation of the Self-Supporting Art Team – a civic association which works as a platform for independent art projects. Her interest in the German cultural provenance eventuated in a dramatic text called *Almtraum* in which she tells a story of composer Alma Mahler-Werfel known as a wife and muse of many distinguished artists. The play is designed as an exciting personal dialogue oscillating between a romantic dream and a nightmare. The lines of figures from history are authentic.

The last author who has been calling the attention to himself belongs to the young generation which follows the dramatic principles of “coolness drama”.

The plays by Roman Olekšák (1978) express life feelings of present-day people which are the results of today's slowly-transforming society. They are often unique parables about a present-day world seen by the eyes of a young person, in which Olekšák uncovers current topics (disintegration of an individual and family, various ways of addiction, fall and estrangement of an individual in society, media manipulation and the gradual destruction of natural interpersonal communication) and expresses them in his own way – his texts are characterised by strong stylization of a story, colloquial language and authentic characters.

One of his latest plays *Smajlci (Smileys)* was a big success and won the prestigious Alfréd Radok Prize. The *Smileys* deals with one of the most current themes of today – it is a publicizing of so-called “over-one-night” stars and starlets, a manipulation of an individual by reality shows and psychological traumas of young artists who search for their own position in the world of show business.

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