

This won't go without saying

Divadelná Nitra theatre festival was again calling out for history. In the jubilee twenty-fifth edition the festival has offered productions, which were looking over the periods of the second world war, socialistic times in Slovakia or even the theatre avant-garde of the 1970s. Thus has this year the confrontation with history become an important tool for re-examination of the values of Europe, the central intention of this year's edition with the provocative motto *Ode to joy?*

The program of the theatre festival in Nitra is traditionally being strongly connected with the past. Over the years the most prestigious theatre event in Slovakia has been regularly presenting theatre production with topics, which staged the problematic periods of the (near) history, especially that of the periods of the second world war and socialism. With the project *Parallel lives* in edition of 2013 the festival as a producer even initiated dealing with the phenomena of the past with secret police supporting productions from several countries from the ex-soviet bloc. In this way the festival has continually served as a platform, which let to deal with the history in order to get to know it, understand it and even link it with the everyday life of people of today. Nevertheless, the presence of history at this year's edition gained a special weight. The program selection with focus on history with fascism or soviet totalitarianism has worked as a well-taken accentuation of those historical periods which relate to the current rise of extremism in Europe of today. Dealing with history has become a tool for better understanding of danger these political tendencies actually represent.

Still, different approaches of staging history at Divadelna Nitra 2016 opened a question of its potential, problems or accuracy. What if the production of Peter Lančarič translates the autobiographical novel of Žo Langerová into a sentimental, kitschy melodrama just as in *Back then in Bratislava* (SK)? Does the opportunity to communicate with the mainstream-audience justify the triviality of such form? Especially when the criticized period of socialist realism operates with similar aesthetical tools, just in name of other ideology? What if in the case of the *Hearing* (CZ) the playwright and dramaturge Tomáš Vůjtek and director Ivan Krejčí depict the life of Adolf Eichmann in a closed story full of stereotypical images, while its fictionalisation stays unmarked? Without doubt is the act of reproducing of history important for its value of knowledge and the indication of the continuity of fascistic

practises till today. The serious reflection on the formal problems of staging history and looking for innovative modes wasn't in both cases the intention of the directors.

A more ambitious formal approach represents the production *Kantor Downtown* from Poland. The collective of directors resigned on trying to stage history in a closed image, a complete storyline or an adaptation of historical events to a gratifying genre. The period of 1970s avant-garde scene in New York is being fragmentally reconstructed through juxtaposed statements of more than ten of its representatives, who are presented in a distinctive stage metaphor. The individual speakers are being projected on TV-monitors as talking heads, while each screen is placed on a desk building up a stage-classroom significantly recalling the image of *Dead Class* (1975) from polish cult-director Tadeusz Kantor. And so the places of “puppeted-actors”, who represented the lost war-generation in the Kantor's the most famous production, are being replaced by animated monitors with representatives of the passing generation of the New York avant-garde. Besides of the installation of objects there is a pair of actors constantly present on the stage as figures of Kantor and Actress, who function basically as a commentary on the topic of the state of avant-garde it's creating conditions back then and today.

The formal approach of *Kantor Downtown* confirms an ambition for a reflected understanding of what does it actually mean to stage history. The polish production succeeded in representing of the past as of a necessarily, uncomplete, reconstructed and medially represented object and it connected the past with the questions of its meaning for the situation of today. But what about the continual aspect of the chosen stage metaphor? Is it even possible to make a connection between the image of polish war society from Kantor with the U.S. avant-garde artists as the polish theatre makers are trying to stretch? As a matter of fact, it's too simplifying and softened to compare the complex issue of influence of the second world war on the society in Poland with the swan song of the U. S. avant-garde, who can't survive in neoliberal conditions of the theatre market of today. Even if *Kantor Downtown* works in comparison to the other presented historical productions of the festival program with more sophisticated form of staging history and tries not only to reproduce the stereotypical, plate image of history, it carelessly equalizes two incompatible historical contexts. Isn't this also distorting the experience of the second world war as a crucial period of European history?

Not only the content of the past, but also its form of representation has an impact on its understanding. Indeed, only reflected form of representation of the past can then contribute towards its better perception. For now on this seems not going without saying and needs to be followed further.