



Maudit soit le traître à sa patrie!

Oliver Frljić | Mladinsko Theatre / Ljubljana

Mise en scène

Oliver Frljić

Avec

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Création

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Durée: 75 minutes

QUELQUES MOTS SUR LE PROJET

Voici un théâtre de combat, où l'on multiplie les mises à mort dans un rituel qui rappelle que cette terre est encore moite du sang de milliers de victimes.



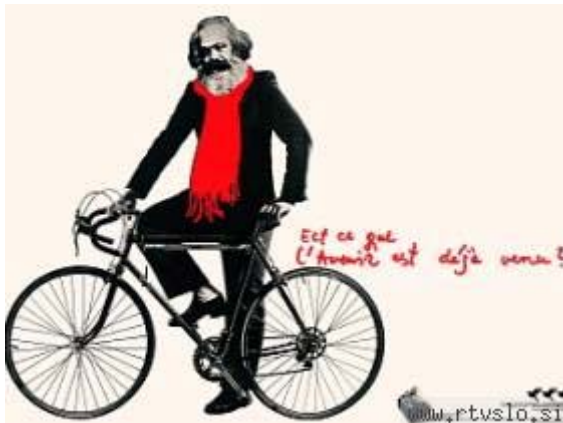
La Yougoslavie, avalée par les guerres civiles, hachée menue en une poignée de nations blessées. Le Croate Oliver Frlić signe une charge explicitement engagée, un manifeste où drames intimes et faits historiques s'enchevêtrent. Voici un théâtre de combat, où l'on multiplie les mises à mort dans un rituel qui rappelle que cette terre est encore moite du sang de milliers de victimes.

Questionnement puissant sur la responsabilité individuelle, le spectacle est porté par une distribution criante de vérité, du Mladinsko Theatre de Slovénie. Douleur extrême, joie démesurée, haine incontrôlable, pleurs excessifs, tout y est exacerbé. Mais l'esprit n'est pas tant à l'illusion théâtrale qu'à la lucidité crue. De ce brutal morcellement, le jeune metteur en scène en colère exhibe les plaies encore vives dans cette œuvre coup de poing. Spectacle choc, accusateur, dérangeant, *Maudit soit le traître à sa patrie !*, dernière strophe de l'hymne national yougoslave, se révèle un cri tonique pour les libertés civiles et artistiques.

Créé en Slovénie, *Maudit soit le traître à sa patrie !* prend l'éclatement de la Yougoslavie comme contexte pour évoquer la (re)montée du patriotisme et du nationalisme en Europe. Désignant les lieux communs et autres points de vue généraux sur l'histoire récente, le «théâtre-réalité» de Frlić joue à bride abattue avec la notion d'identité, le sentiment d'appartenance et les clichés dont ils sont revêtus. Il met à nu les ambiguïtés nichées, entre réalité et fiction, au coeur de la mémoire collective. Avec ce spectacle percutant sur le traumatisme de la tragédie yougoslave, farce politique où la musique et les conversations enjouées cachent un malaise grinçant, Frlić tend aux acteurs, aux spectateurs et au théâtre lui-même un miroir troublant.



SUR LE THEATRE MLADINSKO



Fondé en 1955, *Slovensko mladinsko gledališče* fut initialement le premier théâtre professionnel pour les enfants et la jeunesse de Slovénie. Il devint ensuite une compagnie théâtrale expérimentale de réputation mondiale.

Voué à la recherche de nouvelles formes d'expression dramatique, *Le Théâtre Mladinsko* donne de spectacles connus pour leur esprit original, provocateur et subversif. Ses tournées régulières en Europe, aux Etats-Unis et en Amérique latine font toujours beaucoup parler de lui. Considéré comme la compagnie de théâtre slovène la plus connue au plan international,

La reconnaissance prestigieuse que représente le titre flatteur d'Ambassadeur européen de la Culture, décerné en 2008 par la Commission européenne, était l'un des moments forts de son histoire. Le Théâtre Mladinsko est le premier théâtre et même la première institution culturelle slovène à porter ce titre.



SUR LE METTEUR EN SCENE



Toujours plus reconnu sur la scène internationale, **Oliver Frlić**, le metteur en scène phare de la jeune génération croate est également auteur, théoricien, performeur, comédien et lauréat de nombreux prix prestigieux. Il étudie d'abord la philosophie et la théologie et obtient ensuite son diplôme à l'Académie des Arts dramatiques à Zagreb. Il dirige des productions indépendantes dans des théâtres de répertoire, et si ses projets et ses interprétations radicales de pièces classiques suscitent l'enthousiasme, ses réalisations dérangent et choquent aussi. Ainsi, il a par exemple soulevé un débat enflammé sur la censure dans les théâtres croates. Il assure par ailleurs la dramaturgie de spectacle de danse et est co-auteur de spectacles. Il travaille en étroite collaboration avec le groupe BadCo., avec Borut Šeparović et avec le groupe Montažstroj. Sa collaboration avec le théâtre Mladinsko et le spectacle *Damned be the traitor of his homeland!* lui a ouvert un espace européen élargi.

Auteur, metteur en scène, théoricien, chorégraphe, comédien, Oliver Frlić est véritablement l'enfant terrible du théâtre d'ex-Yougoslavie. Il navigue entre théâtre de rue et institutions, entre lieux de création intime et grandes salles de répertoire. Ses pièces provoquent la discussion, suscitent des sentiments contrastés. Il joue avec les limites, entre réel et fiction, entre sphère publique et privée.

Issu de la performance, Oliver Frlić, à moins de 40 ans, propose un théâtre pamphlétaire et enflammé, qui trouve de plus en plus d'adeptes dans les Balkans. Doublement lauréat du 17^e Festival international de Rijeka (Croatie) en 2010 avec *Turbo Falk* et *Bacchantes*, il obtient en 2011 la « Couronne de laurier dorée », principale récompense de la 51^e édition du Festival international de théâtre MESS de Sarajevo pour *Papa est en voyage d'affaires* adapté du texte d'Abdulah Sidran. En novembre dernier, lors des Rencontres théâtrales de Brčko, en Bosnie, il remporte le Prix du meilleur metteur en scène pour la pièce *La lettre 1920*, qui traite de la Bosnie-Herzégovine d'aujourd'hui.



ENTRETIEN AVEC OLIVER FRLJIĆ

Propos recueillis et mis en forme par Diane Jean

Le texte du spectacle est élaboré à partir d'improvisations mais aussi de discussions qui se sont réellement déroulées entre les acteurs. C'est votre manière habituelle de travailler ou est-ce que cela convenait à ce que vous aviez envie de raconter ?



Je voulais parler de la désintégration de l'ex-Yougoslavie depuis longtemps. J'avais envie de scruter ce qui s'est passé avec ce pays, son patrimoine culturel et politique, et pourquoi jusqu'à un certain point nous avons trahi l'idée de la Yougoslavie et de son potentiel émancipateur, en échange d'un capitalisme néolibéral et de particularités nationales. Ainsi, quand j'ai reçu l'invitation de travailler avec le Théâtre Mladinsko, je savais ce que serait le point de départ de mon projet. Cette compagnie, très avant-gardiste en Yougoslavie pendant les années 1980, propose toujours du théâtre de recherche. Le texte s'est construit après plusieurs discussions et improvisations avec les acteurs. Ce genre d'expérience n'avait rien de nouveau pour eux, ils sont rompus à diverses façons de faire. Quand vous travaillez avec des gens qui ne sont pas habitués à ces principes, vous devez toujours leur donner beaucoup d'explications pour les sortir de la matrice du réalisme psychologique.

Je travaille ainsi naturellement. Je n'ai aucune formation théâtrale. Je viens d'une famille qui n'avait pas cette culture d'aller au théâtre. Je n'étais pas imprégné de toute la tradition théâtrale. En fait, mon initiation théâtrale s'est faite avec la performance. Je questionne toujours la hiérarchie théâtrale et cela rejaillit sur mon travail avec les acteurs. Habituellement, je dis aux acteurs que je veux qu'ils soient sur scène en tant que sujets politiques et pas en tant qu'objets de la démagogie du metteur en scène. Mais l'émancipation des acteurs est délicate. Il y a toujours quelqu'un qui dit: «*Vous devriez être émancipés*», ce qui est, à mon avis, l'origine de la démagogie.

Vous vous adressez d'abord aux gens de l'ex-Yougoslavie, mais vous avez également voyagé à l'extérieur des Balkans avec ce spectacle. Quel est son impact auprès de ceux qui n'ont pas vécu ces guerres ?

Récemment, nous avons reçu des élèves de l'école secondaire. Ils ont perçu *Maudit soit le traître à sa patrie !* comme une performance qui aborde les vrais problèmes dans leur environnement: le chauvinisme, l'homophobie, la xénophobie... Ils sont très jeunes et pas tellement familiers avec l'histoire de la Yougoslavie et de sa destruction, mais ils y reconnaissent leurs propres problèmes. Un public plus âgé peut réagir avec différents types d'émotions. Certains sont vraiment en colère parce que la performance adopte une position critique. D'autres sont heureux que nous démystifiions cette période.



Maudit soit le traître à sa patrie ! estompe la frontière entre le réel et la fiction. Quoi qu'il en soit, la vérité est toujours l'objet d'un consensus social. Nous utilisons différentes stratégies pour remettre en question ce qui est réel sur la scène. Je pense que le cadre théâtral fait de la fiction avec tout. Dans le film *Storytelling* de Todd Solondz un personnage déclare: « *Je ne sais pas ce qui s'est passé, parce qu'une fois qu'on commence à écrire, tout devient fiction.* »

Vous vous adressez directement aux spectateurs pour les invectiver : souhaitez-vous qu'ils réagissent ?

À Sarajevo, l'auditoire criait plus fort que l'acteur sur la scène. Au cours d'une représentation de la performance *Lâcheté* en Serbie, au moment où un acteur annonce qu'ils allaient énumérer les noms de 500 personnes tuées à Srebrenica, un spectateur a commencé à crier : « *Ne faites pas ça !* » La communication dans le théâtre ne doit pas être unilatérale. Je trouve cette pensée très oppressante. C'est comme la télévision, où vous devenez un réceptacle passif. Je pense que ce n'est pas dans la nature du théâtre, mais c'est ainsi dans la majorité des productions théâtrales. J'ai l'habitude de tenter de créer des situations dans lesquelles le spectateur doit sortir de son habituel rôle passif.

Le théâtre n'est pas là pour représenter une seule voix, mais pour créer une situation dans laquelle une multiplicité de voix se fait entendre. Je ne crois pas en la démocratie directe comme système politique, parce que je pense que c'est impossible dans les circonstances actuelles. Mais je crois fermement qu'au théâtre nous n'avons pas à répéter les mauvaises hiérarchies politiques et sociales qui existent dans notre société.

Je voudrais que l'art soit générateur de changements sociaux. Aujourd'hui, ça semble impossible parce que les nouveaux médias sont incapables de faire autre chose que de servir les intérêts du capital. Changer la façon dont les gens pensent est essentiel, mais il est plus important de créer un environnement dans lequel cette nouvelle façon de penser peut commencer à fonctionner.

Propos recueillis et mis en forme par Diane Jean



CHAQUE FOIS QUE L'ON TRAHIT SON PROPRE THÉÂTRE...

Par Tomaž Toporišič



Damned be the traitor of his homeland! adopte une approche radicale de l'amour et de la haine du theatre, abandonnant a la fois les comediens et les spectateurs a l'enchevetrement de la folie et de la douleur. Les comediens produisent une performance caustique, derangeante, voire choquante par moments. Ils se servent de traumatismes de guerre et politique pour soulever des questions existentielles a propos des limites de la liberte artistique et sociale, de la responsabilite individuelle et collective, de la tolerance et des stereotypes.

Le cadre theatral de ce laboratoire provient de recits du demantelement de l'ex-

Yougoslavie dans les annees 90, suivi des guerres acharnees en Croatie et en Bosnie qui ont mene au massacre de Srebrenica. Le titre du spectacle est tire du dernier couplet de l'hymne national de cette nation aujourd'hui disparue

Frljic explore le nationalisme et la xenophobie de la region recouvrant autrefois la Yougoslavie, a commencer par la Slovenie ou le spectacle a ete cree.

Damned be the traitor of his homeland! s'en prend surtout a toutes les formes de patriotisme agressif qui se transforment sournoisement en nationalisme. Le spectacle met en lumiere une serie d'outils utilises par les pretendus defenseurs de la patrie, allant de l'invective et du harcèlement a travers des questions relatives a l'origine, la citoyennete et l'appartenance (« Si une guerre eclatait entre la Slovenie et la Croatie, de quel cote seriez-vous ? ») au defile de mode ou l'on voit parader les acteurs munis de couteaux et revetus de drapeaux des anciennes republicues de l'ex-Yougoslavie.¹ Mis en scene avec une energie debordante

¹ La Republique federative socialiste de Yougoslavie etait un Etat qui s'etendait de l'Europe centrale aux Balkans – une region dont l'histoire est marquee de conflits ethniques. La Yougoslavie fut un conglomérat de six republicues regionales (Slovenie, Croatie, Bosnie-Herzegovine, Macedoine, Montenegro, Serbie) et deux provinces autonomes (le Kosovo et la Voivodine, situes tous deux en Serbie), dont les frontieres suivaient grosso modo les lignes ethniques, et qui a eclate en plusieurs Etats independants au cours des annees 90.



et une sorte de haine generalisee, imprevisible, le spectacle suggere un discours pseudo-ethnique et electrise le spectateur. Melant chants folkloriques et chansons populaires des annees 80, Frljic obtient un effet d'engouement aveugle pour la tradition bien de chez soi, sans aucune forme de justification.

Le spectacle commence par une scene que l'on croirait tout droit sortie du film prime de la Palme d'Or en 1995, *Underground* : la scene est jonchee de cadavres, selon toute vraisemblance des membres d'une fanfare puisque leurs mains se recroquevillent encore sur des instruments de musique. Peu de temps apres, les instruments commencent a generer du son et lentement, on comprend que ce n'est pas le vent qui souffle dans les cuivres. Leur sonorite se mele a une melodie. Tandis que la musique devient de plus en plus audible, les cadavres ressuscitent. Tout au long du spectacle, ces memes personnages seront tues a plusieurs reprises et reviendront chaque fois a la vie.

Oliver Frljic : « Au bout du compte, on finit toujours par denommer les cadavres et ceux-ci deviennent les enjeux de nouveaux projets politiques. Certains corps se voient offrir une sepulture avec tous les honneurs et entrent dans la posterite. D'autres font de nous des Antigone. Il faut parler de la valeur de chaque vie humaine, car si nous ne le faisons pas, nos milliers de morts seraient matiere negligeeable en comparaison de leurs dizaines de milliers de morts. Mais nous considerons ce compte comme defavorable. Apres tout, nous en avons perdu un peu moins et massacre un peu plus. De quel cote etes-vous : celui d'Etecole ou de Polynice ? »

Les tentatives compulsives de la piece de mettre en scene des morts collectives constituent une remise en question de la representation theatrale de la mort, voire de l'idee de la representation theatrale ellememe. Les scenes recurrentes de mort, suivies de la resurrection des protagonistes, mettent en lumiere le point mort des mecanismes de representation, ces producteurs de fiction que l'on cherche a dissimuler la plupart du temps, et qui eliminent tout cadre de contenu thematique pour ainsi demeurer la seule chose visible.

A l'instar du sol de l'ex-Yougoslavie, ou il est impossible de piocher la terre sans tomber sur des ossements, ce spectacle abonde de cadavres. Et de meme que ces cadavres non theatraux ont une certaine valeur sur le marche politique, la plethore de cadavres qui jonche la scene pour ensuite ressusciter a egalement une certaine valeur. En fait, ces corps s'efforcent de deprecier la valeur d'un certain modele de representation theatrale. Or, si celle-ci subit une devalorisation, quelle est donc la valeur de la mort reelle ? Pour repondre a cette question, il nous suffit de regarder les actualites a propos de Haiti ou de nous demander ce que Srebrenica signifie aujourd'hui. Pas grand-chose, encore moins que cela, plus rien du tout ?



Comme Kalina Stefanova le fait remarquer dans le Korean Theatre Journal : « Ces multiples resurrections constituent avant tout une affirmation concrete et tres circonstancielle sur l'aisance particuliere avec laquelle on peut aujourd'hui aneantir des etres humains en masse, sur l'absence de valeur d'une vie humaine et sur la haine des autres. L'essence de cette affirmation n'est pas seulement mise en avant de maniere indirecte par le caractere demesurement grotesque du spectacle, mais aussi de facon tres directe a divers moments. En outre, il s'agit de theatre politique sans ambages, dans le sillage direct de la piece *Black Land* d'Arpad Schilling et de sa determination a nous secouer et nous sortir de notre complaisance – ou de notre cecite ! – quitte a nous choquer par un langage outrancier, une nudite frontale ou simplement par l'evocation de la verite nue deconcertante. (...) En ce sens, quelque chose de l'atmosphere et de la profondeur du spectacle rappelle un autre tres grand film, Oscar du meilleur film etranger en 2002, *No Man's Land*. On y entend resonner le meme type de musique melancolique des Balkans, qui va droit au coeur et parvient a transporter le spectacle dans un autre registre – celui de la veritable tragedie humaine – en lui donnant une troisieme dimension speciale, reaffirmee et approfondie par la touche personnelle du texte dit par les comediens, quand ils ne jurent pas comme des charretiers. La scene finale est particulierement emouvante : elle commence par une chanson ("Je ne m'opposerai pas a mon frere"), chantee par une comedienne a la voix eploriee – a la fin de la chanson, le public est cloue sur son siege. Il s'avere cependant que la comedienne etait en larmes parce que reticente a l'idee de chanter cette chanson liee a la Serbie et qu'elle ait en fait voulu quitter le spectacle ². Voila qui donne lieu a une discussion passionnante, a nouveau directement face au public, sur la responsabilite artistique et humaine, a petite et grande echelle. »

Comme l'ecrit le critique polonais Jaroslaw Klebaniuk : « Outre faire entendre un son de cloche important dans le debat autour du nationalisme (qui pese d'autant plus lourd dans les Balkans ou il n'y a pas si longtemps encore, la folie nationaliste a mene a l'epuration ethnique et le massacre de dizaines de milliers de personnes), le spectacle depasse aussi certaines frontieres artistiques en faisant usage d'outils theatraux extremes et rarement utilises sur scene : insulter le public, exalter son patriotisme ou hyper-patriotisme, invectiver d'autres peuples ou nationalites (surtout les Croates). Si donner a voir a plusieurs reprises le

² Ce qui provoque son dilemme est le fait que la choriste que l'on entend sur l'enregistrement de cette chanson est Svetlana Velickovic, debutante a l'epoque et entretemps la grande diva serbe connue sous le nom de Ceca, qui a epouse plus tard le chef paramilitaire serbe accuse de crimes de guerre (mais assassine avant son proces), Željko Ražnatović Arkan. La comedienne ne voulait pas se produire dans un spectacle qui donne a entendre Velickovic, parce qu'elle considerait cela comme une prise de position politique.



meurtre de tous les personnages par l'un des comédiens de la troupe est un outil puissant, une autre scène tout à fait inhabituelle est plus forte encore, à savoir celle où les comédiens claquent des doigts et récitent "Salopes croates qui suçent des bites serbes" ou chantent "Tuez les Oustachis³, l'Istrie est à nous !", sans oublier d'y ajouter "Putain de public". Autant de fiel et de haine crachés sur une musique a priori émouvante, rythmique, belle et harmonieuse, voilà une véritable transgression. Ridiculiser le nationalisme à travers une parodie manifeste paraît bien plus simple qu'une progression vers le trouble et le pathos ; et si cela nous fait rire, c'est avec le cœur lourd. Les éléments grotesques du spectacle atteignent une quasi-perfection. Ce genre d'effet artistique est rare. >>

Concluons avec quelques pensées de Svetlana Slapšak, une intellectuelle slovène très audacieuse, spécialiste de l'Antiquité et l'étude des genres (*gender studies*) : « Dans le spectacle de Frljic, les comédiens improvisent un défilé de mode, exclusivement vêtus de drapeaux de l'État yougoslave et du parti, pour illustrer avec sarcasme l'identité déclarative. Ce n'est pas l'événement historique de la guerre de Yougoslavie qui est au cœur de ce puissant et brillant spectacle qui mentionne cyniquement le théâtre politique yougoslave et ses héros, mais le problème politique actuel : la volonté de perpétuer les atrocités subsiste, il suffit d'appuyer sur le mauvais bouton. (...) Personne n'est à l'abri de rien. L'histoire nous apprend que l'accusation de perversité a toujours servi d'introduction aux purges de l'ennemi et ensuite de prétexte idéal aux autorités en place pour

l'appliquer elles-mêmes. Voulons-nous vraiment nous engager une fois de plus dans cette spirale ? Alors, courez au théâtre, à nouveau politique, excitant et éducatif. Et à la fin du spectacle, vous pourrez encore une fois échanger des regards complices, purifiés par les larmes et les rires. >>

³ L'idéologie du mouvement Oustachi, fondé en 1929, relève du fascisme, du nazisme et du nationalisme croate. Les Oustachis soutenaient la création d'une Grande Croatie qui s'étendrait jusqu'à la Drina et la périphérie de Belgrade. Le mouvement soulignait la nécessité d'une Croatie racialement « pure » et appelait à l'extermination des Serbes, des Juifs et des Tziganes.



OLIVER FRLJIĆ, BORUT ŠEPAROVIĆ, TOMAŽ TOPORIŠIČ

Every time we betray our own theatre ...

On the basis of the disintegration of the former common country, the symbolic space in which this disintegration occurred, and the establishment of the new national states, this performance researches – through the seemingly high level of politisation – theatre mechanisms of constructing and deconstructing fiction. By using extremely politically incorrect language it tries to open the most direct channels of communication with the audience and materialise its unconscious on stage.

In the staging sense, on a certain level it poses the question what happens when an actor remains without a written text and is put in position on stage where she or he must, instead of written lines of a particular role, share her or his own opinion. Using the thematic frame of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the emergence of new countries with a nationalist connotation, we also witness the incessant disintegration and establishment of a performing subject and its transition from a relatively insecure space in which it is forced to pronounce her or his own beliefs to a relatively safe space of high theatralisation.

It is also perfectly clear that this performance – just like any work of art in the era of technical reproduction – can't escape the socio-economic and technical dominance that determine its aesthetic dimension. Just like it is clear that it would be impossible to expect that a living performance can remain ontologically 'genuine', or that it can function within a cultural economics separate from the economics of mass media. Therefore the actors on stage turn their attention to the attempt to erase the general amnesia we witness in the beginning of the 21st century.

This performance is resisting to the fact that the meaning is evaporating and that our time is searching persistently and manically for the next 'extreme' image or an 'interactive experience'. It stems from the situation described with great precision by Gómez-Peña: "We are now fully installed in what I term the culture of the

mainstream bizarre [...] *Change channel*. From the TV specials on mass murderers, child killers, religious cults [...] to the obsessive repetition of "real crimes" shot by private citizens or by surveillance cameras, we've all become daily voyeurs and participants of a new *cultura in extremis*. [...] Its goal is clear: to entice more consumers while providing them with the illusion of experiencing (vicariously) all the sharp edges and strong emotions that their superficial lives lack."^[1]

By quoting, appropriating, and ironically-terrorist transformations of the manipulative apparatus of ideology and mass media, the performance, due to its image and its non-ideological treatment of the political and its manipulation, exposes itself to danger. It tries to take full advantage of the fact that we today live in the field of the *transcultural business*, which translates every intercultural artistic act into a logic of potential to exploit the trans-political, globalistic economic and political lobby. In the manner of American cultural activists it tries to give the theatre back its function as a place where art and social engagement meet. With the words of Peter Sellars: "I work in theatre to see if democracy is working."

The actors in the performance continually point at the fact that they are what they are, actors, and that they remain actors even in the moment when they 'take on' temporary roles. This pointing is, in its basis, very close to the tradition of reflection on theatre postulated by Peter Handke, for example in his famous *Public Insult*. Originating from Grotowski and his reduction of elements of representation and drama theatre, the performance warns all the time, using Handke's words: "This stage represents nothing ... You can see no object pretending to be other objects. [...] the time on stage is no different from the time off stage." By saluting Stanislavski and the tradition of dramatic illusionism, the speakers realise: "We don't do as if."^[2]



If for Handke the statement “We don’t do as if,” is declarative, there is no need for that today. In its ghetto, theatre can do whatever it wants. The question is only if anyone takes any notice at all of all this. The play and performance as something that doesn’t follow the self-evident laws of representation. The actors are what they are, while at the same time persistently traversing from the state of being oneself to the state of being someone else through oneself and through what you are.

Thus the performance uses neither a script nor a pre-drafted directorial concept, nor speech with defined communicativeness. The actors on stage speak about their life problems, which are quickly revealed as obsessions of our insecure time, as common points of recognition on stage and in the hall. Their stage presence, to a certain level freed of theatricalisation, triggers stage events, brings actors closer to the audience and with their help creates temporary theatre community, which sometimes seems able to change the world. But this is, of course, all just an illusion.

So the actors in the performative act invisibly transfer from (non-)acting themselves and titbits of their own biographies into (non-)acting of some sort of collective heroes of recent history and potential (anti-)heroes of the present. At the same time, we are witnesses to meta-theatrical etudes that in their final consequence produce some sort of theatricalisation of politics or ritual cleansing. The autopoetic feedback loop (Fischer-Lichte) thus becomes one of the possible answers to a type of “the end of history, humanism”.

The performance considers the audience as “fellow actors who, by the virtue of their participation in the play, in other words, their physical presence, their engagement and reactions, produce the performance.”[3] It is therefore (spoken in the spirit of Barthes) always “the result of interaction between the performers and the audience”. [4] A fixed work of art doesn’t exist, the co-presence of actors and spectators is essential, but this co-presence includes the calculated power that stage

has over spectators. Despite performative elements (actors and spectators exchanging roles), the established community is necessarily temporary. The borders between the real and the fictional world are blurred, spectators and actors alike become actors in an event characterised by uneasiness upon disclosing intimacy.

Marina Gržinić would mark this with a syntagma that they eschew conventionality by making “the erroneous recognition of identity” the basis of the act.[5] The performance destroys the representation principle also by having actors “address the audience directly and even challenge them wittily, establish contact with them, and the result of this is total panic, no memory! The forces at work here are those between the audience and the theatre: actors indicate social and cultural change originating from the modern theatre discourse.”[6]

However, at the same time the performance is aware that the total exit from representation is impossible, just like the Schechnerian or the actionist vision is impossible, or naive, for example, claiming that the performative autopoetic feedback loop allows us to reach beyond the logic of the text based culture and its referential function. Nevertheless, through establishing dialogue with the traces of the performative turn of the 1960s – to use Fisher-Lichte’s words – it tries stubbornly to legitimise theatre as performance art *par excellence*. [7]

[1] Guillermo Gómez-Peña. »The New Global Culture.« *The Drama Review* 45, 1, New York, 2001: 13.

[2] Garner, Stanton B. Jr. *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*. Ithaca, NY, 1994: 153.

[3] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des performativen*. Frankfurt am Main 2004: 48.

[4] Op. cit., *ibid*.

[5] Marina Gržinić. »Novi performativnosti in procesualnosti naproti.« *Maska*, 80, 81, 2003. 72–76: 75.

[6] Op. cit., *ibid*.

[7] *Theater seit den 60er Jahren. Grenzgänge der Neo-Avantgarde*, Erika Fischer-Lichte/Friedemann Kreuder/Isabel Pflug (Hrsg.). Tübingen/Basel 1998: 11.



From the reviews

Radio Beograd

12 May 2010

Serbia

We have seen a true, committed, important, rude, political, post-dramatic, post-modern theatre, dealing with us and the time we are living in. This is live theatre that concerns us, it is a living matter of the modern artistic act. The question posed by the play is the question of all questions – the question of responsibility. It is also the common thread, linking all of Oliver Frlijić's so far made plays – the attempt to assign responsibility to an individual, his present and his future.

Goran Cvetković

Novosti

28 May 2010

Croatia

Picturesquely speaking the virus that has recently been ravaging in theatres of the former Yugoslav space and whose name is Oliver Frlijić is already well-known, however, it still raises temperature of the audience and everything around it. His latest play *Damned be the traitor of his homeland!*, performed in the Mladinsko Theatre in Ljubljana, talks about the collapse of Yugoslavia through the mouth of Slovenians, once again running a finger into the eye of political stereotypes in a venomously provocative way 20 years after the tragic events.

Bojan Munjin

Art Act Magazine

28 March 2011

Romania

We would need for sure – in Romania – such a cold shower directed to the national ego, this mixture of narrow-minded respect for culture and tradition, usually a mimic of respect, seasoned with nationalistic outbreaks that show the true inner mechanisms of the so-called “cultural world” – completely isolated from the real one. This is what I was thinking about getting out from the show of the Slovenian company Mladinsko, *Damned be the traitor of his homeland*, signed by Oliver Frlijić and presented in the frame of the Perforations New York – the festival that was in the general attention here in the last week, in spite of the huge cultural offer of the Big Apple.

The Slovenian show directly attacks a series of dangerous taboos – some general ones and some which are specific to the Balkan cultural space – and it does it in a very upfront way, with the effect of a fist in the stomach. The audience is deeply troubled by this confrontation, especially that it is a permanent part of the show – as a witness, as a partner or as the enemy attacked with insults. [...] A demonstration of anarchic theatre, combined with irony and moments of postmodern relaxation, the show *Damned be the traitor of his homeland* is by all means a work of its time.

Cristina Modreanu



The Korean Theatre Journal
Korea

***Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland!
Or Occupy Theatre!***



It's one of these increasingly rarer shows which make critics forgive and forget weeks of going to faceless theatre. It's reminiscent of other great works of art, yet it's undoubtedly original and unique.

The show starts with a scene as if taken out of the Golden Palm-winning film *Underground*: the stage floor is strewn with dead bodies with brass-band musical instruments in their hands. Shortly afterwards the air in the instruments start moving and not before long we understand that it's not the wind blowing in them. The sounds get stronger and stronger, they intertwine in a melody and with the soaring music the dead too rise up. Throughout the show these same people will be repeatedly killed and would rise up

again and again. And this is not merely a part of the patch-work type of a plot or an excellent exploitation of the conditional nature of theatre in principle; nor is it only a display of the vintage Balkan vitality known from all works of the same Kosturitsa-Bregovich team and so well summed up in the line "Even in the dead car we are alive!" (*Arizona Dream*).

The show does brim with the same vitality, despite its first-glance subject matter, but these multiple resurrections are primarily a statement: concrete and very topical about today's special ease of killing people en masse, about the disposability of human beings, about hatred towards the others. The essence of this statement is brought forward not only indirectly through this hyperbolic grotesque, but also in a very direct way several times during the show. Because it's also a straight-forward political theatre, reminiscent of Arpad Schilling's *Black Land* and his determination to shake us out of our complacency – or mind-blindness! – be it at the expense of shocking us via improper language, frontal nudity or simply by saying the inconveniently naked truth.

Here are two scenes, exemplary of that style. The actors, fully or partially undressed, stand in a line en face of us and fulminate against all types of different people (nationality, race, gender, sex orientation wise, including the audience itself). Then the decibels of the vulgar curses all of a sudden turn down to a whisper, the whisper gradually gathers momentum and, to our surprise, becomes a menace-charged recital in one voice, like coming out of soldiers ranks: "Istria is ours!" (Istria obviously being Slovenia) turns out to be what they say. The other scene is figuratively and literally show-stopping: one of the actors rises up from the newly killed dead and, in the same matter-of-factly manner, informs us that at this moment he's supposed to start insulting the Slovenian audience; since, though, it'd be irrelevant now – we are in another country, after all – he'd skip it; then, all of a sudden, he makes a U-turn and ferociously turns on at the local audience: "You want traditional theatre, a fable? No, fucking



pussies! You'll stay here for 4 hours and no one's leaving until you start thinking!" And, yes, despite its only 70 minutes duration, this show does make us think. It, so to speak, manages to jump over the ramp and *occupy* the theatre and makes us too, along with its creative team, profoundly indignant.

However, again, it's not simply a piece of political-cabaret like theatre. It's much more than that. Because it dares to have a palpably poetical touch too, it's courageous enough to enter into the deep waters of throat-grabbing emotions. In this regard, there's something in its mood and its depth that's reminiscent of another great film, the Oscar-winning *No Man's Land*. The same type of heart-rending authentic Balkan folk music resounds and manages to transport the show into another genre – that of real human drama – giving it a special third dimension. And this third dimension is reaffirmed and deepened by the personal touch of the text spoken by the actors, when they don't swear. Especially moving is the final scene, which starts with a song ("I won't go against my brother"), sang by a tearful actress – by the end of the song the audience is riveted to the chairs. Yet, it turns out that the actress may have cried because she has been reluctant to sing the song, due to a Serbian connection in its history, and has actually wanted to leave the show. What follows is a passionate discussion, again en face to us, on responsibility – artistic and human, on a small and big scale.

The show ends abruptly – the feeling is that the discussion hasn't finished – but this is its only shortcoming. Otherwise, there's a startlingly sharp tempo in it – things happen with the immediacy of a net chat – and the montage of the scenes is perfect. In brief, the show definitely speaks the language of modern days. But in this very language it talks about eternal matters, like life and death and basic human relations. This so rare combination is achieved due to the perfect ensemble work of the cast and the unique talent of Oliver Frljic. He knows both how to shock you to the point that you jump back in your seat and move you to tears – both for the sake of humanity at that! And he demands that we start doing something for that very sake. Urgently! He knows how to strip issues to their essence and does make no bones about showing the direct connection between seemingly negligible politics and human drama and even tragedy. That's exactly why he manages to put grotesque hyperbole and true-to-life dramatic reality in one bowl, and make them not fall apart. Or maybe we ourselves have turned our lives into this impossible mixture – or have allowed them to be turned into it – and Frljic wants to scream this in our face and make us change that preposterous status-quo?!

The Festival featured also some famous names, like Alan Platel, Krystian Lupa, Ivo van Hove, Romeo Castellucci, some of whose uncommon theatre has become already quite common and even predictable. There were also several quite meaningless shows, alas, in the very literal sense that one couldn't find the answer of why they have been made in the first place, let alone selected for the event. They provoked informal discussions on whether the festival idea on the whole, around the world, is in an impasse. But then again, when you have even one show like that of Frljic's, it makes 9 days of going to the theatre fully worth it. And in this case there were certainly more than one such shows, all of which good enough to start a dialogue within ourselves and between us, i.e. to make us slow down. For, as Bauman says, "dialogue is the opposite of haste."

Kalina Stefanova



kulisa.eu

15 May 2010

Croatia

The show also gives room to bitter laughter: in the obituary, Frljić is named a theatrical terrorist; it gives room to parody – former rallies have been replaced by fashion shows, in which actors wear the flags of the former state’s republics. There is also sadness: apart from an endless string of violent deaths on the stage, the tears of the acting group and the selection of music directly refer to it. Above all, this is really a play about Responsibility, personal and collective, and it affects all those living in these places. If anyone claims otherwise, then they are lying or are – too young (there is no room for incomprehension here).

Tatjana Sandalj

Times Square

8 April 2011

United States



At odds with the St. Patrick’s Day festivities was *Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland* by the Mladinsko Theater of Slovenia, featuring a multi-Balkan cast. Their exploration of cultural hatred in the Balkan region was chilling. From the sobbing, the multi-tonal choral music, and the murderous shootings of the entire cast at point blank range by a deranged character with an all too real looking

semi-automatic handgun, this show reached out and grabbed me by the throat. Directed by Oliver Frljić, a Croatian, and featuring Primož Bežjak, Olga Grad, Uroš Kaurin, Boris Kos, Uroš Maček, Draga Potočnjak, Matej Recer, Romana Šalehar, Dario Varga, and Matija Vastl, *Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland* ran the gamut of ethnic hatred, mob violence, and single-minded assassination, barely softened by tradition and liturgical music. Although this work has greater meaning for a Balkan audience, the message came through loud and clear: Tribalism will trump morality when all order has perished. In an attempt to re-create an audience-offending diatribe, near the end of the performance Primož Bežjak verbally works over the American audience, trying to foment a nationalistic rise or jingoistic response. Alas, the effort was to no avail, but I admired his attempt to make the work relevant to us. This was the most poignant and purposefully hocking presentation of the entire festival; bring us more of this.

Philip W. Sandstorm



Wurota

16 October 2011

Poland

We witnessed truly transgressive theatre in one of the most interesting plays of the Dialog festival. The artistic provocation served an important goal – studying the idea of nationalism. And we were able to see that we were not only witnesses.

[...]

The entire play is built on shock which stems either from surprise or contrast. First insults proved to be the strongest because we saw the following ones coming. Nationality-based scenes of hatred, played by the actors, created a striking contrast to the sentimental melodies of love and the beauties of nature that they played and sang. After an absolutely brilliant interrogation scene of a fellow actor about his Croatian mother, vacation house in a neighbouring country, yacht and a flag on its mast and finally his relations with ethnically different neighbours, it seemed that the hostile provocations were nothing but a joke, the melancholic melody finally bringing harmony and mutual affection amongst friends; then all of a sudden one of the actors shoots an “ethnically impure” fellow actor. Other characters afterwards die too, being admonished by their colleagues for unimportant, yet suspiciously presented events. The worst reproach was marriage with a woman who was of a different, once Yugoslav nationality. One of the women was raped before her death, a body of a man dishonoured by masturbating on it, everyone dragged on the floor by their feet. The bodies lay covered with flags in colours typical of the majority of the former Yugoslav countries’ flags, yet equipped with fictitious coats of arms. This did not only have to do with protecting themselves from potential violations of the law on state symbols. The play was directed against all kinds of nationalisms, not just the kind the actors experience themselves, the point of nationalism being that love of our homeland is righteous while all others are unjust, worse, in some places even worthy of disdain. The nationalism of our enemies must be a crime. It is hard to generalize this antinationalist perspective without referring to one of the ideologies. Yet the theatre group from Ljubljana succeeded in doing just that. They convincingly compromised every single nationalistic idea there is. [...]

The staging presents not only an important voice in the discussion on nationalism (which is surely even more important in the Balkans, where not long ago ethnic cleansing led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people), but also a means of surpassing certain artistic boundaries. Insulting the audience, stirring up their patriotism or hyperpatriotism which is nationalism, group insults of people of other nationalities (mostly Croatians) – these are extreme and normally unused means. Repetitive murders of all characters, killed by one of the fellow actors, were a powerful means, yet one scene was even more powerful. It was the extremely unusual scene in which the actors snapped their fingers and recited: “Croatian cunts, sucking Serbian cock”, or chanted: “Kill, kill the Ustashe, Istria is ours!”, not forgetting to add the exclamation “fucking audience”. So much poison and hatred in a seemingly touching, rhythmic, musically speaking simply beautiful work – that is a true transgression. Ridiculing nationalism with the help of an overt parody seems much easier than escalation



into disquiet, pathos; and if it makes us laugh, we laugh with a heavy heart. The elements of grotesque in the play were close to perfection. This kind of artistic effect is rare and requires truly exceptional courage.

I must add that the excellent musical equipment (playing the instruments live, singing, background music), perfect spatial coordination and synchronized movement, meant to display the emptiness of the clichés about the cruelty of killing, made the play not only emotional, but also highly aesthetic. It turned out that a theatre that shocks is not necessarily a theatre that is unpleasant to look at. It was also pleasing to the ear, albeit also annoying because of the frequent gunshots. But what can you do – war is war.

Jaroslav Klebaniuk

Vijenac

11 February 2010

Croatia

One of the statements of the play is that there is just one step from models with flags to models under the flags. It also points to the fact that chauvinism of any kind is not to be found on the border that separates entities, but in the atmosphere of only two people and that it can refer to anything. The Slovene discussion on Croats, as well as the Croatian one on Slovenes, especially when a play in Slovenia is the joint work of Oliver Frljić and Borut Šeparović as a dramaturg, must result in this conclusion [...].

[...] For theatre not to lie, although it always does, the director and the dramaturg made an effort to further reduce already tested procedures. Nudity throwing intimacy, which is not the physical kind, to the viewer's face; cheering chant displaying an extract of collective consciousness; game of symbols, such as the anthem and the flags only to clearly depict their anything but symbolic arbitrariness; simulation of a documentary situation with the directorial manipulation of perhaps even real sentences and with the installation of context; hypertrophy of emotions, provoked by popular, sometimes even folk melodies... [...]

The assessment that Oliver Frljić has created a machine that could »guest« – or could again and again be restarted – in any city with hospitable and somewhat-open-minded-about-the-fixed-repertoire theatres, not only across the former state and region, seems sneering. However, this kind of a machine is just as requisite as it is real despite the theatre's lies as one of the last few ways to prevent the best and the worst newspaper title, inspired by the anniversary of the Srebrenica reality, from happening ever again: They were all cooks, yet eight thousand people are gone. Even if the sensitive audience is offered a packet of disinfected earplugs.

Igor Ružić



Nowa Siła Krytyczna

16 October 2011

Poland

The play *Damned be the traitor of his homeland!* mostly fights against all forms of aggressive patriotism, which seamlessly transforms into nationalism. Short compositions during the play demonstrate a series of instruments, used by the so-called defenders of the homeland: from insults, harassment through questions about origine and citizenship («If a war between Slovenia and Croatia broke out, which side would you take?«), to the catwalk show with the flags of the former Yugoslav republics. All this, enacted with incredible energy and some sort of unpredictable general hatred, gives an impression of pseudopatriotic discourse and thrills the spectator. Intertwining folk and popular songs from the eighties achieves the effect of blind infatuation with one's own tradition without any kind of confirmation.

[...] The final scene of the play is very trying for the actors who are required to share their personal beliefs with the audience. This scene thus revolves around the universal question about the boundaries of artistic freedom and to the extent of its compatibility with politics. The actors stand in a straight line in the foreground of the stage and vigorously debate the protest by one of the actresses. The quarrel stemming from different national and political beliefs soon turns into distasteful insults and the washing of each other's dirty laundry in public. Witnessing this (un)realistic scene is a clear reminder of the danger that the mechanism of coiling the spring of hatred presents.

Damned be the traitor of his homeland! is a very sharp and provocative sociopolitical play. Comical and grotesque elements are interweaved with the brutality of war and the cruelty of extremists. Moreover, the play, which was directed by a Croat, contains a visually and rhythmically pleasant composition, during which the actors lie on the floor each playing an instrument. The sounds grow more audible and gradually turn into a single symphony. The broken band manages to stand up and jointly create something marvelous. This incredibly charming and harmonious opening scene, which is afterwards repeated, is the only one of its kind in the entire play. This is because the kind of harmony and congruity, which can only be achieved in music, are nothing more than a temporary state of poise as seconds later everything is destroyed in an avalanche of mutual recriminations and blind rage. It turned out such voices are absolutely necessary not only in Poland, but the whole of Europe. It is therefore of the utmost importance to give them a chance to be heard, even more so because in such plays the social objective is combined with a high artistic level. The unusualness of such an event thus becomes nothing more than an excuse or an attempt of marginalisation.

Karolina Matuszewska



<http://chojnowski.blogspot.com/>

17 October 2011

Poland

The Mladinsko Theatre deservedly received a warm welcome. The director Oliver Frljić and his actors spoke of ethnic conflicts after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, for this purpose turning the theatre into a battlefield – the battle was not only fought between the actors themselves, but also between the actors and the spectators. The latter were shot in the head with fake guns and the accusation of indifference with regard to Srebrenica presented the bullets. Furthermore, the actors jeered Polish fog in Smolensk and criticized double standards.



Even though the play *Damned be the traitor of his homeland!* (a quote from the Yugoslav anthem, which, as we know, melodically resembles the Polish one) could do with a few minor cuts, Frljić, the Croatian Jan Klata according to some, proved to be an artist with a sharp journalistic eye and a non-negligible talent to inspire an inspiring unrest. The Chilean *Simulacro* is similar to this play both in tone and temperament,

yet it did not display such strength. However, when the actors on stage started revealing false images of Chilean reality, sold to tourists during their travels, the adventurous types in the audience started reconsidering their lists of travel destinations. Croatia is often at the top of such lists before for example Cuba or the Dominican Republic. It is similar to Chile, hiding something behind a holiday facade. When it came to the Slovenian offensive, I thought of the impression the Polish theatre would make on the French or the English if Poland went on a European tour with a play about the Polish September (September Campaign, the invasion of Poland marks the start of World War 2) or if a Jew theatre group succeeded in a similar initiative.

Grzegorz Chojnowski

Večer

10 March 2010

Slovenia

The fact that theatre lies is the best justification to stage reality in its most brutal form – due to the ontological basis of theatre, the viewer can never be completely certain about the reality of the performance. This extremely dynamic, deliberately aggressive play is bubbling with all sort of political incorrectness, vulgarisms, nudity and violence. The viewers can not hide in the darkness of their chairs as the actors directly provoke them and problematize their passive stance.

Pia Brezavšček



Večer, Slovenia

6 March 2010

I am obviously referring solely to the theatre of the modern era, which can by no means be compared with the theatre as part of a functional democracy in times of ancient Athens. More precisely, what I have in mind is the theatre of the region we are living in with its various forms of cultural production. The fact that culture was the creator of political concepts and awareness, became ever clearer in the seventies: after raising awareness of the student revolution across the globe and the successful defeat of movements, which were peaceful, yet triggered fundamental change in the way of life around the world, culture (including popular culture) has more or less successfully "translated" thought processes of the revolutionary generation for a wide variety of users. [...]

While *Miss in a minor* is thematically linked to the events that happened 40 years before the making of the play and its performance, the premiere of Oliver Frlijić's play at the Mladinsko Theatre last Wednesday in Ljubljana applies to the events from twenty years ago, to a time before and during the Yugoslav war. Back then we trusted the media, as they had become somewhat diverse and as cultural production, together with nomadism and cooperation, virtually disappeared. The play shocks mainly by politicizing personal stance – or why an anonymous TV spectator the next day becomes a criminal, who himself judges the neighbours according to the criteria set by the media the night before. It also shocks by showing that such mechanisms exist and can function again in the same way – on the basis of the brutal game of truth, played by the actors at the end of the play. Should we blame culture for not creating enough material to help us think and thus survive the war, or for producing enough cultural nationalist manure before the war to provide humans with a stock of hate motivation? We should have a grudge against culture for both. It should always be the one to blame as that can only help it. The play is wild with a lot of swearing and shooting to place the arbitrariness of shooting and swearing in all possible contexts imaginable. In which language do the actors in the play swear? In the general language of Balkan swearing, that is in Serbo-Croatian, then using the same words in Slovene, to insult others in terms of the socially oppressed from eastern Slovenia; the motive does not matter, what matters is that it is allowed. In Frlijić's play, the actors improvise a fashion show, dressed only in Yugoslav state and party flags as a sarcastic example of declarative identities. It is not the historical event of the Yugoslav war that is at the heart of this powerful and brilliant play, in which the Yugoslav political theatre and its heroes are cynically mentioned, but the presence of the political problem today: the willingness for atrocities remains, you just have to press the right button.

For the past year, the right in Slovenia has been preparing a psychological state in which all those frustrated will take the right to judge everyone that is different, privileged or designated as »perverse«. »Perverse« is a term used both in the case of an attack on the president as in the case of an attack on a lesbian couple in the neighbourhood. No one is safe from anything. In the historical cases that we know, the accusation of perversity has always served as an introduction to the purge of the enemies, then as a safe screen for a free implementation of the authority's perversity. Do we really want to go down the same road again? So hurry to the theater, which is once again political, exciting and educative. At the end of the play, you then once again exchange allied looks, refined by tears and laughter.

Svetlana Slapšak



Sterijevo Pozorje Festival Novi Sad, Serbia

Frljić explores nationalism and xenophobia of the Yugoslav region, starting, of course, from the Slovenian territory in which the play was made. – Do you want traditional theatre, a story, something you could identify with? – accompanied by cursing of the audience, this is a question to which we know the answer. Nine actors re/present the verbal and physical aggression of small territories – according to the author’s feelings, latently fascist – and with auto-references and repetitiveness of theatrical death, the director does not deal exclusively with questions of recent political history, but also with the purpose and role of the director in contemporary theatre. As in some other plays, by problematising the classical stage scheme, Frljić uses the political as a starting point for considering the position of a director in a theatrical and social hierarchy.

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