

We can find certain similarities in theatre forms, topics and relationships to drama manifested and used by the artists of the same generation – so-called millennials operating primarily on the independent scene. They are more interested in autobiographical texts than in the original dramatic texts. The author is not represented as one person but as a cooperation of a collective of authors. It is the whole group of creators, the actors or performers included, who create the final shape of the text. It seems that expressing authenticity – in the text and on the stage – becomes the main intention of their approaches to drama. Trivial and everyday matters of life become the subjects of their interpretations. They place in the centre of their attention the human as their self-image or the human as a person they know from close or familiar circles, from media or stories of others. For authors, themselves or their issues and attitude towards life represent the inspiration. Also, they like to speak about themselves and analyse their feelings and perceptions as if defining these in front of the spectators brings them a therapeutic effect and confirms the relevancy of their attitudes towards life. What does such authenticity expressed by the self-projection of artists in their texts and in their performances bring to the audience? Does it raise any deeper awareness and understanding of life for the audience, or does it recycle what we already know?

Keywords: contemporary Slovak theatre, devised theatre, millennials, performance, autobiography, authenticity

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Authenticity in Authorial Works of Devised Theatre: Approaches of the Millennials¹

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The outlook and values of the members of one generation may have similar bases, which are naturally shaped by identical cultural developmental contexts and the social, economic and political conditions in the given environment. An essential role in moulding the common value framework of the same generation is played by the mechanisms that prevail in institutional education, i.e., in the school and education systems. A certain similarity in approaches to creation – in both aesthetic and programmatic terms – as a manifestation of the shared values of one generation can also be seen in a group of Slovak theatremakers active mostly in Bratislava. They may be ranked among the so-called Generation Y or the Millennial Generation. Its members are very close to each other in age; they were collegemates studying various specialisations in subsequent classes at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (hereinafter, APA). After their graduation, some established their own theatres as civil society organisations (e.g., NUDE Theatre, Peter Mankovecky Theatre, Uhol_92/Angle_92, etc.), in which they make theatre collectively. Others are freelancers and collaborate with independent theatres established by their peers on a project basis. Within the independent theatre scene in Bratislava, they represent the main actors of the current wave. However, the topics they bring up and how they depict them on stage are very similar in many aspects and often not very original, either. Several specialists (especially in English-speaking environments) from the fields of sociology, demography, psychology, cultural studies, social economics, human resources and education have dealt with the Millennial Generation.² They have written several journalistic and specialist articles, studies and

¹ The study is an output of the project VEGA 2/0110/19 Poetics of Contemporary Performance Art.

² Let's mention some publications, studies and articles in the field of business and management, social economy sector such as *The Millennial Mindset: Why Today's Young Workforce Thinks Differently* by Cara Silletto, *When Millennials Take Over: Preparing For The Ridiculously Optimistic Future Of Business* by Jamie Notter and Maddie Grant, "Rise of the millennials: how they will impact the cyber workforce" by Adam B. Lowther, "Millennial Generation Perceptions of Value-Centered Leadership Principles" by Thomas Maier, "Mind the Generation Gap: Millennials and Boomers in the Library Workplace" by Eric Jennings and Jill Markgraf, "Protecting my turf: The moderating role of generational differences on the relationships between self-direction and hedonism values and reactions to generational diversity" by the collective of authors from Farmer School of Business, Miami University S. B. Dust, M. W Gerhardt, D. Hebbalalu and M. Murray or *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* by the economist Angus Maddison. There have also been published many interdisciplinary publications and articles transcending the fields psychology, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies such as *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* by Neil Howe William Strauss, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World* by David D. Burstein, "Are Millennials Really the 'Go-Nowhere' Generation?" by Noreen C.

comprehensive publications reflecting on the value framework of this generation in its broader social, cultural, political and economic contexts.³ This generation is sometimes called the “Me Me Me Generation” (Stein). This designation is based on the fact that the authors of several studies and articles define millennials as a selfish, narcissistic, self-centred generation compared to the previous ones.

Images of the “Me Me Me” Generation

Increased attention to oneself and a need for self-reflection or self-expression in terms of talking about oneself can be seen even in the stagings of several independent theatremakers of this “Me Me Me” Generation in Bratislava. Although the open dramaturgy and the wide range of topics and approaches of the independent theatremakers active mainly in Bratislava reveal that, similarly to the previous generations, they also take an active interest in the world, in the developments and in people and their place in it. They often do so through themselves. They give their personal statements in which they expose themselves to the audience “from inside”. They talk about their emotional and mental disposition, their values, their problems, their worries, their status, and their actions in their interpersonal relationships or in their broader social communities. They do not analyse major moral or ethical dilemmas but the trivial issues of everyday life. The attention of this generation focuses on someone who is either in their own image, i.e., their own self, or someone from their close or distant environment whom they know well and whose values are close to theirs. That person and their problems and life become inspiring materials for them. They view their existence also through the lens of the past and its messages. They compare themselves with the generation of their parents and grandparents and look for their self-determination also in confrontation with the past. They try to define their attitude towards the models in which they grew up and find links with the past and with the things they experienced. They pay attention to their depression, frustration, existential crises, complexes and attitude towards the virtual space and social media. They share a constant quest for and re-evaluation of their external and internal identity as a framework to define themselves.

This gives rise to a range of works in the form of scenic autobiographies, characterised by a large extent of authenticity. These are based on authorial texts

McDonald, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* by Jean M. Twenge or some journalistic and popular-educational guides and handbooks such as *Clueless At 30: A Millennial's Search For Everything And Nothing* by Shalini Prakash, *Hacks for Life and Career: A Millennial's Guide to Making it Big* by Sandeep Das, *The Radical Sabbatical: The Millennial Handbook to the Quarter Life Crisis* by Emma Rosen, *The Burnout Generation and Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* by the journalist Anne Helen Petersen or *Ok Boomer*, *Let's Talk: A Millennial Defense of Our Generation* by Jill Filipovic.

³ The time specification of this generation varies by a few years, but, roughly, it includes individuals born in the period ranging from the 1980s to the year 2000.

or, more precisely, authorial scripts, which represent synopses of the plays. The content of the text itself, whose bearer on stage is the author and which contains something from his life, the events he experienced, and something that refers directly to him, may be subject to change and improvisation by the actor-author during the performance (or statement on stage). The texts' language and structure are not crucial for their scenic depiction in the thematisation of everyday things and the banalities of life. The overall scenic form, the statement as such, whose original text only names the author's feelings and his actual situation, becomes a lot more essential. The theatremakers approach their scenic reflections mainly through performative forms. Through them, the actor-performer, as the author, talks about his past and present life and refers to actual events whose centre is he himself. In the context of the assessment of personalised theatrical statements, authenticity bound to the author's talk about himself becomes a highly positive attribute whose value exceeds even the relevance of all the other components of the work. Even in the aesthetically simplest stagings and performative works, anything that exhibits any extent of authenticity and can evoke genuine emotions is considered to be, in a certain way, theatrically high-quality and artistically valuable.

Let us look at a few examples from the millennials on the theatre scene of Bratislava. This manner of artistic expression through autobiographical theatre⁴ is close, e.g., to the female authors of NUDE Theatre (NUDE stands for Independent Formation of Theatrical Energy in the Slovak language). Officially established in 2017, the ensemble consists mostly of women. Their theatre-making has a certain prehistory, however, during which, roughly from 2013, the budding personalities, former classmates, actresses, directors, performers and close friends Veronika Malgot (called Pavelková at that time) and Lýdia Ondrušová (Petrušová at that time) created several autobiographical performances and stagings – *Samson* (2013), *Mama ma má* (Mama Got Me, 2015), *Matilda* (2015) – in which they outlined topics and approaches which they further developed in their later theatrical works. NUDE is an autobiographical theatre, and its founders create scenic works in which they frequently and readily talk about themselves, their own lives and situations, and analyse their actions and feelings as if voicing them directly in front of the audience should have a therapeutic effect or confirm their relevance. They complement their line of women's topics – the desire for finding the “right” man in *Samson* (2013), the relationship with one's mother and the confrontation of the attitudes of the authors to life, which differ from those of their mothers, in *Mama ma má*, the ups and downs of marriage in *Lúbim ťa, dávaj si pozor* (Love You and Take Care, 2018), the status of women in marriage against the background of social and historical changes in *Mala Dr. Csabová pravdu? (Was Dr. Csaba Right?, 2019)*, or getting to know oneself through the stories of the women in

⁴ This manner of artistic expression through autobiographical theatre and performance is close to what Patrice Pavis calls a form of scenic autobiography, a life story (31).

their families in *Roľa* (Role, 2021) – with more general topics in their other shows. For example, in *Andy! To Be Seen* (2020), reflections about the fame, popularity, originality, or unoriginality of a work of art and the desire for success become the topics. In their project *Pasáž 5* (Passage 5, 2020), they ponder over the life and the loneliness of the elderly and the proximity of death with a pinch of humour and, in *Brutto* (Gross, 2021), they discuss the general value of money and the attitude of people to it. All the productions of NUDE Theatre exhibit attributes of documentariness. They are based on authentic materials that draw on their personal experience or the experience of their environment or on the statements or situations actually experienced by strangers (real persons) and their true stories. The theatremakers do not organise the collected materials into storylines or linear scenic structures and do not subject them to the principles of interpretative theatre or large scenic metaphors. They prefer creating fragments and mosaics, which become direct and verbatim statements, often conveyed through audiovisual tools in addition to verbal, or bodily and physical, action. Their works with women's topics offer images of themselves and talk about, in the simplest scenic forms, what they face as women, mothers, friends, wives, lovers, daughters, granddaughters, or actresses and theatremakers, from coping with their body weight through relationship issues to postpartum depression.

The authors opened the self-projection of their actually experienced reality and the problems and dilemmas associated with it with their autobiographical performance called *Samson* (2013).⁵ From its première in February 2013 until 2020, *Samson* was performed nineteen times, including the première. *Samson* is an allusion to a dream man destined to be one's life partner, who is actually the man with whom the performers live. It is not a direct reference to Samson, the Biblical figure, but to the homonymous song about love by the Russian American singer Regina Spektor, which is played at the end of each performance (Mašlárová). The essence of each show is the authors' transformation in time, connected to the changes in their lives (especially their love lives). Although for the performers, the show provides scope for improvisation and a unique scenic situation, it contains staged theatrical components. Some parts in the structure of the scenic form are constant and fixed. The performers change primarily their verbal actions but maintain certain "basic points" and repeat several scenic actions in each show.⁶ In the 2013 shows of *Samson*, Lýdia Ondrušová tells the audience about her desperate desire to find a partner and mentions her authentic embarrassing but humorous dating experiences. Whereas in the 2019 shows, she talks about her marriage (which is already falling apart). "When

⁵ The performance was born at a time when NUDE Theatre did not yet officially exist. The performers, future founders of the theatre, established a civil society organisation as a legal platform for their theatre-making officially in 2017 and that is when the NUDE civil society organisation was entered into the register of civil society organisations of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic.

⁶ For example, the actions of Lýdia Ondrušová on roller skates, Veronika Malgot playing the piano, the action when both performers, dressed, step inside an inflatable pool filled with water and share their actual sorrows there, etc.

we played Samson for the first time, we were desperate single women; now, we are desperate married women”.⁷ The work is not only about finding one’s life partner and “verifying” if he is the “right one”; it is “about how we lived, how we live, and how we found ourselves where we are now”, as Veronika Malgot put it at the beginning of the 2019 performance of *Samson*, i.e., six years after its première.⁸

Thematization of Everyday Life

Thematically, the sphere of the theses analysed in the repeats does not differ much, and the performers draw on their lives’ everyday problems and trivialities. In the 2013 performance, the audience could hear about their joys of going to swing evenings in the KC Dunaj community centre,⁹ their enthusiasm for Beyoncé’s concert in Bratislava, about leaving the dormitory and moving into their first rented flat after graduation, about power cuts and bedbugs, about their disappointments with their romantic relationships, and about their discoveries that their boyfriends were no Samsons. When the authors played *Samson* six years later, one of them already had two children, and the other one was dealing with her uncertainties about whether she was prepared to become a mother and whether she and her husband could overcome their quarrels and misunderstandings, which had been accompanying their relationship. The audience becomes a “sounding board” for their “effusions” about their messy households, their lunchbox diet, being hungry while trying to lose weight or the difficulties of logistics in a family with two children. One of them reveals what irritates her most about her husband, and the other one voices her concerns about marriage and talks about how social media makes her jealous. Some circumstances change, some remain, and it seems to be their battle with their body weight and their eternal desire to lose weight that appears in their statements repeatedly. For example, at the beginning of several shows, Lýdia Ondrušová notes that she did not manage to lose any weight in the past year, either. However, they manage to look at everything from a distance, and this self-irony makes their statements humorous and likeable to the audience.

On the one hand, specific situations in life and, on the other hand, the emotions arising from experiencing them become the sources for the authorial narratives. Together, they create images about the lives of their bearers. Detailed descriptions of banal activities tied to the events experienced by the performers frequently become

⁷ Entry from the recording of the show.

⁸ The text of the pilot performance of *Samson* in 2013 was born from the authors’ Facebook posts which they, as active users of social media, piled up on their Facebook walls (See Mašlářová, *Samson* Bordering Performance Art).

⁹ Audience members close to the performers in age, who know this club well and used to go there themselves when they were students, are well aware of the fact that, in a certain period, entertainment events focusing on music were regularly held there, including “swing parties” and “retro parties”. These events were very popular, especially among the student population of Bratislava.

parts of their statements. Lýdia Ondrušová, for example, describes in detail how she styled her hair and what clothes she wore when she was going on a date. How she spent her time when her husband left for a few days' trip with his colleagues, or even what kind of bread and spread she bought on a lonely evening. The audience often reacts to situations like these with a laugh. The performers mention specific places and situations with which the audience members can identify and of which they may have their own memories. It appears that these seemingly ordinary details and the possibility to identify oneself in a given moment through what has been said enhance a feeling of authenticity in the audience members. When Lýdia Ondrušová mentions how she was waiting at a bus stop in Račko for bus 39, the audience members who are familiar with the conditions of riding this bus to Mlynská dolina¹⁰ can associate the memory the performer shared with an actual situation connected to this place (for example, the awfully crowded buses on this route or how often it used to happen that one could not even get on the bus because it was full). It is not only the experiences, but the stories, the problems, and the circumstances the performers also share with the audience that are real; authenticity permeates even their manner of acting and working with the means of expression. The utmost civilian character and naturalness of their expression (although sometimes showing affect) on stage and the complete denial of the principles of scenic language lift the audience members out of illusion and convince them that whatever the authors say, they mean it.¹¹

The authors lend a different, new dimension of authenticity to this performance in its special version live-streamed from the flat of one of the performers during the pandemic lockdown in May 2020, when all live public events were banned for epidemiological reasons. The authors situate the show in a private space, where one of them lives. The reflection of her everyday life thus shifts straight to her private zone, to the place where she actually lives it out. The audience can again hear about the afflictions of a mother of two, the operation she had to postpone several times, her inability to exercise at home, her divorce, drinking and sorrow, her personal trainer who kept interrupting her training with text messages, or the details of her premenstrual syndrome. The performers play in an even more civilian manner and interrupt the quasi scenic actions with spontaneous insertions and comments. They talk to the camera as if they were having an informal conversation with a friend through one of the digital social media applications. The actions are filmed with two cameras, but the footages are amateurish and home-processed non-professional livestream products. They represent a spontaneous experiment of the performers of *Samson* to get the "theatre" (if it can still be called a theatre at all) to the audience in the virtual space in the simplest way and are partly staged and partly improvised "reality shows" filmed in a DIY way.

¹⁰ A student "village" where the largest complex of dormitories in Bratislava are situated.

¹¹ Both performers have, for example, a noticeable accent of the Eastern Slovak dialect and Veronika Malgot often talks very fast to the point that sometimes she cannot even be understood.

We can find several such examples of the authors talking about themselves as a thematisation of their everyday lives in a performative form from among the creations of the so-called millennials and their online “adaptations”. Let us mention, for example, the multi-authored performance called *Veľká potreba* (Big Need) (with the subtitle *Performative Instastory*). It was performed back in March 2017 in Studio 12 by four authors, Lýdia Ondrušová, Zuzana Haverda, Peter Tilajčík and Tomáš Procházka.¹² At that time, they felt a “big need” to show how the lives of the graduates of the school of arts looked and sincerely admitted that to graduate from the APA does not automatically mean a job with the Slovak National Theatre or a role in a high-budget film, but, often, the complete opposite – they do their profession for free and earn a living as cashiers in a supermarket, bartenders, or waitresses, or get some additional income by making lollipops.

During the pandemic, these four authors also made use of the limited possibilities of making theatre in the virtual space and, in April 2021 (at a time of strict lockdown), they created a sort of free continuation of *Veľká potreba* without using any professional streaming services, with the telling title *Ešte väčšia potreba* (Even Bigger Need). In a video conference call, all four actors share how they are coping with the lockdown, what their daily routine looks (or does not look) like and what they are up to. The viewers are confronted, online, with the everyday lives of the four participants during the pandemic, who talk about all this in front of the cameras in their own rooms, dressed in casual wear, with no makeup, i.e., in their fully admitted realities. The one records himself getting up from the bed in the morning and brushing his teeth and shows in the video what he is wearing, what he has cooked, and what he is planning to do. The other one admits that her only goal in the coming week is to make pesto from the wild garlic she has collected or to change the bedsheets and replace the old mattresses with new ones. Besides describing their ordinary daily activities, the performers also share their feelings and talk openly about their mental state in the past period – about their partners leaving them, their periodic depression, their difficult battle with solitude and loneliness, their problems with alcohol, their longing for love, their feelings of emptiness, and their pain from the deaths of their loved ones. These moments give scope for deeper emotional experiences, such as compassion and empathy with the performers. Katarína Cvečková also appreciated the emotional depth and the authenticity of this collective online confession of the four performers. In her review of *Ešte väčšia potreba* for the online magazine *Mloki* she wrote, comparing it with *Veľká potreba*: “What remained constant is also the unrestrained authenticity that accompanied the *Ešte väčšia*, too. It is the only online project on our scene which managed to convey to me personally an almost equally strong emotion to that which may be expected from live theatre”. On the other hand, we could argue that

¹² The studio in the building of the theatre Institute in Bratislava, meant for the presentation of new Slovak and world drama and contemporary art.

it was more like an online tabloidisation of the authors' lives during the pandemic through a friend's Zoom call rather than an authentic artistic statement. What, then, is the proverbial authenticity?

Enhanced Authenticity

The above examples of authorial projects are based chiefly on verbal action, in which the participants name the emotions they experience and reflect on themselves directly in front of the audience. They are simple verbal statements, verbal collages from the everyday lives of the authors, as well as from their inner worlds. Any motoric or physical action or any prominent playing with the materialness of the body and of the other objects on stage appears to be only an auxiliary, illustrative action that enlivens the verbal aspect of the show. Semantically richer messages are absent in the scenic action. However, this appears to be what evokes feelings of authenticity in the audience. The Czech director Barbara Herz, who deals with documentary theatre in her article about staged authenticity, points out the difference between documentary theatre and theatre that has a similar thematic focus (e.g., historical or political plays) that may be inspired by non-artistic realities but still works with fiction to a certain extent. In this case, the audience remains closed to the semiotic categories of the denoted thing's meaning, signs and conveyance. According to Herz, the difference in perceiving documentary theatre and similarly thematically focused fictive theatre lies neither in their quality nor in their power to affect the audience. The effect, i.e., the authenticity, of the overall expression of a documentary work lies in its intentionally built desemantisation, when the traditional form of constructing meaning and working with a theatrical sign is weakened to the greatest possible extent.¹³ If these personal statements of the authors are perceived as certain forms of documentary theatre (in terms of documenting the personal lives of the authors), the reduction of the theatrical signs leads to the simplicity (artlessness) of the statement and, at the same time, to a stronger effect of authenticity. Although whatever is directly spoken and literally suggested may evoke a series of various other associations, thoughts, and memories in the audience members, it provides a narrower scope for creating semantic connotations than semantically richer scenic actions. The audience members receive (or reject) whatever the performer says, identify with it to their

¹³ The principle of desemantisation is based on questioning the theories of theatrical semiotics and the notions of the theatrical and performance artists of the 1960s that the task of performance should not be to communicate the meanings created by a single group of participants (actors) that may weaken the overall effect on the audience. According to Fischer-Lichte, only avant-garde artists, with their aim of a new aesthetics of effect, gave a clear answer to questions about the effect of performance on the audience and its meaning to it. This requires the performers to give up any effort to construct meanings. The staging means are reduced to pure materialness (sensuousness), i.e., the audience members do not consider them to be bearers of certain meanings and do not connect them with the other elements of the scenic work, nor with any other contexts. They do not look for links as to what they denote and what they refer to. In this way, the minimisation of the construction of meanings opens up, on the one hand, a broader domain of receptive possibilities for the audience and gives them the freedom to mould these meanings individually (Fischer-Lichte 201–202).

own extent, and subsequently develop a feeling of authenticity or a kind of empathy towards the performer. In his essays on postdramatic theatre, Lehman also sees a specific aesthetic quality in the reduction of both themes and forms to the greatest possible simplicity. According to him, triviality may be an indispensable condition for intensifying new ways of audience reception (116–117).

The actors themselves becoming the bearers of the verbal stories and the vividly expressed emotions on stage is another factor that intensifies the feeling of authenticity. This thesis is also supported by Pavis's comparison of autobiographical performance and working with autobiographical dramatic texts as two forms of autobiography on stage. In the case of staging autobiographical texts with all the principles of creating theatrical semiosis, the actor (acting out a character) as the bearer of the text plays the role of the character (Pavis 31). On the other hand, author-actors in a self-performance "are biographers of themselves, there is a real person before us whom we see, live, reflecting upon his past and present condition" (Ibid.). With this, Pavis seems to suggest that it is this form of scenic expression that has the greatest potential to bring authenticity.¹⁴ The creators of autobiographical performances eliminate fiction on stage, or at least completely minimise it, and replace it with documentary materials and direct personal statements. Audience members familiar with the context do not read the work as a set of artistically organised signs denoting the reality but as the reality itself. Barbara Herz notes that the enhancement of the impression of authenticity for the audience directly correlates with who conveys it. If the given conveyor (performer) has a personal relationship to the described event, i.e., if he himself is its carrier, the audience automatically works with the awareness that the shared event concerns its so-called conveyor. At the same time, it stops perceiving the performer in the standard representation of semiotic codes and perceives him as a representative of presence and effect (Herz). Presence may be understood as directness and authenticity on stage, while representation offers the audience only a mediated approach to the world of the acted-out character.¹⁵ Therefore, authenticity as veracity has been named and defined for ages as the basic expressive feature of personal, self-referential performative statements and statements based on real events in any

14 This argument is debatable. Even works based on artistic fiction may be authentic and, vice versa, any extent of realness on stage is not necessarily and ultimately authentic for the audience.

15 Lichte, however, warns that it is not sustainable in aesthetic theories to view the terms "presence" and "presentation" as necessarily opposites. She points out several cases from the past and the present when the actor's body was perceived as the essence of presence, but, at the same time, the character portrayed by the actor exhibited the characteristic features of representation. Lichte elaborates that the genesis of both the presence and the representation of a character is enabled by the special processes of embodiment. When an actor portrays a character, he does not create it based on a formula provided in advance by the text and his character is not only a depiction of something ordered in advance; he creates something completely new and unique. The portrayed character is connected to the specific corporeality of the actor who represents it, and it is thanks to this specific and unique corporeality that the portrayed character may acquire its existence. Fischer thus says that the term of representation denoting the process of moulding a character should be redefined. According to her, both representation and presence result from the specific processes of embodiment arising during the perception of the show. It does not mean, however, that these two terms are interchangeable, or that they are synonyms (212–213).

scenic form. The live character of the realities and the emotions conveyed to the audience through the “Me” of the performer himself naturally have a more affective influence on the perception of the work.

The “Me” Culture

One of those who tried to find an answer to the question of why, in today’s theatrical and performative arts, the audience is interested in self-referential works in which the authors refer to their own realities and existence was Sherill Grace, the author of *Theatre and Autobiography: Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice*, a specialist in Canadian literature and drama and a professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She claims that any form of autobiography, and not only in theatrical arts – prose memoirs, biographies, biographical novels, documentary films, photographic and painted portraits, reality TV shows, online blogs and vlogs, performance art, autobiographical plays – appeals to the audiences and has become a popular genre in Western countries because we live in a culture of “me” (25–26). Grace also names further, more complex explanations of the obsession of today’s Western society with “me”. Although the author of the chapter that gives an introduction to the relationship between theatre and autobiography means mostly autobiographical (staged) plays, certain attributes arising from her description may be applied even to autobiographical performances, in which the performers reveal their own realities even beyond linearly structured stories. Whether through talking about oneself in performative forms or through the acted-out character in autobiographical plays, narrations about one’s own self (“me”) satisfy, according to Grace, people’s basic voyeuristic impulses and hunger for stories and, in a way, they guarantee the truth, the meaning, and the order man looks for in the world. True stories have the ability to reveal, organise and create the meanings people seek. The live emotions directly connected to these stories lend a human face to the impersonality of this globalised world, and the audience finds comfort in this. Grace defines story and memory as the basic tools of autobiography, through which the audience tries to understand what they experience, discovers what is accepted as truth and gets to know themselves and others (27–31).

Judging from these claims, the audience’s fondness for “me” narratives exceeds generational boundaries. Regardless of the generation to which the author recounting his story belongs, he can find recipients in a broad spectrum because our time and its cultural and social conditions generate and enhance a need for such narratives in the audience. The above examples of the theatrical productions of theatremakers of the same generation in Bratislava are not stories with a powerful dramatic conflict but fragmentary images and verbal (and verbatim) illustrations of the outlooks of

their bearers (mostly in anxiety or depression) – they simply name their feelings, sometimes also the reasons for them, in front of the audience. The authenticity of these types of theatrical statements, a form of “mental hygiene” for their participants that brings emotional satisfaction to the audience members, is received very positively not only by the audience but by theatre critics, too. As if, today, it was enough to talk about oneself, to share even one’s most ordinary everyday story, and give it some basic framework of scenic, though very simple, expression, and it will be received well. However, it is questionable whether it is an explicitly generational fondness or only a phenomenon concerning a small group of theatremakers, mostly friends with one another, who have been artistically formed together and work with and influence each other in the same environment.

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Med umetniki iste generacije, t. i. milenijci, ki delujejo predvsem na neodvisni sceni, lahko opazimo določene podobnosti, kot jih kažejo in uporabljajo predvsem v gledaliških formah, temah in odnosu do dramskega besedila. Bolj kot izvirna dramska besedila jih zanimajo avtobiografska besedila. Avtor pri tem ne nastopa kot samostojna oseba, temveč sodeluje cel kolektiv avtorjev. Gre za skupino ustvarjalcev, vključno z igralci oziroma izvajalci, ki izoblikuje dokončno različico besedila. Zdi se, da je izražanje avtentičnosti tako prek besedila kot na odru poglavitni namen takih pristopov k dramatiki. Predmet interpretacije postanejo trivialne in vsakdanje življenjske zadeve. V središče pozornosti postavljajo ljudi kot lastno samopodobo ali pa ljudi kot osebe, ki jih poznajo iz prijateljskih ali družinskih krogov, iz medijev ali iz pripovedovanja drugih. Avtorji se navdihujejo pri samih sebi, pri svojih težavah in odnosu do življenja. Poleg tega ustvarjalci radi pripovedujejo o sebi, analizirajo svoja občutja in zaznave, kot da bi imelo to, da jih lahko definirajo pred gledalci, nanje terapevtski učinek in bi potrjevalo relevantnost njihovega odnosa do življenja. Kaj lahko taka avtentičnost, ki se izraža s samoprojekcijo umetnikov v besedila pa tudi v uprizoritve, nudi občinstvu? Ali pri občinstvu vzbuja globlje zavedanje in razumevanje življenja ali zgolj reciklira tisto, kar že vemo?

Ključne besede: sodobno slovaško gledališče, avtobiografsko gledališče, milenijci, uprizarjanje, avtobiografija, avtentičnost

Zuzana Timčíková dela na Inštitutu za gledališke in filmske raziskave na Slovaški akademiji znanosti v Bratislavi, kjer je leta 2020 tudi doktorirala. V raziskavah se osredotoča na produkcijo neodvisnih gledališč in s kritikami tvorno sodeluje z več slovaškimi revijami pa tudi na mednarodnih platformah. Sodelovala je že na več domačih in mednarodnih konferencah. Leta 2019 je kot raziskovalka gostovala na Gledališki akademiji Aleksandra Zelwerowicza v Varšavi. V tem času je preučevala varšavsko neodvisno gledališko sceno.

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Avtentičnost v delih avtobiografskega gledališča: pristopi milenijske generacije

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Prispevek obravnava tematiko avtentičnosti v delih skupine neodvisnih gledališčnikov v Bratislavi, ki pripadajo t. i. milenijski generaciji. Avtorica v njihovih delih zaznava celo vrsto skupnih elementov, tako v formalni kot tematski obdelavi. Poudarja povečano pozornost te generacije do »jaza« in njeno potrebo po samorefleksiji ter samoekspresiji v smislu, da govori o sami sebi, še posebej v okviru avtobiografskih odrskih form. Po mnenju avtorice gledališčniki milenijske generacije prav zaradi te potrebe po samoekspresiji iščejo orodja za avtobiografsko gledališče, ki so jim bližje od uprizarjanja izvirnih dramskih besedil. V lastnih avtobiografskih besedilih pogosto tematizirajo lastno osebnost: svoje vsakdanje življenje in običajne okoliščine. Tako postanejo glavni igralci (izvajalci) odrskih pripovedi o samih sebi, kar nakazuje, da se raje zatekajo k bolj performativnim kot pa h gledališkim oblikam. Avtorica izhaja iz teze, ki je v socioloških, psiholoških in kulturnih krogih splošno sprejeta, da so poglobitve in določujoče značilnosti t. i. »generacije Y« sebičnost, različne manifestacije narcizma, osredotočenost nase in celo obsedenost s samim sabo. Kot kaže, gledališčniki te generacije celo v odrskih delih najpogosteje govorijo o lastnih čustvenih in duševnih stanjih, o lastnih vrednotah, težavah, skrbeh, o svojem statusu in o medosebnih odnosih ali širši družbeni skupnosti. V delih se osredotočajo na človeka, ki bodisi predstavlja njihovo lastno podobo, se pravi njihovo osebnost, ali pa na nekoga iz svoje bližnje ali daljne okolice, ki ga dobro poznajo in čigar vrednote so jim blizu. Tako pozornost usmerjajo na svojo depresijo, frustracije, eksistencialne krize, komplekse in odnos do virtualnega prostora ter družabnih medijev. Druži jih nenehno iskanje in prevrednotovanje lastne zunanje in notranje identitete kot okvira, v katerem se lahko definirajo.

Avtorica svojo tezo razvija predvsem s pomočjo primerov del ženske gledališke skupine z imenom NUDE iz Bratislave. Osredotoča se na eno njihovih prvih uprizoritev z naslovom *Samson*, v kateri so avtorice zajele oziroma dobesečno dokumentirale vzpore in padce v lastnih življenjih. Predstava je na sporedu že vse od leta 2013, posodablja jo pa jo predvsem s prilagajanjem verbalnih izjav trenutnim razmeram v svojih življenjih. Razpon idej, ki jih analizirajo v ponovitvah, se po tematiki ne razlikuje veliko, osnovno vsebino uprizoritve pa predstavlja tematizacija dejanske, izkustvene resničnosti

ustvarjalk s pogostimi referencami na trivialne okoliščine iz njihovih življenj. Avtorica med deli t. i. milenijcev izpostavi še en primer take avtorske pripovedi o samem sebi, ki temelji na tematizaciji lastnega vsakdanjega življenja. Gre za predstavo z naslovom *Velká potřeba (Velika potreba)*, v kateri štiri diplomantke Akademije scenskih umetnosti v Bratislavi pripovedujejo o razočaranjih in neizpolnjenih pričakovanjih, ki so jih izkusile potem, ko so diplomirale. Na podlagi primerov uprizoritev avtorica poudari, da, čeprav gre za estetsko in tematsko gledano dokaj nezahtevne odrske produkcije, osebne izjave takim delom dodajajo visoko stopnjo avtentičnosti. Kar se tiče vrednotenja takih del, avtentičnost, ki je vezana na pripovedi avtorjev ali avtoric o samih sebi, očitno predstavlja zelo pozitivno lastnost, katere vrednost presega celo relevantnost vseh drugih sestavin dela. Vse, kar vsebuje živa čustva na odru, je pojmovano kot avtentično in posledično tudi obravnavano na določen način, kot gledališko visoko kakovostno in umetniško dragoceno delo. Ena od mogočih razlag, zakaj taka dela, ki so oblikovno in tematsko dokaj nezahtevna, pogosto označujejo kot zelo avtentična, je, da vse višja raven desemantizacije odrskih del krepi učinek avtentičnosti, saj v širši odrski akciji takih del pogosto manjka bogatejših semantičnih sporočil. Še en dejavnik, ki prispeva k intenzivnosti občutka avtentičnosti, bi lahko bil, da so nosilci pripovedovane zgodbe in čustev, ki jih v živo izražajo na odru, kar igralci sami – se pravi izvajalci, ki so obenem tudi avtorji besedila. Če gledalci vedo, da so izvajalci neposredno povezani z opisanimi dogodki, samodejno razvijejo zavest o tem, da dogodek, ki se ga udeležujejo, zadeva t. i. posrednika samega. Zato lahko duh živosti, resničnosti in čustev, ki jih izvajalci prenašajo gledalcem prek svojega lastnega »jaza«, seveda bolj čustveno vpliva na recepcijo dela. Avtorica odgovor na vprašanje, od kod izvira zanimanje tako gledališnikov kot tudi občinstva za taka avtoreferencialna dela, išče v teoriji profesorice Sherrill Grace iz Kanade. Grace se ukvarja s fenomenom t. i. kulture »jaza«, v kateri življenje v egocentrični in narcistični družbi, ki je obsedena z »jazom«, tako pri občinstvu kot pri gledališnikih samih spodbuja naravno zanimanje za različne oblike avtobiografskosti v gledališču pa tudi v drugih umetniških zvrsteh. Kot trdi Grace, pripovedovanje o samem sebi (o »jazom«) zadovoljuje temeljne človeške voajerske impulze in lakoto po zgodbah, pa naj bo to z govorjenjem o samem sebi v performativnih formah ali pa z odigranim likom v avtobiografskih dramah. Na določen način taki pristopi predstavljajo zagotovilo resnice, pomena in reda, ki ga človek išče v svetu. Prek izpeljave teorije Sherrill Grace avtorica pride do zaključka, da zanimanje občinstva za pripovedi o »jazom« očitno presega zgolj generacijski okvir. Težnje po avtorskem in avtentičnem pripovedovanju o samem sebi, po deljenju celo najobičajnejših vsakdanjih zgodb znotraj nekega osnovnega odrskega okvirja in po zelo preprostem izrazu, ki ga zaznava pri skupini neodvisnih gledališnikov v Bratislavi, niso nujno posledica globalnih generacijskih procesov. Lahko gre za pojav, ki se tiče zgolj ozke skupine gledališnikov, ki večinoma prijateljujejo drug z drugim, in ker so se tudi umetniško formirali skupaj, posledično delujejo in vplivajo drug na drugega v istem okolju.