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Existentialism in Slovenian Drama and Theatre in the Period after the World War II

Abstract: The artistic poetics that significantly define Slovenian drama and theatre after World War II were existentialism and existentialist drama. Authorial influences from the western side of the Iron Curtain were, above all, of Francophone or Anglo-American origin appeared in various directions within Slovenian drama. Existentialist drama experienced a sharp response from the political establishment, along with several polemics in mainstream magazines. The political establishment always had a say and opinion about artistic disciplines and genres. One of the most prominent examples that led the ideological front against the new artistic practices was Boris Zihlerl. The article introduces his views alongside critical and playwrights' reception of the existentialist drama. The period between 1945 and 1970 was a time of changes, as government policy, culture (and attitudes towards it), and the cultural situation changed over the course of the twenty-five years.

Key words: Existentialism, existentialist drama, Slovenian theatre, reception, Boris Zihlerl, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre

Eksistencializem v slovenski dramatiki in gledališču v času po drugi svetovni vojni

Izvleček: Slovensko dramatiko in gledališče v času po drugi svetovni vojni močno zaznamujeta filozofija eksistencializma in eksistencialistična drama. V tem obdobju je v slovenski dramatiki mogoče zaznati povečan vpliv frankofonskih in anglo-ameriških avtorjev. Eksistencialistična dramatika je bila sprejeta z ostrim nasprotovanjem vladajočih političnih struktur, ki se je najvidneje kazalo v časopisnih in revijalnih polemikah. Politika se je s svojim ideološkim aparatom javno izrekala o umetniških praksah in žanrih, pri čemer se kot najvidnejši nasprotnik eksistencializma vzpostavi Boris Zihlerl. Članek predstavi tako njegov (uradni) pogled na nove umetniške smeri kot tudi kritiško recepcijo in sprejem pri slovenski dramatiki. Čas med letoma 1945 in 1970 je bilo obdobje korenitih sprememb v političnem prostoru in kulturi, kar se zrcali tudi na področju novih umetniških tokov in njihovega vrednotenja.

Ključne besede: eksistencializem, eksistencialistična dramatika, slovensko gledališče, sprejemanje (recepcija), Boris Zihlerl, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre

Instead of introduction

Cultural policy in the two decades after the World War II in today's Slovenia was strongly marked by the rejection of existentialism by the ruling politicians. The fundamental differences between existentialism and Marxism were already evident in the basic concept of which subject was placed at the center of a particular philosophy. In existentialism this was the individual, in Marxism the community. Existentialism further had no significant higher purpose to which the community and the individual are guided, since it perceives history as a one-time event, while Marxism sees history as cyclically pre-determined. (Vasič 1984, 135)

Cultural opposition, which began to form in the 1950s, expanded in the 1960s. An important role was played by journals that were mostly discontinued after a short period of publication (such as: *Mladinska revija* [A Youth Magazine] that was published in 1946–1951, *Beseda* [Word] (1951–1957), *Revija 57* (1957–1958) and *Perspektive* (1960–1964)). Aleš Gabrič referred to a meeting of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia, where (20 December 1951) the problems facing culture and politics were discussed. The main topic of the debate was the book by Edvard Kocbek *Strah in pogum* [Fear and Courage] and the journal *Beseda*. At this meeting Zihlerl stated: "There is a pronounced invasion of Western influences. This mentality stumbled upon a certain layer of Christian Socialists and in part of young people. Sartre's influence is an organized phenomenon. Sartre is being studied in groups. That group of young people moving in these circles is the one that is foreign to us (Hieng, Grün, Gradišnik). This is not limited to literature, but also penetrates elsewhere, for example,

in the theatre repertoires (Mestno gledališče ljubljansko, Narodno gledališče, Komorno gledališče, etc.). We recognise the same tendencies in painting. These are the phenomena against which we must fight." (Gabrič 1991, 629) At some another session Ziherl used the term "existentialist extremism." (Gabrič 1991, 630)

The literary historian Jože Pogačnik (1933–2002) noted that, after 1948 with the Cominform affair, the link between art and revolution began breaking and eventually they became completely opposite. "Art, which for several years was completely cut off from the spiritual streams of the rest of the world, began to gasp loudly for everything that was missing. First, it met with various types of literary and revolutionary action that, in the meantime, had originated in France." (Pogačnik 1972, 33) Names such as, André Breton (1896–1966), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) and Albert Camus (1913–1960) should be especially highlighted. It was emphasized that these authors were initially introduced merely on the "ideological and literary" level, and only later on (with intense contact with Sartre) did they move towards or nearly completely coincided regarding philosophical issues. The most important impulse was the discussion of Taras Kermauner (1930–2008), published in *Perspektive* (1961), on the theme of the Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960). When confronting young members of the Critical generation with existentialism, three relationships to reality were established, and, consequently, to the authorities. Pogačnik distinguished them by: the concept of art that should be at the service of the revolution (social realism is consequently preserved), the conception of art and revolution as two completely separate concepts (born with the magazine *Beseda* and ushering in

a radical dispute between creators and authorities), and third was the concept of art as an autonomous activity and accepting revolutionary reality in a utilitarian manner (the most prominent direction in Slovenia was personalism). (Pogačnik 1972, 35) In publications such as *Tribuna* and *Problemi* in the 1960s, readers were introduced to the second wave of French philosophical thought, when the works or debates of the great authors were published.

Existentialist drama

Existentialism in drama is described by a variety of terms, all of which lead to the same marker. Dramatic theory has several expressions for existentialist drama: conceptual drama, ideological drama, philosophical drama, thesis drama. (Vasič 1984, 61) All of these descriptions are consequence of the processed content of this type of dramatic work. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect is the problematization of freedom (own/personal freedom and the freedom of others/collective freedom), which leads to the processing of philosophical topics on the principles of verism, or to absurd situations in order to paint a society with as much artistic expression as possible, to present a world or an individual trapped in a wheel of history. Most researchers agree that the main goal of these kinds of dramatic works is resistance (whether it be individual or collective). That is, accordingly, why this drama is always modern, engaged, and direct. In addition to its effects on prose and poetry, the philosophy of existence was aware of the expressive power of performing arts. So, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), and J. P. Sartre rightly found that existentialist philosophy was

already dramatic and lent itself well to sensory dramatization. (Vasič 1984, 61)¹

Reception of Sartre and Camus

As already noted, at the highlight of existentialist thought and literature stood the most exposed authors Albert Camus and Jean P. Sartre. In the period of 1945–1970 Camus was staged six times in Slovenian theatres (nine times by 2018) and Sartre had been staged eleven times (twenty times by 2018). This proves that the performances of Sartre' and Camus' dramas were continuous and omnipresent in Slovenian culture. They were performed at all institutional theatres and some non-institutional ones (a special task was holding a performance at the Gledališče Ad Hoc, directed by Draga Ahačič, due to the frequent performances of western European authors during the 1950s),² as well as at the Akademija za gledališče, radio, film in televizijo (AGRFT).³ Regardless of the active opposition from existing power structures, both authors appeared often on institutional stages. Most of these performances took place within the institutions, and only three were listed outside of them. This confirms the pro-

- 1 In the European tradition of existentialist drama, the most prominent representatives were J. P. Sartre and A. Camus. Vasič urged that, in this context, only the drama of Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) *Les Bouches Inutiles*, *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh and *L'Archipel Lenoir* by Armand Salacrou (1899–1989) must also be considered.
- 2 We will focus on the Ad Hoc in the one of the following chapters, when introducing the work of the non-institutional theatre groups and their staging of the Western European authors.
- 3 Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana.

western orientation of artistic management in Slovenian theatres. Despite the opposition of cultural ideologists, theatres composed their repertoires according to the relevance and quality of individual authors, and not according to their ideological background. The performances' frequency should not come as a surprise, since both authors regularly appeared in various magazines dating back to the 1950s. They maintained their presence either by publishing their works or by reflecting upon it, penning criticisms and other derivatives that followed philosophical or literary texts.

Svetlana Velmar Janković⁴ in her essay "Subjektivne varijacije o generaciji i vremenu" [Subjective Variations on Generation and Time] (1957) described her first encounter with Camus and Sartre. She wrote that, when confronted with such literature, a door opened through which the reader enters the full, infinite spaciousness of the spirit. (Velmar-Janković 1957, 881) Her experience, which was strongly connected to the Belgrade cultural sphere, is of our particular interest because she represents the subjective experience of the author (writer) in contact with existentialist poetics. At the same time, research shows that Velmar Janković confirmed the fact that young authors enthusiastically received Western philosophy and aesthetics (in this case French), regardless of the official positions of politicians and Party ideologists. It also confirms that existentialist philosophical, literary, and dramatic flows came to Yugoslavia (especially in the capitals of individual socialist republics) as soon as they emerged. Velmar Janković's essay outlines her generation, which found in the flood of modern literature its own expression and the role of "hope for new literature." (Velmar Janković

4 Svetlana Velmar Janković (1933–2014), Serbian writer and essayist.

1957, 883) Along with the positive reception in the press, as this example suggested, more and more often a negative one appeared. In the 1950s the negative reception was led by Boris Ziherl and his ideological apparatus.

Case study: critical reception

The representative examples of the critical reception of both authors are the performances of selected *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (J. P. Sartre, MGL, 14 October 1960) and *Caligula* (A. Camus, SNG Drama Ljubljana, 4 October 1963). Vasja Predan acknowledged that the performance of Sartre's play *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* is an important political, family, thesis drama. Predan says that it is not as good as Sartre's previous works, because "to some extent it denies the reputation of the dramatic efficiency of one of the most important authors of contemporary drama." (Predan 1960, 474) As one of the reasons for this, Predan stated that this was a subject matter or motif that was too extensive for effective staging. An important aspect was that "the drama *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* primarily has not solved the philosophical, ontological problems that we encounter in *Les Mouches* or in *Morts sans sépulture* or the social issues that Sartre dealt with in *La Putain respectueuse*." (474) Obviously, Predan knew Sartre's opus well, since before that play only *La Putain respectueuse* (twice) and *Huis clos* had been staged on Slovenian stages. The performance was judged as successful because it was a difficult task to transfer the atmosphere of a large and concentrated text into a theatre situation.

Critic Bogdan Pogačnik (1920–2005) in *Delo* emphasized that Sartre is a great thinker of modern times and that the stag-

ing of this text is the enrichment of Slovenian repertoires. He found the performance itself unimpressive, marking it as a difficult play, its structure oppressively tight and full of contradictions. In this regard, an interesting observation was offered: "Sartre is not an apparent playwright, or rather, beyond the fact that he is a philosopher, a critic, an essayist, writer, screenwriter, publicist, editor and many other things – he is also a playwright." (Pogačnik 1960, 6) This is why the criticism is certainly more lenient. The critic emphasizes that the text was very shortened:

"Even though it is a chamber drama, it has been staged in the style of a great tragedy. Perhaps throughout the course of the drama there was not enough rising action, but without a doubt, each act represented a strong and concise dramaturgical arch, which at the end eventually broke. Despite some small yet also justifiable disadvantages, the drama *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* can undoubtedly be counted among the best-known performances of the Mestno gledališče ljubljansko. Among the performances, which are not only to be seen, but also to think about them." (6)

At the critical reception of *Caligula* by Camus, the situation was quite different, as can be seen in the negative criticism of Josip Vidmar in *Delo*:

"The director A. Hieng pronounced this play as one of the greatest dramatic text of the century. Other critics describe it as an important link in the development of Camus' moral thought. Some of them write about it as a brilliant, if not a genius portrait study. Other critics celebrate it as an inaccessible mental drama, etc. Despite all this, I have to say and write that this play is basically a deeply flawed work, even an irresponsible mistake." (Vidmar 1963, 5)

Later Vidmar turned his attention to the character of Caligula, who, according to him, propagates evil, discarded perversity, meaningless life – the absurd. Regarding the direction he wrote: "The play was staged with enthusiasm and love by A. Hieng, as he expressed himself. /... / Nevertheless, he could not give to the performance either a clear sense of meaning or conviction. He gave the performance a smooth, fluent rhythm and enough stage taste. It seems to me that much more was impossible to give." (5) Then he focused on the actors who, in his opinion, have had an ungrateful and difficult task. In studying the reception of contemporary French drama, the content of the last paragraph of the critique is essential. He asked himself if this play was really a testimony about some important modern thought, about some modern lifestyle? Another question also occurred: does such a play belong on our stages? Vidmar concluded his criticism with:

"However, it seems to me that the thought inside it is so painfully burdened with existential facts that it cannot be ignored, that it does not tell the spectator what it might like to. As such, I find it as a delusion, an almost dangerous delusion. Who needs it? I do not think that anyone. I know that we certainly do not. In particular, it is irresponsible to start a season with such an unfortunate text. Because it should in any case be an important cultural creation." (5)

Vidmar, as the most important theatre critic, the most eminent of the critics in the post-war era, stands in this criticism (and many others) as an arbitrator of a text's appropriateness and not as much of its staging. Camus's text is socially critical and committed in its absurdity. It is impossible to expect

that official critics would recognize the quality of such an attempt.⁵

Vasja Predan's mentioned expertise of the French playwright was again proven in his criticism of *Caligula*, where in his text he paralleled references from other Camus works. A major part of his criticism is based on the appearance of the absurd in existentialist dramatics.

"Personally, I am interested in *Caligula* as that conceptual literary phenomenon, which in his unusual intensity thrilled and reflected the structure of the contemporary European, more precisely Western European spiritual and thinking milieu. And probably because of this excitement and reflection it came – though relatively late – to the repertoire of SNG Drama Ljubljana." (Predan 1963, 421)

But the long criticism still dealt more with the problem of the protagonist Caligula and the Camus' text, and the philosophy surrounding them, but a little less with the performance itself. However, we notice that Predan, who is clearly extremely familiar about the circumstances and genesis of the text and the author, can with all legitimacy blame the performance for its incompleteness and inconsistency with the theoretical background. We recognized his search for

- 5 In the Theatre Bill of the last staging of the *Caligula* in SNG Drama Ljubljana (season 2013/14) Lara Simona Taufer wrote: "Between the rule of extreme nihilistic and cynical autocrat and the infinite story of a self-replicating power elite that does not serve anything other than itself, there is no difference at all. Both are equally limited, equally devastating. Camus, less a philosopher than an artist, did not look for political alternatives. The rebellion is life itself, though short and pointless." (Taufer 2013, 8)

a contemporary theatrical expression, when he recognised that, despite serious efforts and wishes for changes, Slovenian theatres were all trying to find a psychological approach for Camus' abstract, metaphysical content. He also pointed out the problem of the acting and the challenge of reorienting the actor's creative nature. Certainty that unemotional or insensitive, non-psychological, non-psychological, or even anti-psychologizing acting cannot be achieved overnight. Predan wrote that it may be equally difficult to describe what we actually think about such stage creation. (421)

Predan concluded this demanding critical writing with these reconcilable final words, which certainly arise from belief in the necessity of performing the contemporary dramatic works:

"Despite a fairly individualistic interpretation, the truth of Camus' drama was not truncated. Maybe even originally completed. And this recognition is the answer to all who rejected Camus' confession and its stage appearance with a sighing finger and to those who tried to understand certain issues of the contemporary world in it." (421)

Because of this, we can read Predan's critical reception of *Caligula* as an encouragement and not as a reprimand.

Special case of the reception: Ziherl and *Les Mains sales*

The attitude of the Socialist regime was most visible and prominent on the reception of Sartre's plays. Main thoughts can be found in various publications with editorial boards influenced by the Communist Party. Throughout the whole

text “Eksistencializem in njegove družbene korenine” [Existentialism and its social roots] Zihlerl also discusses Sartre’s text *Les Mains sales* (1948), which is considered one of the most successful of Sartre’s plays. By far it was the most popular in France (625 performances after the premiere), but, due to interpretations of the text during the Cold War, Sartre decided not to allow new performances, except in agreement with the communist parties in the countries of the performance. He banned the play in Vienna (1952, 1954), as elsewhere in Europe. After 1962 he again allowed performances in Yugoslavia, Italy, and Czechoslovakia. There were three Slovenian performances in the 1960s: Gledališče Ad Hoc (6 February 1962, dir. Draga Ahačič), SSG Trst (18 April 1964, dir. Jože Babič), and SLG Celje (4 February 1966, dir. Franci Križaj).

Zihlerl established a discourse that showed the complete rejection of everything that was not from working-class culture or at least domestic (social) realistic creativity. Peković stressed that an even greater ideological accusation against Sartre than Zihlerl’s had been written by Erich Koš.⁶ His assertion was that Sartre and Malraux were the traitors of the working class and the renegades of the Resistance movement. According to Koš’s opinion, Sartre with his *Les Mains sales* joined the reaction, especially the American one in order to “repeat, along with the reactionary press in the field of literature, known slanders against Communist parties and national democracies, in which mistrust, fear, and insecurity prevailed. This is also where the secret police were present everywhere, at every step following citizens, and where

6 Erich Koš (1913–2010) was a Serbian writer and politician working in culture. He shared beliefs similar to Zihlerl’s.

communists wandered with their pistols in their hands and killed people in the streets.” (Peković 1986, 51)

Les Mains sales takes place in the fictional state of Illyria in Eastern Europe in the middle of World War II. During the German occupation, there is a drama between two groups, between the more extreme communists on the one hand and the more moderate leftists on the other. The first group is represented by Hugo, the second by Hoederer, who has already begun talks with other parties (liberals, conservatives and even the occupying government) about cooperating in order to survive the war with as few casualties as possible and without escalating to a civil war. Because the Communists considered his tactics as treacherous, Hugo was determined to kill Hoederer. But he could not do it, because as an intellectual he understood Hoederer's attempts. Eventually Hugo killed him, but it was an honour killing, because he discovered that Hoederer and his wife were having an affair. Hugo was sentenced to two years in prison for murder, and, when released, he realized that the political situation (due to orders from Moscow) had resulted in a more moderate policy and cooperation. Even though many lives were saved, Hugo insisted on his extremist beliefs and was assassinated by his former colleagues (those who ordered Hoederer's murder).

The position of dramatic characters is, by its origin, existentialist. It is directed by dramatic events (war, underground movement, occupation, etc.), relations between characters (trust, cooperation, treason) and, last but not least, questions about principles, i.e. how to live fairly with a clear conscience and stay alive. The war is an environment where freedom is most problematized at all levels, as the work questions the

freedom of the community, the individual, and the human race. Sartre's plays lead us to the fact that it is necessary to be engaged at all costs, although this eventually costs Hugo his life.⁷ In his critique of *Les Mains sales*, Zihlerl mostly problematizes the term "the right person", which he showed as a personality independent of society. Therefore, on one side, he set the "real" Hugo and against him the political and historical people, when he wrote that the resistance of the "real" man against the historical and political man is the resistance of the existentialist philosopher against the living social problems of modern times. (Zihlerl 1953b, 116) Zihlerl saw man in a Marxist manner as part of a community, as a historical and political person, who when choosing always sees the community – the class.

The period when Boris Zihlerl led cultural policy or actively influenced it was not encouraging for modern artistic, aesthetic, and philosophical movements, which left a great legacy in Slovenian theatre, dramatic arts, and journalism. The rejection of existentialism took place at the declarative level. It cannot be said that Zihlerl (or his affiliated apparatus) interfered with the theatre repertoires to the extent that the already chosen drama should have been withdrawn. However, there were possibilities that the authorities (politicians) gave their opinion and left the final decision to (ar-

- 7 Zihlerl writes of Sartre's heroes: "There are no complete characters among his characters. Their actions are without motivation and are arbitrary, random." (Zihlerl 1953a, 16) Janko Lavrin (1887–1986) wrote about Sartre's drama that man makes decisions according to others and chooses himself according to others, so he always chooses better. Nothing can be better for an individual if it is not better for everyone. (Lavrin 1967, 572) Lavrin also repeats the popular thought of existential philosophy that man is condemned to be free.

tistic) directors and/or councils of the institutions. In this undefined zone and (non-)option of choice, there was the possibility of (self) censorship, which for most of the time went unrecognized.⁸

We meet a totally different cultural and political situation than existentialism in the reception of the drama and philosophy of the absurd, where such strong opposing factors or public discourses cannot be discerned. Existentialistic aesthetics extremely marked Slovenian culture, which will be shown later in case-by-case examples.

Existentialism in Slovenian drama

The history of Slovenian drama hit a milestone in the mid-1950s that separated the post-war period of dramatic writing and performing partisan agitational propaganda (and the social realism) from the new wave of young Slovenian playwrights. In 1955, the dramaturg of SNG Drama Ljubljana, Lojze Filipič (1921–1975), launched a competition for the best original Slovenian drama. Three texts won the anonymous

8 On that problem Denis Poniž published a monograph *Censorship and self-censorship in Slovenian Drama and Theatre 1945–1990*. In the chapter on self-censorship he wrote: "Self-censorship may be the result of intervention by the censors, whose aim as a first step is to caution and intimidate the writer, and only as a second step to make specific encroachments on their text (the first step is suited to the stage of the genesis of a literary/dramatic work, and the second for the time when the work is already presented to the public). /... / In any event it is impossible (or almost impossible) to prove the self-censorship of texts, when self-censorship is 'merely in the author's head', while what is written down is the result of this process, and offers no evidence of what was self-censored and where." (Poniž 2010, 22)

competition: *Povečevalno steklo* [Magnifying glass] (Jože Javoršek), *Potovanje v Koromandijo* [Travel to Koromandija] (Dominik Smole), and *Delirij* [Delirium] (Igor Torkar).⁹ This event symbolically broke with the socialist approaches in the theatre and the generation of authors who were more oriented to a socially engaged and critical direction. This was also the time when the works of Camus were performed on Slovenian stages for the first time: *Le Peste* (Drama SNG Maribor, 1 October 1955, dir. Fran Žižek) and Sartre's *La Putain respectueuse* (PG Kranj, 18 December 1954, dir. Igor Pretnar).

The main representatives of the generation of the authors emerging after the 1955 were Primož Kozak,¹⁰ Marjan Rožanc,¹¹ Dominik Smole,¹² as well as Peter Božič,¹³ Dane Zajc,¹⁴ Gregor Strniša,¹⁵ and Veno Taufer.¹⁶ In the same generation, authors who were close to existentialism (although, for example, Jože Koruza did not define them directly as existential authors), they wrote – conditionally – thesis drama (Kozak, Rožanc, partly Smole) or were devoted to poetic drama (Zajc, Strniša, Taufer, etc.); in a philosophical context, theorists cannot agree on how to classify such drama. Vasič gave an example when with Zajc's first drama *Otroka reke* [Children of the River] Boris Paternu (1926) wrote that it was

9 All three winners were among unwanted authors. (Troha 2015, 38; Borak and Fischer 2006, 1027)

10 Primož Kozak (1929–1981), playwright, professor, essayist, writer, dramaturg.

11 Marjan Rožanc (1930–1990), playwright, essayist, writer.

12 Dominik Smole (1929–1992), playwright, dramaturg, writer.

13 Peter Božič (1932–2009), playwright and writer.

14 Dane Zajc (1929–2005), playwright and poet.

15 Gregor Strniša (1930–1987), playwright and poet.

16 Veno Taufer (1933), playwright, poet, essayist, translator.

a metaphoric creation of poetry. Jože Koruza added that it was an early existentialist feeling and opinion. Further, the classification of authors into narrower ideological groups, in this context shows as they belong to the same philosophical flow, but each of them encountered and faced it differently. The following classifications were done by Marjeta Vasič (1984, 123–124), who partly summarized the texts of Jože Koruza and Jože Pogačnik.

Dominik Smole had intensive confrontation with the existential drama in his texts *Potovanje v Koromandijo* (1956) and *Igrice* [*Little Plays*] (1957), and in a most effective way in *Antigona* (1960), where Koruza recognised the fusion of philosophical and poetic drama. He took absurdity as the starting point of his writing, but he also described conflicts between representatives of different beliefs, ignorance, aimlessness, drowning in routine, the unsuccessful search for the higher truth – resignedness. As Koruza wrote, Primož Kozak expressed the symbiosis of Marxism with existentialism (influence of Sartre). The dramas *Dialogi* (1958) and *Afera* (1961) have in their central point a philosophical question about personal responsibility for decisions/choices. Marjan Rožanc expressed the problems of living through social issues, but he also devoted his work to alienation, the inability to communicate, etc. The philosophy and writing of the avant-garde anti-drama are attributed to Peter Božič. (Vasič 1984, 122)

To summarize the main topics that the authors dealt with between 1955 and 1970, one finds political, intimate, allegorical topics, as well as engaged and poetic works. Therefore, we can draw a parallel and write that in both French existentialism as well as in Slovenian there are two concepts:

the hopeless and nihilistic, and the engaged perspective. (Vasič 1984, 140)

Jože Pogačnik highlighted two stages in existentialist drama in Slovenia. The first is the substantiation of an individual search for the truth – Smole, Kozak, and partly Božič. The second is the defeat of expansive activism that wants to change the world in the name of historical or metaphysical existence, with authors like Hieng,¹⁷ Kozak ((*Legenda o svetem Che*) [Legend of the holy Che] (1969), and conditionally *Kongres* (1968)), and Smole (*Krst pri Savici* [Baptism at Savica] (1968)). (Pogačnik 1972, 151) Meanwhile, Jože Koruza recognized the three directions that appeared during this time: poetic (poets and Smole with *Antigona*), existentialist (Kozak, Rožanc), and avant-garde (Božič, Smole without *Antigona*). (Vasič 1984, 125)

In this part of the discussion we are mainly dealing with texts that emerged in the shadow of popular existentialist philosophy. It should be emphasized that a complete definition of genre is impossible in parts because different principles began to blend with the individual subject, scene, or act. Therefore, in so-called “Perspektive drama,”¹⁸ which showed the largest share of influences of the philosophy of existentialism, there can also be found elements of bourgeois drama and emerging ludus and the absurd. Troha warned of the enigmatic structure of existentialist drama, moreover

17 Andrej Hieng (1925–2000), writer, playwright, director; author of: *Burleska o Grku* [The Bourlesque of a Greek Man] (1969), *Gluhi mož na meji* [A Deaf Man on the Border] (1969), *Cortesova vrnitev* [The Return of Cortes] (1969), and *Osvajalec* [The Conqueror] (1971).

18 With this term the dramas published in the journal *Perspektive* are named.

he states that it is a transitional form that developed after World War II and “succeeded, despite the new content linked to the philosophy of existence, in retaining at least a seemingly traditional form. In fact, this is a structure whose essential element is the absence of an opposition couple (assistant/opponent) in an actantial model, which should lead the drama into silence and the realm of monologue, or in the vicinity of the epic.” (Troha 2006, 63) The author is covering this absence, the fundamental defect, continues Troha, by creating a threatening situation. Such a situation is relevant, since it gathers substance from the actual situation in society and as such carries social criticism. The absence of the opposition couple as an important feature of existentialist drama fills the process described by Troha:

“The threat to Sartre is formed by the subject itself, which assigns to certain persons the function of an assistant and an opponent. But when he realises that this act is unfounded, the drama quickly takes its course. With Camus the threat comes from the realisation that an individual’s freedom is limited by the freedom of others. It is therefore a question of the coexistence of different tendencies in the context of the same space and time. Evidenced by Camus’ texts the coexistence of independent and incomplete actantial models that to each other represent the missing opposition couple, therefore, the collapse of one of the models necessarily leads to the end of the drama.” (Troha 2006, 63)

These claims are only partly valid for Slovenian drama. Especially if we take the example of Kozak’s *Dialogi*, where we have the dialogues between two prisoners (Martin Haymann and Peter Sigismund), who are then joined by vari-

ous authorities (agent Mathias, chief Mender and Benedikt Minsky). They are preparing a political process against the two of them, but then the play turns to its opposites when an opposition actant becomes the subject – the defendant. (Borovnik 2005, 58) Far fewer opposition tensions are found, e.g. in Kozak's *Afera*, which (like in *Les Mains sales*)¹⁹ is about the issue of revolution and dissolution within the revolutionary camp. It can be noted that *Afera* can carry the claim that the subjects represent to each other the missing opposition pair, or even that it is represented by an organization (that is, a collective that is subordinate to the same idea).

We must also consider the additional dimension in Slovenian drama, which relies on or takes inspiration from existentialism, namely that resorting to dramatic forms of thesis (philosophical) and poetic drama can be a consequence of pressure, censorship, or a regime that did not allow direct criticism, where this is the only way to express social criticism. For a related principle we can compare Sartre's dispute with Heidegger, which was a kind of French resistance to the symptoms of the post-war capitalist system in western countries. This ideological distinction was taken by Sartre's circle with Soviet means and methodological principles (Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, conditionally also Maoism, etc.). In Yugoslavia, however, this struggle against the system, with artistic and aesthetic principles, turned against communism (regardless of its "moderation"), when it created a critical stance with the tools of Western European philosophy and aesthetics. This did not turn so much against a political

19 A comparison between *Afera* and *Les Mains sales* was made also by Kos (*Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature*, 2001) and Troha (*Ujektivniki svobode*, 2015).

system that, according to the consequences of Cominform showed increasingly liberal tendencies, but the drama criticises that societal aspect which restricted the individual and failed to guarantee personal freedom.

Playwrights from the circle around *Perspektive* found it essential to invent new writing processes, which were far away from just social issues, back to the individual and his position in society. Many of them were inspired by Western patterns (existentialism, absurd etc.) and Lev Kreft wrote: "*Perspektive* has often been accused of uncritically transmitting foreign thoughts into Slovenia. /.../ They undoubtedly transferred to us those authors and those of their texts that, from today's point of view, are among the best that could then be taken into account and attached to them their own analysis and their own views." (Kreft 1998, 101)²⁰ With this he considered various publications of philosophical works that have found their way to Slovenian readers through the journal *Perspektive*. The strongest was contact with French philosophical thought, for example, the continuous publication of *Critique de la raison dialectique* by Jean-Paul Sartre, against which there proved to be already from the beginning (No. 5/6 of the first year of the journal) a certain amount of cultural opposition. Kreft emphasised that Sartre was a "popular and a scandalous author for the official Marxist circles. To declare him in September 1963 as the greatest author of the century and to declare that this Frenchman explains our own social practice, it was a provocation." (Kreft 1998, 113)

20 Kreft also explained why the group around *Perspektive* were not (just) existentialists. (Kreft 1998, 113)

Perhaps it is necessary to emphasize in particular the other Western influences that defined drama from the *Perspektive* circle and through which we must understand this drama. In his book *Perspektivovci* [The People of Perspektive] Kermauner described how in the period from the beginning of the 1960s Slovenian consciousness became more like the European one.

“When we read Faulkner, Kafka, Camus, etc., in their works we learned something that was also true for us. I am not saying that we have not imitated anything; imitation is natural among the younger generation, as the older discover or find out a little earlier. But for us imitation was not essential. In fact, we identified with the world of Kafka, Pingnet, Beckett – in the first half of the 1950s – because we lived it before we knew their literary expression. So, we were able to accept Sartre’s existentialism immediately. As if it had been written directly for us, to the soul, all feeling of being lost, his heroes, their disgust and despair.” (Kermauner 1995, 48)

Strong western influences and contemporary literature in general were the main identifying characteristics of this generation of authors. Both principles, existentialism and the absurd (both in dramatic and performance terms), are mentioned as crucial in determining influences. Sometimes these processes were quiet and slow, such as for example reading literature; in other times they were stronger and faster, for example in a performance. Kermauner also wrote about the experience of seeing Jean-Louis Barrault’s performance of Kafka’s *Das Schloß* in Paris (1958) with Kozak:

“The essence of Stalinism is not only terror, but absurd: absurd terror as the opposite of the purpose of a revealing collegial conversation in the establishment of equality of the mind and personal security (human rights, etc.). In the 1950s Kafka’s novels were carefully read and understood as parables for our world – we discovered Kafka’s world as the absurd in Stalinism.” (Kermauner 1994, 944)

As Kermauner later wrote this experience was crucial for the emergence of Kozak’s *Dialogi*.²¹ It was precisely the perception of one’s own (political, artistic) reality, supported by Western literature that established critical distance to the position of the intellectual in socialist society. Especially since state policy and a large part of the pro-Party intellectuals rejected everything that came from the capitalist world. *Perspektive* and all the derivatives that came from the journal – dramatic writing, especially since it was tested in art practice – were a platform of opportunity for everything that was beyond the permissible and acceptable. Kermauner described this situation as openness to everything that was not particularly significant for the conceptually and culturally artistic West. (Kermauner 1995, 17) This was rejected by the other two central groups of that time – the group gathered around the Party and the humanist group. (17)

21 “Kozak in *Dialogi* originated from what the Left Revolution changed since it won. It was transformed into a Stalinist, the Party’s and the police’s terror, which moulded society into a prison, and men into prisoners. Paradoxically tragic: it also made for the prisoner a left revolutionary, the one who, through personal sacrifices as an elite warrior, realized a new society, specifically Dr. Sigismund and Professor Haymann.” (Kermauner 1998, 586)

An example of the experience of Kozak and Kermauner, as well as other examples from *Perspektive*, confirmed the thesis about the significance of the performances, which repeatedly presented a starting point for the emergence of new dramatic texts.

The history of drama teaches us that every artistic and aesthetic movement that develops in a certain environment, and that then through influences, reception, and publications occurs in some other environment, it is unique only for an exactly defined space. Yet every drama has its own conceptual, stylistic, linguistic, and historical features that distance it from narrow terminological classifications, and every drama attempts to unite fragments into larger conceptual units. When dealing with existentialist drama, attention should therefore be paid to the socio-political situation, and to the aesthetic moment. As Gašper Troha wrote: "individual forms of existentialist drama were dominant in certain periods, from which it can be concluded that their specific structure corresponded to the social role occupied by drama and theatre." (Troha 2006, 54)

The presence of philosophy and the existentialist drama was not only generationally episodic but was also questioned in the later forms of original drama. The continuation of the reception of existentialism is in the reception of the drama of the absurd.

Conclusion

After World War II, Slovenian theatre experienced a revival. The presence of contemporary Western European authors

became a constant on Slovenian stages. The presence of Western European authors and their reception in the Slovenian cultural space is therefore an important marker of the period. Also important was their influence (direct or indirect) on the new Slovenian drama. Slovenian drama and theatre in the first two decades after the War were most influenced by existentialist drama and drama of the absurd. In the reception of existentialistic drama (and thought) it was emphasised that it was a broader phenomenon, since French existentialism was chosen by generations of cultural workers who were united around magazines and non-institutional theatres for their own expression. A look at the next phenomena would show that the drama of the absurd did not have such broad reception, as it was not associated with a distinct philosophical movement. Its origin was in existentialist drama and its reception was mostly limited to staging and influence on Slovenian drama.

Existentialist drama and philosophy marked our cultural space at the artistic and political level. This is evident with the intensive development of dramatic writing, new contemporary forms, and influence on young authors. On the other hand, the opinion of domestic political structures was also evident in the public evaluation of a particular drama or theatre performance. The artistic and philosophical movement marking European (and partly American) drama in the decades after the War experienced good reception in Slovenian culture, which can still be observed in today's creativity as well.

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