

SAM SHEPARD'S PLAYS ACCORDING TO SLOVENIAN THEATRE DIRECTORS

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Abstract

The article focuses on the productions of Sam Shepard's plays in Slovenia during 1985-2000 and the author of the paper primarily pays attention to the Slovenian directors' approach to Shepard's works and the problems that have arisen in the process. Five of Shepard's plays have been staged to date in Slovenia, two early works and three works of new realism. In interviews with the directors (Vinko Möderndorfer, Primož Bebler, Boris Kobal, Dušan Jovanović and Boris Cavazza) as well as three actresses and a choreographer (Alenka Vidrih, Barbara Babič, Vesna Jevnikar, Tanja Zgonc) it has emerged that the transplantation of typically American issues to Slovenia and their treatment necessitated a different approach from the one normally taken by the Slovenian directors and actors. Shepard's plays being idiosyncratic, the theatre artists had to either accommodate his material or treat it with different methods that were adapted to suit the Slovenian environment.

1. EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE GLEJ: *SUMMERTIME* BASED ON SAM SHEPARD'S *COWBOY MOUTH*

Crow-like Cavale from *Cowboy Mouth* (1971) tries to transform cowboy Slim into a rock deity. She teaches him about the lives of the decadent French poets and the death of Johnny Ace, a rocker who played Russian roulette on stage and blew his brains out in front of his fans. In her bizarre teaching Cavale assumes a perspective that refers to the end of Christianity and the inevitability of a new saviour, a saint with the cowboy mouth, "rocking to Bethlehem to be born" (Shepard 1988: 156). Slim begins to understand the necessity of the artist's sacrifice and feels the tyrannical power of stage. Cavale explains that the duty of the rock saviour is to embody the collective yearning of community, "the stuff in them that makes them wanna' see God's face" (156-57). Slim realises that an artist is a slave to other people's dreams.

Summertime, a free adaptation of Shepard's play *Cowboy Mouth* was produced on 9 June 1985 at the Experimental Theatre Glej in Ljubljana. The director Vinko Möderndorfer cast Jerca Mrzel and Vojko Zidar for the leading actors, as well as Ivan Rupnik in the role of the Lobster (Anon. 1985: 1). Möderndorfer opens his performance in a dark warehouse with Cavale, who has been street-loitering, returning to Slim, whom she has chained to a car (*Summertime*, video recording). Instead of a feel of

threat the director creates an atmosphere of mysteriousness, the suspense over what might emerge from the darkness. The scene is quite intimate, as if the viewers were uninvited voyeurs, accidentally witnessing a certain privacy and not being able to avert their gaze for being lured by the magic of the moment. Rather than keeping the debris that Shepard demands, Vinko Möderndorfer empties the stage. The Slovenian director wanted the production to be more realistic and aimed at tearing down the fourth wall, thus presenting the audience with a real insight into the intimate world of two people, having the spectators become accidental observers of their daily routine. Instead of the bed, the director placed in the centre of the stage a big pink convertible car, functioning as a bed. It presented an icon of Janice Joplin's car (Möderndorfer 3).

From Shepard Möderndorfer adopts the idea that rock equals God, the imaginary world of hippie dreams of the redemptive king of rock, and transplants it into a Slovenian arena, accommodating it to the rock nostalgia that was present in Slovenia at the time:

I am not a representative of the generation that worshipped Morrison. At that time this adoration was in the air. It was one of the cultic performances of the Glej Theatre as well as of the theatre scene of Ljubljana. Shepard's text provided a great inspiration for the performance which I am certain retained a part of the atmosphere and the message. It is absolutely different, though. Ours. It was a performance of that era – it was the tenth anniversary of the death of Janis Joplin. That time was very far away yet still present in this nostalgia. There existed a certain vacuum, generations relied on this nostalgia, but it was futile. Should you live with it, all you could do was hang yourself. This is how our ending was directed and this is how the audiences experienced it. (Möderndorfer 7)¹

In the stage directions of *Cowboy Mouth* Shepard places “a funky set of drums. An electric guitar and amplifier on the other side” on stage (Shepard 1988: 147). Möderndorfer leaves out the songs, there is no live music, instead Cavale and Slim play records of the Rolling Stones, the Doors and Janis Joplin (*Summertime*, video recording). They play the records of the groups and rock stars that were popular at the time in Slovenia, in hope of recreating and capturing the mood that belonged to the past (Möderndorfer 9). Shepard wanted to combine music and acting, the style of music-making in the manner of acting. Möderndorfer in *Summertime* was not interested in that (Möderndorfer 9):

I focused on Hendrix, Morrison, those who were tragic. Who were mad. Those who the audiences knew. Knew their songs. Just like in the opera. When the listeners know certain arias by heart. This is good, because it appeals to them and captivates them. (Möderndorfer 9)

The assumption of the role of rock star and attempt at acquiring the messiah-like persona of Jim Morrison is highlighted in the Slovenian production. In Möderndorfer's adaptation this attempt is the prevailing and the principal image of the play. It offers the answer to the question that is left open in *Cowboy Mouth*. Who is the rock Jesus

¹ Numbers which appear in connection with the recorded interviews refer to the pages in my MA thesis.

with a cowboy mouth whose status was nearly achieved by Bob Dylan and so desired by Mick Jagger?

Jim Morrison was the pop icon that was closest to Jesus. As well as being a poet he possessed that power. He was not a typical rocker. He was a poet. His lyrics, his performance was very different. So messiah-like. In comparison to other rockers he was very intellectual. His texts and his self-destructive energy. (Möderndorfer 2)

The Slovenian Cavale persistently and adamantly instructs her enslaved protégé, who carries the key to his own chain in his pocket, about the performance and the attitude of the divine Morrison who sings about escape.

Cavale: You have to sing as if you are running for your life. This run – is a call to escape from it all, you understand. /.../ Rock permeates the body and soul, ecstasy squared! All your blood and all the juices in you draw breath from rock. Sing as if you are standing on a street corner. The attitude towards the audience is “fuck you”. Therefore they have to fear you. Then you detach yourself from the corner and go to the centre of the world. You sing ever more passionately. More! It’s poetry, Slim! You mustn’t sing, you have to spit like him. Not outwards, inwards you spit, you bleed inside. He is a priest, a consecrated poet of rock. He speaks from the depths of God! (*Summertime*, the text is not available, the quotation is from the video recording).

Slim cannot be taught to be what he is not, what he does not understand. Möderndorfer’s Slim does not feel that because he is from another generation. This presents the basic conflict of the play: can somebody be taught something that he does not feel. Shepard describes a generation that was devoted to the same idea.

Since Cavale considered these singers her gods, she felt their energy which was overflowing and pouring. When she realises that it cannot be adopted, she hangs herself. This is my message. I wanted to tell the old rockers that time cannot be brought back. (Möderndorfer 8)

Cavale’s story is determined by her name that means escape. From the world where one can only exist in an imaginary story the only escape is to death. This is how Möderndorfer’s performance ends: there is no redemptive vision for Cavale, there is no poetical enigmatic dénouement.

Besides I find the ending a sort of squaring of accounts with the nostalgia of rock and roll. Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Hendrix who all met with a tragic death. This sort of rock and roll was self-destructive, a form of annihilation of oneself through art. I tried to express what I thought of rock and roll. Of this way of life, of the rock and roll fans and groupies who considered rockers Christs, saviours and when they were gone, they remained alone. Remained alone, with no vision of the future. (Möderndorfer 6)

Shepard deals with escape from reality into the world of hallucination. With Möderndorfer even dreams do not suffice. Yet precisely in the act of suicide he comes closest to the greatness of stars, to the stage feel of saviour's function, blending in with the divinity of rock. The difference between Möderndorfer and Shepard is that Shepard believes in the invented identity of a rock star and retains the hope in the reality of his myth, just as he believes in cowboys. If one believes strongly enough, as believes his Cavale, he becomes real. Slim escapes his demonic teacher and returns to normal life, while Möderndorfer's Slim remains trapped in the relationship, ensnared in dreams, and his Cavale realises there is no saviour and that one cannot be artificially created. Thus disillusioned she takes her own life.

2. SLG CELJE: *THE UNSEEN HAND*

With its unstable narrative line *The Unseen Hand* (1969) (*Nevidna roka*) offers a rich world of pop sensibility. Shepard interweaves the elements of mass culture, film, rock music, science fiction, comic books, etc. and shapes a unique world at the intersection of the mythology of the American West, contemporary American stereotypes and science fiction. *The Unseen Hand*, under the direction of Primož Bebler was staged on Oderpododrom of the Slovensko ljudsko gledališče (Slovenian People's Theatre Celje) on 7 January 1996. The members of the cast were Jure Ivanušič, Vesna Jevnikar, Davor Herga, Bojan Umek and Igor Sancin. The director decided on the staging as follows:

I found the play very topical after the war in the former Yugoslavia². This is how it must have seemed to the Americans coming here. As if they were dragged here, putting on an act of cowboys to save somebody with guns and kill all "the bad guys". Some poor creature from another planet comes to seek help. They have to perform their part, they are the heroes here to resolve matters. I did not want to convey a political message, I saw the play more like a series of images. (Bebler 1)

The production in Celje faithfully follows Shepard's text. *The Unseen Hand* begins and ends with a long soliloquy, a sort of a hitch-hiker's guide babble of an old cowboy. Suddenly Willie appears, a creature from Nogo, having travelled two galaxies to find Blue. Willie brings back to life the other two Morgan brothers to help him set his people free. Primož Bebler finds inspiration for the Morgan brothers in different westerns. He classifies them according to the types of film icons and clichés. In bringing his characters Kid and Willie to life, he borrows from the mass culture of comic books, science fiction novels and films.

Cowboys observe special laws. They maintain their image. This image is filmic, not quite real life. Like Gary Cooper. Sycamore is the boss, an authority. He has an austere expression. He upholds a prescribed way of

² The reference is to the war that followed the break of the former Yugoslavia (1991-1998).

walking, movement of legs. The second one, who is best at handling guns, is more Mexican and he also moves that way. This is the middle brother Cisco. He is a bit wild, very energetic and always accompanies someone. He is prepared to stab to death. They are classified into three groups also according to their movement: cowboy, realistic and futuristic. (Bebler 2)

Jesse James' opposite is the antagonist, the villain who is prone to violence. He travels alone or in gangs, is stoic, suppressed and cruel. In American mythology it is often hard to distinguish between the heroes and the villains due to the assimilation of the violence, stoicism and suppressed energy. The violent hero of the West is the American prototype. This is what Primož Bebler was looking for in the revived brothers.

The cowboys who come from the previous century are from the "dirty, mean, ugly" genre. I saw some films of Jesse James, films with some very "mean guys". There was a series of these hyper-realistic westerns. There's a lot of Hollywood artificiality, but we wanted the characters to be the way they really looked like. One was completely without teeth. And a bit "far out". Worse than Clint Eastwood. (Bebler 6)

Primož Bebler guided the actors in between the realistical, probable characters and allegoric figures, in accordance with their basic role of mythical, stereotypical or symbolic figure. The director provided Shepard's collage of genres and quotations with a realistic basis of Blue and Kid from our time and complemented it with the past and the future. He wanted to capture real life and prevent the performance from resembling a film stylisation. Willie and the cowboys from the previous century constitute merely a film genre. They possess something that is already artistic. They are not quite realistic but film clichés. (Bebler 2). The story line is provided with a framework of drunken delirium, enclosed by monologues as a prologue and epilogue. Shepard's characters express their author's belief in performance – the spontaneous creation of second scripts within the main story line – as a technique of facing up to the reality of a moment (Marranca 24). Joyce Aaron, a Shepardian actress, in the article "Clues in a Memory", published in the collection of papers *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, emphasized the danger of a realistic acting approach to Shepard's characters since he does not adhere to its psychological rules or patterns:

You can't approach Sam's plays according to the usual acting terms and conditions – there are no rules, because he has broken them. You might find yourself opening one of his plays as a character who has to deliver a twenty-minute monologue. The character may be in a kind of "tripping-out" state, veering from paranoia to explosion, and the momentum and intensity of the vocal rhythm never lets up, it hounds you. What you have to do is let that rhythm take you instead of you taking it – you have to surrender to the dynamics of that rhythm, let it possess you (Aaron 171–72)

Kid delivers a long, excited and short-winded speech almost without punctuation. Recurring sounds and phrases generate the impression of a hard rock rhythm. The solo brings a projected verse into the play: one sensation immediately follows another. The character's emotions are the projections of his private imagery that usually begins with one sensation and accumulates in a long series of imagery (verbal, visual, aural) that guide the initial sensation into the domain of the character's imagination. This language describes the actor's dilemma that one trained in the Stanislavsky method might have experienced when it became a symptom of a general self-alienation – subjective idealism. Shepard's filmic approach is also evident in his plays, Shepard writes as an actor. Vesna Jevnikar in the role of Willie acknowledges this difference between European and American theatre acting.

European theatre has always had a story line that carried a certain problem in the background. The acting school in Slovenia teaches future actors that words should convey a certain meaning. The American plays are fashioned in such a way that texts speak for themselves, the actor is merely a tool of expression. Already when auditioning for the cast, the Americans base their selection on the acting from oneself. Even the great ones the likes of Nicholson and Pacino seldom create a different character. They build up on their own image – this is how I am; they carry a certain type of role and act from themselves. A Slovenian actor always tries to identify with his role, embrace his character. One changes identities. (Jevnikar 4)

This is why Slovenian actors have to adopt another approach to contemporary American playwrights like Shepard and employ American acting technique:

With an American text such style of acting would prove unproductive. This is why in Slovenia there are so few well performed American plays. This contemporary drama, street drama, Shepard and Mamet, is very demanding for actors, since it is written in such a manner that one should simply carry the text. You are not saying anything with the text. God forbid one wanted to imply a situation, as in European style of acting. The Americans, this type of drama, Shepard, etc., are direct. European acting presupposes another type of communication, conveyance of information. The American dramas are hard to produce. One deals with a neutral gear. One has to discipline oneself greatly not to accentuate. (Jevnikar 4)

Shepard's early plays contain a lot of descriptions of obsession and trances. In a trance Willie pronounces certain magic words that resemble incantation. Shepard emphasizes the electrical charge of these words that influence the spectator and compares them to Indian poetry. The words function with their resonance and the images they conjure up. Each time he has uncensored thoughts Willie gets a spasm. Blood rushes over his eyes and smoke fills up his brain. His whole body shakes. He goes into convulsions and yells out phrases and illogical words as if chasing away unperceivable dread. A realistic approach was not an option. Vesna Jevnikar therefore applied the Japanese technique of internalised movement Butoh:

She was extraordinary. Superb. The spasms are essential. Propelling blood, revitalisation. Here the rhythmical movement is of prime significance. We drew inspiration from trance. The power of poetry that is atavistic. A sort of hypnosis. (Bebler 3)

In agreement with the actress, Tanja Zgonc designed the choreography, creating a special type of movement in order to highlight Willie's extraordinariness. The choreographer defines the Butoh technique as a return of oneself to the interior as well as the exterior. She sees it as an exploration of subjectivity, history and experience that constitute the body and soul. It is derived from Zen Buddhism and is based on the fact that everybody functions through comprehension. Tanja Zgonc developed her original approach through the spinal column. The back is a nerve centre, to Zgonc it represents the centre and the base for the dancer's movements. It is a complete and utter state of consciousness, a conscious stream of energy that one directs from the spinal column. One makes each and every particle of one's body conscious and controls it through breathing in and breathing out (Zgonc 1).

We used the principles of Butoh in my movements, interior spasms. My whole body was distorted. It was very strenuous for me. Butoh is a thing of the interior, the centre of your body. This centre is constantly pulled down. The centre needs to stand and movements originate from it. A typical Butoh movement is when you lie motionlessly on the floor and then leap from the centre as a cat. Quite explosive movements. We also had to find a certain solution for my speech. My speech was not supposed to be human. We had to find a bizarre, torn manner of speech as if plucked from the character. The words jerked out from the spasms ... half robot-like. At times a whole sentence would be discernible from these spasms, at times only a word, half a word. And the voice altered. (Jevnikar 2)

Since a rational approach was not possible they applied a different method of leaps into subconsciousness.

I was not looking for meanings. I saw the illogical speech as thoughts, words, flashes that leave a residue. All this is ejected. A sort of record that one carries in his brains. Completely inarticulate. Subconscious. (Jevnikar 1)

Vesna Jevnikar was aware of the fact that she could easily cross the line when her character would not be credible any more, that there existed a thin line between the credibility and the grotesqueness of her character.

I found the text typically American, hard to adapt. It is a text of Primož Bebler's generation. How he experiences things. As I see the play today, it represents the self-censorship present in Slovenians. The problem of democracy where everything and nothing is allowed at the same time. Everybody has a hand in his head and in 1995 this democracy was very remote in Slovenia, too remote for me to experience it. (Jevnikar 1)

3. CITY THEATRE LJUBLJANA: *TRUE WEST*

True West (1980) (*Pravi Zahod*), the third in the trilogy of Shepard's domestic dramas, retains a firm realistic framework. The play focuses on the relationship between two completely different brothers, Austin and Lee. The main structural principle that Shepard utilises is the exchange of roles – in which brothers reveal their true self, Lee enters the world of business and tries to become a professional scriptwriter and Austin exceeds the limits of orderly bourgeois life and ventures into the realm of pristine human liberty. The play was first staged in Slovenia on 11 December 1986 in the City Theatre Ljubljana under the direction of Boris Kobal and translation of Lado Kralj. The role of Lee was performed by Srečo Špik, and Austin by Ivan Jezernik. Shepard gave very precise stage directions and the ensemble in Ljubljana followed his instructions more or less faithfully. The director Boris Kobal found the text to possess a filmic quality, one imbued with film cuts and written for film actors.

Regardless of the play he directs, the director does not follow the author's instructions laid down in the stage directions, because when writing the author knowingly or not becomes his own director and visualises the play. You visualise it differently from your perspective. The play is meticulously written. Quite filmic to an extent. Because Shepard is more a film than a theatre artist. This is evident in his style of writing, he uses certain segments and the dialogue is such as he uses, when we see him acting in a film. As a director you form your own picture. (Kobal 2)

Shepard's style of writing is filmic, he uses cuts and film dialogue. In the theatre one is faced with the dilemma of the close up of the actor's face, making sure the internal tension shows on his face. Boris Kobal resolved this with a lot of pauses, silences which were to create psychical and physical tension:

Our performance was intended to present a segment of the American style of life, a writer at work. With the coyotes, the desert, resembling *Paris, Texas*. We tried to capture and apply a style of acting that is very colloquial and informal. Perchance a bit filmic. (Kobal 3)

Despite its realistic shell *True West* retains a bizarre, obsessive, dream-like atmosphere. With the conflict between the brothers culminating, the surrealistic touches become more evident and completely take over the stage in the chaotic last scene. The reality in *True West* blends in with the subjective expressionism by means of a special application of sound and light. The howling of the coyotes rises to a crescendo when the conflict between the brothers comes to a climax. In the Slovenian production the director further emphasized the howling of the coyotes – using it to a dramatic effect in all fade-ins thus highlighting the emotional tension between the brothers:

As a sort of inherent threat in the background. As in Strindberg, when a raging storm is brewing and everyone is trapped inside. Here the brothers are trapped in the kitchen. The coyotes are the killers and the tension of entrapment emerges. (Kobal 3)

Srečo Špik and Ivan Jezernik were entrusted with significant acting tasks. In selecting the actors for the principal roles of brothers Boris Kobal was looking for dramatic artists who from the very start would resemble Lee and Austin.

Srečo Špik's very appearance is one of a strange wild animal. He was the axis, the leading man. Among the then ensemble of the City Theatre it was only Špik who had it in him. He possessed a very unique style of acting. He was a bit obnoxious, a bit irritating, a bit warm, all that and mostly very unpredictable. /.../

The transformation between the brothers is very demanding and challenging for an actor. I led Austin as a time bomb. The question is which of the brothers is more dangerous. The one who is wild, has fits of rage or the one whose blood is boiling, simmering and then bursts out. (Kobal 1-3)

Slovenian critics pointed out that *True West* as produced by the City Theatre Ljubljana got entangled in the snare of the concept of acting which counts on the "well-chosen cast" and less on the new, specific moulding of the acting expressions (Inkret 1986: 3). Owing to its metaphoric, symbolic structure, the play demands a special approach to acting, taking into consideration also the internal monologue of the protagonists, their shady, never elucidated, secret self. This was the precise reason why Shepard's dangerous, physical play presented a special challenge for the actors. The director and the actors prepared for the production by watching a few films and reading contemporary American drama. They took film acting for their model of internal monologue. They studied the expressions of American actors, mostly film actors in westerns, where the actor's countenance displays internal suffering:

Shepard diverges significantly from the classical American drama. Because he does not deal with a story following an analytical dramaturgic method, like Miller, he thus opens a psychological horizon. This is not an entirely typical psychological play. It is a psychological war. Which is precisely what poses a problem. We studied certain American actors who say certain lines, it is true, but in the dark recesses there exists an internal monologue that is never revealed, only hinted at. One of the prototypes of such acting is the western. The American western. I am talking about the good ones. For example *High Noon*. Or Ford's westerns. The famous spaghetti westerns. Sergio Leone. Clint Eastwood. These are the actors who possess a certain emotional suffering. You are not aware of their background, what they went through. At the moment when they have to solve something very important, save an entire town. The camera and the direction were phenomenal there, they elicited the tension of expectation. A film close up, a sort of tension cannot be used in a theatre. We tried to solve that with a lot of pauses. (Kobal 1)

True West is a duel where the combatants fence, occasionally violently lash each other. In the production this approach necessitates a very rough physical style of acting. The play is notorious for the strain it places on the actors, the choreography has

to be elaborate to the last detail (Bottoms 1998: 186). The concept of Kobal's direction is hard, cruel, ruthless, the production accentuates the material and physical aspects. With his presence and appearance Lee has complete control over the stage. Srečo Špik becomes imposing especially in the second part, when he takes off his shirt, demonstrating his naked hairy chest, like a Neanderthal claiming the space for himself. He is a wild, untamed, vulgar and ill-bred person, a real Shepadian hero. The director from the very start skilfully employs the golf clubs which function as a threat, not merely physical but also psychological. Golf is a neat sport, suitable for the orderly brother, here it becomes a threat. A means to destroy someone's life. (*True West*).

The review in the newspaper *Delo* denoted Boris Kobal's direction as following the steps of the former psychological-realistic convention. It claims that Kobal stakes all on dialogue and shows the non-verbal actions between the brothers only as secondary, utterly superficial. According to the review the director did not capture Shepard's hyper-realistic picture, composed of anecdotally disintegrated fragments, which Shepard had written following the European models (Inkret 1986: 3).

4. PDG NOVA GORICA: *BURIED CHILD*

Buried Child (1978) (*Pokopani otrok*) is a pronouncedly postmodernist play, characterised by inconsistency, pastiche and an air of acute insurmountable tension in the family structure and dramatic form (Bottoms 1998: 153). *Buried Child* is written in the mode of an analytical play and features Vince who is intent on re-establishing connections with his family in the fertile American Corn Belt. A mysterious event, the murder of a child, has numbed the family, subdued it into vegetative inertia, as if the curse of death had been cast upon it or perhaps a semi-curse since the family members are alive but spiritually dead.

In direction of Dušan Jovanović and translation of Alja Predan *Buried Child* was premiered on 27 February 1992 at the Primorsko dramsko gledališče (Drama Theatre Primorska) Nova Gorica. The members of the cast were Bine Matoh, Stane Leban, Alenka Vidrih, Dragica Kokot, Ivo Barišič, Radoš Bolčina and Rastko Krošl. Jovanović reinvented the drama model, presenting it as a mixture of symbolic events in naturalism and realism, blending the tragic with pathos, perversity with sentimentalism (Lovec 6).

The production in Nova Gorica was very authentic, made from the initiatives of the director, actors and other drama artists. Dušan Jovanović emphasized corn, and the design of the entire set placed a great stress on the family's fixedness in the Corn Belt. The design of the set is original; the yellow colour seemingly absorbing corn (Jovanović 2001: 1). The set designer Marjan Kravos created a wooden "country" set giving the impression that the play takes place inside a barn. The living room walls were lined with boards and on the back wall a double door and a net constructed, leading off onto the porch. In the last scene a gigantic sheaf of corncobs rises in the garden above the characters as a memento of Slavonia and corn grain elevators (Jovanović 2001: 4). Wooden stairs without a landing lead up back stage. The scenery enabled the

transparency of the set and opened various spatial planes, where Jovanović composed different layers of performance and combined them into a clear, dynamically guided story (*Buried Child*, video recording).

In the discrete shading of different time planes and in shedding light on various levels of the play the director cooperated with the composer Davor Rocca, who highlighted the emotive layer of the story. With the melody that resembled the one from the TV series *Twin Peaks*, he evoked the ambience of a horror story, the darkness of the forest that enshrouds the secret of the murder (*Buried Child*). In the set design Dušan Jovanović employed the American fine art modernism of the 1950s and 1960s, the period of colour, graphic stylisation.

The set was yellow. The yellow was dominant. American fine art, mostly graphic art, evolved into a very interesting modernism in the manner of Andy Warhol. It was a stylisation of pop art and op art. Kravos and I tried to capture that trend and chose yellow. For a long time we were searching for precisely the right shade, trying to capture the colour of corn. These silos, corn-racks are a sort of association which Kravos used. (Jovanović 2001: 4)

Shepard uses extended speeches sometimes two pages long, often narrative. With their speeches characters try to exert their will over other characters on stage and demand the attention of the audience (1987: 66). When experiencing the revelation of a man who is destined to restore the decayed estate Vince in a wonderfully designed visual metaphor drunkenly barges in through the curtain on the porch, thrusts the door off its hinges and cuts a hole with a big hunter's knife into the net through which he crawls back into the family in a symbolic rebirth. Dušan Jovanović does not retain many of Shepard's metaphors. The director abridged many monologues although being aware that they represent an idiosyncratic feature of Shepard's language.

The soliloquies seemed too long. Although Shepard wanted them, monologues as a key element of his dramaturgy, when everything that is important to the play happens in monologues. This mythology on a symbolic level does not get through to our spectators with the same force and impact as in America; because some things are conditioned by the civilisation. (Jovanović 2001: 5)

In his collection of essays *Paberki* Dušan Jovanović discusses the style of drama called "new realism" or "dirty realism" or "superrealism", which thrives on accident, dislocation and derangement: The characters are erratic, aimless, often prone to outbursts of wild, irrational violence, the events often follow each other in an illogical fallacious manner. Jovanović maintains that this movement of "new realism" has to some extent confused actors used to portraying "real people" in "real situations" mostly using the acting technique of the System (Method). How can one face up to his character if it is inconsistent, if it acts in a contradictory manner? How is an actor to understand and identify himself with the emotional life of such a personality? How is he to meet the basic requirement of Stanislavsky and find the thread of his character? (Jovanović

1996: 61). A consistent application of Stanislavsky's System in a process of rehearsals would not have been productive for such plays. In *Paberki* Jovanović claims that this rupture between the new realism and the System is not insurmountable. The Academy of Dramatic Art in Ljubljana has been improving on Stanislavsky's System and has been complementing it relevantly with modern techniques. Yet nevertheless – it still holds true that Stanislavsky in Slovenia remains a dominant ideology and the director believes there is nothing detrimental about that (Jovanović 1996: 106). Quite the contrary while involved in the study of the characters Dušan Jovanović felt the problem of their disruption, the difficulty of forming them with the employment of the method or the system of Stanislavsky necessitating the characters' actions to be motivated and psychologically uniform. Jovanović wanted to improve the system, not to renounce it. He wanted to tackle the play with a different approach which he could not apply since it would demand a longer period of study.

I wanted the play to be superrealist mostly on the level of the sensitivity of rhythm, irritability, the speech becoming torn, spasmodic, unusual in rhythm. Yet our actors are used to looking for a thread and uniformity and base their study on some idea of the character and its roundedness. The whole point of this play is in disruption, fragmentariness, accidentality of the uttered words. The characters' intelligence is impaired, one gets the feeling one is dealing with retardation, which necessitates a special manner of thinking, feeling and speech. It was not achieved the way I would have wanted it to be. I had film images in mind, characters. The speech is inarticulate, stammering, the text is written in a way that makes it evident the speech is devised as one goes along. That it is not created by the will of the author but is actually born out of the psychology of characters. Shepard's style of speech evolves from the character. (Jovanović 2001: 5–6)

Jovanović's performance is a brutal, cynical tragedy, as well as a black comedy. It tackles its characters with a distance, arousing cathartic laughter besides pity (Inkret 1992: 3). The comical is inherent in Shepard, yet the cast was such that the comical emerged spontaneously.

As a persona Stane Leban is comical. He is idiosyncratic, bizarre. He possesses physical humour, voice. I am confident the humour is inherent in Shepard. Otherwise we would not have been able to extract it, it was intrinsic in the very situation. The characters. With the humorous touch we were not intending to create comedy, the relation of the cause and consequence facilitated this perspective also, it being the consequence of the text. We did not endeavour to make it funny, it turned humorous with a little intervention of the actors. I allowed the humour to emerge, because I found it amusing. It did not harm the text. Should we have attempted to embrace a certain morbidity, sombreness, we would not have been successful. (Jovanović 2001: 6)

5. PRIMORSKO DRAMSKO GLEDALIŠČE NOVA GORICA: *A LIE OF THE MIND*

A Lie of the Mind (1985) (*Misel lažnivka*) was first produced in Slovenia on 22 February 1996 in Nova Gorica, translated by Srečko Fišer and directed by Boris Cavazza. Members of the cast were Radoš Bolčina, Barbara Babič, Boris Mihalj, Bine Matoh, Mira Lampe-Vujičić, Metka Franko, Nataša Zupančič Konc and Peter Musevski (Inkret 1996: 6).

A Lie of the Mind tragicomically addresses the issues of alienation, possessive love, wanton jealousy, alcoholism and violence. By employing abstract theatre techniques, creating a dream-like atmosphere, *A Lie of the Mind* evokes vast distances between people and places in the present-day America. The play deals with two families and the crisis that arises when violence tears a marriage to shreds. Sam Shepard presents both homes simultaneously by creating a double stage – in stage directions he literally splits the stage, a wide-open space dividing it creates an image of chasm. The front corners of the stage carry two lifted platforms functioning as venues for Montana and California. Before becoming homes, the platforms are used for almost filmic sequences of events. *A Lie of the Mind* is permeated by film references – the simultaneity of the venues, the design of the scenes, the actors thrust into the play *in medias res*, the slang English. The director Boris Cavazza acknowledges that such texts require a somewhat different approach. He ends the scenes in *A Lie of the Mind* with film-like cuts, also curtailing the mode of acting and speech, tending towards realism, to the film genre (Rogelj 15). With the very first scene *A Lie of the Mind* reveals its film structure. Cavazza accentuates the problem of film simultaneity of scenes in a theatre, since on a darkened stage the actors can never be hidden enough from view.

Before starting with the study I was somewhat concerned with the simultaneity of the set. The scenes follow each other in turn between the left and right hand side of the stage. When one side is lit, the other one is in the dark. In the performance we solved this problem by considerably limiting the alternation of set elements, and adapted the third act in such a way that both platforms can be lit. (Rogelj: 15)

Boris Cavazza limited the set elements in *A Lie of the Mind* to place a special stress on the acting. The attention of the audience should from the very start be drawn by the actors. Set and costume design should not interfere (15). Cavazza ends the scenes with filmic cuts, freeze-frames. Such is especially the scene when Beth, whose fragile appearance, bandaged head and child-like inarticulate voice are distressing, is introduced. The scene ends abruptly, as a freeze-frame, thus making the final image resonate and become more intensive (*A Lie of the Mind*, video recording).

I wanted almost all the scenes to end in a freeze-frame. Film cut is a way to achieve film dramaturgy. The scene reverberates. It's a cut. In some artistic films the image freezes. And speaks. This is one of those methods. I directed with the notion that Shepard was a person who wrote a lot for the film that he was a film actor. His works possess film dramaturgy. (Cavazza 3)

As part of the research for her role of Beth the actress Barbara Babič was sent to the rehabilitation centre Soča, to listen and study tapes of people with brain damage.

It was a sort of a method. The type of the method of the American Actors' Studio. In Soča there are mostly young people who have been involved in car accidents. Suffering from brain damage. I studied their tapes. From the first stage after the accident when they cannot even articulate a sentence or a single word, to the whole process of learning to speak from scratch. I also studied their physical posture in a wheelchair. (Babič 3)

The scripts that Shepard wrote for film were the extensions of the issues that he tackled on stage, yet the fact that film and theatre are two quite different media influenced his approach to writing. The stage works were successful also owing to their theatrical nature, the employment of the physical immediacy of the stage, the rhythmical self-demonstrative speech patterns and fragmented flow of events. What belongs to the theatre seems too dramatic on film. Shepard defines this problem: "a play takes place in the flesh and blood and cinema take place in the mind" (Bottoms 1998: 215). A play owes its existence to the physical confrontation of actors within a limited space. Boris Cavazza provided very filmic guidance to his actors, he guided them mentor-like, since the cast was a predominantly young one.

Cavazza has a special approach to film acting. Film acting is less exalted, more natural. Our approach was not exactly realistic. He guided us almost like students, his vision was very elaborately conceived. Being an actor himself, Cavazza helped us considerably. In theatre jargon one would call that a "Vorspieler". He is known for his filmic approach. (Babič 1)

In agreement with Shepard's accent on the musical immediacy of the stage presence a pulsating, throbbing physical style of acting is conceived. Cavazza's direction temperamentally captures Shepard's play. He masterly adopts Shepard's physical style of acting. From the very beginning the performance is tense, elated and aggressive, on the razor's edge throughout, yet in the process some implicit, soundless things, though not less significant than the rhetorical brutality and physical violence, saturating Shepard's characters, were lost (Inkret 1996: 6).

Although the texts of his longer plays less obviously necessitate physical confrontations, Shepard encouraged his actors to concentrate less on the psychological motivation by following the Strasberg method but more on the basic, physical issues of the characters' expression (Bottoms 1998: 219). Running parallel to dramatic and mostly Hollywood film production Lee Strasberg stands out as an important phenomenon with his Method, derived from the naturalistic tradition of Stanislavsky and practices in his Actors' Studio a technique of acting which directs the actor to find the truth within himself about the role he is playing with the emphasis on the affective memory (Jovanović 1996: 61). Strasberg focused on the exercises in affective memory and encouraged obsessed introversion in his students. Strasberg's method influenced all levels of American theatre. American actors want to find a true motive for the behaviour of their character. This is perhaps inappropriate with plays which demand demonstrative, unnaturalistic acting. The approach to a role that thoroughly examines

the motives and impetuses of a character helps the director, using the psychological approach understand better the general dynamics of the play (Jovanović 1994: 4). American Method actors rely on private moments and self-exploration for their technique of acting (Cohen 180). One of the greatest controversies of Method is the application of the affective memory. Towards the end of his career Stanislavsky ceased to employ it, since it could produce an effect opposite to the intended one. Instead of creating an illusion of spontaneity, it could seem that an actor is struggling to evoke an emotion that does not emerge naturally from the situation. The problem starts with acting *din ama* (Cohen 181).

Boris Cavazza tried to have a short methodological course of Lee Strasberg's Method to help the actors express the right emotions. Affective memory is a reliving of past experiences - likes and dislikes - when an analogous situation recurs. Something that has brought pain is anticipated with dislike the second time. The dislike, which is felt immediately, rather than remembered, is like a residue of previous appraisals. Affective memory may be linked directly to the memory of a traumatic experience, as the same situation or a similar one recurs, or to an experience that bears little apparent relation to the original, if the memory has been repressed. Of course, an experience need not necessarily be traumatic to leave an affective memory. The concept embraces both sense memory and emotional memory. The concept of affective memory is essential to an understanding of how the actor functions and the faculties that have to be trained to develop his talent. It is unusually sensitive affective memory that enables the actor to respond to events that must be imagined on the stage and to repeat performances.

The actors know they do not have enough time to develop their emotions. Especially the affective memory, which one merely evokes. What happened to you in your childhood and in puberty is most valuable. Regardless of whether you were experiencing tragedies or not. Small things carry just as much weight, for example whether you were wrongfully punished and that hurt your feeling considerably. It is a very simple painless technique but helps you feel. If one needs to express a certain emotional scene, emotion is aroused organically. One does not act it. Then you evoke memories of the event with your affective memory, with the smell, the hearing, etc. The emotions come to you by themselves. Even when they are not real. Merely apparent. (Cavazza 3)

Stanislavski's System presupposes that an actor invests his understanding and imagination into every moment of the play. He should discover within himself what the role demands from him. The director purifies, filters and shapes the results of the actor's exploration without influencing them or suppressing their spontaneity (Cohen 175).

It was a strange mixture, on one hand it was the Method and on the other it wasn't. The Method was the field research of aphasia. According to the Method I was then supposed to start the process of identification, do exercises everyday. Then your affective memory is shaped in such a way that any emotion can be evoked within a matter of seconds. (Babič 1)

The actors tried to adopt the Method although there was some difficulty. They experienced a lot of problems since it cannot be embraced in such a short period of time.

You have to be a complete master of your instrument. This is Stanislavky's system that was not adopted in Europe. It is called the Method, the only methodological thing being that you have to make your psyche open for emotions. Here you re-create memories and feelings. Summon them up. Shepard is a product of this school. Film acting is actually the same as drama acting, one expects the same results from actors. (Cavazza 4)

In the third act Boris Cavazza lit up both platforms and blended the scenes. The scenes Montana – California do not alternate any more, several scenes take place simultaneously.

In the end I did not employ realism. I joined two scenes; when they are discussing the wedding and when mother and daughter are watching photographs, the light was uniform and black and white. Graphical light. The colours dissolved, only black and white image remained, the lines were uttered alternatively, the dialogue blended. (Cavazza 1)

When Mike and Jake's dialogue ends they do not exit the stage but turn their backs to the audience and wait with their arms folded for the scene to finish.

I found it interesting that they all remain trapped in this space and that the space is relativized, that it merges even though we are dealing with Montana and California. Here the play repositions into another symbolic level. Especially the light was very prominent, besides being black and white, it was the counterlight, "Gegenlicht". They remained frozen in silhouettes. As if cut out of paper. (Cavazza 6)

In the centre of the stage Boris Cavazza placed the front of a big lorry whose blinding lights are lit at the end. A piercing siren is heard, not a real honking but a musical one, saxophones, shattering the lyrical atmosphere of reconciliation (Cavazza 6). The director placed his attention and built his play mostly on the roles; employing only the basic set design he completely exposed and laid bare the actors. The direction in the Slovenian production mostly accentuates the actors and employs a filmic approach, especially in the alternation of the scenes, simultaneity of events, music and acting technique. The Slovenian production emphasizes the entrapment of the characters in their own world, while the American, hinting at the possibility of a happy ending, is ambiguous.

The analysis has shown that Slovenian directors have introduced new elements into the staging of Sam Shepard's plays. Vinko Möderndorfer adapts Shepard's *Cowboy Mouth* and stages it as a happening, yet contrary to Shepard's vision, accentuating the hallucinations of pop stars, he ends the play quite abruptly, plunging the main characters into an abyss of despair, by making them realise there is no such thing as a rock saviour. Quite original in portraying the character of Willie are Primož Bebler and his actress Vesna Jevnikar by employing the Japanese technique Butoh for the purposes

of choreography. In staging *True West*, the Slovenian director Boris Kobal employs the film acting technique prominent in westerns and concentrates on the interior monologue of the two main actors as if they were presented in close up on stage. Dušan Jovanović's stage design of *Buried Child* is quite original, borrowing from the art of the 1950s and 1960s, whereas he has found that Shepard's realism demands a different type of acting, that it enters a sort of magical dimension. To achieve this, he focused on the idiosyncratic speech of characters, making it torn, spasmodic, unusual in rhythm to thus emphasize the surrealist quality of the play. Boris Cavazza is quite innovative in his stage design, especially in the last scene, by breaking the realism and creating a symbolic dimension. He, too, focuses on the filmic approach to acting and attempts to employ the Strasberg's Method in the study and building of characters.

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