

Shakespeare's comeback

In 1988, Heiner Müller, German playwright, wrote an essay *Shakespeare a Difference*. It speaks of hope to live in a world without murders and violence where we can become ourselves because *our plays* won't be written by Shakespeare anymore.

Shakespearean difference is also the difference between Benjamin's image of history seen like a heap of ruins, and Müller's image of petrified angel waiting for the history to come. How strange these images are. The first one comes out with the metaphor of *the angel of history*: he's driven uncontrollably by the tempest to the future, with his back facing it and the heap of ruins in front of him growing up to the sky. The second one is pictured like *the unlucky angel*, awaiting history in the petrification of flight glance breath, until a renewed roar of mighty wing beating propagates, in waves through the stone and announces his flight. In this case, the unlucky angel is Heiner Müller himself. After a year, not only the wings of the angel of history did roar, but their huge blow uprooted the existing order not exactly the way Müller wanted. It seemed like the end of the history; we won't be reading any Shakespearean plays full of murders and violence... there's the new utopian script of non-violent plays with democratic values to come. However, the time of utopia didn't last for more than a decade. Shakespeare, together with scenario of the history as a cycle of murders, made a comeback. After all, theatre can always sense things a little bit earlier: in this case, the return to the angels of history with no luck and to the heaps of ruins as a result of progress...all underneath the today's smooth design. From this point of view, the Slovak present-day „Shakespearomania“ is only understandable. In his essay, Heiner Müller gets back also to Hamlet. Called the thespian Mona Lisa by T. S. Eliot, Müller labels him the character of a total failure. Ten years earlier, in 1997, however, Müller wrote his play *Die Hamletmaschine*, based on the ruins

of the original Hamlet. It's hard to call it a play since it's a nine-page fragment of non-cohesive monologues presenting the identity and sex disintegration, the ultimate excessive violence in *the heart of darkness*.

Die Hamletmaschine, as well as its Slovak equivalent *Stroj Hamlet*, probably had to wait to be changed into English *Hamletmachine* in the time of new media. The performance of P. A. T. Theatre – the word 'performance' is to be considered here literally – first put on stage 1 June 2007 in MsKS Bojnice, was really a play. Slávka Daubnerová performed her scenic concept of Müller's text on a simple stage with four side microphones and a block in the middle transforming from a wardrobe into a cage, pater noster, aquarium, TV screen, cargo or a coffin. The actress kept changing herself like a real machine and mythical Tirezias at the same time... from Hamlet into Ophelia or Heiner Müller, from a presenter or MC into a rapper etc. She was a multiple clone to herself, her writing, voice and image, but particularly her body, physically present on stage along with its visualization via image projection and inverting metaphor of Kleist's flawless grace of mechanical motion: movement of her body was, besides small imprecision, nearly mechanically perfect. Still, thanks to human imperfection, this body - theatrically asexual – becomes a study of Éros and Thanatos. Müller's theatrical metastasis ends up with Electra – the heart of darkness controlled by saturnalia, violence and death. Electra definitely regains the world she gave birth to and leaves it motionless. Difference between the two worlds – the world of motion and the world of stillness – or the beginning and the end of the performance is so unnoticeable that it must be announced; otherwise the stunned audience would be still sitting and staring into nowhere. Multimedia world of the performance is not of a rickety style show, quite the contrary, it is minimalist sober. It doesn't aspire to be a sensation – and it's not. It's precise and profound, nearly unemotional. Everything but the world we are looking at is in order. Text, visuals by Dušan Krnáč, music by Matej Gyarfáš, software design by Peter Gonda, sound, lighting and projection by Viliam Daubner, body of Slávka Daubnerová, in acknowledgement of Martina Vannayová... It was finally a performance created like a collective body. There have been several moments in my life that I felt something unique is being created. They appeared suddenly and unexpectedly like an emotional exposure and were left in my visual memory like a snapshot. I experienced them by the beginnings

of Lasica and Satinský, Radošinské naivné divadlo, Klimáček, Mizera, Uhlár's Stoka and now. Then there come the good times, bad times too, sometimes there's nothing to come... but the moment of creation is singular.

kød – konkrétne o divadle

Vol. 1 (2007)

Nr. 7 (November), p. 11

MARTINA VANNAYOVÁ

theatrologist

Hamletmachine

Slovak theatre finally encountered the first production of one of the most famous plays written by German playwright Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine*. Slávka Daubnerová from the alternative Theatre P. A. T. from Prievidza is the name you would find when looking for the creator. A couple of friends helped her to create the whole scenic concept of the performance and she is also the only actress on stage. First of all, it is necessary to say that she had chosen a very difficult and problematic title. And that's for more reasons: German drama art is not exactly popular with Slovak theatres and we can say they have problems performing it. One of the main reasons could be a traditional tendency of the Slovak theatre to "look" eastwards, Stanislavski's legacy of psychological realism and a kind of helplessness to produce other than classical texts. I mean productions put on stage at the time when Müller's play was progressive, revelatory and up-to-date, in the late 70's and 80's. That was the birth time of what is now considered to be the Slovak alternative theatre. At that time, Müller's text could have fallen on fertile ground but it had no chance and so Slovak alternative theatre – the most suitable to fight for "non- classical" dramatic form – remained authorial-project-oriented. By all means, we can perceive Theatre P. A. T. as a very interesting group with the potential to handle a production formally based on other than traditional principles. The other reason why the play is difficult to perform could be its present reference scope. Many themes of the text are very up to date, however, the form of the text - in the time when storytelling is making its comeback - as

well as its strong political and historical references could be problematic. That is why it is so important – and so hard to perform – to consider it not only as a genius period artefact. Slávka Daubnerová and Theatre P. A. T. succeeded in both. She focused mainly on the male-female conflict from the female point of view. In my opinion, this is the right way how to perform this text at present. Absolute presence of the female element – the only performer, as well as the author of the concept and the director is a woman – creates a key question of the production; to what extent the male element determines the social and private life, or, how a woman copes with the man's world (literature, history, politics and the private life). Slávka Daubnerová finds the inspiration not only in the content of the text, but also in its rhythm. She generates her own segmentation that, more or less, enables the viewer to follow its different layers. Since the female element in the man's world is a determining factor, many subjects and levels of meaning remain unspoken or latent (present only in the textual, not the scenic form) and, vice versa, some resonate a lot. Use of video and other modern technologies still appears to be very amateurish in Slovak theatre – its potentialities seem to be a mystery for our theatre-makers; so we can see only naïve attempts to utilize these “modern” means in a way of “shooting”, not going beyond the illustrational level. Slávka Daubnerová is one of the few who managed to integrate the video into the performance by using camera and projection in parallel in a very interesting way. Actions on stage are filmed in real time, simultaneously mixed, modified and projected on stage from different angles and points of view. In addition, the video is skilfully combined with the sound (echo, timing, sounds, and microphones), so the text is interpreted at the visual as well as auditory level. Fortunately, the interpretation of the text becomes not its analysis, but its rhythmic-visual-auditory decomposition and its reversional production. The “atmosphere” of the text is then very well grasped and represented. It speaks of resignation, impossibility of motion, loss of will-power or impossibility to act freely... it's all reflected in cyclic orbicularity, even monotony of the whole production (unfortunately, sometimes unwitting). Slávka Daubnerová is the only performer of all “roles” like Hamlet, Ophelia, the Author etc., what best reflects the impossibility to name the identity, or evanishment of the borderline between subject and object. At the same time, she plays her own role – herself. In her personality of a director, actress, performer of all the “roles” and a woman, in the whole concept based upon

monodrama, decay and recreation, there are a lot of specifications and particularly the topicality of Müller's text is preserved. Insertion of other Müller's text, which he wrote in the mid 80's, could appear as redundant. The reason why it happened to be part of the scenic concept is not clear and it takes a bite out of the performance dynamics.

The first production of Slávka Daubnerová and Theatre P. A. T., *Cells*, was very successful and *Hamletmachine* is a proof that existence of this group is important and has only enriched the Slovak alternative theatre.

IS.theatre.sk: Monitoring of Slovak theatres

February 2008

EVA KYSELOVÁ

theatrolgist

Heiner Müller: Hamletmachine...And the machine has come to life

We can hardly consider the text by playwright Heiner Müller to be a classical drama. After the first reading, it is almost daring to think that it could be staged within the psychological realism. *Hamletmachine* is a text that is, in the literal sense, predestined to be put on stage in other than conventional way of all stone theatres. First and foremost, it requires a great deal of originality, not only in the concept for direction and dramaturgy, but also in the visual and acting elements. Without a sophisticated and individual approach to the play and to the production itself, profundity of the text could be disturbed very easily, and the image could be presented as a superficial cliché that would maybe use variability of the text, but not highlight its essence.

As if the director, scenographer and actress of the performance *Hamletmachine*, Slávka Daubnerová, knew about the trap and eschewed all mistakes and lapses. Every moment under her direction, every scene is filled with her unbelievable experience with the text. Actually, she herself confessed that she had been thinking of producing this text for nearly ten years. As we could see, it was worth waiting for so long.

Slávka Daubnerová handled Müller's monologue blocks quite aptly and logically in a sense, and let their spirit come to the fore. That is to say that the text is divided into

separate blocks not only at the thematic but also at the graphic level, and the director chose a very suitable form of their expression.

Five acts, five monologues of Hamlet and Ophelia take turns with didascalia or English lyrics that work as a kind of intermezzo, but at the same time, they are an inseparable part of the text and performance itself. Daubnerová created a multimedia production that emphasizes modern technology as one of the essential staging and scenographic solutions. She perfectly utilized its possibilities, so the live projection of images filmed from different angles and playing the pre-recorded text not only sketches the characters, but also characterizes individual texts of director's notes.

Dark and sterile atmosphere of the anxiously demarcated stage is completed by the mystical, even eerie music with lyrics that are actually English extracts of the text.

Modern interpretation of the text is in harmony with seemingly simple stage management - white empty squared space with a microphone stand on the right and a kind of booth in the middle. It is in this "booth" where Daubnerová switches the roles of Hamlet and Ophelia; by putting the sunblind up and down, spotlighting, and projecting onto the booth panel, she creates a world of illusions that come into existence and vanish immediately out of nothing. Everything is presented in a style that flatters not only Daubnerová's acting, but also Müller's monologue blocks. Slávka Daubnerová introduced herself as a skilful performer who masters the acting, as well as its motional and singing part. Her acting is fully concentrated on monologues of Hamlet, who has an innocent boyish charm in her interpretation, and Ophelia, who is expressed in word and motion. Daubnerová's clear, unmannered and not psychological expression fits the non- emotivity and decadency of the text. It's only admirable that she uses one voice pitch to be a man, a woman and a kind of android who's alternately moving in a dark blue overall like a creature (or a machine) and seems to be like from other dimension. Ophelia is characterized by red court shoes on very high heels. This seemingly slight hint and symbol of femininity and feminine sexuality of the 20th century illustrates the animal and shameful principle of feminineness that periodically repeats in the text. It's more than questionable what the author's purpose was; how the author himself wanted to show a woman and womanhood. His uncompromising misogyny and antifeminist allusions prove that his perspective was considerably reserved. Maybe that is why the text offers so many

interpreting and staging possibilities and points of view.

Vlna magazine
Vol. IX, Nr. 33, p.96
DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ
theatrolgist

The new theatre communication

...At a certain period, one of the most impressive new arrivals were the performances by Eduard Kudláč and his Phenomenontheatre which even in its early stages was able to give a true picture of actual social themes, successfully pasting non-dramatic texts and staging them – texts being in confrontation with the use of human body on stage – using visual art concepts. In this respect, the groundbreaking performance was Kudláč's inscenation of a seemingly unscenable text – *Correction*, a novel by Thomas Bernhard .

Body

This line has been followed by P.A.T. Theatre from Prievidza: Slávka Daubnerová – director, actress, and stage concept author, all in one person. Her first production (*Cells*), again, based on 'non-drama texts' by a graphic artist and sculpturer Louise Bourgeois, represented a cooperation with Eduard Kudláč, but her second project *Hamletmachine* was a work of her own. In her stage performances she attacks senses of anyone sitting in audience, she works with videoart as well as with body as a means substituting words to a large extent. Words are there merely to fill in and set forth. Speech reduction opens up a room for lights and tones, either cold or expressive. Stage language of Slávka Daubnerová is fragmentary, visual, physical, and having character of signs. Moves, gestures and rhythm are all curt and brusque, minimalized into pure basic signs and symbols. Intellectual concepts of both *Cells* and *Hamletmachine* are being balanced by strong emotional themes – in *Cells*, it's sculpturer's unsettled relation to her father; in *Hamletmachine*, it's dysfunctionality and frosty relations leading up to violence in the world of marasmus and coldness. In *Hamletmachine* Slávka Daubnerová connects to what she started in *Cells*. Sharp geometric stage arrangement and installation, so typical

for Phenomenontheatre, is even further limited here to emphasize physical presence of movements and rhythm, using only inevitably articulated scattered ideas. This consciously outlawed presence of words is juxtaposed by the abovementioned gestures and movements, and is combined with a minimal number of props present on stage, being her only team-mates. In *Cells*, Louise Bourgeois gets dressed in a tight suit and fixes her hair using gel from one of the bottles on stage. Clear symbols, clear text, clear meaning. The suit – as cold as father’s confidence and egoism – and its extreme tightness represent limits and bondage to Louise.

Editing-like production in *Hamletmachine* is achieved by making use of videoart. An enlarged video shot featuring the face of Hamlet/Slávka Daubnerová works not only as an aesthetic effect but also questions identity and the twine of reality and illusion, and creates an impression of isolation, coldness and communicative failure.