

Theater between project politics and authorship, agenda as mise-en-scène

Kristina Ljevak Bajramović

People still smoking in the theatre. Even fake cigarettes like my friend, former nicotine addict, for the theatre shows purposes he smokes a sage. Smell like weed. Theatre make smoke to be joyful color. Theatre is life essence not imitation. Make us alive and involved. In spite, during the COVID properly distanced from each other's, we were used to watch theatre shows.

On the stage the curses must sound like in the real life. For any life values I'm fighting for in real life, I don't expect to be presented on the theatre stage. Stage is not environment for nice vocabulary. It's not nice behavior school. Project reality is far from the simple.

Project reality has burdened us enough. Performance indicators, dictated by the non-governmental sector threaten to suffocate us.

Political correctness in the theater is an ideal framework for hypocrisy. It is an excuse not to deal with the essence. Elevating form over essential values would be a collective capitulation.

In art, the only important thing is truthfulness, which does not necessarily imply truth.

Any deviation from the truth is only an imitation and an attempt. Is there any way to talk about mass graves, homophobia, abortion ban, or any injustice, without the language being used different from the language in reality? The theater will be alive as much as there is real life in it.

True, whenever I find myself passionately advocating for the lack of imitation on the stage, advocating life itself on the stage, I remember some plays where that was taken literally. It is not necessary to simultaneously roll the actors, actresses and the audience in the mud, so that the message communicated from the stage is clearer. I believe that it is more often a matter of a lack of ideas and the absence of essential inventiveness. And we miss her the most in the theater.

It is clear that it is not easy for theater workers. Given that they inherit the experience of a civilization that was not able to overcome the ideas about man that were set from ancient drama to Shakespeare. All our problems have been described long ago. We evolved only in technological achievements, and then, indiscriminately, transferred them to the stage.

The actor/actress, the audience, the stage and the silence in the audience have long since ceased to be the key elements of theater art. We got different video effects, which compensate for the lack of directorial inventiveness as well as the often unsuccessful search for a timeless contemporary text.

Interventions in the field of stage and in the domain of video art are incomparably less of a problem compared to the way of promoting theatrical content.

If, on the one hand, we have political correctness, which to a certain extent can burden theater art as well as popular culture, it would be good to see what else, by the way, "arrived" at us.

Being present is enough

With the absence of any theater criticism, and most of all relevant ones, with the absence of profiled magazines and the increasingly frequent disappearance of culture pages in the few remaining daily newspapers, while the essential practice of art on most Internet portals never took off, theater workers decided to approach the audience through social networks. It becomes much more important that the actors and actresses deal with what will fit into a thirty-second video, in order to reach a larger audience, than with what is the essence of the play.

We judge the successes of the premiere and later performances by the amount of enthusiasm on social networks. In a time without criteria, it is completely irrelevant who and what kind of message is being sent. It's important to be somewhere. Shakespeare's - being ready, that's all, it has long since replaced - being present, that's enough. Such circumstances are an ideal framework for repertoire politics, which can be characterized as a hundred-meter race. Premieres collide with each other, both between theater houses and within one. The performances that are created under such a matrix are generally not the ones we will remember in five or ten years. We usually forget them the following week. With and without political correctness, which is or is not represented in them.

Theater is not a speech exercise

The lack of funds from state sources, which would have been directed to encourage domestic production, the cultivation of domestic texts and everything that would be in the service of promoting a culture, is compensated by project funds. And donors do not need experiences of the world, the beauty of the ordinary and the joy of everyday life, that is, personal experiences of the beauty of artists. They need a problem.

I thought about this the most during a recent movie experience, during the screening of the film "Za danas toliko" by the Serbian director Marko Đorđević. Who, by some miracle, managed to make a film about the joy of the ordinary, about love in family and among friends, about cross-border godfatherism that at the same time does not include facing the past.

I don't know how he managed it. But I believe that the pamphlet theater, as one of the forms of political correctness or a consequence of the culture of cancellation, in addition to the project criteria, will be a serious problem in the years to come. Surely much bigger than it seems to us today.

In addition to life and truth, the theater must also be a finger in the eye.

Like Fatima. A woman I recently met by chance and who is from Mostar. Since we found ourselves in a conventional situation that includes polite conversations, I, although knowing the conditions in Mostar, asked her if anything in Mostar, in the context of international conditions, had changed.

Fatima answered me briefly - I hate Croats.

Later, she substantiated her position with examples of her own and family members' who stay in camps. Including her children.

The conversation with Fatima was one of the most precious for me in my own process of dealing with the past.

Fatima would probably be ostracized from any conference with the sign of facing the past. As it once happened, almost twenty years ago, to Damir Nikšić, a conceptual artist from Sarajevo, who said at a conference dedicated to the past in Belgrade that nothing should ever be forgiven until war reparations are paid, for every person killed, for every destroyed car, building... His colleagues jumped on him, just as they would have on Fatima, if she had access to the conferences. In the spirit of the theater of the absurd, the biggest opponents of his views were artists from Sarajevo.

Political correctness, as we can see in this example, mainly leads to self-censorship. Do we need that in life and in art?

What would have happened if Oliver Frljić, the director of the play "Letter from 1920" produced by the Bosnian National Theater in Zenica, decided to use "subtle" methods to refer to the involvement of one of the most successful regional actors, Emir Hadžihafizbegović, on the occasion of Hadžihafizbegović's work as an author during the last war, apart from broadcasting in the play an audio recording of his author's monodrama, performed during the war, in which Hadžihafizbegović begs "his own people" not to forgive the other.

Lemonade, or theatrical dilution, would happen on stage. In life, it would be easier for the director. But should the author's choices be limited by expectations of comfort? Are we allowed to make peace with what Frljić himself told me, when I asked him why people in art often make peace with everything, that people are basically not honorable. How much would we believe in honor, if we agreed and agreed to the concept that the theater should be a space of beautiful speech within which we will use subtle methods to point out the guilty. For anything.

Theater is not a speaking exercise, although it would not be bad if the actors and actresses spoke correctly.

My texts, intended for a wider audience, are the embodiment of political correctness. I don't know what would have happened, if by some luck I had been the editor of Kristian Novak's book "Gypsy but the most beautiful", an unusually successful literary work, from which an equally successful theater play was created. I suppose that in the spirit of my postulates, my own proposal would be for the title to be - Member of the Roma minority, but the most beautiful.

I'm not caricaturing. I am so burdened by incorrect speech that I do not know how to set boundaries.

But I see where they should be placed where I am not personally involved.

The play "Sećaš li se Doli Bel" based on the novel of the same name by Abdulah Sidran, directed by Kokan Mladenović and produced by the Sarajevo Chamber Theater 55, has become a tourist attraction in Sarajevo.

And every time I felt terrible nausea during the scene of collective rape of Dolly Bel.

During the first few viewings, I thought that Mladenović should have found a directorial solution that would have been less painful, and the rape scene presented differently.

And it is fortunate that I watched the play so many times that it finally became clear to me that we have no right to expect that rape does not cause suffering in the audience, which cannot even come close to what a victim of sexual abuse experiences.

And in this part, it is important to mention, as before any political correctness and project activity that is usually based on rarely successful dramatic theater, the fact that the theater has not yet evolved, and will not for a long time, to the level where dramatic literature will

correspond with the involvement of women on stage. The best theater texts are written for men. Even in top theater literature, women are Medea or Lady Macbeth, with or without political correctness, patriarchy and heteronormativity can hardly be eradicated from the theater.

When we don't know what to do, we go to take off our clothes

The reality of the project allows us to have more and more theater performances that indicate the position of different minorities, from children with difficulties to adults with psychological problems.

Donors like real people on the autistic spectrum, for example, to be put under the spotlight, even though most of them are not comfortable with that kind of light and exposure.

I'm trying to understand where the illusion comes from that the widest audience will be sensitized through the theater.

The theater is not a football field, its supporters are not football fans. The consciousness of the masses changes in the stadiums. The play with children with disabilities will gather only those who have already been sufficiently sensitized before coming.

Why is it a problem, I wonder, to include a person with Down syndrome in the usual theatrical division, why Hamlet should not be a person with Down syndrome or a person on the autistic spectrum. Certainly Hamlet himself did not seem to have too much respect for reality. And what I just wrote is an example of political incorrectness.

And as long as the theater deals with the Other and the Different and chooses the words to name diversity, in the regular, non-project repertoire, there are mostly naked actresses in front of us. Sometimes an actor too. Depending on preferences and directorial exhibitions.

There is a nudity that comes from artistic justification, the director's projection, the actor's willingness to respond to the task in such a way. And that is this play. And there are those situations of nudity in which the director or playwright did not know what to do with a certain part of the play, so he decided to strip the actresses. Very rarely actors.

And if they think that you can't see that double nakedness, the author's and the actor's, they greatly underestimate us. And us, the theater audience, and theater art in general.

Theater and punishment

Political correctness, or in this case human responsibility, should be fully applied behind the scenes.

To begin with, persons who are suspected of sexual abuse should not be called to the theater festival jury, regardless of whether they have been charged or not.

Also, theater selectors should not be the ones against whom there are indictments for sexual abuse, no matter how much they are kept on the last shelves of prosecutor's offices.

I am alluding to the case of Brčko and the theater festival there, from a few years ago, knowing that the example is not alone, only this one is separated by the fact that I personally know survivors of sexual violence.

It is completely unimportant in what language something will be said on stage, if decisions are made behind the scenes by those who create trauma for women that is reflected on

seven subsequent generations. That's how much the trauma of sexual violence is transgenerationally transmitted.

In every human interaction, humanity is the most important thing. When we start from it, there is no reason to fear whether we will be correctly understood.

In this time, when we are systematically tired of mediocrity, it seems that it is a luxury to expect more from the theater than we have from life.

But sometimes it happens, like the theater and most of all in it, coincides with what we would never like to see in reality.

And this is the confirmation of Peter Brook's statement - theater and life are one and the same and not one and the same. They are made up of the same ingredients, and yet theater would not exist as a form if something else had not happened.

In the collective experience, the second thing happened when the play "Saint Sava" was performed in Zenica, which determined the life and death of Žarko Laušević.

"Hypermnesia" directed by Selma Spahić took place, a rare successful form of documentary theater.

"Three Winters" took place based on the text by Tena Štivičić, directed by Ivica Buljan.

"The Master and Margarita" directed by Oskaras Koršunovas took place.

I've been a theatergoer since I could walk. The fact that I spent a good part of my experience watching "Bugs Bunny" at the Youth Theater in Sarajevo is not the result of my choice, but of endless reruns.

But joking aside, I have an enviable audience experience and within it few performances where "something else" happened.

The one in which the happening of the "other" was most dramatically reflected was the play "The Seagull" directed by Tomij Janežić, with Jasna Đuričić and Boris Isaković. It was created precisely in Novi Sad.

In this theatrical act, the theater did not just illuminate my biography, as Flaiano says, but overlapped with it.

In that almost seven-hour extraordinary theater experience, while I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the theater, a domestic drama took place, without a happy ending.

For this reason, I consider any overly personal relationship to the theater, and high expectations from it, to be legitimate. And I would like it if she went beyond the focus on the presentation of theatrical content on social networks. If we could start from that, for the beginning.