

Independent Theatre in the Post-Socialist Countries of Eastern Europe

New Forms of Production and Creativity in Theatre Aesthetics

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1. INTRODUCTION

To this day, Eastern Europe is a 'blank spot' on the map of European theatre. Current research on the theatre scenes in Eastern Europe is, for the most part, meager; the theatres have barely been examined theoretically, much less in view of their practical work. This is true for institutional theatres and, above all, for independent theatres. Neither international experts nor theatre professionals and experts in the countries themselves have given independent theatre much attention. As the Polish curator Marta Keil notes:¹ '[W]e discovered that, despite our common history, we have virtually no common experience. Not only do we have dissimilar development paths and systems, but we also know surprisingly little about each other.'² A closer examination reveals, however, that in the past 20 years numerous artistic innovations have been realised in the independent theatre scenes in Eastern Europe. This study examines these developments. It investigates the history and the current situation of independent theatre in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The study primarily revolves around the former socialist people's republics of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, then focuses on the post-Yugoslavian countries of Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and finally considers Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine as former republics of the Soviet

1 | The quotations by experts consulted for this study have, in general, been reproduced verbatim in the language chosen by the interviewee (English or German). In many cases, it is not the expert's native language.

2 | Marta Keil, "Preface", in *EEPAP – A Platform for the Development of Performing Arts in Central and Eastern Europe*. Study 2011, see <http://www.eepap.org/web/english/eepap.pl>, pp 7-8, here p. 7.

Union. Although at first glance these 13 countries seem to have experienced similar socio-political developments, a second look reveals significant differences in history, politics and society which have influenced the culture in the individual countries. These differences are also apparent with regard to the development of independent theatre. The emergence of a new self-image and new artistic working methods for independent theatre is closely linked to the economic, social and political circumstances in the respective countries. For this reason, this study proceeds methodically on the basis of individual analyses. It examines the development and current situation of independent theatre in the respective countries separately. The study also shows to what extent the working methods and production forms described can be viewed as paradigmatic for independent theatre in the post-socialist countries.

The study evaluates research activities which are concerned with independent theatre in Eastern Europe. This work deals with a variety of materials. Thus, there are informative source materials and a great deal of (research) literature on the theatre scenes in Poland, Slovenia and Hungary, but there are little to no public sources and/or examples of English literature available on the (independent) theatres in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Belarus and the Ukraine. Accordingly, the individual analyses here may vary.

Considering the current status of the scope of research, the study of the East European Performing Arts Platform (EEPAP) is particularly noteworthy. This network of theatre makers and theorists published comprehensive reports on the theatre scenes in 17 Eastern European countries in 2011.³ The reports include analyses of the general conditions of artistic work and the organizational structures of the theatres following the political upheavals.

Furthermore, the following study is based on the author's own on-site research, which was possible as part of the research project. On-site research included attending performances in Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Belarus, together with a great many on-site interviews with theatre makers and theorists. In addition, questionnaires were sent to independent artists and groups, politicians responsible for cultural and educational policies, and theatre critics in the relevant countries, in which they were asked to describe the situation of independent theatre in their country. Seventeen questionnaires were completed and returned, and the responses were integrated into the analysis. Moreover, four extensive interviews took place in Slovenia. The statements made by representatives of independent theatres have also been included in the study. The questionnaires and interviews supplement the information provided by the research literature.

3 | The study includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine and Kosovo; see EEPAP.

The study is divided into three main areas: The initial focus is on the development of independent theatres in the individual Eastern European countries (Chapter 2). Here the countries are combined according to the different characteristics of their socialist regimes as former socialist people's republics, post-Soviet and post-Yugoslavian states. The study deals with the situation of the independent theatres under socialism as well as their development following the political upheavals at the end of the eighties and at the beginning of the nineties. The chapter also includes an excursus on the independent dance scene because dance plays an important role for the independent theatres.

The next chapter is dedicated to the general conditions of independent theatre work (Chapter 3). The presentation focuses on changes in the cultural policies, in the financial sponsorship of independent theatres and in the production and presentation conditions. In addition, this chapter deals with the issue of restrictions which limit the work of the independent theatres. Finally, the chapter includes descriptions of the professional training and the international networking of independent artists and groups.

The third focal point in Chapter 4 deals with individual productions which feature important working methods and topics which are typical of independent theatre in the post-socialist countries. Even though the analyses are primarily concerned with spoken theatre, or describe performances which emphasise musical elements, these productions are usually transmedial productions which combine different artistic media, such as music, dance and image. Against this background, this study does not assume the usual separation of artistic genres but considers independent theatre as a transmedial practice. This study covers the time up to 2012. Later developments could not be taken into account.

A sensitive approach when dealing with this particular geographical area requires that one first define the term 'Eastern Europe'. It should not be the case that 'the countries of Eastern Europe are all thrown together to form one single region'⁴. In no way was Eastern Europe, even under socialism, a monolithic entity.⁵ Former people's republics, like Poland and Hungary, differ from Yugoslavia under Tito, and this, in turn, differs from the republics of the Soviet

4 | Larry Wolff, "Die Erfindung Osteuropas. Von Voltaire zu Voldemort", in Karl Kaser, Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl and Robert Pichler (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des europäischen Ostens, Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf* (Klagenfurt et al.: Wieser 2003), pp. 21-34, here p. 21.

5 | For the history of Eastern Europe see e.g. Ekaterina Emeliantseva, Arié Malz and Daniel Ursprung (eds.), *Einführung in die osteuropäische Geschichte* (Zürich: Orell Füssli 2008); Aron Buzogány and Rolf Frankenberg (eds.), *Osteuropa. Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden: Nomos 2007); Dieter Segert, *Die Grenzen Osteuropas. 1918, 1945, 1989 – Drei Versuche im Westen anzukommen* (Frankfurt a. Main: Campus 2002); Harald Roth (ed.), *Studienhandbuch Östliches Europa. Geschichte Ostmittel- und*

Union. After the fall of communism, the different countries went their own ways, even if they may exhibit parallel developments in political, social and cultural terms. This study deliberately refrains from assuming a ‘one-size-fits-all’ perspective of ‘Eastern Europe’. However, the study still requires a basis which will enable a comparison of the individual countries. The term *post-socialism* provides such a basis.⁶ It refers equally to historical, geographical, ethnic-linguistic and political aspects and stresses the dissimilarity of the historical background and the current situation of the individual countries. It is the aim of this study to present in detail the very heterogeneous history of independent theatre in the individual countries which are still influenced by a socialist past.

To simplify reading, gender-specific differentiation (e.g. he/she) has been omitted.

2. INDEPENDENT THEATRE AFTER THE POLITICAL UPHEAVALS OF 1989/1991

The political developments in the former socialist people’s republics and the post-Soviet states included in this study indicate commonalities and differences.⁷ In different dimensions, the communist rule in these countries was characterised

Südosteuropas (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 1999); Jenő Szűcs, *Die drei historischen Regionen Europas*, (Frankfurt a. Main: Neue Kritik 1990).

6 | “The term ‘postsocialism’ does not refer to one type of political system but to many political systems whose development exhibit parallels after the end of communist rule but also important differences”; Anton Pelinka, “Vorwort”, in Dieter Segert (ed.), *Postsozialismus. Hinterlassenschaften des Staatssozialismus und neue Kapitalismen in Europa* (Wien: Braumüller 2007), pp. VII-VIII, here p. VII. On post-socialism see also Stanislaw Frącz, *Im Spannungsfeld von Nationalismus und Integration. Zur Komplexität des Transformationsprozesses der postkommunistischen Gesellschaften unter den osteuropäischen Gegebenheiten* (Bonn: Bouvier 2006); Boris Groys, Anne von der Heiden, and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Zurück aus der Zukunft. Osteuropäische Kulturen im Zeitalter des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp 2005); Klaus von Beyme, *Systemwechsel in Osteuropa* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp 1994).

7 | On the history of the former people’s republics and the post-Soviet states, see Andreas Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit. Geschichte Europas unserer Zeit* (München: C. H. Beck 2012); Thomas Kunze and Thomas Vogel, *Von der Sowjetunion in die Unabhängigkeit. Eine Reise durch die 15 früheren Sowjetrepubliken. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (Berlin: Ch. Links 2011); György Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf. Das Ende der Diktaturen in Osteuropa* (München: C. H. Beck 2009); Henrik Bispinck, Jürgen Danyel, Hans-Hermann Hertle and Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Aufstände im Ostblock. Zur Krisengeschichte des realen Sozialismus* (Berlin: Ch. Links 2004).

by state repression, censorship and a deliberate isolation from the West. Society, education and culture were politicised to the same extent. The political thaw after the death of Stalin in 1953 led to a temporary easing of cultural censorship and the rehabilitation of artists, intellectuals and politicians who had been ostracized. However, after a short time this brief political spring was over. Decades followed in which any attempt at democratisation was put down by force. With the symbolic cutting of the barbed wire on the Austrian-Hungarian border on 27 June 1989, the 'iron curtain' was officially lifted, followed by one political upheaval in the individual socialist people's republics after another. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the communist governments lost their hegemony; the union of socialist states disintegrated, and dramatic transformation processes were initiated. The transformation of the communist dictatorships and planned economies into democracies and market economies was accompanied by a profound orientation and value change.

For the culture, and thus for independent theatre, this meant two things: The state-imposed censorship measures were abolished, and the ending of cultural isolation enabled an international exchange.⁸ At the same time, a period of economic instability commenced. The theatres found themselves confronted with a free market economy and were forced to redefine their place in a changing society. The political and societal transformation processes have still not been completed. Despite many commonalities, they took a different course from country to country and thus led to different developments in the independent theatres which will be shown later in the sections dealing with the individual countries.

The political developments in the post-Yugoslavian states differed from those in the socialist people's republics and the republics of the Soviet Union.⁹

8 | On the general developments in the theatre scenes in Eastern Europe, see Silviya Jestrovic, *Performance, Space, Utopia. Cities of War, Cities of Exile* (Hampshire i. a.: Palgrave Macmillan 2013); Manfred Brauneck, *Europas Theater. 2500 Jahre Geschichte – eine Einführung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 2012); Sonja Arsham Kufteinec, *Theatre, Facilitation and Nation Formation in the Balkans and Middle East* (Hampshire et al.: Palgrave Macmillan 2009); Martina Vannayová und Anna Häusler, *Landvermessungen. Theaterlandschaften in Mittel-, Ost- und Südosteuropa. TdZ Recherchen 61* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2008); Manfred Brauneck, *Die Welt als Bühne. Vol. 5* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 2007); Norbert Franz and Herta Schmid (eds.), *Bühne und Öffentlichkeit. Drama und Theater im Spät- und Postsozialismus (1983-1993)* (München: Otto Sagner 2002).

9 | See Holm Sundhussen, *Jugoslawien und seine Nachfolgestaaten 1943-2011. Eine ungewöhnliche Geschichte des Gewöhnlichen* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 2012); Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C. H. Beck 2010); Andreas Moritsch and Alois Mosser, *Den Anderen im Blick. Stereotype im ehemaligen Jugoslawien* (Frankfurt a. Main: Peter Lang 2002).

The former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was frequently referred to as an 'Eastern bloc country'. This designation is, however, incorrect. The former Yugoslavia was always an independent, socialist state; it was never a member of the Warsaw Pact or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Tito pursued a socialist course which was independent of the Soviet Union. Contrary to the other socialist countries, his regime permitted a certain political, economic and cultural contact with the West. The former Yugoslavian republics were politically equal and only allowed little national autonomy, whereby conflicts between the existing nationalities were allayed by force. The former Yugoslav republics could act somewhat independently regarding cultural issues and were permitted to participate in international networks. Thus, many international festivals emerged, such as the summer festival in Dubrovnik (1950), the theatre festival *Sterijino pozorje* in Novi Sad (1956) and the *Beogradski Internacionalni Teatarski Festival (BITEF)*, which was founded in 1967 in Belgrade. After Tito's death in 1980, conflicts between the nationalities erupted openly, which foreshadowed the coming breakup of Yugoslavia. The declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 heralded the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The following wars (the ten-day war in Slovenia, the war in Croatia, in Bosnia and the subsequent war in Kosovo) brought a time of violent conflicts, human rights violations, genocide, mass violence, systematic displacements and ethnic cleansing. In this time the theatre almost came to a complete standstill. Only after international interventions such as the Dayton Peace Agreement, the military intervention of NATO and the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Den Haag did the violence finally come to an end. The severe political, warlike events in the nineties had serious consequences for the transformative processes in the individual post-Yugoslavian states. With the exception of Slovenia, these processes did not begin until about ten years after the other former socialist states. This also had an effect on the development of independent theatre, as will be described in the individual analyses of the post-Yugoslavian states.

In this study, the term 'independent theatre' is also used for the time during the communist regime. It should be noted that the independent groups were not able to act 'independently' in these decades, since they were strongly affected by political restrictions and censorship. However, the independent theatres operated outside the institutional structures and tried to circumvent the guidelines laid down by the state wherever possible.

2.1 Former Socialist People's Republics

On 23 October 1956, there was a 'national uprising' in Hungary.¹⁰ The newly appointed Minister President Imre Nagy wanted to lead his country towards democracy and neutrality. Hungary withdrew from the Warsaw Pact. Only a few days later, Soviet troops invaded Hungary and crushed the movement. Imre Nagy was sentenced to death. His pro-Soviet successor, János Kádár, after a period of political severity, took a more liberal political course which became known as "Goulash Communism"¹¹ in the West. Thus, Hungary assumed a special position among the socialist countries. This also had an impact on the culture, although it still served the socialist system and was subject to state censorship. Yet, contact by artists with the West was permitted. Contrary to the other people's republics, the Hungarian theatre had the possibility to participate in a cultural exchange with international theatre groups and institutions as early as the beginning of the sixties.

In this time period, the first independent theatre groups were founded.¹² University groups such as Szegedi Egyetemi Színház at the József Attila University in Szeged and the University Theatre of the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest emerged from the amateur theatre movement. The University Theatre became acquainted with new forms of theatre on its first trips abroad, such as Jerzy Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre'. In addition, this group gained attention because of its two founders: Péter Halász, who co-founded the world-famous Squat Theatre in the USA in 1977, and Tamás Fodor, who started the independent theatre Stúdió K. in 1974. Both theatre makers were prominent representatives of the independent scene in Hungary. They dealt with subjects critical of the regime in artistic happenings which frequently took place in private apartments. These working methods had an impact, and new alternative groups continued these traditions at the beginning of the eighties. They includ-

10 | For the history of Hungary, see Janos Hauszmann, *Ungarn – vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, (Regensburg: Pustet 2004); Paul Lendvai, *Die Ungarn. Eine tausendjährige Geschichte*, (München: Goldmann 2001).

11 | The milder form of communism was referred to as 'Goulash Communism' because it was more strongly oriented towards consumer needs than the Stalinist economic policies; see Jürgen Rahmig, *Ungarns Rückkehr nach Europa. Vom Gulaschkommunismus zur Marktwirtschaft und Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Deutsch-Ungarische Gesellschaft 1998).

12 | For the development of the theatre scene in Hungary, see the questionnaires Hungary I and Hungary II from 30 September 2012 and 7 November 2012; Szakmáry Dalma and Attila Szabó, "Country Report Hungary", in *EEPAP*, pp. 177-200; National Theatre Museum of Slovenia (ed.), *Occupying Spaces. Experimental Theatre in Central Europe 1950-2010* (Ljubljana: National Theatre Museum of Slovenia 2010).

ed the collective Arvisura, the group Utsloó, Artus, the dance company founded by Gábor Goda, and the group Vonal. All of these groups worked in Budapest.

In October 1989, Hungary became a parliamentary republic. Because of the absence of state subsidies, and because of the strong decrease in theatre guests, many of the groups which had existed since the seventies were dissolved, including the theatre Stúdió K. At the same time (the mid-nineties), many young theatre makers and groups stepped into the public light in Hungary for the first time, including Sándor Zsótér, Eszter Novák, Árpád Schilling's independent group Krétakör (which discontinued its work in 2008) and Béla Pintér's company Pintér Béla és Társulata in the Szkéné Theatre of the Technical University in Budapest. The Szkéné Theatre, which has existed since the seventies, and the Trafó Theatre, which was founded by György Szabó in Budapest in 1998, are the most important venues for the independent theatre scene in Hungary today.

These theatre makers are now among the most well-known representatives of the Hungarian independent theatre. With their artistic work, which focuses on social realities, they were not only aesthetic pioneers, but leading figures for many young artists and groups in the first decade of the new millennium. This new generation comprises Zoltán Balázs, Kornél Mundruczó, Viktor Bodó and his collective, Szputnyik Shipping Company, Gábor Goda's Artus Company, Péter Kárpáti's Secret Company, the group founded by Anna Lengyel called PanoDrama, the KOMA Company and the group HoppArt.

Unlike the focus of the collectives, which were founded in the seventies and which opposed the political system and the aesthetic orientation of the established theatres in Hungary, a certain approximation of the independent theatre scene and established theatres has recently occurred. Indeed, there are still big structural and financial differences between these two spheres, but they now influence each other noticeably:

'The two subsystems of established and alternative theatre, though structurally and financially very rigidly separated, in terms of artistic mobility are quite open and very much affecting each other. When the Krétakör, the internationally acclaimed independent theatre, was dismantled in 2008, many of the former actors became part of the National Theatre's company led by Róbert Alföldi. The group Béla Pintér and Company produced *Gyévuska* in cooperation with the National Theatre and performed several times at the studio of the National. The other direction is also common: Viktor Bodó started as an actor and director at the Katona József Theatre, the most acclaimed drama theatre in Budapest, and then decided to found his own independent company, where he could fully develop his specific form of theatre.'¹³

In 2010, the right-wing conservative party in Hungary, FIDESZ, won a two-thirds majority in parliament and Viktor Orbán assumed the office of Minister President for the second time. A year later he oversaw the adoption of a new constitution which called for a reaffirmation of national values. Since then, the freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary (among other things) have been restricted.

The new regulations have had dramatic effects on public cultural life, and thus on the theatres in Hungary.¹⁴ The government's personnel policy is an important instrument of state control over culture. In state-subsidised institutions, important executive positions are filled for political reasons. Thus, the right-wing actor György Dörner took over as director of the theatre Újszínház in Budapest in February 2012. Róbert Alföldi was removed from his position as artistic director of the national theatre because of 'betrayal of the values and the spirit of the Hungarian nation'. The theatre centre Trafó has also been affected. Its founder and director, György Szabó, was replaced in 2012 by Yvette Bozsik, the so-called 'national choreographer' who is closely linked to the government. Moreover, the cultural policy put the independent theatres under considerable financial pressure, thus robbing them of their flexibility, which is one of the basic premises for their work:

'Whereas the political control over the big repertory theatres is exercised by means of the so-called 'selection process' when filling executive positions [...], the independent scene can be controlled by means of drastic budget cuts which are legitimised by the financial crisis.'¹⁵

In 2012, the government cancelled all subsidies for independent theatres until further notice. The measures are not even directed against individual independent theatre makers but against the entire independent cultural scene. In short, financial support was withdrawn completely. Reports in the media, protests, petitions, demonstrations and public showcases have advocated, and are committed to maintaining, the independent scene in Hungary (so far in vain). Entering into international cooperation or co-productions or dismantling their

14 | For the situation of the independent theatre and cultural scene under the government of Victor Orbán, see Keno Verseck, "Zurück zu Blut und Heimat", *Zeit Online*, see <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-03/ungarn-verfassungsänderung-orban>; Dorte Lena Eilers, "Achtung Kunst!", in *Theater der Zeit* 12 (2012), pp. 18-19; Lena Schneider, "Das beste Land der Welt. Warum es im Ungarn Viktor Orbáns wenig Platz für unabhängiges Theater gibt. Eine Spurensuche", in *Theater der Zeit* 4 (2012), pp. 33-35.

15 | Andrea Trompa, "Gehen oder bleiben? Die darstellenden Künstler der Freien Szene Ungarns sehen sich vor dem Aus und suchen die Öffentlichkeit", in *Theater heute* 1 (2013), pp. 20-22, here p. 21.

groups are the options open to the artists. They work on the basis of projects (if at all) or see themselves forced to leave the country: ‘The result is pretty much that companies are in deep debt, actors are technically unemployed (or decide to work for free), and many times are forced to leave the country – but this time because of economical and not political reasons (at least on the surface).’¹⁶ As in the seventies, independent theatres see themselves in opposition to a political system which poses more and more aesthetic requirements. Whether the independent theatres will survive this precarious situation is uncertain.

In *Poland*, too, the first independent groups appeared at the end of the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties.¹⁷ Unlike Hungary, two directions emerged here which were important for the further development of independent theatre: the *political-artistic* and the *anthropological-artistic* understanding of theatre. Representatives of the *political-artistic* direction continued the student theatre movement of the fifties. In this post-Stalinist time, these included the Studencki Teatr Satyryków (STS) in Warsaw, the Pstrąg Teatr in Łódź, and the group Bim-Bom in Gdańsk. These independent theatres worked as a collective and staged socially critical issues by means of political satire. Their artistic work strongly influenced the sixties and early seventies which were considered the height of political theatre in Poland. Many independent groups were founded. An example of a theatre collective which pursued a political and socially critical approach is the internationally renowned opposition theatre group, Teatr Ósmego Dnia, which was established in Poznań in 1964:

‘Theatre of the Eighth Day, founded in 1964, called by the critics ‘The Rolling Stones of theatre’, is one of the oldest alternative theatres in the world, and it can be still found among the most interesting artistic phenomena. During the times of communism, due to plentiful conflicts with the authorities, the group was perceived as a phenomenon mostly political, it was rare to notice its artistic significance.’¹⁸

16 | Questionnaire Hungary II.

17 | See Berenika Szymanski, *Theatraler Protest und der Weg Polens zu 1989. Zum Aushandeln von Öffentlichkeit im Jahrzehnt der Solidarnosc* (Bielefeld: transcript 2012); Dariusz Kosiński, “Polnisches Theater. Eine Geschichte in Szenen” (Berlin: *Theater der Zeit* 2011); Tadeusz Kornás, *Between Anthropology and Politics. Two strands of Polish Alternative Theatre* (Warschau: The Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute 2007); Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989* (London/New York: Routledge 1996).

18 | Joanna Ostrowska, “The rebellion does not fade, it gets settled...”, in *Teatr Ósmego Dnia*, see <http://osmego.art.pl/t8d/main/en/>.

At this time several groups were founded: the group Akademia Ruchu under the direction of Wojciech Krukowski in Wrocław, the ensemble Scena Plastyczna KUL, led by Leszek Mądzik, the Teatr Provisorium in Lublin, and the Teatr Kana in Szczecin. At the end of the seventies, many of the stages named were institutionalised by permanent state funding. The strict separation of independent theatre and established theatres was gradually dissolved. It is still difficult to make a sharp distinction between the two forms of theatre: 'The formal borders between the repertoire theatre and alternative movement are blurred.'¹⁹

The impulses for the *anthropological-artistic* understanding of the theatre came from the two most important representatives of the Polish theatre avant-garde: Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski.²⁰ Kantor founded the Teatre Cricot 2 in Krakow in 1955. Together with Ludwik Flaszen, Grotowski took over the Teatr 13 Rzędów in Opole (known since 1962 as Teatr Laboratorium 13 Rzędów), with which he moved to Wrocław in 1965. There the theatre was officially awarded the status of a 'Research Institute for Acting Methods'. Kantor and Grotowski not only influenced theatre in Poland, but theatre throughout Europe and in the USA. Grotowski's programmatic essay 'Towards a Poor Theatre' was especially influential. In Gardzienice, a village close to Lublin, Włodzimierz Staniewski founded the Centre for Anthropological Theatre Research and Theatre Practice, Ośrodek Praktyk teatralnych Gardzienice, after having worked with Grotowski in 1977. Inspired by the working methods of Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium, the Centre Gardzienice concentrated on the anthropological basics of acting. However, it distanced itself from Grotowski's later theatre experiments, which were further removed from performance practice and which were staged in rural areas as so-called 'special projects':

'They tried to re-create the original bond between actors and audience which exists in primitive ritual, and thus to create a more profound sense of community between them. They worked in rural parts of Poland carrying on 'active culture' but not with specially

19 | Instytut Polski, Polish Theatre/Dance, see <http://www.polishinstitute.org.il/en/polish-culture/theater-dance/33-polish-theatre-of-the-21st-century.html>.

20 | For the artistic work of Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor Duzik, see Wojciech Dudzik (ed.), *Theater-Bewusstsein. Polnisches Theater in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Ideen – Konzepte – Manifeste*, (Berlin: Lit 2011); Jerzy Grotowski, *Für ein Armes Theater* (Berlin: Alexander 2006 /first 1970); Jan Kłossowicz and Harald Xander, *Tadeusz Kantors Theater* (Tübingen/Basel: Francke 1995); Institut für Moderne Kunst (ed.), *Tadeusz Kantor. Ein Reisender. Seine Texte und seine Manifeste* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst 1988); Manfred Brauneck, *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert. Programmschriften, Stilperioden, Reformmodelle* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1986).

hand-picked participants such as Grotowski used [...] but with simple people, peasants who, for the most part, were unused to 'artists', unfamiliar with 'theatre'.²¹

The Gardzienice achieved international acclaim at the beginning of the eighties thanks to impressive productions such as *Żywot Protopopa Awwakuma* (*The Life of Archpriest Avvakum*). In the nineties, former members of the Gardzienice founded their own independent groups which furthered the artistic work of the centre. Today, the Gardzienice is one of the most famous alternative theatres in Poland.

In 1980, the economic crisis in Poland led to public unrest and strikes. Lech Wałęsa founded the independent trade union 'Solidarność', which '[became] a symbol of the awakening of the forces of reform in the entire Eastern bloc'²². However, revolutionary times did not last long. In 1981, General Jaruzelski imposed martial law in Poland. Strikes were prohibited, intellectuals from the country's opposition were arrested, and the Solidarność was forbidden. The restrictions resulting from the martial law (which lasted until 1983) had a long-term effect on the independent theatres: Grotowski and the group Teatr Ōsmego Dnia left Poland. Kantor worked mainly abroad, and the theatre centre Gardzienice did not produce one single play between 1983 and 1990. Thus, the eighties featured the work of young directors such as Jerzy Jarocki and Jerzy Grzegorzewski, who influenced the Polish theatre and the following generations of theatre makers.

After the political upheaval in 1989, a remarkable number of independent theatre groups emerged despite difficult economic circumstances.²³ These groups were often influenced by Grotowski's theatre or originated from the Centre Gardzienice. Examples are the Studio Teatralne KOŁO, the group SUKA OFF, and the Studium Teatralne, founded by Piotr Borowski in Warsaw in 1995, the group Komuna Otwock near Warsaw, the Teatr Pieśń Kozła in Wrocław, the Teatr ZAR in Wrocław and the Instytut Grotowskiego, which was also situated in Wrocław and which ceased to exist in 2006. Further examples included the group Stowarzyszenie teatralne Chorea in Łódź, the Teatr Węgałty and the theatre school Schola Teatru Węgałty in Węgałty near Olsztyn, the Teatr DADA

21 | Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, p. 206; For the artistic work of Gardzienice, see also Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge, *Hidden territories. The Theatre of Gardzienice* (London/New York: Routledge 2012).

22 | Manfred Brauneck, *Die Welt als Bühne*, p. 723. For the political history of Poland, see Klaus Ziemer, *Das politische System Polens* (Wiesbaden: Springer 2013); Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck 2010).

23 | For the development of the theatre scene in Poland after 1989, see, for example, Tomasz Plata (ed.), *Öffentliche Strategien, private Strategien. Das polnische Theater 1990-2005*, TdZ Recherchen 32 (Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2006).

in Gdańsk which was founded by Leszek Bzdyl and Katarzyna Chmielewska, the theatre research centre Ośrodek Pogranicze – Sztuk, Kultur, Narodów in Sejny in the northeast of Poland on the Lithuanian border and the Teatr Cinema in Michałowice (Piechowice), a small town in Lower Silesia. The independent theatre scene was particularly active in Poznań in the nineties. Following the *political-artistic* movement of the independent theatres in the seventies, the Teatr Biuro Podróży, the Teatr Strefa Cisy, the group Porywacze Ciał and the Teatr Usta Usta Republika were all founded at approximately the same time. They all still exist and are among the most prominent representatives of the Polish independent theatre scene.

In the nineties, the director and set designer Krystian Lupa had a particularly strong influence on independent theatre in Poland. He understood the theatre as a philosophical-metaphysical experiential space, and he primarily gained recognition because of his adaptations of epic literary works for the stage. He gained international recognition, for example, thanks to his adaptations of *The Brothers Karamasov* by Dostojewski (1990) and *The Man without Qualities* by Robert Musil (1990). Lupa is frequently referred to as the ‘master’ of the Polish theatre in early post-communist times:

‘Lupa opened up a completely new kind of theatre; he caused new strings in our sensitivity for the theatre to vibrate. He allowed himself the luxury of turning his back on politics and the all-powerful journalism, allowed the second circulation [the unofficial circulation of texts or music recordings, author’s note A.H.] and the censorship to be forgotten and made it possible for the audience to concern itself with the really important things, like the meaning of our existence which one could easily lose sight of in the tumult of events far-removed from these essential issues.’²⁴

Lupa also worked as a lecturer at the Krakow’s State Theatre School. There he influenced at least two generations of young directors, such as Krzysztof Warlikowski, Grzegorz Jaryzna, Anna Augustynowicz, Piotre Cieplak, Zbigniew Brzoza and Paweł Miśkiewicz. Known as the ‘young talents’, they were the main representatives of the Polish independent theatres after the turn of the millennium. They have attained recognition beyond the national borders, which is verified by their many guest performances and invitations to festivals abroad. Furthermore, a new generation of independent groups, such as 52°43’N19°42’E Project, Koncentrat, Towarzystwo Prze-Twórcze and Teatr Bretoncaffe, established themselves in Warsaw in the middle and towards the end of the past

24 | Piotr Gruszczyński, as quoted in Tomasz Plata, “Persönliche Verpflichtungen”, see above (ed.), *Öffentliche Strategien, private Strategien*, pp. 202-219, here p. 205. See also Uta Schorlemmer, *Die Magie der Annäherung und das Geheimnis der Distanz. Krystian Lupa’s Recherche “neuer Mythen” im Theater* (München: Sagner 2003).

decade. In 2007, the transmedial internet theatre NeTTTheatre was founded in Lublin. Moreover, young theatre makers such as Jan Klata, Marta Górnicka, Maja Kleczewska, Łukasz Kos, Paweł Miśkiewicz, Agnieszka Olsten, Michał Walczak, Aldona Figura, Michał Borczuch and Michał Zadara also made a name for themselves. These groups and artists influence the independent theatre in Poland today. The theatre critic Łukasz Drewniak points out several things which these theatre makers have in common: their 'provocative political incorrectness' as well as their manner of working, in which they concern themselves on the theatre stage with the 'generation of the thirty-year-olds' and develop 'sociological descriptions of Polish reality'.²⁵

As in Hungary and Poland, the first phase of establishing independent theatres in the former *Czechoslovakia* began in the late fifties and in the sixties.²⁶ Experimental theatres especially emerged in Prague, such as the *Laterna Magica*, *Divadlo za branou* and *Divadlo Na zábradlí*. The groups invoked the Czech theatre avant-garde of the twenties and dealt with sociopolitical subjects critically on stage despite censorship and political repression.

From 1989 to 1990, the theatres in Czechoslovakia participated in the political upheaval known as the 'Velvet or Gentle Revolution' by means of their 'persistent criticism of the regime and the system'²⁷. In 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully dissolved, with its constituent states becoming the independent states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Nevertheless, as was the case in the other post-socialist states after the political turbulence, drastic changes took place in the field of culture. On the one hand, theatres such as the *Divadlo za branou* were forced to shut down and prominent theatre makers left the country. These included Pavol Liska, who, together with Kelly Copper, founded the group *Nature Theatre of Oklahoma* in New York in 1995. On the other hand, the political upheaval gave way to artistic liberties, as was the case in the other post-socialist countries:

25 | All quotations from Łukasz Drewniak, "Der Tsunami der Jugend", in Tomasz Plata (ed.), *Öffentliche Strategien, private Strategien*, pp. 95-113, here p. 99. On present-day independent groups see also Aleksandra Rembowska, "Auf der Suche nach Gegenwart. Neue Regiehandschriften aus Polen", in *Theater der Zeit* 4 (2005), pp. 24-27.

26 | For the development of the theatre scene in the Czech Republic, see also the questionnaire Czech Republic dated 2 November 2012; Jakub Škorpiš, "Country Report Czech Republic", in *EEPAP*, pp. 147-158; Arts and Theatre Institute, *Czech Theatre Guide* (Prague: Arts and Theatre Institute 2011).

27 | Manfred Brauneck, *Die Welt als Bühne*, p. 719. For the history of the Czech Republic see Markus Mauritz, *Tschechien* (Regensburg: Pustet 2002).

'It brought freedom of expression to theatres. Banned authors could be performed, sidelined artists and emigrants could return, and theatres [...] began freely to create their new era.'²⁸

In the nineties, more young theatre makers established themselves. Among them were Petr Lébl, who was known as 'the most dynamic director'²⁹ in the independent theatre scene in the Czech Republic of that time. Jan Antonín Pitínský, Hana Burešová, Vladimír Morávek, Jan Borna, Michal Dočekal, Jan Nebeský and Jakub Špalek also ranked among the well-known directors. They had already worked in small studio theatres in the eighties and had developed new forms of the Czech theatre. Some of these artists opened their own small theatres in the middle of the nineties; others took over the management of institutionalised theatres. Thus, Petr Lébl moved on to become the director of the theatre Divadlo Na zábradlí in Prague in 1993. The directors Hana Burešová and Jan Borna became directors of the theatre Divadlo v Dlouhé in Prague in 1996; the actor and director Michal Dočekal managed the theatre Divadlo Komedie from 1994 to 2002 and as of 2002 was in charge of the theatre Národní divadlo; the theatre and film director Vladimír Morávek worked at the theatre Divadlo Husa na provázku in Brno from 1898 to 1995 and as of 1995 was artistic director at the theatre Klicperovo divadlo in Hradec Králové. The following generation of independent theatre professionals in the decade of the 2000s differed from them as is described here:

'Here, there is a greater tendency to found independent companies whose members share the same generational background and outlook. These companies often work with the poetics of various (intertwining) theatre genres, most of them emerge from the field of movement and dance theatre, but they also appear in the areas of drama, puppet and even opera and musical theatre.'³⁰

After the turn of the millennium, young artists in their mid-thirties primarily influenced the independent spoken theatre. They included Dušan Pařízek, Jan Mikulášek, Daniel Špinar, Jiří Havelka, Jiří Adámek, Martin Kukučka, Lukáš Trpišovský and Rosta Novák. At the same time, a style typified by the New Circus Theatre emerged which is characteristic of the independent scene in the Czech Republic. The Czech theatre had always drawn on circus arts and circus aesthetics as a source for its work. This was already evident in the artistic works of theatre avant-gardists, such as Jiří Frejka, Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich from the 1920s. The New Circus Theatre now combined circus practices and theatre

28 | Questionnaire Czech Republic.

29 | Ibid.

30 | Ibid.

work: 'Czech new circus is not so much based on circus technique as it is on theatre, on a story, on a theme.'³¹ In particular, the touring companies Divadlo bratří Formanů and the theatres Divadlo Continuo in Malovice and Divadlo Krepsko in Prague worked with the artistic elements of the New Circus Theatre:

'While in traditional circus the artist only stands for himself or herself, the theatre quality of new circus is based on the artist's ability to enact a character, to represent a story, an idea on stage – in front of the audience. The artistic character of new circus is based on the individual's creative potential. The performing artist is the bearer of meaning, the intermediary of communication: it is not the case with the traditional circus performer who is not an actor and who never doubles his or her identity.'³²

What is more, at the beginning of the new millennium a growing cooperation between independent and institutional theatres becomes apparent. Several groups of artists worked simultaneously or alternately on their independent productions at state-subsidised theatres. This overlapping can frequently still be observed. The independent groups and artists are, above all, active in so-called 'stagione venues': in theatres, associations and clubs which are not used permanently but, like production houses for theatre, as occasional venues. Such locations in Prague include Divadlo Archa, Meet Factory, Palác Akropolis, Experimentální prostor NoD Roxy, Alfred ve dvoře, La Fabrika and Divadlo Ponec. Outside of Prague, these include the theatre Divadlo Konvikt in Olomouc, the venue Club 29 in Pardubice, and the two venues Skleněná louka and Multikulturní centrum Stádec in Brno.

The independent theatre scene in the Czech Republic is characterised by a particularly wide diversity, and not only because of its use of different locations and premises. The artistic working methods are also broadly based. Thus, for instance, Jiří Adámek's group Boca Loca Lab deals with socially critical issues and, in the process, collages the (text) language with musical sounds and song in its artistic productions. The group Handa Gote Research & Development combines installation elements with movement and dance theatre as well as with electronic sounds and live music. The group SKUTR and the Spitfire Company both work on stage with the elements of puppetry, buffoonery, and acrobatics, as well as with text and music. And finally, Miroslav Bambušek relates historical and socio-political themes to each other in his location-specific performances and employs practices taken from artistic reenactment. All the groups mentioned share the practices of using different artistic media

31 | "New Circus in the Czech Republic", in *Czech Dance Info*, see <http://www.czechdance.info/dance-in-the-czech-republic/introduction/new-circus-in-the-czech-republic>.

32 | *Ibid.*

on the stage and dealing with social problems from the past and the present: 'Independent theatres are more open to contemporary dramatic texts, the problems of the contemporary world, and documentary and social theatre. They often stage original works instead of classic stage plays.'³³



Figure 1: Pilsen, 2012. Photograph: Andrea Hensel

Many independent theatres have taken this course, the most famous groups among them being *mamapapa*, *Divadlo Vosto5* and *Barevný děti* in Prague, *Bílé divadlo* in Ostrava, *Divadlo Continuo* in Malovice, *Divadlo DNO* in Hradec Králové and *Divadlo Facka* in Brno.³⁴

In the past 20 years, many organisations with an influence on cultural and educational policies have come together to support the independent theatres in the Czech Republic. These include *Jedefrau*, *mamapapa*, the cultural centre

33 | Questionnaire Czech Republic.

34 | Other well-known independent groups in the Czech Republic are *Cirk La Putyka*, *Bohinská divadelní společnost*, *Décalages – divadlo v pohybu*, *Depresivní děti touží po penězích*, *Divadlo Mimotaurus*, *Farma v jeskyni*, *Damúza Studio*, *Stage Code* and *Veselé skoky* in Prague; in Brno the *Buranteatr*, *Divadlo Anička a letadýlko* and *Divadlo Neslýším*; in Brník *Divadlo Skelp* and in České Budějovice *Divadlo Kvelb*.

Johan – centrum pro kulturní a sociální projekty, Art Prometheus, Econnect, MOTUS, ProCulture and For a Cultural Czech Republic. All these organisations are based in Prague.

The developments in *Slovakia* followed a course similar to those in the Czech Republic prior to its separation from Czechoslovakia in 1993. One of the first independent theatres, Astorka Korzo, was founded in Bratislava in 1969 at a time when the communist regime was still in power.³⁵ It was closed after three years for political reasons. After Slovakia had been constituted, young directors produced progressive works in the nineties. The artists included Svetozár Sprušanský, Rastislav Ballek and Martin Čičvák. The independent venue Astorka Korzo was reopened and other independent groups were founded, such as S.T.O.K.A and the theatre Divadlo a.ha in Bratislava. Yet, inadequate attempts at reform led to precarious circumstances in the field of culture. One of the consequences was the fact that a sharp distinction was made between established theatres and independent theatre groups – a distinction which still exists.

Under Minister President Vladimír Mečiar Slovak, nationalism was strengthened in 1994. Culture, and with it the theatre, suffered once again as a result of political instrumentalisation and state regimentation. The activities of the independent theatres virtually came to a standstill. After a change of government in 1998, the necessary cultural reforms that had been hoped for did not materialise; working conditions at the theatres continued to worsen. However, the independent theatres went on working in the years that followed despite the adverse circumstances. They entered into international collaborations, and new independent groups emerged, among them the collectives Divadlo SkRAT and Moje experimentálne divadlo (MED) in Bratislava, which are internationally known today.

Not until 2004, the year in which Slovakia joined the EU, did the country introduce the first reforms in the area of culture. Such cultural reforms are only being put into practice very slowly, but a large number of independent groups and theatres already exist. These include the theatre Radošinské naivné divadlo in Bratislava, the in Nitra as well as the group J.A.eV in Žilina, and the theatre Divadlo z Pasáže in Banská Bystrica. A special feature of the independent theatres in Slovakia is that they largely work as a collective. They

35 | For the development of the theatre scene in Slovakia, see the questionnaires Slovakia I and II from 22 November 2012 and from 29 October 2012; Vladislava Fekete, “Country Report Slovakia”, in *EEPAP*, pp. 277-286; Johannes C. Hoflehner, Martina Vanayová and Marianne Vajtisek (eds.), *Durchbrochene Linien. Zeitgenössisches Theater in der Slowakei. TdZ Recherchen* 40 (Berlin: *Theater der Zeit* 2007); Slovak Theatre Institute, Independent Theatres, see <http://www.theatre.sk/en/homepage/>.

usually develop their productions in one rehearsal process in which every actor becomes a co-author of the production. Noteworthy is also the frequent use of music as an important dramaturgical element in productions. Groups such as Divadlo SkRAT, which integrates musical collages on stage and experiments with transmedial elements, and the theatre GUnaGU exemplify this manner of working. In 1985, the latter was founded in Bratislava and remains one of the 'most successful and most popular Slovak theatres'³⁶ to this day.

The independent groups and venues Štúdio L & S, Divadlo Non.Garde, Tanečné divadlo Bralen and Slovenské divadlo tanca, s.r.o., which are all located in Bratislava, also play an important role.³⁷ However, independent theatre groups are also active in other cities in Slovakia.

'Independent theatre in Slovakia is definitely the most progressive movement in the Slovak theatrical culture at all. They were the first who reflected new tendencies and forms of theatrical expression they often win prizes in Slovakia and are well accepted abroad.'³⁸

The independent theatres in Slovakia have undergone a remarkable development in the past years and still play an important role in the Slovak theatre scene.

The independent theatres in *Romania* can be described in the words of a Romanian theatre maker as 'strong, bold, free, new, fresh, unconventional, open in dealing with all kinds of issues or even taboos'³⁹. Yet, their history

36 | Juraj Šebesta, "Erfolgsgeschichte mit Hindernissen", in Johannes C. Hoflehner, Martina Vannayová and Marianne Vejtisek (eds.), *Durchbrochene Linien*, pp. 42-58, here p. 47.

37 | Other groups are in Bratislava Teatro Wüstenrot, Asociácia súčasného tanca, Tanečná spoločnosť Artyci, P.A.T., ElleDanse, Arteatro, Biele divadlo, Prešporské divadlo, TANGERE Productions and Divadlo Meteorit; in Košice Staromestské divadlo, Divadlo V kufri, Divadlo Na peróne and Divadlo Maškrtá; in Budmerice Teátro Neline; in Pezinok Divadlo PIKI; in Bátorce Divadlo Pôtoň; in Žilina Phenomenon Theatre; in Trnava Túlavé divadlo and Divadelné štúdio DISK Trnava; in Prešov Detské kočovné divadlo DRaK and Portál-komorné divadlo bez opony; in Senica Divadlo oProti; in Svätý Jur Divadlo Na kolesách.

38 | Questionnaire Slovakia II.

39 | Questionnaire Romania I of 4 September 2012. On the development of the Romanian theatre scene see also the questionnaires Romania II and III of 4 October 2012 and 29 October 2012; Julia Popovici, "Country Report Romania", in *EEPAP*, pp. 241-262; Wolf Lamsa, "Transformation und Neubestimmung im Theateruniversum Rumänien. Das rumänische Theater nach 1989", in *gift - zeitschrift für freies theater* 2 (2012), see http://www.freiethheater.at/?page=service&subpage=gift&detail=48918&id_text=16; Mari-

differs from the scenarios in the other former socialist people's republics already described here. Whereas in Hungary, Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, free groups were founded under the communist regimes, this was not the case in Romania. The repression under the authoritarian rule of Ceaușescu and his brutal secret police, Securitate, was too strong.⁴⁰

After the country had collapsed economically, a bloody revolution erupted in November 1989 which took a toll of over 1000 deaths and, in the end, succeeded in overthrowing the communist regime. After decades of dictatorship, mismanagement, oppression and isolation, economic changes progressed slowly in the nineties. Even the restructuring of the theatres proved to be a slow process because of the lack of subsidies and reforms:

'The revolution pretty much changed the whole system and deeply affected the theatrical landscape [...]. In short (and maybe a little overly dramatic, but just a little) soon after communism theatre was left with hundreds of jobless actors, not enough spectators and very few to no playwrights (the ones who had worked all their creative life in the communist system, so it was almost impossible to change). It was more and more obvious that theatre needed to change something in order to survive, but it took years before the first change appeared.'⁴¹

The return of directors who had left the country during the Ceaușescu era marked the beginning of a real change. Theatre makers such as Andrei Șerban, Vlad Mugur and Lucian Giurchescu were 'important reformers from the outside'⁴². They took over the direction of institutional theatres in Bukarest at the beginning of the nineties and encouraged young theatre performers to work experimentally by staging progressive productions. They also strengthened

na Mazilu, Marina, Medana Weident and Irina Wolf (eds.): *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989* (Berlin: Frank & Timme 2011); Ileana Pintilie, "Romanian Artists before and after 1989", *Maska 4* (2006), pp. 122-124.

40 | For the history of Romania see also Thede Kahl (ed.): *Kilometer Null – politische Transformation und gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen in Rumänien seit 1989* (Berlin: Frank & Timme 2011); Kurt Scharr, *Rumänien – Geschichte und Geografie* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 2008); Karl Thede (ed.) *Rumänien. Raum und Bevölkerung, Geschichte und Geschichtsbilder, Kultur, Gesellschaft und Politik heute, Wirtschaft, Recht und Verfassung, historische Regionen* (Wien/Berlin/Münster: Lit 2006); Lucian Boia, *Geschichte und Mythos. Über die Gegenwart des Vergangenen in der rumänischen Gesellschaft* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 2003).

41 | Questionnaire Romania III.

42 | Cristina Modreanu, "Wir haben geniale Ideen, wissen aber nicht, was wir damit anfangen sollen", in Marina Mazilu, Medana Weident and Irina Wolf (eds.), *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989*, pp. 51-58, here p. 51.

the work of the first independent groups and stages in Romania. The nineties marked the beginning of the Teatrul Levantul in Bukarest, which closed in the same year, and the Teatrul ACT, which today is still used under the name Bukarest 'cellar theatre' by independent groups. However, the development of the independent theatre progressed slowly. Because of the precarious circumstances which massively inhibited the work of the independent groups, the Romanian independent scene established itself much later than those other independent theatre scenes already described here. Not until the beginning of the new millennium did the emergence of the independent groups DramAcum and TangaProject in Bukarest mark the beginning of independent theatre in Romania: 'Independent theatre means a new generation of artists who graduated after 1989.'⁴³ The young directors and theatre makers who now appeared on the scene and who have achieved international recognition today include personalities such as Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Apostol, Alex Berceanu, Andreea Vălean, Miruna Dinu, Bogdan Georgescu, Vera Ion, Ioana Păun, David Schwartz, Ana Margineanu and Radu Afrim.

All of these artists focused their work on social issues. 'In artistic terms, the most interesting aspects are connected to the emergence of community art, socially committed theatre, political theatre, documentary theatre and site-specific theatre.'⁴⁴ This understanding of theatre was pursued by the groups and organisations which emerged in the following years, such as Figura Association in Gheorgheni, Dramafest Foundation in Tîrgu Mureş, The Magic Theatre in Râmnicu Vâlcea, the groups Auăleu Garage, Courtyard Theatre and At4t Association in Timișoara and The Offensive of Generosity (O2G), Theatre without borders, 4Culture Association, Collectiva, Passe-Partout Company and D'AYA Company in Bukarest.

Despite their numbers, the independent theatres in Romania have neither their own stages nor rehearsal rooms. The only exceptions are the Teatrul ACT and Teatrul ARCA in the La Scena Club in Bukarest and the theatres Teatrul 74 und Studio Yorick in Tîrgu Mureş. The drastic lack of space resulted in groups staging their productions in 'everyday places' and in alternative locations, such as bars, galleries, cafés and factories. In Bukarest, such locations used by independent theatre groups for performances include Monday Theatre @ Bar Green Hours, Montage Gallery, Godot Café Teatru and Fabrica.

The political development of *Bulgaria* differs from that of the countries described previously:⁴⁵

43 | Questionnaire Romania I.

44 | Julia Popovici: "Country Report Romania", p. 243.

45 | For the history of Bulgaria see also Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, *Bulgarien von Ost nach West. Zeitgeschichte ab 1939* (Wien: Braumüller 2009); Georgi P. Dimitrov,

'One should not apply the same standards to Bulgaria as to the other Eastern bloc countries – in our case, after the Soviet model was introduced after 1944, there were never any attempts to overthrow the system. In Bulgaria there were never any forces which could have developed such dynamics like those observed in the Czech Republic, Hungary or Poland.'⁴⁶

Under communist rule, the Bulgarian theatre was not a critical institution. Immediately after the end of communism, many independent theatres emerged. A prominent example is the state-subsidised theatre workshop *Sfumato* established in 1989 by Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobčev. It is still an important meeting point for independent groups and artists. In the first years after the revolution, the following groups emerged: *La Strada*, founded by Tedi Moskov, the collective *Credo* founded by Nina Dimitrova and Vasil Vsilev-Zueka, the *Triumviratus Art Group* founded by Javor Gardev, Georgi Tnev and Nikola Toromanov, and *Krasen Krăstev's Aramant Dance Studio*. All of the groups were located in Sofia. In addition, independent directors such as Ivan Pantelev, Desislava Špatova, Valerija Vălčeva, Marius Kurkinski, Galina Borissova and Văzkresija Vihărova made a name for themselves. These theatre makers experimented with new ways of working and new dramatic compositions. In doing so, they laid the cornerstone for the development of the independent theatres in Bulgaria: 'The nineties of the past century were the strongest, the most diverse and the most creative period in contemporary Bulgarian theatre.'⁴⁷

In 1997, the worsening economic situation caused the most dramatic national and financial crisis the country had ever experienced. The first signs of a hyperinflation led to mass demonstrations. The government was finally forced to resign. Independent theatres had virtually disappeared. Despite this difficult starting situation, many independent groups were founded at the beginning of the new millennium, and they have been generating trend-setting impulses for the independent theatre scene in Bulgaria to this day. The productions of these collectives focus on a critical view of everyday life in Bulgaria. A great diversity of artistic directions is displayed here, 'from psychological theatre which is based on a text, to performances in which the text is developed by the actors or dancers

Kultur im Transformationsprozess Osteuropas. Zum Wandel kultureller Institutionen am Beispiel Bulgariens nach 1989 (München/Berlin: Otto Sagner 2009).

46 | Javor Gardev, quoted in "Das Ende der Ideologie. Neue Regieansätze für eine neue Zeit". An interview with Javor Gardev and Georgi Tnev of the *Triumviratus Art Group*, in Dorte Lena Eilers, Anna Volkland and Holger Schultze (eds.), *Die neue Freiheit*, pp. 74-83, here p. 77. For the development of the theatre scene in Bulgaria, see also Kalina Wagenstein, "Country Report Bulgaria", in *EEPAP*, pp. 111-124.

47 | Nikolova, Kamelija, "Der Aufstand der verspäteten Modernisten" in Dorte Lena Eilers, Anna Volkland and Holger Schultze (eds.), *Die neue Freiheit*, pp. 54-62, here p. 59.

themselves, from body arts to performance installations⁴⁸. The most important groups today include the Brain Store Project, 36 Monkeys, the Derida Dance Centre, the group B+, the Garage Collective, the MOMO Theatre Company and the DUNE Dance Company. They are all located in Sofia. An important role for independent theatres in Bulgaria has been assumed by theatre makers, such as Gergana Dimitrova, Mladen Aleksiev, Veselin Dimov, Galina Borissova, Violeta Vitanova, Stanislav Genadiev, Vasilena Radeva, Alexander Georgiev, Dimitar Dimitrov, Martin Vangelov, Petar Todorov and Ida Daniel. It is also important to mention the cultural and political ACT-Organisation, which was established in 2009. It evolved from an association of independent artists who stood up for and supported the independent scene. The working conditions of independent groups are, however, difficult. The financial and artistic gap between the institutional theatres and the independent artists is constantly widening. Rehearsal rooms and stages are not available for independent theatre projects. The production and performance venues of the independent theatre scene in Sofia at this time primarily include art rooms and everyday places such as the Red House – Centre for Culture and Debate, the former swimming pool Poduene, the exhibition room for contemporary art and performance known as The Fridge, the gallery, Industrialna 11, the Pro Rodopi Arts Centre and the Sklada gallery.

2.2 Post-Yugoslavian States

Independent theatre groups in Serbia were first founded in the fifties.⁴⁹ They usually understood theatre as a political medium. A typical representative of these early groups is the avant-garde theatre Atelje 212, which was established in Belgrade in 1956. It worked with censored artistic theatre practices and staged plays which were forbidden, especially plays of the Absurd Theatre. Also noteworthy is the group KPGT,⁵⁰ which emerged at the end of the seventies under the direction of four theatre makers from different Yugoslav republics: Ljubiša Ristić from Serbia, Dušan Jovanović from Slovenia, and Nada Kokotović and Rade Šerbedžija from Croatia. The name of this group, which still exists today, is composed of the first letters of the Croatian, Bosnian, Slovenian and

48 | Desislava Gavrilova, “Ausschwärmen und Ausweiten des Feldes”, in Dorte Lena Eilers, Anna Volkland and Holger Schultze (eds.), *Die neue Freiheit*, pp. 90-97, here p. 94.

49 | For the development of the theatre in Serbia, see the questionnaires Serbia I and II from 29 September 2012 and 5 September 2012; Andjekla Jankovic, “Country Report Serbia”, in *EEPAP*, pp. 263-276; Jadranka Andjelic, “Country Report Serbia”, in *IGFreie Theaterarbeit*, see http://www.freiethater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#13.

50 | KPGT, see <http://www.kpgtyu.org/>.

Serbian words for 'theatre': kazalište, pozorište, gledališče and teatar. The collective is frequently involved in international projects which have to do with social grievances. This understanding of theatre is also followed by the Teatar Mimart. It was founded by Nela Antonović in Belgrade in 1984 as a nonverbal physical theatre and is today among the most famous independent theatres in Serbia:

'Mimart researches the answers to many axiom questions close to the facts of life, especially in Serbia which had witnessed cultural destruction for the past years. We hold that art educators need to work towards establishing more progressive, non-repressive and non-manipulative ways of interpreting other cultures and other arts. We wish to implant the power of a non-verbal and interactive art process into intercultural communication.'⁵¹

The wars in the nineties, the destruction of the infrastructure, the economic crises, the ethnic-cultural conflicts, and the international isolation of the country had a strong impact on the situation of the independent theatres in Serbia.⁵² Many artists left the country, among them the prominent performance artist Marina Abramović. Subsidies were hardly available to finance even state institutions. Furthermore, they were under pressure to deal with and justify the civil wars in their artistic work. It was practically impossible for independent groups and artists to work. Nevertheless, in the nineties, independent theatre groups were established. One of these was the DAH Teatar – Centar za pozorišna istraživanja in Belgrade, which was founded by Jadranka Anđelić and Dijana Milošević in 1991. The productions of Jagoš Marković and Gorčin Stojanović attracted much attention. The groups and artists dealt critically with the wars waged by their country on stage; they belonged to the artistic opposition in Serbia. They encouraged the creation of further independent theatre collectives which were founded in the middle of the nineties. Even these new groups understood their theatre work in a political sense, such as the groups Ister Teatar, company INTRA for contemporary dance, which was initiated by Dalija Aćin, the group Ad Hoc Lom, the ERGstatus plesni Teatar, the theatre laboratorium Plavo pozorište, the OMEN Teatar, the SVAN Teatar, the Splin Teatar (formerly Popocatepetl), the venue Pozorište Ogledalo and the group Kraft Teatar. All of these groups were located in Belgrade. They laid the cornerstone for the independent theatre scene in Serbia and today are well-known independent theatres. In recent years, young directors such as Bojan

51 | Questionnaire Serbia I.

52 | For the history of Serbia, see also Holm Sundhussen, *Geschichte Serbiens 19.-21. Jahrhundert* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 2007); Katrin Boeckh, *Serbien, Montenegro. Geschichte und Gegenwart* (München: Pustet 2002).

Dorđev, Kinga Mezei and Miloš Lolić established themselves in the scene. The artistic work of the dramatists Maja Pelević and Milan Marković is receiving more and more attention on the local scene as well as internationally.⁵³



Figure 2: Belgrade, 2012. Photograph: Andrea Hensel

The independent theatres in Serbia receive support from cultural organisations as well as networks and platforms dealing with cultural policies which, in part, had already been founded in the nineties. These are active in cultural policy-making and are strongly committed to providing support for the independent theatre scene. These organisations include the cultural centres, REX Cultural Center, Dom Omladine and CZKD (Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju), the association for contemporary dance called Stanica and the association for independent theatre, NKSS, which was founded in 2011, all of which are located in Belgrade.

Two trends have been evident in the work of the independent theatres in Serbia for some time. The first is the increasing theoretical reflection of their own artistic practice, best exemplified by the theoretical-aesthetic platform Walking Theory, which was created in 2000:

53 | In addition, the following independent organisations and groups were founded: BAZAART, DEZ.ORG, MUDRA Teatar and Corpus Artisticum, the DDT kreativni centar za pokret, the Teatar Projekat Objektivna Drama, the Kolektiv SubHuman Teatar, the PoToP (Deluge) Teatar and the SET-Studio, all of which are located in Belgrade. For other groups and artists, see TkH Forum for Performing Arts Critique: RASTER.

'TkH (Walking Theory) is an independent (institutionally non-aligned, extra-academic) platform for performing theoretical-artistic activism. It is initiated and run by the editorial collective TkH whose members are theorists and artists coming from performance theory and practice, theatre, cinema, and visual arts.'⁵⁴

The second trend is the ever-growing importance of dance and performance theatre. Important impulses were provided by the group Mimart in the eighties. Now, young choreographers, performers and groups who primarily experiment with body practices are establishing themselves.

In Slovenia, the centre Križanke, in the capital Ljubljana, is the focus of the independent theatre scene.⁵⁵ It is one of the most popular cultural venues in the country. It was built in the 13th century as a monastery for the Knights of the Cross, and later the architect Jože Plečnik rebuilt the ruins at the beginning of the fifties to accommodate the Festival Ljubljana. Since that time, the location has housed an open-air stage and a restored knight's hall (Viteška dvorana), which is used as a venue for experimental theatre. Since the middle of the fifties, independent theatres have performed there: in the early years, Balbina Battelino Baranovič's ensemble Eksperimentalno gledališče, the group Oder 57, Gledališče Ad Hoc, headed by Draga Ahačič, and the children's and young people's theatre, Mladinsko gledališče, which was also newly founded by Balbina Battelino Baranovič and which achieved international recognition in the eighties under the name Slovensko mladinsko gledališče. The groups orient themselves toward non-socialist ideas of theatre:

'As an opposition to the repertoire-driven, soc-realist, traditional theatre of consensus, the experimental theatre consciously staged contemporary, existentialist and absurdist drama, including contemporary politically engaged Slovene plays, and also revolutioni-

54 | Walking Theory, see <http://www.tkh-generator.net/>. For the trends described, see also TkH Forum for Performing Arts Critique, *RASTER – Yearbook of the Independent Performing Arts Scene in Serbia*, Belgrade, *TkH Centre for Performing Arts Theory and Practice* 2009; Miško Šuvaković, "Theoretical Performance", *Maska 1* (2005), pp. 67-72.

55 | For the development of the theatre scene in Slovenia, see the questionnaires Slovenia I and II from 3 November 2012 and 5 October 2012; Tomaž Toporišič, "Country Report Slovenia", in *EEPAP*, pp. 289-294; National Theatre Museum of Slovenia (ed.): *Occupying Spaces. Experimental Theatre in Central Europe 1950-2010* (Ljubljana: National Theatre Museum of Slovenia 2010); Culture from Slovenia worldwide, see <http://www.culture.si/en/Category:Theatre>.

sed the stage in the sense of Artaud and re-theatralisation. This new theatre did not call itself political but experimental, exploratory.⁵⁶

The neo-avant-garde performance group Gledališče Pupilije Ferkeverk gained great importance. It was founded at the end of the sixties in Ljubljana. It was not only comprised of professional theatre makers, but included lay performers in its ranks. The collective moved away from literary sources and focused on the relationship between the audience and the actors. Following the movement of the Second Theatre Avant-garde in the sixties and seventies, it hoped to spiritually overcome borders and achieve a(n) (personal) awareness for both actors and audience by means of an anthropological-theatrical process. Tomaž Kralj, one of the founders of the group, commented:

‘[I]n our group, the presentation of a text is not the main rule and performances are realised directly through theatrical visualisation which is devoted to theatre and not literature. The final form and consequence of a theatrical situation are not predictable or known in advance; when a situation is theatrically visualised, the simple and the total emerge. The author becomes researcher of his own theatre and research unfolds in practice.’⁵⁷

The group Gledališče Pekarna played an important role among the independent theatres at this time. Lado Kralj, who participated in the independent group Eksperimentalno gledališče Glej at the same time, founded the group in 1972. The concept of the group was based on an intensive occupation with ritual practices in theatre work. The ensemble broke up in 1978.

The independent theatre Eksperimentalno gledališče Glej, mentioned earlier, was founded in Ljubljana by the director and dramatist Dušan Jovanović together with Lado Kralj, Zvone Šedlbauer and others in 1970. It is the oldest non-institutional theatre in Slovenia which until today has had its own permanent venue. The artistic directors – Janez Pipan, Eduard Miler, Nevenka Koprivšek, Matjaž Pograjc, Bojan Jablanovec, Tomi Janežič, Sebastijan Horvat, Diego DeBrea, Jure Novak, Marko (Mare) Bulc and, at this time, Marko Bratuš – still have a strong influence on Slovenian independent theatre. The theatre offers independent theatre makers in Slovenia good conditions for their artistic work. Thus, the theatre is an important venue in the country in which independent

56 | Tomaž Toporišič, “Spatial Machines and Slovene (No Longer-)Experimental Theatre in the Second Half of the 20th Century”, in National Theatre Museum of Slovenia (ed.), *Occupying Spaces*, pp. 418-468, here p. 423.

57 | Tomaž Kralj, quoted in Tomaž Toporišič, “Spatial Machines and Slovene (No Longer-)Experimental Theatre in the Second Half of the 20th Century”, p. 431.

groups can experiment with new methods of working and themes, as former director Marko Bulc describes here:

'Glej always was a new contemporary, a young theatre. It is for directors, who want to get the space in Glej, who want to work in complete freedom, who want to have a lot of free space and some extra production money to do what they want. Glej is not so much focused on the product in the end but mostly we try to focus to think about the process much more than their results. We do also a lot of work-in-progress situations. Mistakes are allowed. [...] We are trying to be a space for new ways of theatre, a space to explore the borders to the media and a space to find interesting stuff.'⁵⁸

Another important venue for independent groups is the theatre Mladinsko gledališče in Ljubljana. Balbina Battelino Baranovič created the first professional children's and young people's theatre here in 1955. In 1978, Dušan Jovanović took over the direction of the theatre and turned the Slovensko mladinsko gledališče, as it was then called, into an internationally recognised stage. Prominent theatre makers such as Ljubiša Ristić, Vito Taufer, Dragan Živadinov, Janez Pipan, Eduard Miler and Tomaž Pandur worked there. In the eighties, they were the most important representatives of Slovenian experimental theatre, and they had a strong influence on independent groups and artists in the country. Today's concept of the Slovensko mladinsko gledališče is described as follows:

'Today, it [the Theatre Slovensko mladinsko gledališče, author's note A. H.] is known for a wide range of innovative poetics of various young directors and the phenomenon of 'ensemble energy' – the [Peter, author's note A. H.] Brook approach, towards acting, which is not based on star hierarchy, but on an acting laboratory connecting individual bravura parts into a strong whole of the acting ensemble. In its performances, the Mladinsko Theatre strives to thematise universal paradoxes of the civilisation, with its programme based on the problematisation of new times and spaces. The Mladinsko Theatre will continue to develop the code of new theatrical practice, new visual paradigms, new views on the classics, modernism and postmodernism. At the Mladinsko Theatre, the actor, director, choreographer, set designer, musician ... all research and develop, risk and create in order to develop a new spectator through their gestures.'⁵⁹

The Slovensko mladinsko gledališče receives state subsidies, has a permanent ensemble and a fixed annual programme. At the same time, it provides a venue for collective performances, alternative dramaturgies and experimental, artistic methods of working.

58 | Author's interview with Marko Bulc on 27 May 2012. For artistic work of the Gledališče Glej, see the theatre's homepage at http://www.culture.si/en/Glej_Theatre.

59 | Slovensko mladinsko gledališče, see <http://en.mladinsko.com/home/>.

In 1984, the movement of the artists' collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) began.⁶⁰ The founder quartette consisted of the industrial band Laibach, the painters' collective IRWIN, the graphic and design studio Novi Kolektivizem, and the experimental theatre group Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice, which later became known as Kozmokinetični kabinet Noordung. The art of NSK is frequently provocative. In its artistic works, the collective often makes use of symbols, signs, images or icons taken from political-historical contexts, such as the totalitarian systems of the 20th century. These are torn from their original context, reassembled and deconstructed. In addition, at the beginning of the nineties, the collective created a virtual NSK state with symbolic IDs, passports, embassies, consulates and, for a time, a fictional currency. According to reports (although they have not been officially substantiated), it was possible for members of the movement to repeatedly cross international borders using the NSK passport. Because of this critical approach to socio-political and historical issues, the collective was seen as a catalyst for the upcoming independence movement in the country.

Unlike the other Yugoslavian republics, Slovenia already had an extremely active and rich independent theatre scene prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia. Many of the independent groups and artists mentioned are still active today. They are still considered to be important representatives of the independent theatres in Slovenia.

In June 1991, the country detached itself from the former Yugoslavia and declared its independence.⁶¹ Immediately afterwards, there were armed conflicts with the Yugoslavian army. In contrast to the years of war in the neighbouring countries of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the fighting ended after ten days. The democratisation and economic development of the country could therefore begin quite soon. This is reflected in the development of the independent theatres. Many young theatre makers appeared in public in the nineties, including internationally known artists such as Matjaž Berger, Vlado Repnik, Davide Grassi (later known as Janez Janša), Igor Štromajer, Marko Peljhan, Emil Hrvatin (later known as Janez Janša, too), Tomi Janežič, Sebastijan Horvat, Matjaž Farič, Jernej Lorenci, Ivica Buljan, Nevenka Koprivšek and Diego de Brea. At the same time, independent theatre collectives formed in Ljubljana, such as Matjaž Pograjc's group Betontanc, the Muzeum Institute,

60 | See Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine. Laibach and NSK* (London/Cambridge: The MIT Press 2005); Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian (eds.), *Mind the Map! History is not given* (Frankfurt a. Main: Revolver 2004); Inke Arns, *Neue slowenische Kunst. Eine Analyse ihrer künstlerischen Strategien im Kontext der 1980er Jahre in Jugoslawien* (Regensburg: Museum Ostdeutsche Galerie 2002).

61 | See Peter Štih, Vasko Simoniti and Peter Vodopivec, *Slowenische Geschichte. Gesellschaft – Politik – Kultur* (Graz: Leykam 2008).

the Bunker Institute founded by Nevenka Koprivšek, the internationally renowned Maska Institute, the group Dejmo Stisnt Teater by Mare Bulc, En Knap under the direction of Iztok Kovač, Bojan Jablanovec's Via Negativa and the internationally acclaimed project under the direction of Dragan Živadinov's Kozmokinetični kabinet Noordung. These theatre makers and groups are still active. They are considered pioneers of experimental theatre in Slovenia and primarily influenced young theatre artists with their productions in the first decade of the new millennium. These young artists included Jelena Rusjan and her group Škrip Orkestra, Sebastian Roškarič and Polonka Červek with the group Saltimbanko Magic World, Primož Ekart and his production house Imaginarni Institute, as well as the performance collective Narobov, all of which are located in Ljubljana.⁶² The organisation Asociacija, which was founded in 1992, actively supports the independent groups and artists in Slovenia with regard to cultural and educational policies.

Slovenia's independent theatres experienced different phases of development after the political changes in the country. At the end of the socialist era, the starting situation was good compared with the other republics. Today the artistic scope of independent groups and theatre makers is huge. Yet, two conditions limit the work of the independent theatres: the concentration of cultural life in the capital, Ljubljana, and the increasingly difficult economic conditions. Because of the worsening economic situation in Slovenia, theatre makers and independent groups have hardly been able to establish themselves since the middle of the 2000s.

'The theatre and the contemporary dance have been in decline since 2004. The charm of which the Slovenian culture used to be recognised in Ex-Yugoslavia is gone. And NGO sector had been drying out, self-destroying and slowly drowning.'⁶³

This is how an independent theatre critic describes the situation of the independent theatres in Slovenia in recent years. How independent theatre will develop in this country in the coming years, and whether new independent groups will emerge under these circumstances, remains to be seen.

The Yugoslavian Republic of *Croatia* experienced the 'Croatian Spring' in the late sixties and early seventies when a broad national-democratic movement

62 | In this context, the following theatre makers can also be named: Sabina Schwenner, Marko Bratuš, Boris Kadin, Peter Kus, Miha Nemeč, Mala Kline, Irena Tmažin, Maja Delak, Mateja Bučar, Matija Solce, Andreja Kopač, Katarina Stegnar, Mare Bulc, Jure Novak and Urška Brodar.

63 | Questionnaire Slovenia I.

called for greater autonomy and more national rights.⁶⁴ The Yugoslavian government under state and party leader Tito used force to put down the protest. In this time of political unrest, the first independent theatre groups were founded in Croatia.⁶⁵ These emerged from the amateur theatre movement, whose artistic manner of working they continued. The most famous names include the group Kugla glumište (today known as Damir Bartol Indoš) and the student theatre Lero, founded by Davor Mojaš, which were both located in Zagreb, and Nebojša Borojević's collective Daska in Sisak. Because there were no theatres available to them, the groups usually presented their productions at festivals in Croatia. By doing so, they received much attention in their own country and beyond its borders. In the eighties, other important theatre groups were founded, such as Romano Bodan's collective Kazališna družina Pinklec in Čakovec, the group Dr. Inat under the direction of Branko Sušac in Pula, Borut Šeparović's performance group Montažstroj in Zagreb, the ensemble, Tranzicijsko-fikcijsko (Trafik) in Rijeka, and the first independent children's and young people's theatre, Mala Scena, which was founded by Vitomira Lončar, Zvezdana Ladika and Ivica Šimić in Zagreb in 1986. The group KGPT, whose importance has already been mentioned, was also one of the groups founded at this time.

Like Slovenia, Croatia declared its independence in June 1991. In the following four years of the Croatian War, the Yugoslavian army and Serbian paramilitary units forcibly displaced the Croatian population in the areas of the country which they controlled and perpetrated massacres under the banner of ethnic cleansing. In 1995, Croatia ended the war in its favour. The Erdut Agreement regulated the future cohabitation with the Serbian minority. In the years that followed, Croatia implemented many economic, judicial and social reforms.

The work of the Croatian independent theatres was severely restricted during the war. Despite the precarious situation, a few collectives were founded: HKD Teatar by Nenad Šegvić and Lary Zappia in Rijeka and the Teatar Exit in Zagreb. It is important to mention the Pula art Umjetnicki Festival (PUF) in this context. Independent theatre makers such as Davor Mojaš, Nebojša Borojević, Branko Sušac and Romano Bogdan started it in 1994 under the name International Festival for Independent Theatre in Pula: 'PUF was born as a

64 | For the history of Croatia, see also Ludwig Steindorff, *Kroatien. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Pustet 2001).

65 | For the development of the theatre scene in Croatia, see Jelena Kovačić, "Country Report Croatia", in *EEPAP*, pp. 125-146; Nebojša Borojević, "Country Report Croatia", in *IG Freie Theaterarbeit*, see http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#2.

direct commentary on Croatian theatre reality.⁶⁶ The start of this theatre meeting made a considerable contribution to the continuation of the independent theatres in Croatia despite the circumstances of war. However, facilities were reduced to a minimum. The festival still exists, and it is still an important communication platform for independent theatres in Croatia:

'*PUF* functions as a communication channel; revealing the world from a new angle: not monologue and passive communication, but dialogue, frankness, identification, and participation. At the same time, it is obvious that *PUF* will be a site of encounters between artists who differ in their worldviews and inner necessities, yet not in their marginalized social position.'⁶⁷

In recent years, there have been three outstanding experimental theatres. The Teatar & TD in Zagreb is an important point of contact for independent artists, mainly because of the support programme 'kultura promjene' (culture change) initiated by Nataša Rajković and Marin Blažević. Theatre makers such as Branko Brezovac, Damir Bartol Indoš, Anika Tomić and Oliver Frljić work there. Independent groups, such as the aforementioned performance collective Montažstroj and the group BADco, founded by Goran Sergej Pristaš in 2000, perform in this theatre. The second important venue is the theatre Zagrebačko kazalište mladih (ZeKaeM) in Zagreb. It is headed by the dramatic advisor Dubravka Vrgoč, who has initiated many international projects with a wide spectrum of artistic activities. Finally, the group Teatar Exit, founded by Matko Raguž and Nataša Lušetić in Zagreb, has had its own permanent theatre since 1998. The group's productions are developed on the basis of a collective and process-oriented collaboration of all those involved. The group sees theatre 'as a [...] common [...] workshop, a work in progress with all parties having equal rights with respect to the authorship'⁶⁸. Countless theatre groups and young artists in Croatia adopted this understanding of theatre in the past (e.g., Bobo Jelčić, Nataša Rajković, Matija Ferlin, Rene Medvešek, Saša Anočić and Lary Zappia). In recent years, other groups have influenced the independent theatre scene in the country. Among them are Boris Bakal's group Bacači Sjenki and the collectives Act Lab, Bumerang, Gustl, Moruzgva, Planet Art, Teatar Ruginino, Teatar Svarog, Kazalište Merlin, Kazalište Hotel Bulić and Studio Kvak. All these groups work in Zagreb. The theatre collectives Room 100, Kazalište Licem u Lice, Play Drama and Malo Splitsko Kazalište were founded in Split.

66 | Nebojša Borojević, "Country Report Croatia".

67 | Ibid.

68 | Hrvoje Ivanković, "Zwischen Text und Kontext", in Martina Vannayová and Anna Häusler (eds.), *Landvermessungen*, pp. 63-74, here p. 65.

The free groups Ludens Teatar and Grupa Kugla are situated in Koprivnica near the Croatian-Hungarian border.

The military conflicts in the post-Yugoslavian states in the nineties also devastated Bosnia-Herzegovina. After the declaration of independence of the former Yugoslavian republic in 1992, a three-year war erupted between Bosnians, Serbs and the Croatian minority in the country. After the war ended in 1995, the economic situation in the country was disastrous: residential buildings, industrial facilities and the infrastructure were destroyed, and yet there was no end to the ethnically motivated conflicts.

Given this situation, a collapse of the theatre in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the first half of the nineties would not have been surprising. Yet, the opposite was the case: 'During the four years of occupation, more than a hundred premieres and debut performances took place in Sarajevo.'⁶⁹ The theatre Sarajevski ratni teatar (SARTR) in Sarajevo played an important role. It was founded at the beginning of the besiegement of the city by the directors Gradimir Gojer and Dubravko Bibanović, the engineer Đorđe Mačkić, and the author Safet Plakalo. The SARTR was the artistic centre for actors, directors and other theatre professionals whose theatres had been closed in Sarajevo because of the war. It was an important meeting place for many artists and the venue of countless performances. After the war, the theatre was granted the status of a public institution of particular importance for the city.

Some theatre productions which were performed in the occupied city of Sarajevo gained a particular importance because of their political message. One of these was Susan Sontag's *Waiting for Godot*, which was staged in 1993. In the performance, the artist called upon the Western countries to intervene in order to end the war. The performance aroused international attention. This was also true for the performances of *Silk Drums* by the theatre and film director Haris Pašović and the production *In the Country of the Last Things*, an adaptation of the novel by Paul Auster, by the Sarajevo Festival Ensemble. These two performances were among the most famous productions in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war years. All of the productions mentioned here were of particular symbolic importance because of their political messages: They stood for the survival of the theatre.

69 | Almir Bašović, "Theater im Transitbereich oder Dionysos auf Dienstreise", in Martina Vannayová and Anna Häusler (eds.), *Landvermessungen*, pp. 23-30, here p. 24. For the development of the theatre scene in Bosnia-Herzegovina, see also the questionnaires Bosnia-Herzegovina I and II, both from 30 October 2012; Tanja Miletic Orucevic, "Country Report Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *EEPAP*, pp. 95-110; *After the fall. Europa nach 1989. Ein Theaterprojekt des Goethe-Instituts*, see <http://www.goethe.de/kue/the/prj/atf/the/sar/deindex.htm>.

'In this big area to be covered I can focus the theatre produced during the siege of Sarajevo 1992-1996. Under the inhuman conditions of life (24-hours mortal danger, shelling, snipers, hunger, no electricity, etc.), the artists produced theatre and the audience risked their lives to come to watch the show.'⁷⁰

After the end of the war, the situation changed. The importance of the theatre declined. The country mainly had to struggle with the economic and social effects of the war, which took priority over any cultural matters. There was very little interest in the theatre, and there was hardly any money available.

For many years, until much after the turn of the millennium, there were no independent theatres in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In comparison to the theatre scenes in the post-socialist countries already presented here, an independent theatre scene did not develop until much later. Not until 2005 were there first signs of life, when the director Haris Pašović started the cultural centre East West Centar in Sarajevo.⁷¹ The centre sees itself as an NGO-institution which provides services without generating any profit. It stages its own performances and offers workshops with international theatre makers. Furthermore, it collaborates with independent artists from more than 20 countries. Today the venue is the most famous cultural centre in the post-Yugoslavian states by far. In 2006, the theatre Gradsko pozorište Jazavac was founded in Baja Luka. The venue is not only a children's and young people's theatre, but offers workshops and training programs for acting, dramaturgy and directing. In addition, it is an important meeting place for young theatre makers and groups. Artistically, the productions focus on everyday subjects and deal with the social realities in the country:

'Mission of the Gradsko pozorište Jazavac is to discover and promote young artists and to offer to the public a theatre art as a communication and dialogue on current and everyday topics of their interest, with which they are faced with [sic].'⁷²

The theatre centres mentioned here are working to promote the development of the independent theatres in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They are important venues for groups and artists who still find themselves in the very slow process of establishing themselves there.

70 | Questionnaire Bosnia-Herzegovina I.

71 | East West Centar, see <http://eastwest.ba/>.

72 | Gradsko pozorište Jazavac, see <http://gpj.ba/>.

2.3 Post-Soviet States

The theatre in Russia can look back on a rich history.⁷³ Theatre reformers such as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Alexander Tairov, Konstantin Stanislavsky and Sergei M. Eisenstein had a great influence on the national and international theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the post-Stalin era, directors and theatre makers such as Oleg Jefremov, Georgi Alexandrovitch Tovstonogov, Maria Knebel, Anatoly Efros, Anatoly Vasiliev and Lev Dodin influenced Russian theatre. They mainly worked on experimental stages, such as the internationally renowned theatre Moskovskiy Hudojestvenny Akademicheskij Teatr (MChAT), the Teatr na Taganke founded by Yuri Petrovics Lyubimov, the Teatr Sovremennik in Moscow, and the Teatr Mały in St. Petersburg.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, severe internal political conflicts erupted in the newly founded Russian state.⁷⁴ The privatisation of the economy and attempts to democratise the state and society failed. The industry collapsed; inflation soared, and the gap between the poor strata of the population and the influential oligarchs widened more and more. At the end of the nineties, the country was in a severe economic crisis. Tensions arose in the North Caucasus which led to the two wars in Chechnya. In 2000, Vladimir Putin took over the office of president, which he had already held prior to a four-year interruption between 2008 and 2012. Thanks to tax reforms, capital reflux and the export of raw materials, the economic situation improved. At the same time, Putin had the constitution amended so that the president was given extensive powers.

Despite the difficult political and economic situation, Russian independent theatre continued to develop in the nineties and at the beginning of the new millennium. Especially in Moscow, new stages and collectives emerged, including the Teatr na Pokrovke under the direction of Sergey Artsybashev, the Teatr Kamernaya Scena initiated by Michael Shepenko, the theatre workshop Petr Fomenko Workshop, Alexander Kaliagin's Teatr EtCetera, the Teatr Okolo under Yuri Porgreblichko and Ludmila Rasumovskaya's Teatr Chevolek.

73 | For the development of the theatre in Russia, see also Amy Bryzgel, *Performing the East. Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland since 1980* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris 2013); Robert Laech and Victor Borovsky, *A History of Russian Theatre* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University 1999); Theatre Institute Russia, see <http://www.teatr.ru/>.

74 | For the history of Russia, see Margareta Mommsen, *Wer herrscht in Russland? Der Kreml und die Schatten der Macht* (München: C. H. Beck 2003); Gottfried Schramm (ed.), *Russlands langer Weg zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001).

Moreover, after the turn of the millennium, the artistic style known as the Novaya Drama emerged.⁷⁵ This development was initiated by the independent theatres. Novaya Drama is represented today by notable groups and artists, including the Teatr.doc, which was founded in 2002 by Michail Ugarov and Elena Gremina, the group CDR – Tsentr dramaturgii i rezhissury of Michail Roshchin und Alexei Kazantsev, the Teatr Praktika founded by Eduard Boiakov in 2005, and the SounDrama under the direction of Vladimir Pankov, also founded in 2005. The groups, which are all located in Moscow, relate their work to the German documentary theatre of the sixties and the British ‘in-er-face’ theatre. Their aim is to develop a documentary realism for the theatre which uses authentic source material such as interviews, documents and reports as a starting point. The content of this material is not changed but artistically revised, edited and reassembled. The group Teatr.doc describes its artistic conception of itself in the following words: ‘Teatr.doc is a theatre in which there is no acting.’⁷⁶ The movement Novaya Drama is an important artistic direction of the Russian independent theatre. It is also known outside of Russia.

Young directors who made public appearances in recent years include Dimitri Krymov, Ivan Alexandrovitch Vyrypajev, Kirill Serebrennikov, Andrei Mogutschi, Yuri Butusov, Mindaugas Karbauskis and Dimitri Yegorov. The following theatres and collectives are internationally known today: the theatre AKHE of Maxim Isayev and Pavel Semtschenko, the Teatr Oddance and the collective DNEVO, all of which are located in St. Petersburg, and the Studio for Theatre Art of Sergei Zhenovach, the Centre for Dance and Performance, TsEKh and the Teatr Liquid in Moscow.

In August 1991, the Republic of Belarus was constituted.⁷⁷ Since 1994, Alexander Lukashenko has been in power as the head of state. Belarus has a higher standard of living than Russia. Bigger cities such as Minsk, Gomel and Mogi-

75 | For the artistic movement *Novaya Drama*, see Dorte Lena Eilers, “Achtung Kunst!”, in *Theater der Zeit* 12 (2012), pp. 18-19; Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovetsky, *Performing Violence. Literary and Theatrical Experiments of New Russian Drama* (Bristol/Chicago: Intellect 2009); Roman Dolschanski, “Kommerz und erfreuliche Ausnahmen”, in: *Theater der Zeit* 3 (2006), pp. 23-26; Carola Dürr, “Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Helden. Das Festival Neue Dramatik in Moskau”, in *Theater der Zeit* 3 (2006), p. 33; Carola Dürr, “Der Aufbruch hat begonnen”, in *Theater der Zeit* 3 (2006), pp. 20-22; Nina Belenitskaja, “Kurswechsel. Ein Schlüssel für das Verständnis des Wertekanons in der russischen Gesellschaft”, in *Theater der Zeit* 3 (2006), pp. 16-19.

76 | Olga Galachowa, “Archipel Moskau”, in *Theater der Zeit* 12 (2012), pp. 12-15, here p. 15.

77 | See Valentin Akudowitsch, *Der Abwesenheitscode. Versuch, Weißrussland zu verstehen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2013); Thomas M. Bohn and Victor Shadurski (eds.), *Ein weißer*

lyev project an image of cleanliness, order and security, and there are active subcultures. However, the population lives under a dictatorship. The country is internationally isolated, censorship is harsh, and the omnipotence of the state security organisation, KGB, is intimidating.



Figure 3: Minsk, 2013. Photograph: Andrea Hensel

The state theatres are in a difficult situation.⁷⁸ They cannot work independently without fearing repression by the government. Since the beginning of the new millennium, they have only received funding from the state to cover the salaries of artists and operating costs. Furthermore, only those contract productions are subsidised which are considered socially relevant and politically acceptable: ‘In this category one can find performances of Belarusian and international classics and plays which deal with Belarusian history.’⁷⁹ The state-imposed restrictions limit the founding of independent theatres.

Fleck in Europa...: Die Imagination der Belarus als Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West (Bielefeld: transcript 2011).

78 | For the development of the theatre scene in Belarus, see the questionnaire Belarus from 22 September 2012; Viktor Pietrow, “Country Report Belarus”, in *EEPAP*, pp. 83-94; Fundacja Open Culture (ed.), *A report on the condition of culture and NGOs in Belarus* (Lublin: Episteme 2011), see <http://fundacjaopenculture.org/>.

79 | Tatjana Komonowa, “Die Welt im Spiegel betrachtet”, in Martina Vannayová and Anna Häusler (eds.), *Landvermessungen*, pp. 13-22, here p. 13.

'Experimental theatre and performance and the struggle for performance art, as an experimental art, are forbidden in a political context. An artist and freedom are considered to be contrary to each other, and art as a process is forbidden. Anything that is impossible to be understood by the government is forbidden.'⁸⁰

However, in recent years, more and more independent theatre groups have emerged in Belarus. They work in the underground in private apartments, galleries and cafés. The performances deal with forbidden subjects such as homosexuality, gender issues, mental illness and drug consumption. The theatre makers experiment aesthetically with new, usually censored artistic forms:

'In my opinion, the main peculiarity is the tendency to go beyond the old theatrical style which still dominates in public theatres and to create a kind of new theatrical product according to modern times and today's audience interests. This can be reached in several ways.'⁸¹

An important artist is Pavel Admatschikow. As an actor and director at the State Academy of the Arts in Minsk, he is considered a pioneer of the movement theatre, which is little known in Belarus. Also the director, Vladimir Petrowitsch, plays an important role in independent theatre. In his works, he motivates the audience to question their own perception and confronts the audience with the social grievances in the country. The director Wladimir Schtscherban is an important representative of the independent theatre. His productions of contemporary Belarusian and international drama have been repeatedly censored or have been dropped from the programme altogether. Since 2005, Schtscherban has been a member of the Belarus Free Theatre, which was founded by the human rights activist Nikolai Khalezin and the theatre producer Natalia Koliada in Minsk in the same year. Because of the restrictions imposed by the government, the group set up a second seat in London in 2011. Their performances, which are staged internationally, deal with the political, social and cultural situation in Belarus. In Minsk, the Belarus Free Theatre is one of the best-known independent theatres. Other independent groups which work in Minsk are the Korniyag Teatr founded by Evgeni Korniyag, Alexander Tebenkow's dance theatre, Gallery, the groups Kryly Halopa, InZest, and Zy-waja Planet, the D.O.Z.SK.I Company, the performance groups Jana Try Jon, Petli and Mechaniorij Kultury, and the Teatr Psichicznej neuraunawazanasci. The group Parallels is located in Vitebsk, and the Quadro-Company is situated in Grodno.

80 | Viktor Pietrow, "Country Report Belarus", p. 91.

81 | Questionnaire Belarus.

Despite the fact that the groups differ among themselves, they often have an all-encompassing manner of working in common which transcends the usual boundaries which separate art forms. Thus, independent theatre makers cooperate with curators, fine artists, media artists and journalists in the independent scene. New aesthetic formats in unusual venues emerge from this dialogue. Partners of the independent theatre are also culture magazines, galleries and agencies (e.g., the Galerie Ÿ, owned by Valentina Kiselieva, the culture magazine *Artaktivist*, initiated by Sergei Shabothin, the online magazine, *pARTisan*, the photo gallery Studio 67, and the concert agency BOpromo in Minsk).

In the Ukraine, independent artists, groups and theatres did not emerge until the beginning of the nineties:⁸² 'At that time, ideological restrictions in theatrical and choreographic life were relaxed – after the abolishment of censorship, theatres could finally form their repertoires independently.'⁸³ In addition to the young directors such as Gregory Hlady, Mark Nestantiner and Yuriy Yatsenko, students of the Russian theatre reformer Anatoly Vasiliev, such as Oleh Lipstyn, Andriy Zholdak and Valerij Bilchenko, made a name for themselves in the independent theatre scene. A renowned venue, the *Milodyi Teatr*, was established by Volodmyr Kuchynsky in Lviv in 1988; later the theatre became very well-known under the name *Teatr Łeś Kurbas* and still exists under this name.

After the Ukraine became independent in 1991, the country suffered from economic crises in the nineties; the population was poor and the crime rate high.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, new independent theatre groups emerged. Valerij Bilchenko founded the street theatre *Kyivsky Teatr Uliczny KET* in Kiev at the beginning of the nineties. At the same time, Vitaly Malakhov established the *Kyivsky Teatr na Podoli* in Kiev. Both theatre groups, together with the *Milodyi Teatr*, played an important role in the independent theatre scene in Ukraine in the nineties. Their artistic work was primarily influenced by the work of Jerzy Grotowski and Anatoly Vasiliev. However, the difficult economic situation took its toll on the independent theatres. More and more often, well-known theatre makers such as Bilchenko, Oleh Lipstyn, Gregory Hlady, Mark Nestantiner and Yuri Yatsenko worked abroad or left the Ukraine permanently. But new

82 | For the development of the theatre scene in the Ukraine, see the questionnaires Ukraine I and II from 28 October 2012 and 11 October 2012; Tina Peresunko, "Country Report Ukraine", in *EEPAP*, pp. 295-348; Fundacja Open Culture (ed.), *A report on the condition of culture and NGOs in Ukraine* (Lublin: Episteme 2012), see <http://fundacjaopenculture.org/>.

83 | Tina Peresunko, "Country Report Ukraine", p. 300.

84 | See Winfried Schneider-Deters, *Die Ukraine – Machtvakuum zwischen Russland und der Europäischen Union* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag 2012).

independent groups and stages were founded, including Vladislav Troitsky's Teatr Dakh and the Tanzlaboratorium in Kiev. Svitlana Oleshko's collective Arabesky and the group P.S. settled in Charkiv. In Lviv, Irina Volytska and Lidiya Danylchuk created the Teatr u Koshyku; the group Verim was established in Dnipropetrovsk, and Vie was established in Zaporishia.

The 'Orange Revolution' in 2004 led to far-reaching political upheavals in the Ukraine. Because of the unstable political situation, the cultural sector – and with it the independent theatres – received little attention from politicians and society in general. Nevertheless, the middle of the 2000s gave rise to new independent groups and venues. These included the stage Budynok akтора and the group Nowa Szena in Charkiv, and the collective Wilna Szena, founded by Dmytro Gogomasov, Anton Ovchinnikov's dance theatre, Black O!Range, the Vilnyi Teatr and the Teatr 19 in Kiev. Together with the groups and directors who had already begun working in the nineties, and with theatre makers of the younger generation such as Maxym Holenko and Igor Ladenko, they are the principal representatives of the Ukrainian independent theatre today.

At this time, the independent theatre in the Ukraine is in dire straits:

'There were more than 200 independent theatre companies in Ukraine in the beginning of the 1990s and now there are just few of them alive [...] mostly they ceased to exist due to lack of funding, lack of space. They did a lot of experiment in the beginning of the 1990s but it didn't change the Ukrainian theatre in general. Ukrainian theatre, as it was in the Soviet Union times, still remains traditional, inflexible, rigid.'⁸⁵

The lack of cultural reforms, antiquated structures in cultural policies, and uncertain economic conditions make the work of the independent theatres difficult in the Ukraine today and have an extremely adverse effect on the development of new groups.

2.4 Excursus: The Independent Dance Scene

With the exception of Yugoslavia, in whose republics culture could develop relatively autonomously, the dance productions in the socialist countries are based on an ideologically charged and politically instrumentalised body image. Dance was used to stage the collective socialist body. This stipulation did not allow any individual body images on stage.

'The collective body in its various hypostases (party structures, workers' unions, local party organisations etc.) was hostile to all manifestations of personal corporeality – distinguishable appearances, sexual or emotional preferences or personal tastes. The

nation was the 'virtual socialist body', which was not interested in individuality, but encouraged unification and large-scale formations [...].⁸⁶

Uniformisation and collectivisation characterised the dance productions in the socialist countries. These were obliged to fulfil the aesthetic preconditions prescribed by politics. Classical ballet and folk dance were considered by the government to be the forms of dance with which those prerequisites could best be realised.

Following the political upheavals at the end of the eighties, a lively independent dance scene emerged – especially in Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria. To this day, the high level of development in these dance scenes far exceeds anything to be found in other post-socialist countries. 'In the remaining countries contemporary dance is at the beginning of its organisational stage, which can be compared to the Flemish scene in the early 1980s.'⁸⁷ This has been noted in the EEPAP study on the development of the dance scene in the other post-socialist countries. In Slovenia, Romania and Croatia, the dance groups received active support through the founding of cultural associations and the establishment of production venues. Examples are the association, Društvo za sodobni ples Slovenije, which was founded in Ljubljana in 1994, the Centrul National al Dansului – Bucuresti (CNDB), founded in Bukarest in 2004, and the Zagrebački Plesni Centar, which was established in Zagreb in 2009. In addition, the practice of reviewing dance performances was promoted. The training of dance dramaturgists also contributed to a professionalisation of the independent dance scene. These three factors enabled the independent dance scene to become firmly established in the cultural landscapes of the three countries.

In Serbia, the emergence of the independent dance scene at the beginning of the new millennium was expedited by groups as well as by individual choreographers and dancers: 'It emerged and evolved mostly within the alternative theatre scene (mainly in Belgrade), as nonverbal, physical, dance theatre, and theatre movement – as well as in various other forms of experimental theatre and performance.'⁸⁸

86 | Mira Todorova, *Body, Identity, Community. Dance in Bulgaria after 1989*, 11 pages, no place or date of publication given, manuscript privately owned by the author, here p. 2. For the development of the dance scene in the post-socialist states, see all available questionnaires, all Country Reports in EEPAP and Paweł Płoski, "Introduction", in EEPAP, pp. 9-62.

87 | Paweł Płoski: "Introduction", p. 37.

88 | Questionnaire Serbia I.

Companies emerged, such as the Dah teatar, the Ister teatar, Placo pozorište, Mimart, Omen and Erg Status. Young choreographers and dancers, such as Boris Čakširan, Ivana Vujić, Bojana Mladenović, Dalija Aćin, Isidora Stanišić, Dragana Alfirević, Dušan Murić, Olivera Kovačević and Saša Asentić gained renown. In a collective process, the body is artistically explored. In doing so, the artistic dance practice is always linked to theoretical reflection. A Serbian choreographer describes the work of the independent dance theatre in her country with these words:

'Open process which creates body declarative art using interactive contemporary arts and interdisciplinary researching way, expanding the borders of theatre. Phenomena are intuitively explored in workshops with body because you can only enter the phenomenon using body. Research using auto-dramaturgy of body brings out new theatre aesthetics of signalise, with risk. [...] Non-verbal theatre transcends all barriers: language, geographic, political, ethical, ethnic, social [...].'⁸⁹

The founding of the association for contemporary dance, Stanica/Station, in Belgrade and the Belgrade dance festival Beogradski *festival igre* in 2001 attracted international attention. They continue to be the focus of international attention, and are therefore in a position to promote the transnational networking of Serbian dance groups. Furthermore, the establishment of the platform Walking Theory in 2000 and the TkH Centre for Performing Arts Theory and Practice in 2002 accelerated the development of the dance scene. Both primarily support international cooperation projects of Serbian independent companies and promote a close connection between theory and practice. In 2005, the Nomad Dance Academy was founded in Belgrade. It contributes to the professionalisation of the independent dance scene and initiates transnational projects. Moreover, it has an influence on cultural and educational policies:

'Its activities have been aimed at creating a strong, recognisable Balkan scene of contemporary dance. NDA is a platform of cooperation, a tool of promotion, a programme of education and creation, and a self-reproducing organisation model.'⁹⁰

Independent dance groups also emerged in Bulgaria. The independent dance groups Ek Studio and Ego Group were formed in the eighties. They combined dance practices which had been unknown in the country until then with the politically prescribed canon of body dramatisation: 'Their performances were marked by the aesthetics of expressionism, and by modernist interpretations

89 | Ibid.

90 | Paweł Płoski, "Introduction", p. 38.

of folk motifs, which came to reflect their attempt to ‘modernise’ dance.⁹¹ The two companies disbanded after only a few years. Their attempts to open the dance theatre had no aesthetic effect. The choreographer and dancer Krasen Krăstev, who founded the independent group Amarant in Sofia in 1993, was more successful. The company developed its productions in a collective process and entered into international collaborations. The group experimented with new dance practices. In doing so, it contributed to the further development of contemporary dance in Bulgaria:

‘They liberated the Bulgarian notion of contemporary dance and its strong dependence on the classical academic position of bodies and body movement from assuming the perfectly trained body and the flawless performance of strict choreography. Free, random, everyday movement started to appear [...], as did chaotic compositions devoid of a single centre. Narration or suggestive metaphors carrying ideas, messages and stories were no longer needed.’⁹²

Other young choreographers who became well-known in Bulgaria in the nineties are Mila Iskrenova, Tatyana Sokolova, Albena Atanassova, Galina Borissova and Rossen Mihaylov. They not only worked in Bulgaria, but internationally. At the beginning and in the middle of the 2000s, independent choreographers such as Anna Doneva, Yuliana Siska, Stefan Shterev, Mila Odadjieva and Ivo Dimchev made a name for themselves. Some independent dance collectives were founded at this time, including the group Dance BG, headed by Petya Stoykova and Marga Goranova in Burgas, and the companies Brain Store Project by Iva Sveshtarova and Villy Prager, and the Kinesthetic Project of Violeta Vitanova, Stanislav Genadiev, Diana Papazova, Ognyana Serafimova-Penava and Miroslav Yordanov in Sofia. The productions of these groups were characterised ‘by their radicalism, a specific artistic attitude and individualism’⁹³. In 2008, the Derida Dance Centre was founded in Sofia, the first and still the only independent contemporary dance theatre in Bulgaria. Its founding is the result of an initiative of the choreographer Zhivko Zhelyazkov and the art manager Atanas Maev. The centre promotes dance training and offers international residence programmes.

The economic situation of the independent dance theatre is difficult in all post-socialist countries. Aside from the fact that there is insufficient funding available, there are also not enough venues. The companies usually work in rented rooms, use cultural centres or cooperate with theatres. However,

91 | Mira Todorova, *Body, Identity, Community*, p. 6.

92 | *Ibid.*, p. 7.

93 | Mila Iskrenova, “Nichts soll bleiben, wie es war...”, in Dorte Lena Eilers, Anna Volkland and Holger Schultze (eds.), *Die neue Freiheit*, pp. 105-112, here p. 107.

the established cultural institutions are often unwilling to cooperate with independent dance groups. There are few or – in many countries – no funding programmes which include the leasing of premises. Furthermore, contemporary dance receives little mention in cultural and educational policies. ‘Contemporary dance is practically absent from cultural policy in most of the countries. [...] Most of the countries still lack a cohesive policy of support for dance despite the constant emergence of new dance companies.’⁹⁴

The inadequate conditions severely restrict the artistic work in the independent dance scene in the post-socialist countries. Companies and artists, therefore, can only establish themselves with difficulty. Yet, as has been described, a positive development of the independent dance theatre can be observed in some post-socialist countries: ‘The Eastern European dance scene is evolving slowly. But some developments can be seen on the horizon.’⁹⁵

3. CONDITIONS FOR ARTISTIC WORK

3.1 Cultural Policies and Funding

After the political upheavals at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, the cultural and educational policies in the post-socialist states changed completely.⁹⁶ Everywhere they were given a greater importance and a different function than in the past even though the development was different in the individual countries. Up to that point, culture had served to establish and legitimise socialism. Now the political mission of cultural facilities ended, and with it their economic security. The cultural and educational policies assumed new tasks. The transformation of cultural and educational policies is still impeded, because patterns of thought and behaviour which originated under

94 | Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 42.

95 | *Ibid.*, p. 38.

96 | For the entire chapter on cultural and educational policies, see all available questionnaires and all Country Reports in *EEPAP*; Maria Davydchik, *Transformationen der Kulturpolitik. Kulturpolitische Veränderungen nach dem Zusammenbruch des sozialistischen Systems in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Wiesbaden: VS 2012); Wolfgang Rauter, *Kulturpolitik und -finanzierung im osteuropäischen Raum* (Saarbrücken: VDM 2008); Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V. (ed.), *Übereinkommen über den Schutz und die Förderung der Vielfalt kultureller Ausdrucksformen. Magna Charta der Internationalen Kulturpolitik* (Bonn: Köllen 2005); Therese Kaufmann and Gerald Raunig, *Anticipating European Cultural Policies. Europäische Kulturpolitiken vorausdenken* (Wien/Linz: European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies 2003).

socialism continue to exist or a high degree of continuity in terms of personnel prevails.

In all post-socialist countries, two important changes can be observed. Instead of simply implementing the requirements laid down by the state and the party, as in the past, cultural policies now promote cultural diversity and cultural autonomy. Cultural institutions and the stakeholders on the local level are involved in decision-making processes concerning cultural and educational issues. Second, cultural and educational policies face the challenge of finding a 'balance between stability and flexibility, tradition and innovation'⁹⁷. A high degree of flexibility in cultural and educational policies is important to be able to react to the frequent changes in the external conditions. At the same time, a minimum of economic security and cultural-political certainty is necessary. Achieving this balance has proven to be one of the biggest difficulties facing the cultural policymakers in post-socialist countries.

In terms of organisational forms, transparency and the cohesion of cultural policies, the individual post-socialist countries have achieved different levels of development. According to the study by the East European Performing Arts Platform from 2011, the situation at that time could be described as follows: The transformation process in which cultural and educational policies are no longer subordinate to a socialist state but which now represent an autonomous, transparent and stable cultural programme is very far advanced in Slovenia and in the countries of the Visegrád Group (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland), or has even reached a level which approximates that of Western European countries. Croatia is also highly developed: 'This group is joined by Croatia, whose cultural system and policy is closest to the achievements of the countries of Central Europe.'⁹⁸ The cultural and educational policies of Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia are in the middle of the transformation process. Rigorous state decision-making structures continue to exist, and the networking of cultural institutions has been only partially realised. Both characteristics are carry-overs from the old systems. As has already been described in the individual country analyses, the cultural and educational policies in Russia, Belarus and in the Ukraine are unclear and incoherent. The study characterises them as follows: '[...] a conglomerate of socialist and capitalist tendencies results in a combination of both the good and bad aspects of both systems, including corruption and strong tendency toward introverted self-sufficiency'⁹⁹. In Belarus as well as in Russia there is still a strict censorship; neither is the report positive for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The cultural and educational policies are still influenced by instability, inconsistency and ambiguity, all consequences of the

97 | Maria Davydchy, *Transformationen der Kulturpolitik*, p. 37.

98 | Paweł Płoski, "Introduction", p. 12.

99 | Ibid.

hostilities and armed conflicts. For this reason, an independent theatre maker from Bosnia-Herzegovina observes:

'In no country of Europe is cultural policy more important than in Bosnia Herzegovina. Culture is both the cause and the solution to its problems. Cultural arguments were used to divide the country, yet culture might be able to bring people back together again through initiating cultural programmes and activity that increase mutual understanding and respect.'¹⁰⁰

An important indicator for the democratisation of cultural and educational policies is the question regarding the extent to which theatres are decentrally organised. Here, too, cultural and educational policies in the post-socialist states have advanced to varying degrees. The decentralisation of theatres means an empowerment of regional and local decision-makers. Thus, artistic and administrative decisions do not lie solely in the hands of the central authority of the state, as was the case prior to the decline of the communist systems, but they are transferred to local and regional levels. 'Decentralisation was understood as the state relinquishing direct management of cultural matters and handing them over to lower administrative levels.'¹⁰¹ This shift to a decentralised structure primarily means advantages for the theatres. They enjoy a greater autonomy. Funding on local and municipality levels increases. Theatres can make decisions regarding programme and financing largely independently, and institutions close ranks with their socio-cultural environment. Decentralisation also holds disadvantages for the theatres: the discrepancies and lack of clarity when the needs and concerns of the theatres are distributed over countless local and regional administrative levels, the lack of consistency regarding theatre-pertinent policies, and the lack of willingness of the political level responsible to administrate and support theatres efficiently. An additional difficulty results from the fact that authorities dealing with cultural and educational issues are usually persons who are mostly unfamiliar with artistic practice: 'It's a pity that cultural policy is increasingly being developed by professional 'culturologists' instead of experts from the individual fields of art.'¹⁰² Lastly, there are communication problems and competition between the different theatre centres.

'Since the authorities resigned their control as a result of decentralization, everyone started looking for artistic freedom on their own, everybody started making their own contacts, their own space. We began to guard our own territory more than before [...].'¹⁰³

100 | Questionnaire Bosnia-Herzegovina II.

101 | Paweł Płoski, "Introduction", p. 13.

102 | Questionnaire Czech Republic.

103 | Marek Waskiel, quoted in Paweł Płoski, "Introduction", p. 17.

Whereas the theatres in Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and the Ukraine are now decentrally organised, centralised and decentralised structures exist parallel to each other in Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina: 'In Bosnia and Herzegovina, which functions as an asymmetrical confederacy with undefined spheres of competence on the state level, centralist and decentralist tendencies clash with each other.'¹⁰⁴ In Belarus and Russia, on the other hand, centralised structures still prevail. A Belarusian independent director described the situation as follows: 'As for state culture politics – in my opinion, they haven't changed over the last 20 years. The government supports old traditional forms of culture that have existed for years.'¹⁰⁵

As can be surmised from the individual analyses, the funding of independent theatre groups and artists differs greatly from country to country. The most important possibilities available will be mentioned here: First of all, there is financial support provided by the respective ministry of culture. It consists of project, long-term and short-term funding. Independent theatres and theatre makers can apply, whereby the countries also differ with regard to the prerequisites, the decision-making structures and the use of the funding. Second, financial support is also offered on the municipality or regional level. In this case, too, there are different provisions concerning the prerequisites and decision-making. Third, financial support can be obtained from large companies, such as Telekom, MasterCard and others. Fourth, private financing can also be obtained through individual sponsors, such as Marcel Iures in Romania or Vladimir Filippov in the Ukraine. Fifth, EU programmes such as Culture 2007, Kaleidoskop, Theorem, PHARE and Culture 2000 are also available. The prerequisite for an application is membership in the EU, which is not fulfilled by all of the countries mentioned here (Russia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Ukraine are not members of the EU). International cultural organisations such as the Goethe Institute and the British Council also offer funding possibilities. Finally, there is the possibility of a partial financing through the sale of tickets. Sales revenues are usually quite low, so only a small supplement to some other form of financing is possible. Finally, international collaborations and networks provide the possibility of obtaining financial support. This form of financing has increased steadily in the past twenty years. It is an important perspective for independent theatres and is one aspect of international cooperation which will be dealt with later in this text.

In addition, three international foundations have been particularly important for the development of independent theatres in Eastern Europe for

104 | *Ibid.*, p. 16.

105 | Questionnaire Belarus.

many years.¹⁰⁶ They concentrate their work exclusively on the region of the post-socialist states. The Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia has maintained offices in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1992. At first, the foundation was primarily concerned with promoting the democratic restructuring of culture in these countries. Since 1999, it has mainly supported cultural exchange. The Soros Foundation, founded at the beginning of the nineties by the American George Soros, has been coordinated by the Open Society in New York since 1994. The organisation focuses mainly on the Central and Eastern European countries, where the foundation maintains many branches. Besides socio-political and cultural activities, it supports cultural, economic and social reforms. The foundation was among the most important supporters of independent theatres and artists in the post-socialist countries. The Visegrád Foundation has promoted scientific and cultural cooperation among the Visegrád countries since its establishment in the year 2000. This also includes international collaborations. The foundation is an important promoter of independent theatres in the Visegrád Group.

3.2 Production and Presentation Conditions

Despite the existing funding possibilities, the production and performance conditions for independent groups and artists are precarious in all of the post-socialist countries. The established theatres are largely or entirely financed by the state and municipalities. In addition, they have permanent venues. In contrast, all independent theatres are financially unstable. Thus, there is no form of state subsidising available in the Ukraine to this date:

‘It becomes worse and worse here in Ukraine. The government and politicians are not interested in the development of culture. They support public theatres very badly. They don’t support independent companies at all. And there is no legislation of sponsorship. It is disadvantageous for sponsors to maintain a culture.’¹⁰⁷

The independent theatres in Belarus have only received state support since 2010: ‘In Belarus, private theatres still do not have any legal status, and it was not until 2010 that independent theatres gained some support from the government.’¹⁰⁸ A similar situation can be observed in the other post-socialist states. Thus, one of the responses on the questionnaire regarding the situation in Ro-

106 | For international foundations, see the respective homepages of Open Society Foundation, see <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/>; of Stiftung Pro Helvetia, see <http://www.prohelvetia.ch/>; and of Visegrád Fund, see <http://visegradfund.org/>.

107 | Questionnaire Ukraine I.

108 | Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 21.

mania reads as follows: ‘There is a big discrimination and lack of any support interest in awareness towards the importance of independent theatre from the part of the state and public structures.’¹⁰⁹ With regard to Serbia, one can read: ‘Institutional, public theatres have a constant inflow of money, because of the state budget. They do not think about the problems of existence.’¹¹⁰ The situation in Slovakia is described as follows: ‘Independent theatre in Slovakia chronically suffers from underfinancing.’¹¹¹ The following is true for Bosnia-Herzegovina: ‘We have to work hard on fund-raising, the public theatres don’t have to do anything concerning the fund-raising.’¹¹² The report on Slovenia states: ‘In public theatres everybody is getting regular salaries (including cleaning ladies) and they are not dependent on the programme; it is a direct transaction from the state.’¹¹³ The situation in Croatia is described as follows: ‘In Croatia the situation is similar: most independent theatres don’t have their own space.’¹¹⁴ The situation in the Czech Republic is equally grim: ‘It is difficult for independent theatres to obtain grants. The outlook for independent theatres is therefore very uncertain and their continuous operation is not secured.’¹¹⁵ The situation in Hungary is no different from that of the other countries: ‘Recently the whole scene has been suffocating. The groups look for connections and collaboration to survive and help them out of this situation. But many of them must disappear.’¹¹⁶

The working conditions of independent groups and artists are characterised by three drawbacks. The first has already been presented in this chapter as well as in the previous country descriptions: Independent theatres in the post-socialist countries seldom have permanent venues or rehearsal rooms. Leasing premises is seldom a financial option for most groups. Not having their own stage means not being able to maintain regular contact with the audience, and this in turn means receiving far less public attention. This situation has a serious impact on a group’s ability to receive funding, since a permanent venue is often a prerequisite for sponsoring. This is well exemplified by the independent theatres in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

‘In Bosnia, the theatre policy for the Sarajevo Canton, while recognizing theatres as non-governmental organisations, nevertheless forces them to act under strict and

109 | Questionnaire Romania I.

110 | Questionnaire Serbia I.

111 | Questionnaire Slovakia II.

112 | Questionnaire Bosnia-Herzegovina I.

113 | Questionnaire Slovenia II.

114 | Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 22.

115 | Questionnaire Czech Republic.

116 | Questionnaire Hungary I.

strange conditions. For example the policy states that it is necessary for a theatre to have an auditorium with seats fixed permanently to the floor.¹¹⁷

Not having your own venue can also have positive aspects. The groups resort to performing in everyday locations such as cafés, galleries and factories, and in doing so create new space for art. They develop flexible structures, experiment with innovative spatial constellations, and enter into collaborations with other cultural institutions. These developments are characteristic of the independent theatres in the post-socialist countries.

The second drawback regarding the production conditions is the high administrative effort. Independent theatres were constantly forced to request funding, to formulate project applications, and to apply for financial support at home and abroad. Success is far from guaranteed. Often the waiting times are long, requests are refused and payments are delayed, making advanced financing necessary. The pressure on the theatres to continually come up with more and more innovative ideas indeed leads to a constant reflection of their own artistic position, but it also makes on-going work more difficult.

The third drawback related to working conditions concerns state repression and economic restrictions. With the end of socialism, the censorship which had hampered the work of independent theatres in Eastern European countries to varying degrees in the past was supposedly abolished. As a result, the names of authors who had been prohibited reappeared on theatre programmes, and independent theatres could now work with artistic processes and practices which had been forbidden. However, state censorship was not entirely done away with. It is still practiced in Belarus and Russia. In some other countries indirect restrictions are imposed on the work of independent theatres which go beyond the economic limitations already mentioned, and which manifest themselves in the form of censorship. The reason can be found in the strong dependence of independent theatres on their sponsors. A Bosnian independent artist describes the situation thus: ‘There was a cultural minister of Canton Sarajevo who I criticized very much in public. The result was that he was cutting our funds for four years. It was another way of censorship.’¹¹⁸ A Slovenian project, *My name is Janez Janša* (2007), was also affected by political interventions. Three independent artists joined the conservative Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and had their names officially changed to that of the incumbent party chairman and minister president, Janez Janša. In doing so, they aroused public interest:

117 | Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 22.

118 | Questionnaire Bosnia-Herzegovina I.

'While they renamed themselves for personal reasons, the boundaries between their lives and their art began to merge in numerous and unforeseen ways. Signified as an artistic gesture, this particular name change provoked a wide range of interpretations in art circles both in Slovenia and abroad, as well as among journalists and the general public.'¹¹⁹

As part of the project, the artists produced the film of the same name, *My name is Janez Janša*. Although the production ended well, work was problematic because subsidies were not paid due to political pressure. In the words of a Slovenian critic: 'Sometimes the politicians [...] are producing the pressure directly or sometimes just indirectly with the financial procedures.'¹²⁰ In Serbia, the lecture performance *They live (in a search of text zero)*, from the year 2012 and performed by Maja Pelević and Milan Marković (and which will be described later) also experienced constraints.¹²¹ The artists were prohibited from performing the piece in an established theatre. Censorship was imposed indirectly by depriving the artists of a venue. In particular, the independent theatres in Hungary are struggling under state repression and politically motivated decisions. As has been described, the measures in Hungary are not only aimed at the independent theatre groups but at the entire independent cultural scene.

3.3 Training

Until 1989/91, the artistic training of actors and directors was under a strong ideological influence.¹²² Stanislavski's acting methodology was the most important basis for this training. Its psychological style was accepted from the political side. After the political upheavals at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, training centres for artists were forced to undergo further development. This did not succeed everywhere: the old hierarchical structures still prevail in some places, instructors still advocate the traditional theatre aesthetics, and experimental ideas regarding the theatre are given little notice. However, there are training centres which have changed their methods and teaching content. A prime example is the New Bulgarian University (NBU) in Sofia, which promotes collective work methods and experimental artistic

119 | *My name is Janez Janša*, see <http://www.mynameisjanezjansa.com>.

120 | Questionnaire Slovenia I.

121 | For the project *They live (in a search of text zero)*, see <http://theyliveonline.wordpress.com/>.

122 | For acting methodology, see also Manfred Brauneck, *Klassiker der Schauspielregie. Positionen und Kommentare zum Theater im 20. Jahrhundert* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1988).

processes. As stated in the chapter on Belarus, the actor and director Pavel Admatchikov provides important impulses for the independent theatres at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts in Minsk by teaching methods used in the theatre of movement. The young director Evgeny Korniyag seized these impulses and acted on them by founding the independent group Korniyag Theatre in Minsk together with students of the academy in 2011. In Prague, the academy Divadelní fakulta AMU v Praze (DAMU) provides a diverse programme which includes a department for experimental forms of theatre in puppetry, the Katedra alternativního a loutkového divadla.¹²³ In all the countries, there is no difference between the professional training of independent artists and the training of artists who work at institutionalised theatres: 'The separation of artists only comes after graduating.'¹²⁴ The majority of independent theatre makers complete a classical artistic training at a drama academy. Many independent theatres offer their own professional training and advanced training courses. The number of courses has increased in recent years:

'Due to the lack of funds and specific policies, professionals in the cultural field where there is a lack of education, are participating in different retraining programmes or courses to improve their professional skills, sporadically, usually under the initiative of foreign donors or NGOs. The programme varies in the quality, genres as well as the length of the education they offer. Shorter educational programmes are organised by many NGOs and have different formats such as: seminars, workshops, coaching's, lectures, talks, discussions. They are programming in the frame of festivals or not.'¹²⁵

The courses give lateral entrants, career changers, newcomers, autodidacts, etc. the opportunity to learn more about artistic processes, to develop their own approaches, and to make new contacts. The workshops, seminars and forums offered by independent groups and artists supplement the usual professional training. Courses such as instruction in technical aspects, seminars on the basics of culture management, and training courses on administration develop skills in those areas which are missing in classical artistic training.

There are also cross-national professional training and advanced professional training projects offered by independent groups or artists. Great importance should be attributed to the project DESANT, initiated by Joanna Wichowska and Goran Injac. The project took place in the Ukraine in 2012 and later in Belarus. Representatives of the Teatr Les Kurbas from Ukraine, the Konfrontacije

123 | For all the training centres and initiatives of the Korniyag Theatre, see <http://korniyag-theatre.com/index.html>; NBU, see <http://www.nbu.bg/entrance.php?lang=1>; Divadelní fakulta AMU v Praze, see <http://www.damu.cz/>.

124 | Questionnaire Hungary II.

125 | Questionnaire Slovenia I.

Teatralne Festival from Poland, the Slovensko mladinsko gledališče from Slovenia and the theatre Atelje 212 and the Beogradski Internacionalni Teatarski Festival, both from Serbia, offered seminars in Kiev. The subjects dealt with questions relating to the organisation and administration of independent theatre work, networking possibilities, and content concerning art, culture, society and politics. During the second part in Minsk, workshops lasting several days were organised for dramatic advisers, light and sound designers. The project DESANT represents the beginning of a series of training and advanced training programmes whose organisation is supported by the EEPAP. The variety of offers reflects the great importance that independent theatres in post-socialist countries attach to professional training.

‘Education is fundamental for the independent theatre work. Being open, curious, imaginative, learning all the time, being well informed about what happens in the market, in the artistic world, makes one’s work competitive, a good selling product. So independent work requires a good education and good education is best used in the quality of independent theatre work. As compared to public theatre, independent theatre can’t survive if it’s not of good quality. So education is a must from all points of view.’¹²⁶

Professional training is considered a prerequisite for artistic work. It is an important quality criterion and is, in the end, a confirmation of one’s own professionalism.

3.4 International Networking

The political upheavals in the years 1989-1991 made it possible for independent theatres in Eastern Europe to establish contact with the international theatre scene. As stated previously, up to that point only the Yugoslavian republics had been able to participate in international collaborations and organise festivals with guests from non-socialist countries. Now it was possible to travel abroad, to establish contact with foreign theatres, and to organise international festivals in all the Eastern European countries. Furthermore, a great number of organisations, networks and funding programmes cropped up which support this international exchange. Thus, independent theatres in the post-socialist countries have been able to build up more and more networks across national borders in the past 20 years.

Independent theatre groups and artists are participating more and more often in cultural sponsorship programmes offered by the EU, such as the

programme Culture 2007-2013.¹²⁷ These programmes primarily sponsor international cooperation projects. However, it is not possible to apply for such support in all the countries. The independent theatres and artists in Romania and Bulgaria can hardly hope for the necessary local co-financing, which makes applying for such EU funding virtually impossible. Those countries, which do not belong to the European Union, are not eligible for such financing. They are only allowed to participate as partner organisations. However, they have taken advantage of the EU cultural programme Eastern Partnership since 2010. This programme supports the reform of cultural institutions and tries to pave the way for participation in regular EU cultural sponsorship programmes.

The networking of independent theatres manifests itself in the ever-increasing number of memberships in international organisations and networks. The International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), with particular focus on the platform Balkan Express,¹²⁸ the Association Internationale du Théâtre pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (ASSITEJ), the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), the International Organisation of Scenographers, the Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT), and the International Festivals & Events Association (EFEA) all represent forums used by independent groups and artists for international exchange. Above all, the frequently mentioned network East European Performing Arts Platform (EEPAP) promotes the development of independent performing arts in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In 2010, as initiated by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw, the work of the network was focused on three areas: First,

127 | The EU cultural sponsorship programme Culture 2007-2013 expired at the end of 2013. Since 2014, the programme Creative Europe has taken over until the end of 2020, and with MEDIA and MEDIA Mundus also supports audiovisual projects. See Claudia Bruell, *Kreatives Europa 2014-2020. Ein neues Programm – auch eine neue Kulturpolitik? Studie des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Edition für Kultur und Außenpolitik 2013), see http://www.ifa.de/fileadmin/pdf/edition/kreatives-europa_bruell.pdf.

128 | See IETM – International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts, see <http://ietm.org/ietm-balkan-express>. IETM is a membership organisation which especially supports the international networking of contemporary performing artists. The task of the organization is to improve the quality, development and general conditions for contemporary performing art. The Balkan Express was initiated by IETM. On this subject, the following can be found on the internet site of the platform: “Balkan Express is a platform that connects people interested in collaboration in and with the Balkans involved in contemporary art and complementary socially engaged practices. Balkan Express is a platform for reflection on the new roles of contemporary arts in a changing political and social environment. It builds new relations; encourages sharing and cooperation and contributes to the recognition of contemporary arts in the Balkans and wider.”

the professional training of theatre artists is promoted and the international training programme DESANT is continued. Second, the platform supports the exchange of information among theatres. For this purpose, meetings and workshops are offered by means of the network. This focus also supports the internet site, through which theatre people can contact other members and inform themselves about upcoming events. Third, EEPAP supports international collaborations with its own residence programmes.

The many different international cooperation projects in which independent theatres in the post-socialist countries have participated in recent years not only indicate the great interest in international contacts. The difficult situation in these countries often makes a transnational artistic collaboration essential for survival because it helps them to financially secure their work – at least temporarily. It is important to mention that this is also true for collaborations with established theatres and with other groups in the respective country. The number of such collaborations has increased sharply in recent years. By means of international cooperation projects, the theatres and artists have often attained a greater degree of prominence abroad than in their own countries. This can be said of the directors Árpád Schilling, Kornel Mondruczó and Béla Pintér in Hungary, of the groups Belarus Free Theatre in Belarus and Foreman Brothers in the Czech Republic as well as of the directors Krzysztof Warlikowski and Gregorz Jarzyna in Poland. The international success also contributes to a greater acceptance and visibility in their own countries.

The high degree of international networking is especially evident within the festival culture. Even in the post-socialist countries it is possible to speak of a ‘festival boom’ that has developed in Europe in the last two decades. This distinctive festival culture is also referred to as a ‘festivalisation of the cultural life of cities’¹²⁹.

‘On the one hand, the multiplication of festivals is the result of the global tendency for this form of cultural activity to expand. On the other hand, authorities have responded to the needs of creators and consumers and consequently have started to support a variety of cultural initiatives. Festivals have proved to be the relatively easiest way to support due to their unique features (a limited and short duration, the accumulation of events) as well as being attractive for the promotion of cities, regions and, last but not least, politicians.’¹³⁰

In the post-socialist countries, the festivals, which often include offers from several different artistic sectors, take place in urban centres as well as in more

129 | According to the sociologists John Hannigan, David Harvey, Maria-Louisa Laopoldi, Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, quoted by Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 34.

130 | Ibid.

remote locations. For the independent theatres, they are important platforms on which they can present their artistic work, as can be seen in the following analyses of such performances. At the same time, the festivals are organised more and more often by the independent artists and groups themselves. The ACT Independent Theatre Festival in Sofia, the Mladi Levi Festival in Ljubljana, the INFANT-Festival in Belgrade, the Apostrof Festival in Prague, the KioSK Festival in Zilina, Slovakia, and the PUF Festival in Zagreb are only a few such initiatives. They bring the independent theatres international recognition, transcultural exchange and new networks and collaborations. It is becoming increasingly common for the festivals to include discussion forums and workshops on artistic methods or on the administrative and organisational framework conditions, and this contributes to the artistic quality of the events. Yet, there are also disadvantages which have emerged from this extensive festival culture. The programmes of such events are scrutinised critically. The independent groups and artists depend on the decisions of the respective organisers as to whether they may participate in the festival or not. In addition, the artistic work performed at a festival has almost no sustainable effect, because of the great number of performances staged in a relatively short period of time.

4. EXEMPLARY ANALYSES

The following chapter presents individual independent groups and performances from different post-socialist countries. An important criterion for the selection of the performances is the artistic significance of the productions in the individual countries and their impact on the respective theatre scene in recent years. The selection is based on the statements made in interviews and in the questionnaires as well as on research conducted on site. The groups and performances presented here show the current spectrum of independent theatre work in the post-socialist countries. Three of the performances place a particular focus on musical elements. All the productions described in this chapter stand for current artistic trends which have developed in the countries. The exemplary analyses focus on presenting these trends in detail based on specific examples. They describe the artistic themes and processes in the productions and filter out the theatre practices which the various independent groups, despite their different socio-political contexts, have in common.

4.1 The Independent Groups *DramAcum* and *TangaProject* – Romania

In 2001, five young dramatists and directors founded the independent theatre group *DramAcum* (in English, *DramaNow*). The collective, located in Bukarest, was to make a decisive impact on the independent theatre scene in Romania in the following years. *DramAcum* is the most influential independent group in the country to this day.

‘They were young, and coming with no communist background, bringing a very fresh perspective and way of writing. *DramAcum* is the first organization formed by directors that appeared with the purpose of finding new playwrights and offering them a place to experience and grow.’¹³¹

The founders of the group, the theatre makers Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Apostol, Alex Berceanu, Andreea Vălean and Ana Margineanu, who are now all internationally known, had set an important goal for themselves: They wanted to bring Romanian theatre closer to developments which had taken place in the international theatre scene. The prerequisite for doing so was – according to *DramAcum* – to transform contemporary Romanian theatre into a theatre that ‘depicts a cross-section of reality and neither chokes on metaphors nor hangs on a political hook’¹³². To achieve this goal, new artistic ways of working were necessary. The term ‘cross-section of reality’ was used by *DramAcum* to describe the fact that artistic work should be more strongly related to everyday subjects. The group understood its theatre as artistic practice which deals with social issues. With the cooperation of all those involved in the theatrical process, the group primarily addresses social problems and social reality. In addition, one can observe a reassessment of the role and the tasks of the dramatist. He is integrated in the rehearsal process and is also actively involved in designing the performance. His text is not considered a finished product; the finished product emerges out of the common production process.

Another feature of the work of *DramAcum* is the audience involvement in the happenings onstage. The audience is assigned a ‘role’ and actively takes part in the theatrical process. At the same time, using networking to make their work known beyond national borders is very important to the group. Thus, *DramAcum* has organised an internationally oriented competition for playwrights every year since 2002. The winner’s text is performed in a

131 | Questionnaire Romania III.

132 | Mihaela Michailov, “Theater als Eingriff in den Alltag”, in Marina Mazilu, Medana Weident and Irina Wolf (eds.), *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989*, pp. 109-114, here p. 111.

collectively developed production. These competitions help to promote young authors and focus attention on new plays. Furthermore, they make it possible for DramAcum to initiate partnerships with theatres in other countries, thereby establishing transnational networks.

The winner of the DramAcum competition in 2004 was Bogdan Georgescu. The dramatist, social activist and transmedial artist has had a significant impact on the Romanian independent theatre scene to this day. Motivated by the artistic projects of DramAcum, he founded the independent performance group TangaProject in 2005. Its members included the author Vera Ion and the directors Miruna Dinu, Iona Paun and David Schwartz, among others. DramAcum and the TangaProject are two of the most well-known independent groups in Romania.

The projects staged by TangaProject frequently take place in public spaces, using artistic means to point out social problems and initiate critical discussions. The aim of its artistic projects is to change society at its margins and make different strata in the population aware of the socio-political developments in their city. The residents can participate in the theatrical processes; they themselves become co-designers of the group's socio-cultural (city) projects:

'The TangaProject interventions enable a theatre of demonstration and reaction, a theatre that functions directly, that forces reality to discover weaknesses. The artists act as detectors of social problems which they document in order to then scrutinise them.'¹³³

The artists pursued this aim in the 25-hour performance of *RahovaNonstop* in 2006. As a site-specific project, the performance was staged in the underprivileged neighbourhood in Bukarest known as Rahova-Uranus. The production dealt with the difficult situation in this part of the city and the lives of its residents. The performance presented the tentative result of research which had lasted one year. The artists had asked the residents to recount their biographies in public places in their neighbourhood. The stories were then documented by the group, rewritten as dramatic texts and then artistically revised and staged. In this way, short documentary performances of approximately ten minutes were produced based on these biographies. They were then presented one after another in the 25-hour performance.

The thematic focus of the documentary-fictional texts and the scenic presentations was the social situation in the Rahova district. During the performance, passers-by could randomly find themselves witness to a public speech being made by the mayor of Bukarest, who was apologising to the residents for the precarious situation in the neighbourhood. The audience reacted angrily with boos and catcalls. In the end, they dragged the mayor off

the stage. Following that, the TangaProject staged a public discussion to deal with the changes proposed by the residents to improve the living situation in the district. The fictional speech, which was part of the performance and based on the narratives of city residents, was so realistic that bystanders could not distinguish it from actual speeches that had been made by the mayor in the past. The audience's reactions were authentic. The performance and the ensuing discussion brought about the public debate which the director Bogdan Georgescu had hoped to trigger: 'Theatre is for me more than a product that can simply be consumed. With our theatre we create a neutral zone in which we can honestly discuss the really big problems and, at the same time, still enjoy the protection of the theatre convention.'¹³⁴

The performance *RahovaNonstop* was part of the large-scale project *Offensive of Generosity Initiative*, which the TangaProject realised between 2006 and 2009. In those three years, the group organised discussion forums, workshops and artistic work to call attention to the impending eviction of residents in the Rahova district because their apartments had been sold to investors. The residents placed great trust in the group during this time:

'Their sincere interest (interest of the group TangaProject, author's note A.H.) in the lives of the residents which they demonstrated in the search for subjects for their documentary-fictional texts became apparent when one of the young authors was summoned to appear as a witness in the legal proceedings initiated by the residents against the government: Several buildings had been taken over by the state under the communist regime, and the city wanted to have the tenants of those buildings evicted who then, in effect, would have been homeless.'¹³⁵

The socially critical theatre work in the project, *Offensive of Generosity Initiative*, also included improving the quality of life in the neighbourhood by, for example, replanting the Rahova Park. In order to make room for a big event in the mayoral election campaign, all of the trees in the park were cut down in 2005. What remained was a barren area with a few tree stumps which stuck out of the ground like gravestones. There was garbage everywhere. Plastic bottles,

134 | Bogdan Georgescu, quoted in Karl Wolfgang Flender, "Die Walnuss-Revolution. Wie die rumänische Theatergruppe TangaProject in Bukarest öffentlichen Raum mit Kunst zurückerobert", in *NEUE STÜCKE AUS EUROPA*, see <http://newplays-blog.de/tag/tangaproject>.

135 | Cristina Modreanu, "Ankunft im dritten Jahrtausend", in Marina Mazilu, Medana Weident and Irina Wolf (eds.), *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989*, pp. 115-122, here p. 111. For the project described here, see also *Offensive of Generosity Initiative*, see <http://ofensivagenerozitatii.blogspot.de/2009/02/rahova-uranus-community-centre-labomba.html>.

scrap glass and paper were ‘the only spots of colour in front of the dirty grey backdrop of dilapidated urban apartment buildings’¹³⁶. The park was hardly used. ‘There isn’t any money available to maintain the park, anyway’¹³⁷, was the response from city officials. A year later, in October 2006, many of the residents of the district congregated in the park accompanied by members of TangaProject. Residents and artists together began to collect and remove the garbage. They planted walnut trees to replace those which had been cut down by the city. The residents themselves revived the park. They reclaimed it as part of their own urban living space and subsequently used it as a public rehearsal and performance venue for artistic work with TangaProject.

The project *Build Your Community!* also emerged from the undertaking *Offensive of Generosity Initiative*. Following *RahovaNonstop*, the project group once again focused on the situation in the Rahova-Uranus district and its residents in 2007: ‘The best part of this kind of work is that the last project always gives rise to the next one. Our group is developing and growing.’¹³⁸ The project *Build Your Community!* focused on several social groups in the district. It was about ‘inhabitants of apartment buildings covered with advertising banners, the tenants of city-owned buildings, blood donors, the young people in a service project for juvenile delinquents in the district of Bukarest known as Titan’¹³⁹. *Build Your Community!*, as a project in public urban space, used stories from the neighbourhood and reworked them for artistic presentation. In addition, the project included public discussion, drama workshops, creativity workshops for children and a visual archive of that part of the city and the surrounding area.

‘TangaProject developed research techniques and procedures which were common to social theatre but which were largely unknown to the Romanian public. TangaProject created a quick-witted style of theatre which takes a clear stand, a theatre which is based on a two-fold joint construction: on the one hand a creative collective (dramatists, directors, actors), whose work requires a team analysis of the target groups, and, on the other hand, a collective which researches the socio-theatrical aspects.’¹⁴⁰

The project *Build Your Community!* led to a concrete improvement in the quality of life in that district of the city. Shortly after the project ended, a community centre was founded in the neighbourhood. The artistic workshops organised by TangaProject still take place in Rahova.

136 | Karl Wolfgang Flender, “Die Walnuss-Revolution”.

137 | Ibid.

138 | Bogdan Georgescu, quoted in Karl Wolfgang Flender, “Die Walnuss-Revolution”.

139 | Mihaela Michailov, “Theater als Eingriff in den Alltag”, p. 113.

140 | Ibid., p. 114.

Besides the socio-cultural projects described here, TangaProject is responsible for other initiatives, such as the programme *Radical Refresh*, which was developed in 2005 to promote young playwrights, or the trans-cultural German-Romanian music and theatre project *Muränien Muränien!* from 2012.¹⁴¹ In addition, members of the group write and stage plays together, as can be seen in the following comments on the production *Romania! Kiss me!*

4.2 *Romania! Kiss me!* – Romania

Bogdan Georgescu and David Schwartz of the group TangaProject were responsible for the production of *Romania! Kiss me!* in 2010. The play was first performed in the Teatrul Național ‘Vasile Alecsandri’ Iași in Bukarest.

The figures in *Romania! Kiss me!* all have the same wish: They want to leave Romania as soon as possible. There is a 20-year-old female student with the boy’s name ‘Vasile’ who would like to continue her studies in the USA with a scholarship from the Soros foundation; the paranoid pensioner, Miss Renata, who has invited herself to stay with her relatives in Germany along with her cat; and the unemployed alcoholic, Mr Neagoe, who has worked illegally to earn enough money to leave the country. The three of them meet by chance in a train compartment. A rivalry develops in which each tries to prove that he or she has the better reasons for wanting to leave Romania. The three figures cite clichés and stereotypes which they immediately recant. Their attachment to their home country clashes with the ‘exaggerated utopian vision of a better life in the West’¹⁴². Their hopes conflict with fear and self-hatred, and everything ends in a tragicomedy. All of them fail in their attempts to leave the country; all three stay in Romania.

An important artistic element in the performance is a chorus-like orchestra which one critic described as follows: ‘Five figures dressed in black overalls who, as the text informs us, generate the soundtrack and the ‘olfactory framework’

141 | For the projects *Radical Fresh*, *Muränien Muränien!* and *Muränien Muränien!*, see <http://muraenien.wordpress.com>; Art Act Magazine, see <http://artactmagazine.ro/participative-dramaturgy-tangaproject-radical-refresh.html>.

142 | Gesellschaft Freunde der Künste, “Drei Rumänen möchten so schnell wie möglich raus - Romänia! Te pup Rumänien! Küss mich”, see <http://www.freundederkuenste.de/empfehlung/theater-und-premierer/buehne/drei-rumaenen-moechten-so-schnell-wie-moeglich-raus-romania-te-pup-rumaenien-kuess-mich.html>. For the play’s contents, see also Saviana Stanescu and Daniel Gerould (eds.), *ROMANIA after 2000. Five new Romanian Plays* (New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center 2007); *NEUE STÜCKE AUS EUROPA 2010*: play description see http://www.newplays.de/index.php?page=archive&content=archive_2010&content_sub=archive_2010_parts&id_event_cluster=542809.

and, quite incidentally, also provide narrative comments on the plot.¹⁴³ The orchestra assumed a number of different tasks. Its sounds accompanied the appearance of the individual figures, the meeting and the failure of the three protagonists. Furthermore, the orchestra was always present. For the audience, the orchestra visually defined the stage area, assumed minor roles, and revealed the theatrical process.



Figure 4: 'Romania! Kiss me!', Teatrul Național, 'Vasile Alecsandri' Iași. Bucharest, 2010.
Photograph: Catalin Gradinariu

A separate audience area. An empty stage. Only the 'instruments' of the orchestra could be seen on the ramp: plastic bottles, tin cans, empty canisters, drumsticks, glasses, cups, silverware and kitchen graters. The orchestra sat on the stage, directly facing the audience. The orchestra observed the audience, even stared at the audience, so that the audience could not avoid the stares and the feeling of being watched. It was impossible for the audience to remain passive and uninvolved under the constant scrutiny of the five musicians in black overalls. The tables were turned. The audience was not watching but being watched. A duplicity of looks: seeing and being seen, looking and being looked at. Looking at the orchestra suddenly became, for the members of the audience, the same as looking at themselves.

The appearances of each of the three protagonists were directed by the orchestra. Vasile, Miss Renata and Mr Neagoe stood on rolling pedestals which were pushed to the middle of the stage by a member of the orchestra. The setting for the three protagonists was only suggested by a few props. The actors

143 | Jakob C. Heller, "Bis zur letzten Nase", in *NEUE STÜCKE AUS EUROPA*, see <http://newplays-blog.de/2010/06/19/bis-zur-letzten-nase/>.

themselves remained static on their pedestals while members of the orchestra moved about to position and exhibit them.

The orchestra determined the rhythm and structure of the performance. It influenced the plot by means of the constant interaction with the protagonists and by playing minor roles. Two other sensory elements were also employed: The 'instruments' created noises, sounds, rhythms and melodies, and odours also played a role in the performance. During a scene on the train, two members of the orchestra began cutting garlic, onions and bacon in parallel to the other action on stage. The odours filled the room. One could also smell canned fish, perfume and alcohol. A ventilator carried the mixture of odours to the area where the audience was seated, so they could not escape the smells and were virtually overwhelmed by fascination or disgust. There was no longer a separation of stage and audience, of production sphere and reception sphere. The audience was integrated into the theatrical process. In the process, they were mostly confronted with their own clichés concerning apparently typical Romanian smells. The audience could see (and in this case, smell) the clichés, and this brought about the desired confrontation with the everyday life that was being portrayed on stage. This is what the theatre makers hoped to achieve. In their own words, they wanted to 'create an atmospherically dense, sensory reproduction of everyday life in Romania'¹⁴⁴.



Figure 5: 'Romania! Kiss me!'; Teatrul Național, 'Vasile Alecsandri' Iași. Bucharest, 2010.

Photograph: Catalin Gradinariu

The play *Romania! Kiss me!* was conceived as a transcultural performance.¹⁴⁵ Transcultural means a cultural practice which annuls the concept of an alleged 'own' versus an alleged 'other'. The audience realises that what one considers 'one's own' is permeated with what one might consider foreign, and, vice versa, what is foreign may sometimes contain what is 'one's own'. In *Romania! Kiss me!*, transculturality is demonstrated by the acoustic and olfactory elements which make what is 'foreign' a sensory experience which one can then accept as one's own. The constant exchange of visual contact between the orchestra and the audience also contributed to this effect. Looking at the 'other' became a look at oneself.

The successful production was performed many times in translation both in and outside of Europe. In 2010, the group was invited to perform the piece at the theatre biennial *Neue Stücke aus Europa* in Wiesbaden.

4.3 *Reasons to be Happy* – Slovenia

The performance *Reasons to be happy* premiered in Ljubljana in December 2011. It was performed in the theatre Gledališče Glej, already mentioned in this text as the oldest non-institutional theatre in Slovenia and an important venue for experimentation for independent theatres. The former head of the Gledališče Glej, Jure Novak, developed the production as director together with the performer Katarina Stegnar and the dramatic adviser and translator Urška Brodar. What is remarkable about the performance is the unique concept of space and the unusual way of presenting the figure of the performer and the audience. The performance deals with the subject of depression. It investigates the relationship between the individual's mental illness and society's expectations of the individual.

'It is our duty to be happy. Happy men, women and children on posters and in TV ads constantly show us easy ways to be happy. What is happiness, apart from its chemical makeup? Why is it so high on the ladder of contemporary values? And furthermore – why is happiness the only value that is not called into question that is inherently good? Have you felt bad in the past month, have you felt depressed, sad, tormented or even hopeless? Have you been finding it hard to do things you usually enjoy doing? We have the solution: Jure Novak: *Reasons to be happy* is a performance about depression, the performance for you. If you buy a ticket now, you will also receive instant gratification. Offer valid while supplies last.'¹⁴⁶

145 | See Günther Heeg, *Das transkulturelle Theater* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014).

146 | *Reasons to be happy*. Programme description see <http://www.glej.si/en/events/performances/144/128/jure-novak-reasons-to-be-happy>.

The performance focuses on the constructed biography of the director, Jure Novak – a kind of ‘acting identity’. The figure Jure Novak grew up in Slovenia and was diagnosed with cancer at the age of twelve. Jure Novak can be cured of the illness, but he loses the ability to feel happy. No therapy or other attempts to counteract this have worked. Jure Novak loses his job and social contacts. Subsequently, Jure Novak is completely ostracised. Not until he is treated by the Swiss physician Dr Durani is there hope for improvement. Following the little-researched scientific assumption that emotions are triggered by chemical processes in the body and that these are mechanically controllable, an implant is placed in the emotional centre of Jure Novak’s brain. However, the treatment fails, and Jure Novak does not regain the ability to feel happiness. Jure Novak cannot return to the community. Yet, Dr Durani again gives him hope. New medical procedures make it possible to influence emotions extraneously. A device is set so that Jure Novak can decide by pressing a button when he would like to feel positive, negative or neutral. The method is successful. Jure Novak can once again fulfil social conventions; family and friends, his social environment, welcome him back into the fold.

In comparison with other Eastern European countries, Slovenia has an extraordinarily high suicide rate, which can frequently be traced back to depression.¹⁴⁷ There is a lack of therapeutic facilities and psychological counselling. Furthermore, society as a whole suppresses any concern with the illness, which makes treatment difficult. The performance *Reasons to be happy* portrays this pressing problem onstage. It deals with the relationship between the individual and society, between mental illness and social norms. The socio-critical discourse forces the audience to come to grips with this issue.

The artistic process of the performance also challenges the audience to become actively involved. The audience is confronted with a theatre space which does not correspond with the usual arrangement. The separation between audience and stage is eliminated. Audience and actors share the stage with each other. In the middle of the stage, there is a spartanly furnished kitchen with storage shelves containing plates, pots, glasses, pans, seasonings and provisions. Next to it, one can see armchairs and side tables which were apparently bought at the Swedish furniture store Ikea. Articles of clothing and books lie strewn on the floor, among them literature by Sarah Kane, Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka.

147 | See European Radio Network: “Hohe Selbstmordrate in Slowenien”, see <http://www.euranet.eu/ger/Dossiers/Euranet-Schwerpunkte/Depressionen-in-Europa/Hohe-Selbstmordrate-in-Slowenien>; Foundation for Depression Relief, see <http://www.deutsche-depressionshilfe.de/stiftung/9751.php>.



Figure 6: 'Reasons to be happy', Gledališče Glej, Ljubljana, 2011.

Photograph: Urška Boljkovac

As the members of the audience, whose number does not exceed 15, enter the room, they are received by Jure Novak. They are greeted with a handshake, kindly requested to put on slippers and asked to take a seat in the armchairs. As 'host' and only actor in the performance, Jure Novak describes his/a fictional life story. While doing so, he does not attempt to portray a role or a figure. He continually refers to his own person and, in doing so, verifies the authenticity of his presentation. Yet, he does not present only himself. He stages himself; he creates an 'acting identity' which is in contrast with reality. The performance is about staging oneself. A state of tension exists between the acting identity and the alleged authenticity. Seemingly authentic, Novak nevertheless remains a performer – a figure in an artistic setting. While speaking, Novak cooks for the audience and involves it in the plot. He asks individual participants for help, distributes questionnaires on the symptoms of depression, sits down next to an audience member and strikes up a conversation with them. Members of the audience cannot withdraw from the happenings, nor can they simply assume the role of observers. In fact, Jure Novak himself becomes a participant who, in the theatrical process, appears simultaneously as a spectator and an actor. As a member of the temporary community, he is assigned an important role. The end of the performance reemphasises this sense of belonging. The audience does not applaud, and the actor takes no bow. Jure Novak takes a seat among the participants as the doors are opened. The discussions continue; the boundaries between player and audience become increasingly blurred.

The production has been performed in Ljubljana for two years and so far has been extremely well received. It has been invited to numerous festivals, such as the PRELET Overflight Theatre Festival 2012 in Ljubljana, the DRUGAJANJE

Contemporary Arts Festival 2012 in Maribor, Slovenia, and the IMPACT International Theatre Festival 2012 in Veles in Macedonia.

4.4 *They Live (in Search of Text Zero)* – Serbia

The lecture-performance *They live (in search of text zero)* came about in spring of 2012 and was based on a concept of the independent Serbian theatre makers Maja Pelević and Milan Marković.¹⁴⁸ Maja Pelević was born in Belgrade in 1981 and studied dramatic writing there. During her doctoral work, she took courses held by Richard Schechner. She still lives in Belgrade and ranks among the leading representatives of contemporary Serbian drama. Her texts have been performed in Germany, Croatia, Slovenia, Russia and Montenegro. The focus of her writing can be described as follows: ‘Pelević’s post-dramatic texts describe the attitude towards life of a generation which, thanks to modern technologies, is connected to the entire world and has access to all kinds of stimuli – and yet at its core is in danger of being lonely and isolated.’¹⁴⁹ Milan Marković is one of Serbia’s most famous young playwrights. He was born in Belgrade in 1978 and has worked as a playwright on German, Slovenian, Croatian and Danish theatre productions. His texts have been translated into different languages and performed in England.

The performance *They live (in search of text zero)* is based on a text which shifts between fact and fiction. The space where fact and fiction mix is the focus of the performance. In February 2012, Pelević and Marković joined the seven largest political parties in Serbia. When registering, they truthfully stated that they were theatre makers:

‘[...] Milan Marković and Maja Pelević became members of seven leading parties in Serbia: the Democratic Party of Serbia, the United Regions of Serbia, the Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Serbian Progressive Party, and the Socialist Party of Serbia.’¹⁵⁰

As members, they presented a programme for culture marketing to the parties called ‘Idea-Strategy-Movement’. It received broad-based support. As gratifying as this positive reaction was at first glance, the more irritating it proved to be at

148 | For the biographies and artistic work of both theatre makers, see also Contemporary Performance Network, http://contemporaryperformance.org/profile/MilanMarkovic?xg_source=activity; Portrait of Maja Pelevic, in: Nachtkritik/Spielbetriebe, http://nachtkritik-spieltriebe3.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=128&Itemid=43&lang=de.

149 | Portrait of Maja Pelević.

150 | *They live (in search of text zero)*.

second glance: The programme was not based on the ideas of the two theatre makers. On the contrary, the idea was taken from one of the writings of Joseph Goebbels entitled 'Erkenntnis und Propaganda' (English: 'Enlightenment and Propaganda') which was published in 1928. Pelević and Marković had only changed three words in the text. Instead of 'Adolf Hitler', they had inserted the name of the respective Serbian party chairman. The words 'national socialism' had been replaced by the word 'democracy', and the term 'propaganda' had been replaced by 'political marketing'. Not one single party official noticed the origin of the manifest. In fact, the programme was received with great enthusiasm:

'The leaders of the parties liked the text so much that the two protagonists, who introduced themselves with their real identities, immediately became members of cultural boards and councils in the majority of the selected parties, and in some of them they were even shortlisted for the leading positions in Belgrade theatres.'¹⁵¹

The lecture-performance *They live (in search of text zero)* presents this project. It describes how the idea originated, presents excerpts from conversations with party politicians, and shows the reactions of party members. The performance aimed to expose how powerful the political parties in Serbia are and to critically examine their clientelism. Thus, one can read in the description of the performance: 'If you are not a member of a party, you are nothing. Become a member, this is your only chance.'¹⁵²

The significance of this statement can be seen in terms of the performance itself. Indeed, the parties ignored the situation when the project was revealed. However, the public performance of the staged reading proved to be difficult. The premiere was first planned to take place in the Jugoslovensko Dramsko Pozorište, a state-subsidised theatre in Belgrade. A few days before the premiere date, the theatre management cancelled the performance because of an alleged lack of artistic innovation and serious provocation. As a result, the premiere took place in the cultural centre Dom Omladine in Belgrade in April 2012.

'The public reading of *They Live* was supposed to take place on 17 March, 2012, at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre. On 15 March the authors were informed that the reading was being postponed and they were invited to present the text to the management. After that the reading was cancelled.'¹⁵³

In the following months, the performance was staged in many independent venues, such as the Gledališče Glej in Ljubljana and the Kaserne in Basel, at the

151 | Jelesijević, Nenad: "Into the Paradox", in: *They live (in search of text zero)*.

152 | *They live (in search of text zero)*.

153 | *Ibid.*

annual theatre festival Borštnikovo srečanje in Maribor and at the Beogradski Internacionalni Teatarski Festival (BITEF) in Belgrade. It was at this event that Pelević and Marković were surprisingly given permission to hold the lecture-performance on the premises of the Belgrade city council. On this occasion, the authors added a venue-related prologue and epilogue to their performance.

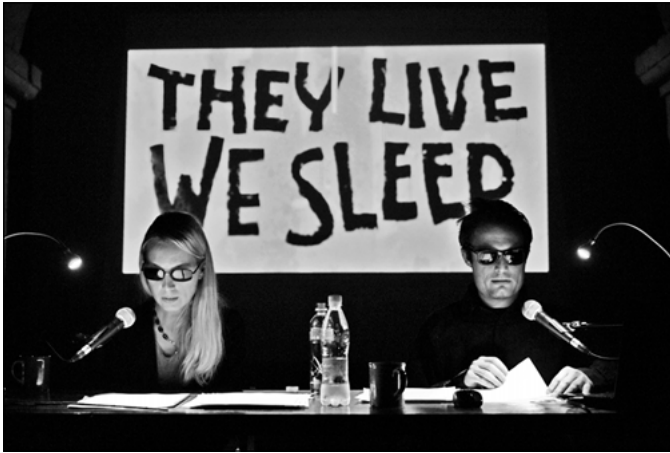


Figure 7: 'They live (in search of text zero)', Gledališče Glej, Ljubljana, 2011.
Photograph: Janko Oven

In the municipal hall, the audience found itself in very prestigious rooms furnished with sparkling chandeliers, marble columns and chairs upholstered in red velvet. For the performance, a table had been placed in the middle of the room so that when seated at the table the performer would face the luxurious interior. Behind the table there were Serbian flags, the municipal coat of arms of the city of Belgrade and two projection screens. Everything seemed to be arranged for a festive event. Maja Pelević and Milan Marković entered the room dressed in black and wearing dark sunglasses. They seated themselves at the table and opened the presentation by reading out the prologue. In it they described the biography of Dragomir Dragi Jovanović, the mayor of Belgrade from 1941 to 1944, who had maintained strong ties to the Nazis. With the figure of Jovanović, they established a connection to the text by Joseph Goebbels. The instructions regarding culture marketing were the focus of the second part of the performance. They were either read out or a recording was played which was highlighted by projected images. Any changes in the original text were indicated. Excerpts from conversations with the politicians and their reactions when they were informed of the true origin of the programme for culture marketing were presented. Finally, the reflections of the two artists were discussed. A text collage emerged which was composed of different voices and different

qualities and characteristics of speaking and writing. At the end of the performance, current political measures taken by the Belgrade municipal government and the resulting social grievances were made the subject of discussion. In the epilogue, images and texts appeared on the screens which documented the forced eviction of a Roma settlement in the city, presented its consequences and questioned the political decisions behind it:

'April 2012. The eviction of the Roma near the Belvil estate is coming to an end. Instead of 40 families as announced, the city authorities suddenly evict 250 families located in the range of the access roads. City employees, equipped with hygienic gloves, help the Roma to pack their belongings and enter buses, each of which have one of the five locations written on it. Most of the locations are far away from the places where the residents work, exercise social and health care rights or send their children to school. On top of that, the newly established settlements become targets of attacks by masked Nazis and unmasked neighbours. In the new Jabučki Rit settlement, only a week after the eviction, Roma are attacked by a group of Nazis with baseball bats shouting such slogans as: 'Serbia to the Serbs' and 'Get out'. Regarding the attacks in Resnik, the Mayor of Belgrade declares: 'We are aware that citizens are afraid of the arrival of those who used to steal water, electricity and other things [...]'.¹⁵⁴

At the end of the performance, the focus was once again placed on the politicians responsible. A photograph of the incumbent mayor, Dragan Đilas, was shown. In doing so, the presentation closed the circle by returning to the starting point of the performance.

The performance *They live (in search of text zero)* aimed to use artistic means to examine the social, political and cultural reality of the country. The theatre makers first intervened in the political scene and then negotiated this intervention in their presentation. In doing so, they connected historical events in Serbia with current political structures and decisions. The two players wanted to stimulate a broad political discussion. That is why part of their concept included the documentation and public presentation on the internet of the origin and development of the lecture-performance: 'Given the fact, that the presentation is available online – that is, it is freely accessible to anyone – the political image of the event as a whole is completed.'¹⁵⁵

4.5 Lili Handel - Bulgaria/The Netherlands/Belgium

The actor, choreographer, dancer and performance artist Ivo Dimchev is one of the most well-known independent artists in the dance and performance theatre

154 | Ibid.

155 | Nenad Jelesijević, "Into the Paradox".

scene in Bulgaria.¹⁵⁶ He was born in Sofia in 1976, studied performing arts at the Dasarts Academy in Amsterdam, and has been an artist-in-residence at the Kaaitheater in Brussels since January 2013. In addition to his artistic activities, Dimchev is also a guest lecturer at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest, at the Royal Dance Conservatory of Belgium in Antwerp and at the Hochschule der Künste in Bern. In 2004, he founded the cultural organisation NeMe Humarts in Sofia, and annually organises a competition for contemporary choreography under its auspices. Dimchev's performances are characterised by transmedial work methods. He combines elements from dance, theatre, performance, fine arts, music and photography on stage. Dimchev frequently appears as a solo performer. A radical approach to his own body and an almost oppressive closeness of the player to the audience distinguish his work:

'His performances are marked by an intense emotional and personal presence, in his rough and therefore extremely powerful impulses, outbursts, different states that border the human and the animalistic, normalcy and madness. This overwhelming energy is placed on the stage through the highly sophisticated technique of the well-trained body, the cultivated voice, precise choreography.'¹⁵⁷

The performance, *Lili Handel – Blood Poetry and Music from the White Whore's Boudoir*, celebrated its premiere in Stockholm in 2004. The performance centred around the biography of Lili Handel, an ageing diva once famous, popular and loved, who found herself at the end of her career facing old age. The performance not only presented the past life of the diva by means of the spoken word. Instead, the figure used her body to tell the story of her long-outlived glory days. At the moment of decline, the masquerade ended and the figure exposed itself. She recalled individual stages and situations in her life. Physical and temporal transience was demonstrated with a shocking intensity.

Entering the stage area in the House of Dance in Stockholm to watch the 40-minute solo performance, the audience found itself in a conventional setting. Auditorium and stage were clearly separated from each other. The stage was dark and practically empty. Only the silhouettes of individual props and pieces of furniture were visible. In the dim light a shabby old armchair was visible on

156 | For Ivo Dimchev and his artistic work, see also the homepage of Ivo Dimchev, see <http://www.ivodimchev.com/index.htm>; Archiv mime centrum berlin: Ivo Dimchev. Lili Handel – blood, poetry and music from the white whore's boudoir, see <http://archiv.mimecentrum.de/video/show/3132>; Woetzing, Julia, "Come on. Do something!", in *Kulturen. Das Online-Magazin der KulturjournalistInnen an der UdK Berlin*, see <http://194.95.94.164/wordpress/2012/12/come-on-do-something>.

157 | Mira Todorova, *Body, Identity, Community*, p. 9.

which a leather cowboy hat was lying. On the right, the audience could make out the silhouette of a tuba. The remains of a red velvet curtain were hanging on the left side of the stage, reminiscent of an artist's life long past.

Gradually the stage was illuminated. The sound of soft and high-pitched singing whose source could not be identified as male or female could be heard from offstage. The irritation continued when, as the illumination became brighter and the voice became louder and shriller, the figure appeared on the stage: Ivo Dimchev as his 'alter ego' Lili Handel or Lili Handel as a bald-headed naked man – only dressed in a string tanga made of beads and with a beads necklace wrapped around his head – teetered onto the stage in black high heels. The striking masculine face was a mask of white makeup, red lipstick and black mascara. The gender of the figure could not immediately be determined. Since the figure was not wearing anything but a tanga and jewellery, attention was focused on the asexual and faceless body around which the performance centred.

'We are presented with an alien creature whose face looks as artificial as a masque of porcelain, a musician whose only instrument is his own body. We are witnessing the tragic and final outcome of a body that is both naked and helpless, shows signs of emotional torture, yet is beautiful.'¹⁵⁸

Short individual scenes from the life of Lili Handel followed, but they did not represent a chronological narration of a life story. Up to the end of the performance, the audience did not know who or what was behind the feminine name Lili Handel. Yet, Dimchev impressively portrayed the biography and physical decline using the physicality of his figure. The once-clear voice of the diva could only bring forth croaking sounds reminiscent of eunuchs singing. While play-acting, Lili Handel told of legendary deeds which she claimed to be her own experiences. 'She' put on props, such as a fur coat, a cowboy hat and a wig, only to immediately lay them aside again. The brief phases in costume were quickly followed by a demasking. Lili Handel repeated dance steps, quoted gestures and implied movements which she abruptly broke off. The muscular body reared up once again; it danced, ran and jumped, then suddenly sank into the armchair, fragile, exhausted and breathless. Loud bass tones shook the naked body and caused it to twitch and jerk to the point of exhaustion. The pain and decline of the figure were exhibited. They were not only visible but could actually be felt by the audience, because it was hardly possible for the spectators to escape the proximity and physicality of the figure.

A compelling interplay of seduction, pain and self-obliteration unfolded before the audience. The members of the audience were called on in many

ways to subject themselves to a process of (personal) reflection: through the visible physical decline of the figure and its projection on oneself; through the simultaneous meeting of masquerade and exposure, closeness and distance; and finally through the physical transgression of boundaries by the performer. In a review, the curator Renate Klett describes the performance as follows: ‘The performance is characterised by a perverse frankness; you can love it or hate it – but you cannot escape it.’¹⁵⁹ During the performance, blood was actually drawn on stage. Lili Handel tied off her upper arm, took a syringe and drew a vial of blood from the vein in the crook of her arm. This was then auctioned off to members of the audience in small doses. By literally selling her own blood, she questioned the (selling) value of art and that of the (aging) human body in society and in today’s art scene.

‘Ivo Dimchev’s powerful solo exposes the body as a multi-expressive reality. It reminds us that the body is not merely a form, to be perceived mainly visually, but that it has a constitutive inside. Dimchev extends this interiority to the audience by all means, voice, movement, speech and even his blood, and engages them viscerally.’¹⁶⁰

Since its premiere, the production has received numerous awards and invitations for guest appearances in other European countries, such as Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Switzerland.

4.6 Szutyok – Hungary

Béla Pintér is one of the most famous playwrights, directors and actors in the independent theatre scene in Hungary. He was born in Budapest in 1970. Towards the end of the eighties, he worked artistically for the first time as a member of the independent group Arvisura. Pintér had no professional artistic training but started work in the theatre as a lay actor. He established many contacts to other independent groups and artists and founded his own group, Pintér Béla és Társulata (Béla Pintér & Company), at the Szkéne Theatre in Budapest in 1998. Composed of professional and lay actors, the company achieved an international breakthrough at the beginning of the millennium. Since then, they have appeared at countless festivals in Germany, such as NEUE STÜCKE AUS EUROPA in Wiesbaden, euro-scene in Leipzig, the Berliner Festspiele or the Laokoon Festival Kampnagel in Hamburg. The group has also given guest performances in other European countries, such as the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff or at the Festival d’automne in Paris.

159 | Renate Klett, “Es fließt Blut!”, in *Zeit Online*, see <http://www.zeit.de/2012/18/KS-Dimchev>.

160 | Guru Ertem, quoted in homepage Ivo Dimchev.

Béla Pintér's performances deal with socially critical issues. Artistically, he works with texts, dance elements and music.

'In his plays, Pintér often holds up a mirror to society. With music he is able to open more theatrical dimensions and, for this purpose, uses Hungarian film music from the forties, reminiscences of late-romantic opera, recitatives accompanied by cembalo from baroque operas and very often Hungarian folk music and dances which are used in an unusual and ironic way.'¹⁶¹

Music is an important medium in Pintér's work. Its sources can mainly be found in Hungarian folklore, the opera, and film music. Music is not only used as background music or to accentuate what is happening on stage. Pintér uses music as its own dramaturgical medium. He removes pieces of music from their original context and places them – sometimes remixed – in a different context. The music in his performances confounds the audience and loudly interrupts what is happening onstage.

Such is the case in the production of *Szutyok (Bastard)* from the year 2012.¹⁶² The play is about a young farmer and his wife, Attila and Irén, from the Hungarian province, who wish to have a child. Because Irén is infertile, the couple decides to adopt. Since the waiting time for a baby seems very long, they decide on the spur of the moment to adopt the 15-year-old Rósz, who is better known in the municipal orphanage as 'bitch'. Rósz can only be adopted together with Anita, a girl of the same age and 'exactly what they did not want: a Roma'¹⁶³, as it says in the description of the play. The young parents return to their village with the two teenagers. At first, life together seems harmonious, and music underlines the portrayal of this harmonious co-existence:

'The happenings on stage are accompanied and commented on by a bare-foot flautist who is seated in the background on a perch. There is a lot of singing and music-playing in this play, anyway, folklore by which we should not be fooled: for this is no provincial farce.'¹⁶⁴

161 | *NEUESTÜCKE AUSEUROPA 2012*: Pintér Béla és Társulata, see http://www.newplays.de/index.php?page=events&content=events_program&id_event_cluster=849037.

162 | See Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden (ed.), Béla Pintér, *Miststück*. Play text. Published for the festival, *NEUE STÜCKE AUS EUROPA*, 14 -24 June 2012, pp. 1-104; Theaterformen: Pintér Béla és Társulata – *Miststück*, see http://www.theaterformen.de/Theaterformen_2011/miststueck/.

163 | Romanodialog: Pintér Béla és Társulata, see <http://www.romanodialog.org/ZTS%202012%20Bela%20Pinter.pdf>.

164 | Esther Boldt, "Gemeinschaft der Verlotterten", in *Nachtkritik*, see http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5819%253Aszuty

However, the seemingly idyllic family life begins to crumble and gives way to reveal the power structures and plight of society. The two girls, initially inseparable, become the worst of enemies. The girls' egotism and greed are now coupled with xenophobia, opportunism and a total lack of empathy for each other. The folk music sounds increasingly twisted and distorted, and is mixed with other musical styles such as pop songs. As in other productions, everyday life is made visible in this performance. It reflects 'the here and now of Hungarian society'¹⁶⁵. Yet, at the same time, the play could be about any other postmodern society.

4.7 *Magnificat* - Poland

Another example of developments in the independent theatre scene in the post-socialist countries which demonstrates an increased use of musical elements is Marta Górnicka's Warsaw group Chór Kobiet. Górnicka, an independent musician, singer and director, was born in Warsaw in 1986. She completed her studies in vocal music and theatre direction at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw. In 2009, she founded her own women's choir. The Chór Kobiet is made up of 23 women of different ages, backgrounds and occupations. In workshops which began in January 2010 and included intensive movement and vocal training, the group worked out its first performance, *This is the chorus speaking: only 6 to 8 hours, only 6 to 8 hours*. The production celebrated its premiere in Warsaw at the Instytut Teatralny on 13 June 2010 and received the award as the 'Music Theatre Production of the Year 2010' in Poland.

The women's choir deals with three important themes in its performances. The choir occupies itself with old texts, myths and songs: '[...] it recalls Polish songs, forgotten drama texts, as well as chorus songs from ancient dramas'¹⁶⁶. The choir also experiments with the human voice: '[...] it searches for a chorus voice detached from the language, for example in rhythms, echolalia or in a drone'¹⁶⁷. A third focus is placed on a presentation of gender issues. The aim of the choir is to give women's voices more strength, and in doing so the choir hopes to stimulate an examination of gender equality in contemporary society. This is clearly demonstrated in the production *Magnificat*, which was developed in January 2011: 'The second project, *Magnificat*, is a statement on the role of women in the power system of the church – and, in the process of making this statement, it completely foregoes using sacred language/holy

ok-miststueck-nbela-pinter-schockt-bei-den-theaterformen-mit-zeitgenoessischer-guehlsverkommenheit&catid=623%253Atheaterformen&Itemid=99.

165 | Theaterformen: Pintér Béla és Társulata – *Miststück*.

166 | Chór kobiet, see <http://www.chorkobiet.pl/en/page/1/>.

167 | Ibid.

words. It is a post-opera which makes a polyphonic, pocultural [*sic!*] Magnificat possible.¹⁶⁸



Figure 8: ‘Magnificat’, Instytut Teatralny, Warsaw, 2011.
Photograph: Marta Ankersztejn

The twenty-three women in the choir stood facing the audience during the performance of *Magnificat*. They spoke rhythmically, whispered, hissed and broke into sacral-sounding singing. While doing so, they frequently varied their arrangement with each other and their gestures and postures. They recited texts by Elfriede Jelinek, Adam Mickiewicz and Judith Butler. Excerpts from Euripides’ ‘The Bacchae’, biblical quotations, advertising slogans, current newspaper articles and cooking recipes were also recited. A sound emerged which was composed of individual voices with different qualities and characteristics of speaking. This mixture of texts and voices was used to present the role of women in society and in the church.

The performance *Magnificat* received the award from the Polish theatre magazine, *Teatr*, as the best Polish alternative theatre performance of the season 2010/2011. The choir was invited to perform the production at many theatre festivals throughout Europe, such as the theatre festival Malta in Poznań, the international theatre festival MESS in Sarajevo and the euro-scene in Leipzig.

168 | Ringlokschuppen Mülheim an der Ruhr: Programme description *Magnificat*, see <http://www.ringlokschuppen.de/ringlokschuppen/produktionen/bisher-2012/gast-spiele-bisher-2012/frauenchor-chor-kobiet-marta-gornicka/>.

4.8 *Mŕtve duše* – Slovakia

As a reaction to the difficult conditions for the Slovakian independent theatre, the Association for Contemporary Opera, Združenia Pre Súčasnú Operu, was founded in Bratislava in the year 2000. Young directors, actors, choreographers and composers work on the productions in a team. Every member contributes his experience and skills to the theatrical process and becomes a co-author or co-director of the production. With regard to the conceptual work, the players strive for an intertwining of ‘chamber opera and alternative theatre’¹⁶⁹. They develop musical collages, modify existing compositions and combine them with pop music. The composition of traditional operatic elements and everyday music is used by the group to create a critical parody of artistic conventions. This approach is clearly visible in the performances *Smrt’ v kuchyni* (2000), *Okná, brehy, pozostalosti* (2000) and *Čo bude zajtra* (2001).

The Združenia Pre Súčasnú Operu brought forth the group Divadlo SkRAT in 2004. This group continued the work of the association and expanded the artistic practices to gradually include more and more multimedia elements. The more recent performances of Divadlo SkRAT present transmedia collages. Instead of operatic music, electronic noises and sounds are used to rhythmically structure the performances. A good example of this is the performance *Mŕtve duše* (Dead Souls) from the year 2008. The production adopted both the name and contents of the classic ‘Dead Souls’ by the rock group Joy Division, and Nicolai Gogol’s novel of the same name:

‘Beside the title, the other thing these Dead Souls have in common with Gogol’s novel is that they are a sharp satire of the existing socio-political system. We peep in block of flats on Bratislava’s housing estate quarter Petržalka, but it may be on any other such estate in Central or Eastern Europe.’¹⁷⁰

During the performance, the members of the audience became voyeurs as they observed the residents of different private flats in an apartment building in Bratislava. People could be seen for a fleeting moment: lying in bed, sitting in the bathtub, smoking, drinking, talking on the phone. Silhouettes of a kitchen were discernible; there an ironing board, junk and rubbish. ‘Bare high-rise apartment buildings, bodies and couples reminiscent of the dark avant-garde post-war photomontages of Heinz Hajek-Halke which communicate forsakenness, unapproachability, chaos,’¹⁷¹ as was written in one description

169 | Juraj Šebesta, “Erfolgsgeschichte mit Hindernissen”, p. 50.

170 | Divadlo SkRAT, see <http://www.skrat.info/en>.

171 | Gabriele Mayer, “Der Voyeur braucht Geduld, um zu fühlen und zu verstehen”, in *Mittelbayerische Zeitung*, see <http://www.mittelbayerische.de/index.cfm?pid=10022&pk=467515>.

of the production. The spectator waited in anticipation of what was to come, whether it be amusement, violence or a breaking down of boundaries. Nothing of the like occurred. Not a single word was spoken, not a note sung. The scenes were filled only with light and music or background noises. Fragments of electronic music could be heard. Fragments of melodies and songs were played, then a hubbub, basses and rhythmic electronic sounds. The sounds highlighted the fragmented picture of a society without interruption and at the same time jolted it. Sound was an important theatrical element of this transmedia performance:

'An exciting, atmospherically dense collage of images, voices, sounds and bits of music, melancholy pictures and magical sounds in pulsating, rapidly changing lighting and sound controls. In the focus: lonely, yearning bodies and dead, lost souls.'¹⁷²

The group gave guest performances at many festivals: in Slovakia at the KioSK Festival in Žilina and the theatre festival Divadelná in Nitra. It was also performed at the Unidram Festival in Potsdam, the DEMOULDY Festival in Olsztyn, Poland, the East Gate Europe Festival in Aarhus, Denmark and the MittelFest Cividale in the city of the same name in Italy.

5. SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

An examination of the individual groups and performances revealed characteristic work practices, aesthetics and dramaturgies of the independent theatres in the post-socialist countries. The main focus was on the productions of independent artists and groups of different backgrounds. The works dealt with different discourses and were the result of different artistic processes and practices. They were based on different ideas of theatre. However, some features became evident which can be considered characteristic of the independent theatres in the post-socialist countries.

What connects the groups and performances described here is a strong focus on everyday themes. The artistic confrontation with everyday realities, with the plight of society, grievances and problems, is often the basis of independent theatre work, whereby theatre is not understood as the mere staging of text but as an artistic process which sharpens the audience's perception of daily life and, in the best case, changes it. This understanding of theatre is shared by

172 | Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie: *Dead Souls. Verlorene Seelen, sehnsüchtige Leiber*, see <http://www.freunderkuenste.de/stadart/regensburg/kunst-veranstaltungen/theater-skrat-aus-bratislava-folgt-einladung-der-donumenta-am-3102009.html>.

all the groups included in this study. As has been demonstrated by the artistic approach of the group DramAcum and the community projects of the group TangaProject, the independent theatre work, particularly in Romania, can be considered paradigmatic for this view.¹⁷³

The connection between artistic practice and everyday issues raises the question of the role of the audience. A characteristic of independent theatre work is the involvement of the audience in the artistic events. This need not mean that the members of the audience automatically become active players. By avoiding the usual visual experiences, the audience is already more strongly involved in the theatrical process. This can, for example, be achieved by using unconventional audience-stage arrangements or through a particular presentation by the actor, as in the performance of *Reasons to be happy*. The spectator can not escape the happenings on stage and is called on to take a position on what is being presented.¹⁷⁴

There are also commonalities in the independent groups' working methods. They often work as a collective, with the individual director taking a step back. Although there are no fixed hierarchies, the groups nevertheless work within defined structures. The focus is placed on the respective skills of the individuals. These are considered to be of equivalent quality and, as such, are integrated into the artistic process. The experience, qualifications and talents of the individual group members enhance the artistic work.¹⁷⁵

Based on the exemplary analyses, it was evident that independent theatre in the post-socialist countries often cannot be assigned to a particular genre. Although all the individual productions mainly represent spoken theatre, the focus of the performances is usually not placed on the text alone. The independent theatre work can rather be described as a transmedia practice. The independent groups use different genres and media and merge them into

173 | See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Das Politische Schreiben. Essays zu Theatertexten* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2002); Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt a. Main: Verlag der Autoren 1999).

174 | See Adam Czihak, *Partizipation der Blicke. Szenarien des Sehens und Gesehenwerdens im Theater* (Bielefeld: transcript 2012); Jan Deck and Angelika Sieburg (eds.), *Paradoxien des Zuschauens. Die Rolle des Publikums im zeitgenössischen Theater* (Bielefeld: transcript 2008).

175 | See Jan Deck and Angelika Sieburg (eds.), *Politisch Theater machen. Neue Artikulationsformen des Politischen in den darstellenden Künsten* (Bielefeld: transcript 2011); Hajo Kurzenberger, *Der kollektive Prozess des Theaters. Chorkörper, Probengemeinschaften, theatrale Kreativität*. (Bielefeld: transcript 2009).

a theatrical process.¹⁷⁶ This was particularly evident in the performances of *Lili Handel*, *Szutyok* and *Mrtve duše*.

It is important to the independent groups to utilize their collective way of working and the transmedia approach to explore new artistic practices. The centres of independent theatre work resemble laboratories which pursue and modify the intentions of the theatre avant-garde. One of many examples is the theatre centre for anthropological theatre research and practice in Poland, Ośrodek Praktyk teatralnych Gardzienice. Another important direction is the understanding of theatre as a means to research day-to-day life. As has been described in the analyses, social problems and realities are at the heart of this theatre work, and are documented and dealt with artistically in the productions.

Finally, there is a great interest in international cooperation among all the independent groups. It has been shown that independent groups in the post-socialist countries are participating more and more frequently in EU cultural sponsorship programmes. In addition, many international platforms and organisations have been founded and international collaborations have increased. In particular, a transnational festival culture has developed. The international networking not only contributes to a transcultural exchange, to international attention and to a temporary stabilisation of the general conditions. Participating in transnational cooperation projects is much more a survival strategy for the independent theatres. Despite difficult socio-economic conditions, the theatres are able to finance the continuation of their work by means of such international projects:

‘For non-commercial art, which has always struggled with the problem of insufficient funding, networks have become an opportunity to raise additional funding without having to abandon ambitious artistic goals. [...] ‘Network’ and ‘networking’ have become both a practice and a general philosophy of how to behave in the artistic market, as well as the basic strategy for a group or an institution to survive.’¹⁷⁷

All independent groups in the post-socialist region are in a precarious financial situation. This not only influences their artistic work but also the social status of the artists. It is responsible for the often hesitant development of new initiatives and makes the establishment of independent groups and artists more difficult. Considerable funding cuts, as have been introduced in Slovenia, Hungary, and in the Ukraine, ultimately mean a substantial worsening of the working conditions. The restrictive structures lead to independent artists’ having to

176 | Cf. Günther Heeg and Anno Mungen (eds.), *Stillstand und Bewegung. Intermediale Studien zur Theatralität von Text, Bild und Musik* (München: Epodium 2004).

177 | Joanna Leśniewska, quoted in Paweł Płoski, “Introduction”, p. 29.

seek other forms of employment. Many groups have left or are leaving their home countries to settle abroad.

The independent theatre scene in the post-socialist countries has proven to be very flexible. If the political and socio-economic setting changes, the independent theatres adapt to such changes and adjust to the new circumstances. At the same time, it is difficult to formulate a future perspective for the entire independent theatre scene in the post-socialist countries at this point because of the country-specific conditions. As in the past twenty years, the theatre scenes will continue to develop in different directions, and thus the future will hold different perspectives for the independent groups. This is manifested in the answers given on site by the theatre makers, with whose words this study will close. A Slovenian independent critic stated: 'My vision is a bit pessimistic. More and more promising artists will leave the country, which is already happening and quite a few are already struggling with their lack of enthusiasm and are changing their professions.'¹⁷⁸ In contrast, a Slovakian theatre expert commented: 'Independent theatre makers are more and more connected, experienced and educated. More and more they enter into public theatres as guests and influenced them.'¹⁷⁹ A Ukrainian independent theatre critic expressed himself as follows: 'If the government changes nothing, the most of independent theatres can disappear.'¹⁸⁰ And finally, a Hungarian independent director observes: 'Important would be to build a domestic touring network.'¹⁸¹

178 | Questionnaire Slovenia I.

179 | Questionnaire Slovakia II.

180 | Questionnaire Ukraine I.

181 | Questionnaire Hungary I.

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Questionnaire Hungary I. Received on 30th September 2012.

Questionnaire Hungary II. Received on 7th November 2012.

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Marko Bulc, former director of the Gledališče Glej theatre in Ljubljana, on 27th May 2012 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Tomaž Toporišič, playwright at the Slovensko mladinsko gledališče in Ljubljana, on 28th May 2012 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Inga Remata, programme director of the Gledališče Glej in Ljubljana, on 30th May 2012 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Andreja Kopač, independent journalist, playwright and performer from Ljubljana, on 31st May 2012 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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