

The Realpolitical Powerlessness of Slovenian Theatre

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The story of the Phoenician princess who lent her name to an entire continent has been linked to politics since its mythological beginning. While it would certainly be naïve to turn to mythology in the search for reasons for the history of the European continent, the symbolic value of the kidnapping is telling. The political history of Europe is full of extremes: the most horrific wars and destruction and the highest achievements of the human mind (for example, the idea of liberty, fraternity and equality) have, as a rule, walked hand in hand. After the end of the communist system, it seemed that centuries of antagonisms, international conflicts and political manipulations of people would finally be happily transformed into a political community that all of us Europeans would understand and consider our own, but with the inauguration of the Golden Calf as the new highest deity, Europe, as the victim of the neoliberal capital has – without blinking – betrayed its enlightenment ideals and entered into the era of post-democracy.

Politicity of art has at least two different origins. The first one bases its content in its etymological explanation, in the ontological link to the ancient Greek *polis*, the city, homeland; while the other method denounces primarily the form. Hans-Thies Lehmann follows suit: “if ‘what’ can’t define a specifically theatrical political practice, then ‘how’ has to”.

Just like European playwriting, the Slovenian drama of the past half-decade has also responded to this painful insight, in ways that differ in form but not in content. The plays I talk about are *The Fall of Europe* (2011) by M. Zupančič, *Europe* (2014) by V. Möderndorfer and *we, the european corpses* (2016) by S. Semenič. They are no longer interested in Europa, only Entropa (D. Gavrilova).

The most unambiguous, direct, linear criticism of the “fall” of contemporary Europe comes from M. Zupančič. It is about the moral disintegration of the European world as a metaphor for the general humanist and political-administrative ideals. Despite his realistic *spleen*, Zupančič refuses to capitulate. His message is full of hope; it is optimistic and also artistically convincing, even though it only indicates a new path.

Möderndorfer's *Europe* is more evasive, even expressionist. The subtitle "a meaningful drama, a terribly blasphemous farce, a poetic burlesque, a severe European nightmare and much more" first indicates the genre's elusiveness, then – seriously speaking – the deep crisis of the world reminiscent of a nightmare, and finally, the author's poetically blasphemous approach to describing this crisis.

The newest Slovenian "play" about Europe – by S. Semenič – at first sight is the most radical: the title, borrowed from Srečko Kosovel's verse *The Ecstasy of Death* insinuates the understanding of Europe as a law that disregards its subjects and sacrifices them for its fabrications or needs. The Europeans are (already/still) corpses, which is primarily a political thesis, but it is a question whether the play itself fits the message. S. Semenič's text is not a traditional theatre text but grinds together all the anticipated forms.

"The political can only be present in theatre as covert and indirect. In fact, one of the criteria of the political theatre can be defined as: political can only appear in theatre in case it can *in no way be re-translated* into the logic, concepts and notions of the political discourse of what we call reality" (Lehmann). S. Semenič has achieved this goal with her radical text, which strives to change the spectator into a citizen, the one who will figure out, in the disintegrated form of the text, the parallels with the disintegrated form of reality and change tomorrow's world for the better. But the director S. Horvat managed to do exactly the opposite: he confronted the citizens aggressively with the fact that they are only and simply spectators.

If anywhere, the castration of the political in theatre most often comes precisely at the transition of the (non-)text to the stage, when in the desire for the stage social, real-political efficiency, it is denied the precise expressiveness of thought. Art is most powerful as ... art and theatre as theatre.