

Samo Oleami

Stories in the street, dancing in the street

itinerary of 2017 Ana Desetnica festival

20th International Street Theatre Festival Ana Desetnica 2017, from 5 to 8 July 2017, Ljubljana

Highlights from the festival where I hosted morning talks with the artists.

Includes: 4 reviews, 2 semi-review-dramaturgical feedbacks, 1 pondering



Goro Osojnik, festival director, addressing the crowd at the opening ceremony of the anniversary 20th edition of Ana Desetnica festival

In 2015, my first year of hosting talks with street artists *at Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival*, I was exploring and mapping out this new to me territory through a lens of a theatre critic. I then expanded on these horizons in my second year, 2016. This third time around rather than expanding on my understanding of street theatre, I'm deepening my grasp of its artistic strategies by filling in the gaps, getting acquainted with the details.

I'd like to thank all the artists who engaged with me and let me explore their art through the format of our festival talks, this year successfully rescheduled at an off-main-programme breakfast slot. Within the casual morning setting, we could easily break the ice and pursue collective articulation of different street theatre practices and strategies on the path of our joint exploration and vivid dialogue. Below are some of the fruits from this harvest, filtered through my personal mental investigation, listing the performances I found most intriguing (out of those I've seen).

Telling a story in street theatre setting

In my initial incursion into street theatre universe I deliberately ignored the narrative aspect of it, focusing instead on performing strategies of creating temporary micro communities between performers and audience on the street which could sustain the special space of a theatre within the street environment. With the absence of both the enclosed space and the black box architecture it's the audience which forms the boundaries of a street theatre performance. Which is why strategies based on what I called "*fourth wall effects*" could alienate them and break the togetherness of performers and spectators. In particularly the theatre strategies which focus on the precise reading of signs, flowing over the invisible barrier between the stage and the auditorium. These signs would then be used within the sensorial isolation of the black box by the audience members for their internal processes, such as: creation of a coherent narrative in one's mind, or identification with the protagonists. In the space of the street however, the audience is often not able to understand every word said, let alone have the luxury of being able to ponder about it in tranquillity of their minds. Quite often spectators will join and leave a performance, making detailed story arches not only impossible, but potentially confusing and alienating to those spectators not being able to follow them. Furthermore, such strategies imply the fourth wall which creates a barrier between the performers and the audience, creating a distinction instead of togetherness, thus losing the audience to the environment of the street instead of enclosing them from it.



In my first year at Ana Desetnica in 2015 I encountered a specific street theatre strategy that lets each audience member individually wander around in their mind and imagination. Though the use of music and strong visual language (*paper puppets in Papelito's "Totem", shadow puppets and dance in Alla Tea's "Memories"*) such performances would create loosely structured scenes and atmospheres through which spectators would be able to traverse, creating their own flow of associations emerging from the seen. This approach doesn't require a coherent narrative and doesn't depend on everybody exploring the space of the performance in the same way.

Only later that year, in December 2015 at EFETSA's practicum no.1, while observing a workshop by **Craig Weston** and **Goro Osojnik** on their *"Triangulation method"*, I could understand the tools which could be used to lead the audience along a story line in a street theatre situation by the pace they can follow, keeping them engaged for the entire journey. The method, based on physical theatre, focuses on the relationships – between characters, characters and objects, characters and space – and on actions the characters intend to do, using performers to actively communicate these "vectors" to the audience. Focus is on what's going on and where it is going to, rather than why something is going on (backstory, inner motivation of protagonists), or as Craig Weston said: *"On the street you're not a doctor because your character has a backstory including middle class background, a degree, an office and a nurse he cheats his wife with, on the street you're a doctor because you're wearing a white coat."*

Instead of performers being observable objects inside the voyeur frame of the black box, to which the audience creates relations to (of identification, of interpretation, of narrative construction), the performers in street theatre actively create all the relations: first between their characters, then linking their characters to the action/story, and finally using their gaze to invite the audience in, guiding them along the path. If in the indoor theatre performers can count on the context of the theatre and the theatre architecture (black box isolation) to establish certain channels for the audience's viewing strategies, these channels need to be actively created by performer's physical action in the street theatre situation.

It's interesting to look at this flow or relations between audience and performers within **Tom Greder's** scheme of three overlapping roles of a street theatre performer (*from Vida Cerkevnik Bren's EFETSA lecture*): *"the character"* is an entry point for the audience, *"the director"* is the role of making artistic decisions on the spot within the unpredictable street situations, while *"the person"* is the role ensuring everybody involved in the show (performers and audience) is safe and connected. Understanding performers as integral architecture of the street theatre show, I would see the *"character"* as a user interface, the first point of contact that draws the audience in, immediately taken over by the *"person"* who establishes the collective situation and makes sure the audience and



performers are and stay connected, only then can the “*director*” role implement various artistic strategies, one of them being a creation of a coherent narrative. Performative strategies like “*Triangulation method*” or similar approaches manage to develop a story within the street environment, once “*the person*” role establishes the shared architecture of the community between the audience and the performers.

A set of techniques similar/related to the “Triangulation method” was used by the Italian group Nanirossi to create a street theatre show with the longest and most complex narrative, I’ve witnessed so far. The reflection above can be read an introduction to its review.

Nanirossi (Italy): Running away in an R4

Review of a street theatre performance

6th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017

An old clunky Renault 4 enters the scene, engine catching fire, smoke pouring out of its windows as two policemen jump out of the car and immediately establish the situation: it’s a clown show, things are going to get wrong (in a funny way), there’s a higher ranked semi-competent officer (Michele Fois), a lower ranked mostly incompetent officer (Matteo Mazzei), their car is falling apart and there’s a dangerous criminal in the back, trying to break free (Elena Fresch). It’s a recipe for a ... *disaster!* ... a rollercoaster ride in which we, the audience, are led through an array of scenes, with twists and U-turns: there’s fixing the car, there’s the clever prisoner escaping, there’s kung-fu, there’s acrobatics, there’s prisoner falling unconscious, there’s volunteer from the audience helping getting the prisoner back into the car, there’s pecking order protocol, there’s a surprise reggae marijuana scene, there’s prisoner escaping again, there’s more acrobatics, there’s juggling with motor parts, there’s police getting everything under control, before everything falls apart for them for the final time and the prisoner escapes.



To look under the hood of the show and what makes it run, I suggest investigating the role of the volunteer, an audience member carefully selected by the group to play a prominent part in their show as an additional member of the police force. Both times *Nanirossi* performed their show in Ljubljana questions were raised whether the person was planted or pre-prepared, but the group assured me, there are never any arrangements and no out-of-character or behind-the-scenes instructions given. The volunteer I've seen progressed from initially just helping with "harder" physically tasks (carrying criminal into the car) to getting more relaxed in his role and eventually even acquiring a certain character – particularly impressive was his immediate adaptation to "marijuana reggae scene". The reason volunteers blended in so easily with the scenes they were in, is the same as how *Nanirossi* manage to cram so much story with multiple plot twists and developments into their street performance: their mastery of communicating the aim of each scene with the audience and leading them with the tempo everybody can follow. The well-versed trio immediately establishes who leads the scene, what is scene's direction and how do other characters relate to the action and to each other: are they adversaries or comrades, do they have lower or higher status? Focus of the action transitions smoothly – sometimes a performer would step back letting another do their solo scene, to then jump in with the direction for the next scene. Intent of the characters is always communicated with the audience (eye contact, facial expression), before it is enacted, the group always checks everybody is on board with what's currently happening, before the story progresses.



I got further insight into the workings of the show and its creation through the morning festival talks, where the group explained its evolution. The first version of the *Running away in an R4* show was created three years ago in a collaboration with a theatre director, it included even more material, more scenes, often with faster transitions between them. After touring for a year, *Nanirossi* asked a clowning professor to help them clean up the show, remove the unnecessary material, simplify the plot and adjust the pacing of the performance to the one audience can keep up with in the street environment (*i.e.* "what works on the street"). As the audience is an integral part of the street theatre "architecture", sustaining the space of the theatre in the street, the relation between the

spectators and the performers enables (most) other artistic strategies – as for instance having a complex plot. Which is why it takes rehearsing on the street and touring for the street performances to fully understand the dynamics of the audience-performers relation particular to them, to be then able to fully develop their potential. For this reason, the open call for the first *urbANA ljubljANA 2017 award of excellence* at 2017 Ana Desetnica festival asked that performances applying are at least a year old. Amongst the four shows contending for the prize, “*Running away in an R4*”, which won, was also the oldest, the one that toured the most. In the three years of touring, the acrobatics/juggling parts of the show and the story part, formerly distinct from one another, began to blend seamlessly, letting the characters be at the forefront of each scene driving it forward. As the performers became familiar with their material and with one another, it allowed them to focus on their characters as the entry points for the audience, and thus drive their R4 performance along its winding path of scenes with the exact pace the audience can follow.

Ben Smalls (Germany): MozArt

Review of a street theatre performance

5th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017

MozArt is a juggling show, not really about juggling, or a clown show, not really about the clown, the juggling and the clown are just devices to guide the audience’s focus towards the story, which ... isn’t really a story. It’s a concert. Or a dance performance? Dance concert?



The frame of the performance is a sequence of “numbers”, each a juggling choreography done to an announced piece of music by *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. Through the performance *Ben Smalls’* clown constantly shifts between high and low status, high and low register, between sophistication and silliness, between admiration for the classical music and being overcome by emotions and exhaustion, between the evening suit and the sweat, between trying to do his best and just not

caring enough. The clown is an entry point for the audience into the world of Mozart – initially Ben wanted to include more information on the composer, but then reverted to just the information his clown character cares about and can emote to the audience: “When I say ‘Mozart’, you say ‘aaah!’”. The actual focus of the show, and where the show gets its humour from, is the relationship between the music and the movement, between Mozart and juggling – but juggling understood as dancing. In his juggling approach Ben uses the impulse of catching an object to direct his bodily movement and the subsequent throw (*Ben trained in contemporary dance and body-mind-centring*). As is his juggling similar to dancing, his dancing is similar to juggling – he would use the weight of his body, arms, legs, emphasising the skeletal logic of falling and catching, of levers and pendulums, to make his body and the objects he’s manipulating (juggling props, clothes) material, physical, concrete.

The performing strategy, as Ben disclosed to me, is doing as little as possible, for the audience to be able to follow the show and to understand its game between the dance/juggling and the music. Even though it’s a juggling show, nor Ben nor his clown character focus any attention on how hard it is to perform certain juggling tricks, rather what matters to the clown is how well the juggling follows the music of Mozart. The character wouldn’t match every beat and sound with a throw, sometimes he would substitute the throw by a wave of hand, a tired gesture, a frown, as it’s keeping up with the music that is important (to him). From the interplay of juggling, dance and gestures on one side and Mozart’s music on the other many tiny humorous moments emerge, moments that Ben could have milked for further laughs, but instead the aim is simpler and subtler. Ben uses his clown character as an entry point for the audience, then uses clown’s emotions to direct them towards the interplay of movement and music, emphasizing the rhythm. Not only does he use his gaze and his clown’s expression in guiding the audience along, but also responds with his movements and his body to the attitude and reactions of the spectators. Ultimately using emotional tools and his performing awareness to guide the attention towards the physical, the material, the abstract: the sequence of sounds, the sequence of objects and the material interplay between them.

In contrast to Ben Smalls’ use of his clown’s character and emotions to direct the audience’s gaze towards dancing (fiction -> body), Diana Gadish takes a somewhat opposite approach (body -> fiction), using dancing to create a special fictional space within the environment of the street and invites the audience in.

Diana Gadish (Spain): Handle with care

Dramaturgical feedback/review of street theatre performance

6th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017

Audience gathers around a circular space covered by randomly placed cardboard boxes overlaid by the metallic rhythmic sound of the diddley bow being played live. Slowly, one of the boxes starts moving on its own, circling around the stage in tiny zig zag movements, until it opens revealing a cardboard creature – feet covered in brown paper, tubular cardboard over its hands, a cardboard box over a head, dressed in brownish hues, matching the cardboard. *Diana Gadish’s Handle with care* is amongst those street performances that attempt to create a special, fictional, “magical” place in the street, the audience can interact with and enter. Within the slow rhythmic and somewhat monotone sound of one amplified string on a wooden board, the creature she embodies explores its newly found motoric capacities and establishes the fictional cardboard world with the logic of its dance movement (*Diana studied contemporary dance at Amsterdam’s SNDO*). She would put her centre of gravity low, often moving on all fours, using the weight of her body, her limbs, her head, playing with momentum and release, to gain a very organic, bodily sense of movement, with which her cardboard creature moves around its thingy material cardboard realm.



As the cardboard world and its inhabitant are framed by their objectiveness and physicality, the level of interaction between this world and the audience follows another logic, alluded in the performance's title (and printed on the cardboard boxes): "*handle with care.*" The world of cardboard is a fragile one requesting careful handling. However, the cardboard creature asks spectators of something more specific, namely to *help* it with its "evolution", which drives the show's dramaturgy. The creature initially asks the audience to release the cardboard wrapped around its hands, then it removes one cardboard box from its head, uncovering a smaller box, removes this one, and another, and another – there's many of them – till Diana's hair and face appear. Evolution then shifts from the body of the performer to the performance space, with Diana's character asking the audience to help her renovate it. It begins by building a cardboard tower in the middle of it, a process performer directs while kneeling on top of seemingly unsound construction. She moves in a way to deliberately emphasise her fragile situation, making it necessary for audience members to stand by the tower, supporting it for the remainder of the performance. Diana carefully selects the audience whom she would ask for help, favouring adults (to avoid only kids, being forced by their parents to do the helping) – some boxes are deliberately too big for children to carry some tasks ask for reaching too high for them, one box is so heavy several adults need to cooperate to lift it. Once this heavy box is brought to Diana, she starts pulling white paper garlands from it, firstly to transform herself from the "cardboard being" to a "paper bird", defying gravity and screeching off the top of the cardboard tower. Then with the audience's help four garlands are stretched out from the tower to four different sides of the space to prepare it for the show's climax: the music shifts to a pre-recorded social dance song as the musician (Ameno) walks around encouraging the audience to dance in the festive arrangements. After the song, the show concludes with Diana's creature organising the audience for her stagedive.

Handle with care takes everyday objects – cardboard boxes – and creates a magical world out of them, while still respecting their materiality, letting us marvel at the beauty of their thingness. The

concrete music of Ameno's diddley bow and Diana's contemporary dance technique are both auto-reflexive, drawing attention to the materiality of their creation: the physical sound of one amplified metal string, the psychical dance style emphasizing the weight of the body, joints, inertia. Both the dancing and the music connect with cardboard on the level of materiality and together push it to the level of imagination, creating the world of *Handle with care* which exists in between the two. Between the material and the fictitious there is a space of poetic (*in Roman Jakobson's understanding of poetic as auto-reflexive*), there is a space of marvel and thus a space of fragility. *Handle with care's* ingenuity lies in taking the concept of fragility from the level of perception – *the fictional level of the performance is fragile as its cardboard world is both fictitious and still obviously made from (everyday) material* – and place it as the principle of physical interaction with the audience. As the cardboard creature is seen as fragile, the audience's natural response is to help it and thus give it what it needs for its self-realisation, its transformation from the initial moving box to its final form of the papery bird creature. The whole performance depends on the audience being not just spectators, but to physically push its dramaturgy and story onwards. The story/dramaturgy is one of unfolding, of opening up boxes, of slow emergence of magical potential from its seemingly everyday origin. In a way *Handle with care* takes the role the audience always has – being a partner a performance needs to realise its potential – and makes it into a principle of behavioural interaction.



I see the penultimate scene as standing apart from the delicate coherent whole of the show. The act with the audience dancing in couples in the performance space breaks with the dramaturgy of the performance on many levels: it uses different, pre-recorded music, it utilises a different interaction type (dancing instead of helping), and thus temporarily suspends the magical world of the show, even the cardboard creature waits in stand-by on top of the cardboard tower for this scene to pass. The shift feels forced, as the scene ditches the slowly evolving unique co-dependency of asking for help and giving help, the performance built upon, for an instantly recognisable model of interaction we were given no prior exposition for. (*With an odd moment of some audience members still having to stand and support the cardboard tower, not being able to join the dancing.*) From a dramaturgical

standpoint, I would suggest reconsidering the scene, perhaps making it more in line with the rest of the show, or placing it after the stagedive, which concludes the cardboard creature's story.

As the performance's title suggests *Handle with care* asks for certain attentiveness from its crowd – the audience isn't led by a character along a plot, instead our gaze is invited to carefully wander in an atmosphere of metallic sounds and slowly evolving cardboard landscape around which a native lifeform crawls and climbs. Care, in street theatre usually given from a performer to their audience ensuring the safety of everyone involved, is here mutual and shared, as the audience has to take on some responsibilities: keeping the performer safe while she's elevated 4 meters above the ground on top of the cardboard tower, coordinating between themselves to complete certain tasks and ensure the show is moving forward. Inspired by the attributes of cardboard material and the warnings on the side of cardboard parcels, the performance takes the concept of fragility and embodies in its dramaturgy, both on the level of watching the show – “with care”, and interacting with the show – “with care”. In a poetic self-reflexive way *Handle with care* manifests the fragile nature of any street theatre event within the busy street environment on the level of audience to performance relationship: “handle it with care”.



Tango on the street

Comparative review of two walkabout street performances

Compañía Teatral Devenir (Argentina): Without words

Belle Etage (Austria, Columbia): Tango? Si, tango!

7th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017

Two walkabout performances at this year's Ana Desetnica festival, both with a female and a male performer, both with mostly Latin American cast (two Argentinians, one Columbian, one Austrian), used the medium of social dance – tango – as a mean to engage passers-by on one-to-one basis, seeking for playful physical interaction.



Compañía Teatral Devenir's *Without words* uses common street theatre techniques to create a small temporary community of spectators on the street – using characters as an entry point for the audience to follow and relate to, using gesticulation and eye contact to direct the audience towards the action with the pace they're able to follow – but combines these with community building aspects of tango and retaining its one-on-one physical interaction. The spatial dramaturgy starts with Gustavo Vallejos and Pampa Veronica Gonzalez each dancing on their part of the street on their own, interacting with passers-by, talking, gesticulating, having very short dance encounters (*the dance they use, they later told me, isn't tango, but a related, more lighthearted dance, milonga*). Their characters come most to the fore at this part of the performance – Gustavo's specific type of verbose Buenos Aires character from 1970s constantly chatting incomprehensibly, Pampa's 1960s hippy chick hovering above people's gazes. After they gathered attention of enough onlookers, they would have a dance with each other next to their stationary speaker to establish their audience, and then start inviting other people to dance with them. Even while being in a dance contract with a partner, performer's characters would gesticulate and communicate with the entire audience, focusing always on the entire community having fun together, either watching or dancing. Community building would peak with the pair teaching willing audience members (myself included) a simple disco dance routine, noticeably making sure we followed the instructions by progressing slowly and encouraging us along the way. After we presented our rehearsed number to the audience, the performers would invite everybody – dancing "volunteers" and spectators – to engage in milonga dancing, handing the performance over to the audience.

During our morning talks Gustavo and Pampa explained to me the narrative frame the performance is built around: two characters from two different eras (1960s vs 1970s) find their connection with one another, their love, though the dance and music of milonga/tango and wish to share it with the audience in hope they would experience something similar themselves. This story, while it organises the dramaturgy of the performance, isn't necessary for the audience to figure out to be able to follow and participate in the show. Instead it functions as a hidden dramaturgy, being a tool for both



performers to orient themselves within the show and improvise off this premise, while the audience only finds traces of it, that nonetheless give texture to the event. A more interesting inspiration for the show, one Gustavo shared with us, is related to how milonga dance events helped immigrant neighbourhoods of 1920s/1930s Buenos Aires develop social connections and built themselves as communities, while also developing dancing styles in the process. *Without words* interweaves the community building aspects of both the street theatre and the milonga dance evenings: it uses street theatre tools to get people to dance on the street, and it uses dance as a tool to get people physically involved with a street theatre performance. Combining one-on-one social dancing with a street theatre situation gives its audience an opportunity for a playful personal experience where they can find the joy of physical interaction within the safety of a fictional street theatre world, while the dancing offers a familiar, safe and creative way of engaging with it.

In contrast to community focused *Without words*, *Belle Etage's Tango? Si, tango!* is a small-scale intervention into a private space of passers-by, by the use of tango and a tiny portable radio. In their loose, improvised journey through the street environment Camilo Acosta Mendoza and Sabine Maringer would react to the situations they encounter, invent situations of their own, and often bounce off the previous situation they've been in, with a different group of spectators, and carry its momentum into the next situation. The show runs on the dynamics between their characters, between Camilo's open, gentle, welcoming approach that can lead to creation of little fantasies on the street, and Sabine's capricious, cold, cynical impulse initiating drama and fast shifts of direction. Occasionally I got an impression as if passers-by got entangled into a personal film of a crazy couple, bouncing off love, hate and jealousy – with performers scaling the drama down or ramping it up, as appropriate. Sabine and Camilo let themselves be daring, striving for unique one-off situations, improvising off the reactions of audience members that become co-creators of a scene, encouraged to physically interact and to offer suggestions. The medium of tango is used as an invitation into this playful, intimate collaboration between audience and performers, with Sabine and Camilo's characters being anchors for the fictional frame of the situation. While each of their encounters with



a specific group of spectators is its own universe, a little performance in itself, I did follow the pair through the whole length of their evening street journey, even though their walkabout isn't really made for this type of continuous observation. (*I was even shooed away once*). What I got out of it is a sense of a narrative connecting the scenes, one not intended for the audience to notice or decipher, rather a narrative as a sense of internal organisation of an improvised material for the duo of performers themselves, letting the dynamics of the previous situation they were in, lead into the next one. The improvised nature of *Tango? Si, tango!*'s allows it to surf with the impulses of their audience into an exploration of shared mini-happenings, using a "tango" combination of romance and passion, tenderness and daring, to create memorable unique situations.

Both performances use the form of tango/milonga to engage audience on the personal level of physical interaction in way which is familiar and playful. Through our talk the Latin Americans did find European assumption of dancing being "something you need to know the steps of", odd and an obstacle to a relaxed atmosphere. Compañia Teatral Devenir's performance connects the personal experience of one-to-one dancing to a sense of community, linked to Buenos Aires culture of milongas, which is reflected in the show's form: starting as a walkabout, but ending with a fixed "stage" surrounded by an audience. Belle Etage's use of tango is perhaps more European in embracing the fantasy of it – passion, drama, romance – to create shared, yet intimate playful imaginations or, at the least, weird exotic encounters.

Teatro Naranjazul (Mexico, France): Mundo lunaticus

Dramaturgical feedback/review of street theatre performance

6th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017

Teatro Naranjazul's story driven **Mundo Lunaticus** tackles the sensitive theme of immigration in the postcolonial world inside a fitting environment of a public space. *Aarón Govea* presents his character as an indigenous immigrant from Latin America to a first world country, where he's forced to deal

with questions of acceptance by the local population, freedom of movement and bureaucratic obstacles (which are underlined by latent racism). In this “*me against the world*” scenario, the show juxtaposes scenes of “*me*”, “*the world*” and the third type, connecting both and pushing the narrative forward. “*Me*” scenes establish slowly unfolding poetic pictures using dance and juggling to create impressions of protagonist’s inner world and imagination – *like in the opening scene where Aarón juggles his luggage before leaving, creating an image of longing and uncertainty*. Contrasted against gentle “*how I see myself*” scenes are confrontative situations of “*how other see me*”, where the audience is put into the position of first world citizens, viewing the immigrant with suspicion. In these the tension can be tangible, as in the scene where *Aarón* juggles with two whips, bare chested, in defiance of the society around him, creating a menacing picture of a repressed individual wanting to strike back. As he cracks whips (seemingly) dangerously close to the audience, the protagonist becomes in the process akin the image of fear projected upon him. This antagonism gets ramped up in a short exchange with the audience where the performer mimics an angry monkey, becoming the caricature, his environment sees him as. Since these two types of scenes are static (picturing protagonist from two points of view), the third type is needed to progress the story onwards, with the help of the second performer, Maud Giboudeau, playing different (bureaucratic) characters and using a spoken word.



While each of these three different scene types asks for a different kind of audience involvement, all of them would be a better fit for enclosed theatre situations than the open street environment (in the show’s current form). The most crucial moments for the audience to be able to follow the performance are those that drive the story forward, but as these use a spoken word, often uttered too quietly and without repetitions, the information can get lost in the urban noise. (*This occurred at the performance’s first showing at Ana Desetnica, at an early slot on an open street, with many young children in attendance. Not being able to understand the plot, noticeable number of spectators left before the show’s end.*) Both authors later revealed to me that while the performance is made for both indoors and the street, it was mostly, so far, performed indoors – not necessarily in the black

box (could also be courtyards, halls). It does make sense the poetic potential of *Mundo Lunaticus* would prosper in the site-specific situation, not only because an enclosed space would make the spoken parts easy to follow, but also as a specific architectural backdrop could enrich the visual atmosphere of the piece. *Mundo Lunaticus* uses a strong visual code – Aarón's clothes and all the props are grey – to create a stylized, poetic world; perhaps creating a metaphor for the protagonist's existential situation, perhaps alluding to aesthetics of black-and-white films? Each spectator is invited to travel along the paths of associations evoked in them by the visual style, the atmosphere, the lyrical chorographic scenes and fill in the blanks with their own imagination. Enclosed performing space makes this this type of audience investment easier, while a site-specific location could add material to it, enriching possible meanings and images. I was told this is exactly what happened at *Mundo Lunaticus*' second Ana Desetnica showing at a later evening slot, in a city centre underpass formerly populated with small shops now mostly deserted. Within this site-specific enclosed space, the performance could develop its potential, confirmed by passers-by joining the audience in the progress.



The question for the authors is how to proceed: develop the show as an indoor/site-specific performance only, transform it into a show better adapted to a street environment, or to create two different versions? The main challenge in how to make this show's potential work in the street situation is finding a way to convey the narrative to the audience and guide them along the story line. I'll allow myself to offer some dramaturgic suggestions from approaches I've seen in other street performances. The simplest option would be to merely amplify the spoken word (microphone, pre-recorded speech), maybe also repeat the crucial information so everybody hears it. Another approach would be in finding a way to embody this information – by using gesticulation, props, costumes. Going along this path, it would help to flesh out the role of the second performer, *Maud Giboudeau*, in each scene. Aside from the scene with her as the white winged angel asking for a passport, her costumes and character could be more pronounced, highlighting those elements that need to be understood for following the story. This strategy would involve strengthening the relation

between the performance and the audience, then use this connection to drive the story forward. Yet another option would be strengthening the isolation between the show and the street to try to make the performance work as it does indoors. By for instance pronouncing music and weakening narrative, the poetic side of the show could come to the fore, with strong atmosphere, music, and mosaic-like structure in which spectators can find their own path through associations that emerge in their minds, without the need to follow the whole story though.

Mundo Lunaticus appears to be still at the beginning of its artistic journey and I expect it will develop with more touring, its currently fragmented structure becoming more integrated, transitions becoming smoother. With its ambitious tackling of the issue of immigration, using poetic approach to highlight immigrant's personality and hopes while not shying away from direct confrontation, it has a potential to offer both sympathy for situation in portrays and give space to the audience to think it over.

Markeliñe Compañia Teatro: Andante

Review of a street theatre performance

8th July 2017, Ljubljana, Ana Desetnica International Street Theatre Festival, 2017



Waiting for the performance to start, audience gathers around an installation on the street – building debris, pieces of bricks, a broken mirror, and shoes, many, many shoes. From the distance, a weird wooden cart slowly proceeds to the scene, woven baskets and an oil lamp hanging from branches that make a part of its structure. Accompanying the cart are four characters, one of them playing an accordion, the other three wear big papier-mâché masks with sad eyes, representing ... maybe ghosts, maybe unnatural creatures, perhaps people? As they encroach on the scene of devastation, the tall figure, possibly a priest, rings a bell. This gives a sign to the other two, a man and a woman, to start investigating the location, gathering shoes in baskets or trying them on. The three masked

performers are well versed in physical theatre, communication emotions through their bodily expression even with their faces hidden, directing the audience's gaze towards the action. As we follow the interplay of the three characters and them moving shoes around, suddenly the (recorded) sound of an airplane attack and bombing comes upon us. And the second layer of the performance is revealed – these are shoes of people who died in an air raid. Suddenly there are stories emerging from the objects – under the broken mirror, there's a pair of women shoes, and inside each shoe, there's a smaller, baby shoe. As each member of audience connects the dots in their mind, realisation kicks in, from which each of us creates our own emotional reaction.

Andante strengthens the interplay of these two levels – *the immediate visceral actions of the characters and the underlying meaning behind them* – as the performance goes on. After the first scene performers begin to enact the last moments of the deceased: a wedding that gets gunned down; a 1930s dictator's nationalistic speech to his followers; his subsequent death and a celebration thereof. With each subsequent scene carrying a darker tone, focusing more and more on historical undertones, the jubilant celebration of dictator's death brings a surprising shift onto the tangible, physical level only – with the joyful balancing/juggling of shoes. Till the moment in the magician's trick for a rabbit to be pulled out of a hat..., err, out of the dictator's boot and ... the plush rabbit is found decapitated. We're again pushed from enjoying in the visceral present into realisation about the historical context and the past. For audience to have time for their inner realisation and digestion of what just happened *Andante* uses pauses in between its scenes in which the entire performance moves to another location, where the next shoe installation awaits us. As we walk to the next "stage", we ponder about what we've seen and wonder about the new remains we encounter – what will emerge from them in the next act?



The communal is established on both levels the performance works with. Audience enters the show through the shared situation of a street theatre, established with physical and bodily means, creating the strange world of these masked figures, their playful bodily expression, their visceral immediate

interaction with the one another and the objects they encounter. Once the audience establishes itself as a community following this first level of action, the second level can emerge (akin the Marxist superstructure) – one based on a pool of shared common knowledge of historic real-life events. *It was interesting to observe a kid next to me who was engaged only by the first, visceral level of physical action: he was very excited by a firecracker explosion, telling his parents he'd love to see the next one (amidst the ominous atmosphere of the nationalistic Franco's speech). After a while his mother kneeled next to him to explain the meaning behind the event – the war, the suffering of civilians – creating a nice example of how collective memory is shared: by telling stories and by being engaged in a collective remembrance*

Markeliñe performers explained me how *Andante's* role is in being an enacted memorial, each scene a commemoration to unknown people whose shoes are found, each scene opening with the elder figure ringing the bell ceremoniously. I would link the performance to the expressionist station drama approach (*even if its authors claimed no intentional link*) or, perhaps more fittingly, to its inspiration, the Christian procession through the Stations of the Cross, as the format of these is a communal journey through the stations/steps, connecting the collective memory with individual's inner experience and contemplation. As *Andante* doesn't relate to a specific event, time or place, and even the nature and origin of the masked figures is left a mystery, it leaves a lot of space open to interpretation – space each audience member can inhabit on their own, filling in the blacks with their accumulated personal knowledge. The topic of *Andante* is the act of commemoration itself. On the physical level, the performance allowed a community to establish itself through the collective journey in which the multi-instrumental musician lead us like a Pied Piper through the images of tragedies the performers re-created like archaeologists from the rubble. This shared tangible enactment was then filtered through individual inner processes of each audience member – our knowledge, imagination, emotions. As each of us reached a certain personal realisation, this "harvest" was then brought back to the communal, contributing to the atmosphere of a shared understanding. *Andante* borrows from processions and rites such as commemoration, through which



human communities consolidated themselves from time immemorial, merging individual and collective in a realisation of mortality, empathy and humanity. The performance gives this format an artistic, fictional twist releasing it from potential historical debris of religion and politics and focusing on essential human empathy – through the artistic procession of *Andante* a collective participation merges with individual realisations and in this process a community becomes self-aware.

All photographs: Luka Dakskobler, 2017