

High points in Puppet Fair, 2012

Patrizia Nikolova

„Holy“ of Duda Paiva

The dualism in the title suggests the dual perspective in multiple message of the show – turning to both the religious mysticism and the transformation of the subject from object of study in mundi-creator (seizing the divine function for creating a world with an actor's decisive move on the stage as a complete system, which in this case is not self-sufficient). The transformations in the show of the famous Dutch puppet experimenter Duda Paiva do not stop there. The conversion of one into another is seen on several levels: stage, drama, multi-genre, puppet, scenography, etc. However, unfortunately, most of his brilliant discoveries remain isolated in the general body of the show, in which actors from SPT – Tsvetoslava Simeonova, Ivet Lazarova, Dimitar Todorov, Marieta Petrova and Ivan Raykov achieve a success, combining genres and complex acting tasks, with the puppets or with each other, alone on the stage, with objects or they themselves as objects in the field of multimedia. The transition from comic to tragic and from absurd to grotesque is not easy and sufficiently justified, precisely because the playwright of „Holy“ falls apart in small, independently interesting stories. But at the expense of that, the show as a whole is not able to conduct a comprehensive narrative and demonstrate a unified concept in terms of means of expression in the context of the action. The scenography and the playwright are work of Jaka Ivanc (Slovenia) and the script, direction and choreography – of Duda Paiva. That gap between the script and the playwright, the scenography and the choreography raise reasonable questions.

The deductive approach of Duda Paiva is very interesting. He begins the general narrative in the usual way, building a not very typical scene of giving welcome on a birthday. The ironic, diabolic element appears yet with the presence of Rebecca (Tsvetoslava Simeonova), who stands on the stage, totally immersed into her role of a sick old woman, who has to meet the guests on her maybe last birthday. Looking over the audience (as potential guests of the family celebration?), the actress introduces the viewers into the stage action, even before the show itself has begun. What happens later, more and more resembles an answer of the Day of Judgment, but twisted through the grotesque family atmosphere of a typical holiday, dominated by passions, demons, complexes and doubts, played by the participants through the miniature puppets not as a second, but just as a first plan.

At the very beginning each of the actors receives a dish, covered by a lid, from which he takes out his alter ego, materialized through the very flexible and spectacular puppets made by Jim Barnard (Great Britain). Eating ostentatiously „his/her personality“, each of the characters begins to deal not with the general action, but with a his/her own individual story, wickedly puppet controlled by some invisible power, which till the end remains a mystery (though certainly it is not the power, „that power, which eternally

In the intensive festival program of this year VII edition of the already established as a traditional for the capital international festival „Puppet Fair“ there was everything for everyone, a rich variety of genres, topics, current issues, provocative puppet design and diverse authors' styles. I would like to focus in particular on two of the most unusual multi-genre performances, presented at the Festival, especially since one of them was included in the repertoire of Sofia Puppet Theater and had its official premiere in the festival, received with great enthusiasm by the audience and part of skepticism by the group of puppeteers in our country. Both performances are very innovative and work in the same direction, to be more precise, using transformation as a primary method of displaying their original ideas, but they also have similar problems. Namely – the breakdown of the overall story and the focus on separate, independent, internal stories developed as subplots in the text of the entire puppet-theater discourse.

wills evil and eternally works good“, known by Goethe's „Faust“). The focus of the camera shamelessly monitors and consolidates even the smallest detail – a fragment of a lost thought, a piece of someone's uneaten leg, helplessly hanging hand ... The Babylon confusion is powerfully achieved by the puppets, mixed as a combination of human limbs and faces. But it remains as a lone piece of a broad conception that works for the message of the show, without being fully explored.

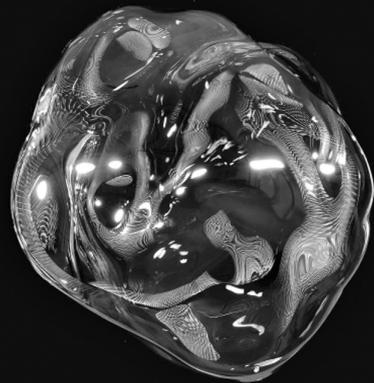
The effect of setting a distance is achieved, but the balance, on drama and image level, is breached. Furthermore, everything that follows in this extremely curious, complex and innovative for the Bulgarian puppet theateric tradition show, occurs as a striking, alienating transformation. But till the end it remains a field of exploration, dominated by doubts and conjectures. The humor as an alienating element is also well set, but cannot serve as a connection between the different scenes of a highly provocative and yet disintegrated into separate segments show.

„Rebufaplanetes“ of Pep Bou

The original show of the Catalan actor and director Pep Bou has been presented in all sorts of options, directions and transformations – for exactly 30 years. The main element, uniting all experiments of the famous Catalan, is the experiment with the space, form and the transformation of one thing into another. The secret of the success and long stage life of this magical show is based precisely on the diverse means of expression, that reveal the transformation, passing through the forming, the play, and ultimately, the effective disappearance of the soap-bubbles in the empty space.

The story in the show develops – it breaks, unfolds, falls apart, and fits together again in a way that Bou creates (as a mundi-creator, controlling to perfection the instruments of magic reality, namely the illusion in the theater) his giant soap-bubbles, dancing on the stage of the Theater Bulgarian Army, where the Bulgarian audience watched this attractive performance.

„Rebufaplanetes“ is searching its recipients in all generations of the audience. Therefore the performance, made on one hand as a one man show, and on the other as a slap-



„Ребуфпланетс“
„Rebufaplanetes“

Кукл
21pm

stick and sketches in front and behind of a screen with the active participation of the flexible Isaias Antolin, not accidentally ranks among the vast range of the type „family theater“. But still. Where is the fine line between the show, the jugglery with a clear reference to the medieval square screen theater, arena theater (circus) and the European visionary theater? I guess the limit is too thin, if not invisible, as the above mentioned genres and elements constantly interlace and displace, just like the playing character of Bou does not stop to change and turn the space, forming his huge soap-bubbles as independent worlds. And here it is a good point to define the function of these non-persistent items created with virtuosity and speed, worth of admiration.

The filling of the transitory, imaginary air spheres with different lights and the emergence of new forms from the old forms looks like a well known children's game at first. It does not need so many tools – just a few drops of washing-up liquid, some water and a straw. The play with the balloons, their consolidation, their transformation of one state into another, their mixing and separation in dependence of the different situations and invariably in the form of dance is more like a play with objects. Or, in other words, these are „conventional puppets“ in a fully conventional space. So conventional that they exist for no more than a few seconds and the speeding in the short duration of their conventional life creates intensive reactions both by the actor's and the audience's part.

The references to the silent cinema (Chaplin and the scene with the globe from „The Great Dictator“), the sketches, the jugglery, the slapsticks, the fun music Intermedia, etc. are interesting elements of a complete performance. However, it runs the risk that the overemphasis on something will change the whole genre and even the direction of „Rebufaplanetes.“ But more interesting in this case, it seems to me, is the function of the screen that divides the stage into two – in terms of space and condition, and sometimes even into two parallel storylines,

inevitably interlaced at a definite point. As a remnant of the Square Theater the screen inserts the outer space (the street) in the conventional internal (the stage in the closed hall), creating a change in the

codes and the relations between the actors. The duo Bou and Antolin set two parallel storylines that cannot interlace without the invisible „finishing of the writing“ in the imagination of the audience and their supposed reaction. So with the help of the silent actors in front and behind the screen the viewer has the chance to „finish“ the story, that is presented, in his own way. This happens also due to the emphasized props, used as a puppet theater of the objects (empty glass, walking on the edge of the screen in a silent dialogue with the actor in front). But the most interesting is, if you perceive metaphorically the logic of Pep Bou, who plays with the huge soap-bubbles as conventional puppets. And if we understand the glowing, transitory body of these fragile creatures in this context, we cannot help it but be intrigued by the many possibilities, offered by this kind of conditional „Puppet“ Theater – the puppet soap-bubble has a totally conventional body, which may at any time transform into something else or simply disappear (which in the theater itself, especially in front of the children's audience is kind of magic). „The bodies“ of this kind of „puppets“ are totally abstract and are subject to a totally conventional control. Moreover, they have the possibility to look different every time, which approximates the theater of Bou to the jugglery, the magic or, in other words, to the live magic.

Unfortunately, the show that we saw during the festival, missed the criteria in the multi-genre conventional space and the magic gave way to the jugglery and the slapstick – to the sketches. Off course, within this kind of conventional „Puppet“ theater such risks can be always expected and they are a full responsibility of the actors who control the development of the show. The good thing is that the golden mean can be ascertained next time. And it might not be ascertained. It is question of transformation. ■

Translation by Nadia Zhhereva