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Abstract

The article analyses the intriguing geocultural and chronopolitical/poetic position of the Dubrovnik-based Studentski teatar Lero (Lero Student Theatre), founded in 1968. In the more than fifty years of its uninterrupted existence, the group has maintained firm ideological and expressive links to the progressivist and cosmopolitan European historical avant-gardes and post-avant-gardes while at the same time holding on just as firmly to Dubrovnik's cultural heritage, literary tradition and a kind of isolated nostalgia for the times when this city was an independent state and a thriving cultural centre of southeastern Europe. The latter, highly aestheticised and oneiric tendency in Lero's poetics, staged in an all-female cast, has crystallised more and more over the last thirty years under the direction of Davor Mojaš, clashing bizarrely with the more subversive aspects of his avant-garde strategies and a kind of melancholic feminist politics of history. Lero Student Theatre thus represents a confusing case of a relatively long-lived, internationally recognised and yet deliberately peripheral artistic project that demands its own interpretative framework and even defies the logic of local reproduction of the centre-periphery model.

Keywords: Lero Student Theatre, geocultural space, chronopoetics, feminist revision

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Exalted Periphery: The Confusing Case of Lero Student Theatre in Dubrovnik, Croatia

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By focusing on the shifting centre-periphery dynamic that characterises many different expressions of avant-garde theatre, this issue of *Amfiteater* solicits us to reconsider, if not resolve, a curious spatiotemporal crux that lies behind any consideration of avant-garde projects in their concrete geographical and sociocultural environments. Just as it is difficult to determine the nature of the historical rupture that decisively shapes the art of the avant-garde and its theatre in particular – namely, to tell what historical and aesthetic circumstances actually made individual avant-garde movements and actors gain the attributes of radicalism, novelty and experimentation (cf. Papaioannou) – it is perhaps even more difficult to identify the ways in which later ramifications of the avant-garde, that is, the re-emergence of analogous artistic procedures and subversive ambitions in the second wave in the late 1960s and the 1970s, managed to disturb existing distributions of power within the cultural field. If at least part of the definition of the avant-garde is to challenge the notion of cultural dominance – an often unacknowledged but underlying, geopolitically conditioned hegemony that dictates certain artistic characteristics worthy of everyone's attention – how is it that histories of the avant-garde tend to reproduce the same asymmetry, again privileging Western "centres" at the expense of, say, East-European, let alone South-East-European contributions? What fate do peripheral or "semi-peripheral"[1] cultures suffer under such circumstances? Is the same logic at work here that Pascale Casanova denounces in her seminal *World Republic of Letters*, in which she points to the paradoxical – inverted – reproduction of hierarchical tendencies within the so-called "small literary nations", which are intent on marginalising the very "cosmopolitan" writers, those who are striving to reach the standards of "the centre"? And what about artistic phenomena that confuse the kind of poetic orthodoxy that

1 I borrow this term from Dubravka Đurić, who applies it to the entire region of the former Yugoslavia, torn between aspiring to adopt Western standards and its modernity, and another pull, to resist such autocolonisation and integration and cultivate instead one's own tradition, which often means isolation and autarchy. Such cultures are, she argues, unstable and unstructured and exposed to temporal discontinuities and to a mixture of pre-modern, modern and postmodern tendencies (192–193).

emerges from such implicit or explicit hegemonic judgements and the resulting chronopolitical positioning of entire regions of the world as well as artists, groups, processes and strategic choices?

The case of the relatively short-lived Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is unique in this chronopolitical respect, as Branimir Jakovljević has succinctly theorised in his inspiring book *Alienation Effects*, in which he traces fascinating correspondences between the different phases that marked the profiling of the ideological background, economical reforms and cultural production – especially in the field of experimental theatre and performance – of the tragically collapsed federal state. Since the former Yugoslavia was itself a modern political experiment courageously eschewing the Cold War cultural divisions and was ruled by a party that famously claimed to be the avant-garde of the working class, it could have by no means been considered, at least not from the late 1950s and early 1960s on, at the periphery of European modernisation processes, intellectual standards and also, at least in retrospect, bold artistic experiments and political subversions, mainly in plastic arts, that could pride themselves to rightfully belong to post–WWII avant-garde movements. However, as Reana Senjković's study, *The Pop-Experience of Soc-Culture*, shows, despite all the intellectual and artistic efforts at maintaining the cultural edginess of the Yugoslav public scene that Jakovljević traces, these experiments, in fact, took a relatively peripheral position vis-à-vis the dominant cultural policy of the rulers. The dominant cultural policy was to a large extent a curious mixture of inherited bourgeois aesthetic criteria in all the "arts" and a tolerance of the local appropriation of the Western entertainment industry propagated by the burgeoning media, sometimes criticised by the state ideologues, but never too harshly, as potentially endangering the authenticity of socialist cultural aspirations. It is, therefore, unavoidable when discussing a particular phenomenon, author or group belonging to the ex-Yugoslav avant-garde theatre to repeatedly address the paradoxes of periodisation and localisation on the ever-changing scale between the "centre" and its "periphery", especially given the fact that the former Yugoslavia consisted of several republics whose capitals, especially Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Belgrade, relentlessly competed for the role of the ruling cultural centre.

Here, I would like to point out how such paradoxes pertain even to a more narrow national scale by focusing on the curious geocultural and chronopolitical position of the Dubrovnik Studentski teatar Lero (Lero Student Theatre),[2] which tends to slip from contemporary overviews of either the ex-Yugoslav or Croatian theatre post-avant-garde.[3] This position is by no means a conscious and explicitly formulated decision

2 The name of the group still persists, despite the fact that nowadays its members are no longer in their teens or twenties, but are mostly adult women.

3 To be fair, there is no systematic overview of the Croatian alternative theatre history after WWII. There are, however, a couple of recent studies and collections of interviews dealing with separate currents within it, such as Marjanić (*Kronotop* and *Topoi*), which deal mostly with performance art, and Blažević (*Razgovori* and *Izboren poraz*), where Lero is mentioned in three footnotes (156, 182, 208).

but rather a reflex of the internal geopolitical logic that made Dubrovnik visible only once a year during the socialist period, during the three or four months of the tourist season. Nevertheless, it is still largely unjust since Lero represents a rare avant-garde jewel on the Croatian map of non-institutional theatre, indeed a jewel in the heart of the Croatian periphery, which Dubrovnik definitely is geographically, and at the same time, in the heart of the most independent and highly developed civilisation Croatia can ever boast of having partaken, which Dubrovnik definitely was, historically, from the medieval times to the arrival of Napoleon's troupes. Neither, however, prevented the abovementioned bizarre cultural policy from being embodied in this same city at its fullest during the socialist period since one of the most famous and internationally recognised Yugoslav cultural projects, the Dubrovnik Summer Games, was founded there in the 1950s, to fortify Dubrovnik's growing touristic destiny and profitable prospects. In addition to some of the best local stars from all republics, "the Games",[4] as a heavily state-sponsored event, at its best hosted many world-renowned musicians and theatre makers, all of whom were specially invited to spend several weeks in Dubrovnik to prepare and rehearse their works on site and thus participate in the festivities with concerts, recitals and environmental performances. The theatre programme of the Games was based on both European and local classical and modernist repertoire – from the Greeks and Shakespeare to Calderon, Molière and Goethe, to the most popular national classics by Držić, Gundulić and Vojnović, as well as their newer and more daring successors in the same classical lineage, from Edward Bond's *Lear* and Luis Buñuel's *Hamlet* to, for example, Marijan Matković's and Lada Kaštelan's reinterpretations of Euripides.

I could not have missed mentioning this particular manifestation because in the more than fifty years of its uninterrupted existence, the Lero Student Theatre has lived in a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the Games, half as its antagonist, half as an admiring shadow of this seasonal refreshment of a basically provincial, culturally stifled, small town, all the while serving as the only internal reminder that neither the festival nor the only theatre in the town, Kazalište Marina Držića (Marin Držić Theatre), necessarily fulfil all the creative needs and energies of Dubrovnik's inhabitants. This contribution aims to point to a kind of "push-and-pull" relationship that existed between the large mainstream cultural projects such as the Dubrovnik Summer Games – the respectable representative of the "centrality" of the particular poetics of (environmental) theatre – and the small and deliberately marginal, subversive projects of Lero, which were intended to undermine the idea of representative culture conceived mainly for the middle class and the well-educated older generation. The group ostentatiously used artificial materials and a small square stage for their scenic designs, as well as lighting

4 The idea of one of their initiators, Branko Gavella, was not to yield to the concept of the festival but rather to organise a framework for perpetual interpenetration between the everyday life and theatrical experience: actors and other artists were invited to spend two months together collaborating on the project, not just visiting and delivering their ready-made performances.

effects and recorded music, thus defying the reliance of the mainstream repertoire of the Games on decorative historical settings and atmospheric musical accompaniment for their supposedly environmental and actually very classically used theatre space. Unlike the "star" performers of the former Yugoslavia, the group consisted of young people and amateurs. Instead of the fetishised bodies exhibited in neoclassically envisaged performances or the mystified interiorities of actors' poetic psychological realism as the predominant acting poetics of the Games, the group opted instead for the radical suppression of the actor's traditional mimetic function and foregrounded actors' bodies and voices as thematic stage signs. In doing so, reviving the physical interactivity of the actor in popular street theatre and deploying Brechtian gesture, demonstration and distance, as well as Beckettian reduction and impersonality, often fragmenting the actor's body with lighting and costume effects, that is, allowing only its symbolically overloaded "parts" to become visible: hands, feet, mouths, heads. Finally, counter to the implicit veneration of the ideological framework that supported the Games as the best result of Yugoslav cultural policy, which united artists across national and international borders, Lero insisted on its local anchoring and its "grassroots" – often satirical, if not blasphemous – perspective.

Over time, however, Lero became increasingly nostalgic for the general festive atmosphere of the Games, which, with Croatian independence, had to be gradually abandoned in favour of the more economical version of a typical "festival", which merely staged performances for a few days and only formally fulfilled the hopes of the original idea of mixing theatre and everyday life. However, Lero never abandoned its "peripheral" vision and alternative performance style but increasingly began to collect lost pieces, for example, recordings of earlier performances from the golden days of the Games, and to use them as recycled material for its own post-modernist collages. Therefore, as I argue below, Lero cannot be clearly located on a map of the Croatian alternative scene: its inextricable links to the mainstream culture that has dominated the city for fifty years have to do with a shared connection to Dubrovnik's former glory as an independent state and the most developed early modern civilisation, whose decadence both "scenes" – each in its own way – seek to prevent. As one of Lero's most enthusiastic critics, Vlado Krušić aptly summarises:

> For Lero, the sense of belonging was never exclusive, local–patriotic. The city sets its boundaries, but they are flexible enough to include the world. The city was a locus universalis not only for Lero but for all its creative artists and thinkers, even in those times when its claustrophobic ideological and state policies mercilessly stifled any flicker of personal difference. (Mojaš ed., *Lerovnica* 36)

Founded by local writer Feđa Šehović in 1968, Lero first started as a mere satirical outlet for a group of intellectuals and young people who adopted this name, traditionally given in Dubrovnik to all eccentric, free-spirited, humorous

individualists. However, with the arrival of its current leader and director, Davor Mojaš (by profession a journalist), in the early 1970s, Lero profiled its repertoire in much more thoughtfully and managed not only to establish but also to maintain firm ideological and expressive links with the European historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes. They put on stage such playwrights as Jarry, Kharms, Mayakovsky, Vvedensky, Shklovsky, Witkiewicz, Różewicż, Brecht, Ionesco and Beckett, organised ironic recitals of partisan agit-prop poetry, humorous cabaret skits and occasional happenings, as well as performed modern Croatian playwrights and poets such as the surrealist Radovan Ivšić, the expressionist Miroslav Krleža and the rebel 1950s female poet, Vesna Parun, as well as local poets and playwrights, such as Milan Milišić and Luko Paljetak. Each season, the group staged two or three new performances on improvised stages and in urban spaces that were deemed unusable. Often eclectic, unpredictable and provocative, the repertoire mixed different, sometimes even incompatible, approaches to the text, the audience and the playful, didactic or satirical outcomes of their performances.

The methodology that characterised the work of this professionally completely untrained group of young people led by Mojaš was somewhat unusual from the outset, even by amateur standards and even in the light of fairly well-known avant-garde liberties in terms of the level of responsibility, professional work ethic, collaborative coherence, treatment of the text, relationship to broader social issues, attitude towards institutional hierarchies, etc. The Lero Student Theatre was open to any young person who wanted to join the group. However, once you were accepted as a member, you had to come to rehearsals every day of the working week to confirm time and again that you were committed to the common "cause", that is, to the alternative socialisation offered by the group, which also included looking after each individual in any private crises. Although Mojaš was the one who decided on the repertory title they would work on, everyone was encouraged to develop their own individual approach to the text and free to impose their own personality on the group, as the work regularly began its rehearsals with deliberately completely uninhibited activities such as playing, pranking, dancing and joking, regardless of the supposed "seriousness" of the text's subject matter or its status in the academic and cultural field. In one of his interviews, Mojaš recalls how the preparations for *The Partisan Stage* – a humorous performance of partisan and agitprop poems collected in Croatia by the scholar and university professor Maja Hribar Ožegović – began as three days of non-stop marching and singing in the tiny premises of Lero in the centre of the city (see Krušić, "Važno"). Then, when the group felt most comfortable and had accumulated enough performance material, the process of removing all superfluous parts began a kind of dramaturgical "cleansing" that was carried out collectively and consensually, but mainly under the direction of Mojaš. No wonder that the result of such preparations was often a particular kind of joyful irreverence, evident even

towards such avant-garde authors as the Marxist Brecht, the absurdist Beckett or the Croatian surrealist Ivšić, the performance of whose play *Vane*, for example, was built entirely on the process of introducing a schoolgirl actress to the rules of Lero's game.

In addition, Lero gradually insisted on projecting their unique image outside the framework of individual performances: they rehearsed in advance the scenario of their arrival in the cities they visited, getting off the bus and entering the premises in which they had to perform; the members of the group wore special clothes that distinguished them from other participants at, say, theatre festivals, as if Lero were some sports team; they teased the audience with their improvised performative outbursts long before the actual performance began, etc. Over time, however, Lero's performances became increasingly ambitious in terms of the performative and interpretative problems that the group sought to solve (the relationships between protagonist and group, the performance and the historical context of their production, how to play Brecht's alienation effect, etc.), as they also evolved into more disciplined and tightly structured events that utilised choreographed and highly controlled movements.

These outstanding first decades of Mojaš's engagement ensured that Lero established itself as the absolute favourite of theatre critics in the former Yugoslavia, who wrote about this "phenomenon" with undying admiration, as can easily be gathered from the abundance of press material published in two collections commemorating the group's longevity, *Lerovnica* (*The Leralmanacs*, 2011), and *Lero u knjigu stavljen* (*Lero Put in a Book*, 2013). The group regularly won prizes at the annual meetings of theatre amateurs at the republican and federal level and received numerous opportunities for international visits – from Solun, Bologna, Krakow, Ljubljana and Vienna to Cambridge, London, Manchester and Glasgow, as well as to BROUHAHA in Liverpool, where in 1992, Lero even performed at the opening of the festival. Many of its members, who joined the group as youngsters in the 1960s and 1970s, aspired to become professional actors, a status which some of them succeeded in achieving, either by accepting engagements in the local theatre or by leaving Dubrovnik in order to start a more visible acting career in Zagreb – like the too early deceased darlings of Croatian film audiences Ena Begović and Predrag Vušović-Pređo, or Doris Šarić-Kukuljica, who is still an important asset of the Zagreb Youth Theatre, one of the city's most prominent acting ensembles known for its poetics of collective play.

Nevertheless, as the last three decades of Lero's thriving presence in the city testify, Mojaš gradually emphasised the group's affiliation to a historically confirmed tradition that had once brought Dubrovnik very close to the centre of European cultural life as well as that of the Renaissance and Baroque academies that flourished mainly in Italy but inspired an analogous fashion in the neighbouring Croatian small towns. These were also associations of ambitious theatre amateurs, most of them noblemen,

who considered themselves to be at the centre of theatrical culture at a time when, throughout Europe, acting as a profession was still despised as being more suited to the margins of society, that is, to the lower classes, who had to earn their living by selling their bodies for money. However, the irony that marks Lero's later explicit commitment to the aforementioned legacy described and poeticised in Mojaš's surrealist novel *Kazalište Isprazni* (*The Vanity Theatre*) – a kind of fictionalised memoir of the troupe, in which the troupe is represented as performing in an epoch without precise temporal coordinates – is the growing female dominance in the troupe, as women were not allowed to become members of the Renaissance academies and were, in fact, the main target of the already mentioned attacks on despised professionals. For Mojaš, however, female performers became an important artistic medium for a critical revision of the historical context favouring such deprecatory attitudes.

In the context of the professionalism/amateurism divide, which is itself an ironic example of the historically conditioned relationships between what is considered central to a given culture and what is considered peripheral, it is perhaps interesting to mention in passing a revealing episode involving "scandalised" professionals in which Lero was also involved. In the late 1970s, the Dubrovnik Festival opened its hitherto closely guarded high-cultural doors for a section of the programme called Days of Youth Theatre, until then organised in the Croatian capital, Zagreb. The festival hosted big names from the world of avant-garde theatre, from Bread and Puppet Theatre to La Fura dels Baus, and important Croatian avant-garde theatre groups also performed there. In 1979, one of them, Kugla glumište (Kugla Theatre), also a group of "amateurs", organised one of the most impressive environmental happenings ever seen in Dubrovnik, *Ljetno popodne* (*Summer Afternoon*), and invited the members of Lero to join them. The performance won the annual prize for the best actor, Orlando, which was awarded to Dunja Koprolčec, one of the members of Kugla Theatre, and a scandal broke out. One of the main arguments was that it is inconceivable that a non-professional actress, who also appears naked at the end of the performance, should win such an honourable award.[5] I mention this only to illustrate the kind of mentality that prevailed at the time, both in Dubrovnik itself and in Croatia, if not throughout Yugoslavia as well. The distinction between professionals and amateurs – not to mention what a man or a woman was entitled to do on stage – was one of the components that strongly influenced the placement of avant-garde performing groups on the map of relevant cultural production.

However, the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, and above all, the outbreak of war, which made Dubrovnik – one of the most valuable treasures of Croatian identity – the target of heavy bombardment, meant that Lero and its leader Mojaš suddenly took a completely different direction, away from what Vlado Krušić described in his 1985

5 More on the entire affair in Blažević (*Izboren poraz* 199–211).

article, "The Lero Case", as a "healthy, unbridled mocking attitude" towards either the local or the state-promoted ideological hypocrisy that the group unabashedly attacked in its performances (109). As I have already mentioned, Mojaš now relied mainly on female performers to invent a theatrical atmosphere all his own, much darker, more deeply engaged and more enigmatic than the unconventional and humorous diversions for which the group had previously been known. This is how writer Milan Milišić described the main features of the performance *Noć u domu Radost* (*The Night in the Joy Dormitory*) in 1986, which had already marked and announced this turning point:

> The black dresses that the girls wear make each of them one, and each of them is supposed to represent all of them. These representatives of sameness tell us eloquently that uniqueness is an unstable category and that the self is only a state of consciousness in time. In contrast to the text, which requires a known relationship of meaning, music does not. Mojaš argues the same for theatrical performance. That is why the structure of his performance is primarily rhythmic. Just as the music does not express, does not have its own expression, but only sews it up – as if covering the audience with "musical rabble" – the actresses also do not express their feelings or the complexity of their situation. Imbued with their asynchronous rhythms, they fill the space with their physical being and their corresponding signs. (The stage set seems to be one of these contemporary installations, as it imposes itself as the scene within the scene.) The limitedness of the inner space, as well as the limitedness of visibility, the limitedness of audibility, creates an impression of discomfort that is certainly comparable to the controlled atmosphere of a school hall, a factory or a correctional institution. (Mojaš ed., *The Leralmanacs* 40)

Although the director himself, in addition to war trauma, had suffered some personal blows of fate in the intervening years, which no doubt influenced him to adopt a bleak view of the course of human history, together with his all-female cast, he managed to create a poetics of female melancholy and literary nostalgia that challenged the official narrative regarding Dubrovnik's importance in the national imaginary from the perspective of the often anonymous victims and bystanders, primarily women and children. The new repertoire performed by the troupe now consisted mainly of a kind of neo-romantic, decadent collage of paragraphs and lines from poems, plays, diaries and letters by well-known authors from ancient Dubrovnik – philosophers, historians, writers and playwrights – whose works were often addressed either openly or secretly to their sisters, wives and lovers, the ones however who as a group remained invisible, on the margins of history. As inheritors of the mentioned anonymous girls in black from the seminal *Night in the Joy Dormitory*, these silent and restrained women now came to the forefront of the stage as long-forgotten Beckettian ghosts, sometimes to simply remind the audience of their sheer existence, their daily rituals, their loneliness, abandonment and hushed-up memories, sometimes however also to finally express themselves – to sing, dance and tell their "history from below". Suggestive titles such as *The Waltz*, *Maybe Wind*, *The State of Luna*, *The Quieting Down*,

Epitaphio put the audience in the anxiety states of their protagonists. They tried the audience's patience with often deliberately slowed, precisely designed movements performed by actors ceremoniously manipulating precious objects of their intimate pasts and accompanied by disembodied voices, often also recordings of well-known Dubrovnik professional actors, reciting anthological or particularly emotional passages from long-forgotten poems and personal letters.

The textual collages thus served to evoke the oneiric atmosphere that the director had devised in a curious continuation of his former avant-garde poetics, which forefronted the materiality of bodies, movements, costumes, objects, voices, noises and recognisable, intertextually functional musical scores, rather than any narrativity. He insistently used cryptic, free-floating stage symbols, often props from the women's everyday lives, such as linen, lace, curtains, dresses, hats, gloves and fans, which seemed to have been robbed of their rightful former owners and yet resisted the cruel passage of time. Since they were deprived of the support of a clearly articulated narrative context and were thus forced to figure as lost souls gathering debris of a somewhat distant and mourned civilisation, the actresses still adhered to the group's inherited performance style, that is, depersonalised, frontal address to the public and ostentatiously non-illusionistic acting and stylised movement, maintaining the already recognisable discipline that characterised Lero's previous work. Nevertheless, they became much more aware of the director's ideas than was the case before his turn towards nostalgic local reminiscences. They began to appear much more skilful in their diction, also given the fact that unlike before when they were forced to follow a neutral Croatian language "norm", they now performed in their own language, that is, in the Dubrovnik dialect, in which they all excel, taking their vocal expression to previously unknown musical heights.

A word should finally be said about Davor Mojaš as a novelist, author of short stories and, above all, as a playwright whose opus manifests the same chronopolitical and, should we say, chronopoetic ambiguity. When reading his ninety-nine short plays published recently in the collection *Skroviti teatar* (*Secret Theatre*, 2024), one immediately notices his adherence to the late 19th- and early 20th-century avant-garde generic penchant for microdramatic writing, that is, for "reshaping the minimum boundaries of dramatic form and insisting that a short play might be equal or even superior to a long one", furthermore, for "making visible the shape of temporal conventions that inform any theatrical performance".[6] The collection, however, shows Mojaš to be an equally adamant admirer of Dubrovnik's rich historical and literary heritage, often consisting of long, verbose works that he ironically fragments and then uses selected passages from them that he drastically strips of their context,

6 I refer here to the book *Microdramas, Crucibles for Theater and Time* by John H. Muse (2), although there is also a German notion of "minidramas" whose reference compendium was written by Karlheinz Braun in 2007, as I learned from Blaž Lukan, see the next footnote.

sometimes also reducing entire works to their wittily exposed backbones. On the one hand, therefore, the form of microdrama thus, as Blaž Lukan would put it, liberates the author's (anarchist) pleasure in writing itself.[7] However, on the other hand, the works by Mojaš's predecessors which he chooses to borrow, quote, maltreat, paraphrase, mock and also lovingly re-member and re-incarnate, do not function here as mere textuality: as I have already indicated, they form the connection to the mainstream culture the group once upon a time tried to oppose, since the majority of these quoted works – by Držić and Vojnović above all – used to be performed in their full grandeur on the urban stages of the Dubrovnik Summer Games, so that their fragmentation in fact attempted to re-install their legendary, anthological, momentary performative effects, imprinted as Benjaminian "flashes" in memories of longstanding adepts of the mythic side of festival attendance.

No wonder then that Lero, which for the last thirty years had a number of Mojaš's plays on its repertoire, became – and still is – one of the regular off-programme participants of the newly re-programmed festival. Lero thus continues its ambivalent institutional position since it functions both as the festival's late-, neo-, post-avant-garde intruder and opponent, reminding the public of the festival's resistant cultural-political anachronicity, and as its supreme alibi, to a certain extent only re-confirming the longstanding programmatic rootedness of the festival's cultural policy in the local and European classical tradition. However, this ambivalence is not only of an institutional nature but is also constitutive of the problem of defining the avant-garde with which this contribution began: it is precisely such an indeterminate positioning that ensured Lero's longevity, enabling the group to remain both true to its disruptive ambitions and to belong to the very ancient civilisation that it tirelessly questions and values.

7 I cannot provide the exact page reference here since I quote from the manuscript of Blaž Lukan's article "This text never existed. It's all just fiction.", forthcoming in: *The Twenty-First-Century Slovenian Theatre and Drama and Its International Context*, edited by Maja Murnik, Barbara Orel, Tomaž Toporišič and Gašper Troha, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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