

Cross Cultural Studies Review

A journal for comparative studies
of culture, literature, and the arts

Studia Mediterranea

Edited by: Paula Jurišić

Politics of Fear and Solidarity Mechanisms in Documentary Theatre Staging Asylum: Žiga Divjak's 6

Katja Grcić*
Independent researcher

Abstract

In the context of the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, contemporary documentary theatre still has a potential to serve as a sophisticated political agon for an in-depth analysis of structural injustice and its causalities. Through the comparative analysis of the performance 6 by the Slovenian director Žiga Divjak and the cult film by Lars von Trier, *Dogville*, I examine the motive of a refugee in two different media by juxtaposing emotions of fear and solidarity. Both phenomena are ideologically highly potent: the first contributes to the rise of racism, xenophobia and restrictive politics, the latter however, if not precisely conceptualized, can further reinforce the neoliberal spectacle of suffering. The aim of this research paper was to provide theoretical framework for the use of solidarity and reflexivity when staging and dramatizing political narratives.

Keywords: refugee crisis, documentary theatre, politics of fear, solidarity, Žiga Divjak, *Dogville*

The Immigrant

Let her cross the border cross the border
not only reaching across not looking across
let her climb across let her cut
her skin on the wire let her claw
at hard dirt let her clasp
a stone and pull it from the ground and throw it
let her flee let her breathe let her not
drown let her beat thirst let her
wait a while longer let her be born a bit
later let her be brave
and not quit let her try again
let her dare and dare and come.
– Uroš Prah, Hunger

* katja.grcic@gmail.com

The Crisis

Migration is not a recent thing – it has been a feature of human existence for centuries. People have always migrated, either in groups or as individuals, to flee from different forms of oppression. Regardless of causes – may it be wars, climate changes or economic reasons – all of these being now more intertwined than ever – the number of refugees and immigrants is on the rise. However, it was only in 2015 that EU, after the long summer of migration, announced the *refugee crisis*. That same year in September, the United Nations General Assembly brought together world leaders to address this new challenge – namely how to respond to large movements of people. Since more than one million registered refugees and migrants entered EU that year, the crisis was reduced to either a *crisis of numbers* or to a *humanitarian crisis*.

For the purpose of this paper, I will continue using the word *refugee* despite its epistemological and ontological complexity (Marino 1). Alternatives like *migrant* and *asylum seeker* pose certain problems too – the latter due to the connotation of opportunistic agent claiming benefits and the former due to an unclear difference between voluntary and forced migration.

It is apparent that the long summer of migration' was preceded by the long history of colonization' and the *crisis* was in many aspects result of a domino effect of the Western imperialism combined with the global capitalistic system and its structural injustice. In order to diffuse responsibility, the term *crisis* was not only contextually misplaced, but also used as a cover for development of unprecedented restrictive directions by the EU and deployment of new authoritarian measures. When it comes to the reinforcement of neoliberal capitalism and the rapid implementation of policies that further diminish rights of (the most vulnerable) social groups, crisis has already proved itself as extremely effective tool. Agamben defines crisis as a contemporary instrument of rule, one that serves to legitimize political and economic decisions that dispossess citizens and deprive them of possibility of decision – which usually results in a *politics of fear* (García Agustín and Bak Jørgensen 5). Fear is primarily fuelled by a *politics of numbers* – and even though numbers play a significant role in immigration policy-making, they are often used for the purpose of what Nicholas De Genova calls the “the spectacle of statistics” (qtd in: García Agustín and Bak Jørgensen 6). This type of crisis representation directly contributes the outbreak of moral panic, and accordingly, usually results in rise of racism, xenophobia and violence.

On the other hand, reducing the refugee crisis only to humanitarian aspect can be as counterproductive and misleading, keeping us entangled in our own misconceptions on solidarity and empathy.

The comprehension of refugee crisis as primarily the crisis of border regimes and its following immigration policies was addressed in the recent performances made by Slovenian director Žiga Divjak. Both *6* (which premiered on the 31st of March, 2018, at Mladinsko theatre, Ljubljana) and *The Game* (which premiered on the 10th of June, 2020, at Mladinsko theatre, Ljubljana) deal with the treatment of refugees in the Eastern European context.

For the purpose of this paper, I use the performance *6* as an example of how documentary theatre can effectively deconstruct the mechanisms of *the politics of fear* and call for social changes based on horizontal instead of vertical solidarity. While the politics of fear directly reinforce the extreme-right policies, the solidarity misconceptions of the left may often be more enmeshed with coloniality than one is aware, consequently contributing the structural injustice and political violence they allegedly strive to abolish. The aim of this paper is to shed new light on the concept of solidarity by comparative analysis of *6* and *Dogville*, the cult film by Lars von Trier. The critical examination of solidarity and fear is done to provide theoretical framework for new political praxis in theatre and beyond.

Documentary Theatre

Speaking of performing arts, it is documentary theatre that has grown into a major genre for introducing political themes on stage. It uses pre-existing documentary material – newspapers, government reports, interviews, journals and correspondence – as source material for stories about real events and people, frequently without altering the text in the performance. Although its effects may not always match its intentions, documentary theatre often summons the public consideration of aspects of reality in a spirit of critical reasoning. In this sense, it is performative of a public sphere (Reinelt 12). This type of theatre is produced in the interaction between data (as a result of more or less extensive research), performers and spectators. The genre typically includes or is referred to as a verbatim theatre, theatre of fact, investigative theatre, theatre of witness, autobiographical theatre or ethnodrama (6).

Its origins date back to the ancient Greeks (Aeschylus' *The Persians*, Phrynichus' *The capture of Miletus*) and it occurred later in various moments of theatre history (e.g., French revolution). As a major practice it re-emerged in the twentieth century, initially as a type of propaganda

technique used as a post-revolution communist strategy in the Soviet Union. Consisting of dramatizations of current events, social problems and controversial issues this type of theatre became a political tool for indoctrination and re-education. It resulted in agitprop as a part of Lenin's political strategy - combining social inequities with emotionally charged elements it aimed to mobilize broader support and mould public opinion. The approach also affected Germany in the Weimar period under Erwin Piscator, who strongly influenced Brecht and his concept of *epic theatre*.

The complicated relationship between emotion and reason in agitprop theatre was also transferred to Piscator's work. The contradictory performances of his *Proletarian Theatre* were related to the very contradictions of communism, "which drew on the scientific analysis of history as a class struggle, but in practice transformed the idea of class struggle into an irrational myth" (Bregović 8). Brecht's work in this sense showed more sophistication and awareness – strategies he applied working with actors aimed primarily at promotion of critical reflection. His *epic theatre* in the late 1940s embraced a more dialectical approach due to his idea that theatre performance is the most complex form of communication. Emotions and all factors that led to them were not to be abolished, but examined – the goal was to disrupt the habitual empathy and avoid all kinds of emotional exploitation (Gordon 249).

In the USA the Federal Theatre Project's *Living Newspapers* was initiated in 1935. Radical in advocating for social changes and addressing the topics of racism, housing and democracy their work was soon categorized as anti-American propaganda and was faced with resistance of the political elites.

In the second half of the twentieth century various artists continued to further experiment with staging documentary and verbatim material for political effect – among others Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth, Heinar Kipphardt, Robert Berrigan, Eric Bentley, John McGrath and Joan Littlewood (Wilmer 73).

Clearly, theatre has a long history of functioning as a force of moral education and can still be used as a powerful tool to address political issues. In the current age of rising statelessness, it may still offer multiple perspectives and new insights. It is important to mention that the character of a refugee was particularly well-known in ancient Greek tragedy: Medea, Orestes, Oedipus, the children of Herakles, the daughters of Danaus – they not only depict uprooted and homeless persons seeking asylum i.e., protection and help, they also demonstrate the importance of hospitality (*xenia*) (11).

Hospitality

Derrida, as the major theoretician of the ethics of hospitality, makes an essential distinction between two regimes of the law of hospitality – unconditional (absolute, hyperbolic) and conditional (juridic-political). Both are for him grounded in language or the lack of it. He wonders if the unconditional hospitality actually consists in suspending determinative language, where one abstains from asking any questions, not even about the name, origin or the whereabouts of the Other. That may be the only way to avoid “the economy of the circle” (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 135) – the conditions imposed through law and politics. However, keeping silent is already a modality of possible speaking, says Derrida. The paradox of hospitality is that it cannot be offered unconditionally without undermining its own conditions of possibility – namely, the existence of the host with the ability to welcome the guest. Furthermore, one can virtually become xenophobic in order to protect one’s own hospitality, home and ipseity (53).

With high potential for an easy perversion, hospitality remains in the liminal zone of continuous negotiation and everlasting attempts to make it less conditional, not to mention the inevitable collusion of hospitality and power. In the context of the European response to the refugee crisis, the concept of hospitality offers limited guidance if we try to address the fact that receiving societies are actually complicit in producing the conditions refugees and migrants are trying to escape.

Placed outside of the realm of duties, Derrida’s categorical imperative of unconditional hospitality, remains grounded in the ambiguous ethic of infinitive responsibility, which on one hand, risks producing a despondent apathy that does no more to motivate us to take responsibility for the suffering of others than disingenuous theories that merely seek to assuage our guilt. On the other hand, the hubris of this kind of ethic arguably “lends itself to sanctioning neo-imperial ethical doctrines” such as the “responsibility to protect” within the context of human rights, which often demonstrate no sense of equality with those they claim to protect (Chamberlain 96).

Regarding the refugee crisis, Žižek also calls for responsibility of receiving societies, but advocates a certain degree of distance, claiming that forced integration is beneficial neither to the *host*, nor to the *guest*. He does not specify the ideal degree of integration, nor does he offer a deeper analysis of the problem. However, he does pose an important question about class division, inherent both to Europe and the Middle East: “What

if the obstacle to integration is not only Western racism?" (Žižek 42).

The major problem of limitless responsibility derived from Derrida's theory of absolute hospitality is the that it potentially overburdens the very subject of that practice. In her book *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), Iris M. Young proposes *social connection* as foundation for the new forward-looking model of responsibility (Young 69). She argues that all those who contribute by their actions to the structural processes with unjust outcomes share responsibility for that injustice. She names four factors that determine degrees and levels of responsibility: power, privilege, interest and collective ability. The analysis of these factors brings her to the conclusion that responsibility is conditional upon the agents reproducing structural injustice through their acts.

The participation of citizens in structural injustices of the countries the refugees and migrants are coming from, alongside with their (in) direct participation in administrative, financial or military aspect of border regimes is evidence based and strongly contributes the concept of responsibility advocated by Young. Highlighting the global reproduction of injustice and showing the connections between separate and dissimilar actors Chamberlain suggests following perspective for improvement: "Framing responsibility to migrants in terms of solidarity instead of hospitality goes some way to overcoming the hierarchical host-guest relation; rather than regarding migrants as passive victims in need of protection, solidarity emphasizes the agency of migrants and their equal moral standing with members of receiving societies" (Chamberlain 72).

Theatre of Solidarity

Speaking of historical mutations and the genealogy of solidarity in her awarded book *The Ironic Spectator* (2013), Lilie Chouliaraki distinguishes between *solidarity as salvation* (apolitical humanitarian solidarity based on the principles of Henri Dunant) and *solidarity as revolution* (political solidarity of Marxian origin). She argues that neither of the two variations was actually able to avoid the accusations that its "moral certainties were ultimately doing more harm than good to the societies they were applied to" (Chouliaraki 24). The contemporary solidarity of neoliberal capitalism, however departed it may be from the moral certainties of both saving lives (*salvation*) or changing society (*revolution*), is also committed to the suffering of (distant) others, but unfortunately in a much more individualist manner of the feel good' activism that easily turns into a mere self-empowerment.

In the West, theatre is no exception to the spectacle of suffering and more often than not, ends up being merely a form of *Betroffenheitstheater*

– one that often lacks objectivity, undermines critical thinking and motivates nobody into action of any kind. The sorrow-stricken or shocked audience is usually emotionally overwhelmed, which leaves very little space for any potential *Verfremdung* benefits. Over time, this approach of well-aimed consternation has generated much suspicion and scepticism towards solidarity in general, as well as apathy towards the mediation of any kind of human vulnerability. Furthermore, this approach contributes dystopian arguments on impossibility of solidarity and “transforms other-oriented dispositions into a cynical hyper-individualism” (40).

Is there a way for the performative arts of today not to undergo these simplistic principles? Are transpositions of theatrical elements possible in a way that could be effective in the contemporary political agon?

Chouliaraki suggests that the capacity of theatre to stage human vulnerability by distancing the spectator through the objective space of the stage (or any other framing device), at the same time enabling the proximity through the theatrical resources, may be one of the most valuable tools in making solidarity nowadays more of a political, rather than consumerist concept. While dramaturgical consciousness of the new media places high demand of authenticity, mostly through expressing one’s own feelings about others, Chouliaraki argues that it is not authenticity, but objectivity – seeing suffering others as human others and recognizing ourselves as actors upon their suffering – that should become our central point of interest (Chouliaraki 36-7).

Staging Asylum: 6

I argue that both objectivity and solidarity have been put into practice when it comes to the performance 6. The piece was created in coproduction of Maska collective and Slovensko mladinsko gledališče (Slovenian Youth Theatre) and received the Borštnik Grand Prix (2018) for the best performance.

Highlighting the political instead of emotional aspect of the sad true story’ of six minors seeking asylum in Slovenia in 2016, Divjak managed to avoid what Brecht defines as *the exploitation of empathy* and succeeded in creating an omnipotent political narrative. Combining both documentary and fictional material he meticulously shaped polarized tension arising from the anxiety of ordinary people, their basic premise being well known idea that “the threat to their way of life always comes from outside, from foreigners, especially ones coming from a different culture” (Žižek 55). While the fear of the unknown can be deeply irrational, Žižek rightly emphasizes that we should not underestimate the cultural differences between people and instead of advocating for humanistic

utopia or unconditional hospitality, rather look for the deeper roots of fearing the Other. Besides, it is less a matter of a general *phobia* and more the fear of losing specific rights, privileges and benefits, but without an awareness that they are accumulated upon exploitative and unjust global power structures.

6 follows the course of events from the 19th of February 2016, when the head of the student dormitory Kranj gets an unexpected visit from the Deputy Mayor and the Chief of the Civil Protection of the Kranj Municipality. Both of them approach the head with their rising concerns upon the six-underage asylum seekers that may arrive to the dormitory, the capacities of which are only thirty percent full. After the first official attempt to accept the children had failed, due to, at first timid, but eventually severe resistance of the Kranj community – primarily the parents of the children accommodated in the dormitory – the story hits the headlines and through a domino effect leads to further antagonism and rejections, not just towards the six teenagers, but also to the possibility of constructing refugee centre anywhere in Slovenia.

In cooperation with the dormitory head Judita Nahtigal and journalist Maja Ava Žiberna, Divjak made thorough research into the particular case. He used diverse resources in structuring the piece: extracts from various media, e-mail correspondence between the parents and the head, range of interviews with the dormitory employees, public statements of the politicians, as well as random thoughts he collected from the local community of Kranj. Through the implementation of the elements of verbatim theatre, that is based on the spoken words of real people, Divjak created a layered political performance.

It is precisely the separation of the cultural and political dimensions of solidarity that Chouliaraki marks as the most significant. One should take into consideration that this separation privileges the cultural over the political, making solidarity itself much more a matter of “training of the soul” (Chouliaraki 212) rather than a matter of understanding the causes of suffering and debating our response to it, which was, in the theatre context, the essence of the Brechtian approach, whose influences are also visible in 6. Divjak chooses to confront the audience with mechanisms that govern the majority of society, mostly those non-aligned, those who are neither pro, nor contra. His intention was clearly neither to criticize nor to rectify, but to effectively put things into a perspective that enables constructive debate and analysis. While this decision shows a high level of political awareness and the causalities that operate in the background, the decision to put the pre-recorded video of six boys (simply sitting and actively looking) behind the actors, facing the audience in slow motion, had a somewhat different effect. It seems that Divjak wanted to give a human presence to the mere numbers that refugees represent in

the administration of the EU (clearly referenced in the title of the piece), but leaving them without voices he only partially succeeds in this.

Comparable phenomenon on the political scale was the failed EU relocation scheme (2015-2017) – an attempt to institutionalize solidarity between EU member states that started as an emergency response to the rising number of refugees in Italy and Greece, but was extremely exclusive of the refugees, who got no voice in that framing. Dramaturgical decision to leave the six boys completely voiceless seems to me as counterproductive as creating a victimhood narrative that would articulate only their private stories. On the other hand, maybe it was precisely this what Derrida meant when he spoke about suspending the determinative language if one strives for absolute hospitality.

Creating the analytical framework of solidarity, Agustín and Jørgensen refer to it as a “spatial concept” and “relational practice” that primarily consists in connecting *here* and *there*. (García Agustín and Bak Jørgensen 25). The problem with Divjak’s piece is that it also fails to connect here (the Slovenian political agon) with there (in the context of asylum seekers’ country of origin). Since the limits and risks of unconditional hospitality were previously defined, and hospitality as a concept declared insufficient in addressing the problem of refugee crisis, I will now try to examine to which extent has Divjak’s piece been operating within the framework of solidarity.

Agustín and Jørgensen argue that solidarity is at risk of becoming a “floating signifier” unless one takes a more analytical approach to it. Therefore, they distinguish three types of solidarity: autonomous, civic and institutional. Autonomous solidarity is self-organized (mainly in urban places), implies horizontal participation, equality and direct democracy; it rejects cooperation with the state as well as the idea of supporting “anyone in need” which is upheld by NGOs. Civic solidarity is organized through a vast number of manifestations and actors, such as NGOs, local communities and individuals. The degree of their contention varies depending on its claims and strategies. Finally, institutional solidarity stands for the formalization of solidarity in various degrees and connects the civil society arena with that of policy-making. The contribution of members is mandatory and there is a high expectation to get something in return when in need (39).

What Divjak deconstructs in 6 is primarily institutional solidarity and the means in which it operates on the low level – dormitory, school, town, municipality. Also, he demonstrates how autonomous solidarity, when not coherent and cohesive, easily ends up dispersed or even transformed into fear.

Therefore, the first and most significant characteristic of solidarity, claims Agustín, is its contentiousness which operates at least at two

levels – hierarchical and exclusionary. Grounded in nation-state borders, solidarity fails to become trans-national and therefore remains limited to governments and their strategic calculations of rights and obligations. Frontex, the European Border and Coastline Agency, is a good example for this and shows how attempts to force an (inexistent) political common goal result in solidarity that is neither inclusionary nor progressive (ibid.). Therefore, the attempt to define the refugee crisis as a *solidarity crisis* is as wrong as the previously mentioned displacements of the term crisis. Conclusively, the real crisis is actually the crisis of states and their institutionalized solidarity.

When official institutions fail to adequately respond to large-scale problems like the refugee crisis, showing both the lack of political responsibility as well as the willingness to deal with those problems, art can shed some light to the most urgent matters and serve as a political agon.

In the field of the visual arts, the most controversial analysis of misconceptions on solidarity was performed by Lars von Trier in his unfinished trilogy *USA – The Land of Opportunities. Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005) both theatricalize a social experiment which explores how an act of solidarity can lead to animosity, punishment and retaliation. While *Manderlay* deals with racial aspect of American society, *Dogville* is placed into the economic and political context of a single community accepting a refugee – the Other who is significantly different than themselves.

The Other

The arrival of the Other into a small community and sequent gradation of hostility towards him/her is not a new motive, but for the purpose of this comparative analysis, the one I chose demonstrates wide range of theatrical and dramaturgical elements in common with Divjak's 6. For instance, in the play *Katzelmacher* (1968) by Rainer Maria Fassbinder, which evolved into a movie a year later, a similar motive was used. The arrival of the immigrant worker Yorgos to a Munich suburb, into a hermetic little clique of men and women whose sexual and social frustrations are tightly intertwined, triggers xenophobia, envy and aggression. Things escalate into an act of physical violence when men decide to beat him up. After the beating they decide to let him stay, as long as he can be further exploited, which resembles the treatment Grace receives in the “welcoming” community of Dogville. The eponymous film, just like *Katzelmacher*, deals with the arrival of a refugee into a small community. The film extracts much of its imaginary from theatre – with direct references to Brecht's *Drei Groschen Opera* (e.g., the revenge song of *Seeräuberin Jenny*) and uses variations of the *Verfremdung* concept, together with minimal, stage-like

set. In a highly stylized manner, von Trier places actors on a bare sound stage with no decoration, marking their homes and other buildings in town by simple chalk lines on the floor.

If *Dogville* was Trier's attempt to deconstruct the American myth of freedom, prosperity and equal opportunities, as well as mass media propaganda and cultural imperialism, then Divjak's work in many aspects addresses similar phenomena in the contemporary European context. In 2018, when Divjak created *6*, Europe was celebrating the 29th anniversary of the fall of the 155-kilometre-long Berlin wall, while at the same time a total of about a 1,000 km of walls stood inside and around Europe. (Brunet and Ruiz 5). Clearly, what Divjak deconstructs is the myth of Europe full of duty and moral obligation, Europe where "things go in the right direction" ("Remarks), as Donald Tusk puts it in September 2018 at the EU summit in Austria. By paying countries like Turkey and Libya to stop the migrants before they even reach the EU border, alongside building walls, the EU has proven as the most successful in feeding the media propaganda on the refugee crises. Political response to the increased need for asylum in Europe is not clearly articulated and confirms how paradigms of free movement relate much more to commodities rather than people.

Comparative analysis of *Dogville* and *6* in this paper is used as a framework for the analysis of the concept of solidarity in two different media – film and theatre. Both of them are related to the Brechtian political praxis and while *Dogville* surely demonstrates more formal and political complexity, the motive of a refugee is present in both of them, but with clear detachment from the "*spectacles of commodification* that foster dominant voyeuristic, even pornographic disposition towards suffering other" (Chuliaraki 52). The dominant prostitution of suffering on stage is so common because it uses a predicable approach to extract pity, a power-oriented feeling that draws fuel from its privileged and elevated position that is analogous to the basic principles of institutional solidarity.

Common ground for the following analysis lies in the fact that both pieces force the audience to think beyond drama, which is achieved by showing that characters' reactions and attitudes are as much an outcome of the social relationships as of the psychological mechanisms of the individuals.

From Dogville to Kranj

Dogville is a small, fictional town at the bottom of the Rocky Mountains; Kranj, a small, non-fictional town at the bottom of the Slovenian Alps. While Trier sets his protagonists in houses without walls, pointing simultaneously at their false sense of privacy borders, Divjak raises an

awareness of the established antagonism between private and public by creating an interwoven network of personal confessions, administrative communication and sensationalist news. He sharply discloses the mechanisms of fear and their impact on society.

Trier uses frequent shower shots that set his protagonists in some sort of metaphorical prison. In the pervading tone of uneasiness citizens of Kranj become the prisoners of their own fear. For them, stage becomes a place of narrowness with no way out. Shot at ground level, Trier uses a hand-held camera that moves among the characters, as if they were all one, while Divjak decides that his actors will be put on a same level stage with the audience, without any scenic interventions and actors dressed just like the audience they are facing. Both approaches denote oneness and underline the awareness of the community, but Trier's chalk lines additionally underline the motive of borders.

Moreover, Trier's high-angle shots create an atmosphere of powerlessness in which characters seem to be governed by some "higher force" that makes them change their opinions and behaviours. Divjak's meticulous dramaturgy creates similar effect through narration – whereas the shift from initial hospitality to final xenophobia is seen as a result of pressure, propaganda and politics of fear. From media sensationalism to rumours and anguish, fear and the overall feeling of distrust slowly build up. Since the concept of the performance is very minimalist, with subtle music and lighting effects, tension accumulates by juxtaposing different discursive practices: from calm, intimate confessions of workers and their ambivalent emotions over the arrival of six boys and long-term effects it might have, to the overly kind administrative responses to the concerns of the parents, whose communication, over time, become more and more aggressive. Dramaturgically and rhythmically the performance is masterfully guided – from the initial quiet, more personal discourse to the final turmoil and verbal violence.

"I believe we have to help children. It seems normal to me" – says one of the dormitory employees in 6. This tone of duty and moral obligation soon becomes endangered by the awareness of economic reality that calls for different methods. Conflict between the initial idea of hospitality and the final exclusion and rejection shows how solidarity based on *common humanity* (Chouliaraki) – which is a concept of neoliberal philanthro-capitalism – is insufficient and hypocritical response to the political crisis. "Based on universal sentimentalism of pity or the particularistic pragmatism of irony" (15) this approach is misleading and contributes to the false notion that moral reformism can motivate political change.

Without question. Of course. Absolutely. Yes. Yes."

The rhythmical repetition of this self-implied moral standard in *6* gradually becomes completely devoid of its meaning. Divjak gives priority to political rather than sentimental education. He moves the focus from the popular humanitarian imaginary to political responsibility. In *Dogville* Trier is even more dedicated to the “complex seeing” (Koutsourakis 150) which invokes dialectical engagement and is not interested in transmitting a single-minded message.

It is the character of Grace that is the most paradoxical and controversial – by introducing it Trier surely ran the risk of being proclaimed an anti-humanist. This particular accusation came from the Grand Jury at the Cannes Film festival and was followed by other moralistic readings of the film. Things became even more complicated when Anders Behring Breivik, a Norwegian neo-fascist perpetrator accused of terrorist attacks and mass murder in 2011, referenced *Dogville* as a great inspiration for his actions (Koutsourakis 147).

The character of Grace is conceptually based on the antonymic notion of *absolute hospitality* – I suggest we call it *absolute graciousness*. Grace stands for an unconditional generosity (with her time and her labour) and limitless forgiveness (which stretches so far that she forgives physical and mental abuse, including rape) upon which she constructs her moral superiority over the deteriorating citizens of Dogville. Her stoic acceptance and passive reconciliation with the underdog role contribute to the reproduction of the structures of the social oppression and injustice. The paradox of Grace is summoned by her father in the final car scene – her condescending arrogance based on unattainable ethical standards combined with no understanding of the real-life struggles of the working class of people of Dogville is what makes the core of her hollow narrative. Furthermore, the powerless victimhood she embodies is eventually revealed to have its counterpart in limitless cruelty and the urge for revenge and punishment. So sweet and seemingly innocent, Grace turns out to be one of the most brilliantly portrayed characters with traits of *covert narcissism* which, precisely for being covert, are so often misinterpreted. Interestingly, Breivik received an overt type of diagnosis after court-appointed psychiatric examination. I argue that von Trier was neither anti-humanist nor amoral cynic when creating the character of Grace, but possibly highly aware of this complex paradox and its private and political consequences, but his insightful approach to this phenomenon (essentially didactic in its nature, just like the rest of the film) was both misunderstood and dismissed. The overall concept of *Dogville* is also far from being limited to individual deviations or shock therapy – every character is a part of the totality and influences the political realm. The idea “personal is political,” rooted in the second-wave feminism, can and should be extended to other phenomena of structural injustice and

systematic oppression and exploitation. The inherent mutuality of micro and macro relations in *Dogville* and *6* can be linked to the global political relations nowadays, especially the ones that contribute the rise of migrants and refugees. Mutuality, claims Fiorenza Picozza, is inherent to the production of asylum and Europe: "Europe produces refugees and refugees produce the space of Europe" (Picozza xxiii), Picozza, who as a volunteer in Hamburg in 2015, witnessed much of what she calls "the spectacle of solidarity" (probably the most obscure was the scene of applauding to the refugees at the main train station in Hamburg) (xix), claims that "coloniality renders refugees objects of someone else's compassion, protection, management and political engagement and in doing so, concomitantly reproduces their exteriority to Europe" (xvii). She defines asylum as spatial and temporal struggle – a transnational movement based in its temporal reality of first becoming and then ceasing to become a refugee. Picozza reveals how the displayed humanitarian inclusion we have witnessed in the media was actually just a performance that concealed the exclusion through illegalization and deportation.

In view of this, Picozza also invokes solidarity as a method in dealing with the refugee crisis, but argues that the concept should be based on understanding of the political production of refugees and awareness of the complexity of their socialization and integration. The long-term temporality and fragmented spatiality are, according to her, two major elements in the existential struggle of a refugee, who is therefore particularly vulnerable subject. In both *Dogville* and *6* we witness the abuse of power towards those subjects.

Gradation of Fear

Divjak's suggestive theatrical language combined with minimalist setting creates a crawling atmosphere of anxiety and angst. The skilful gradation of fear in this performance reaches its climax in a set of irrational social constructs. Arising from the real or fake perception of danger, fear responses cause behavioural changes – when modulated by cognition and learning, fear is rational, otherwise we speak of phobia – an irrational fear. It is a common illusion that progress may take away our fears – some of them will surely disappear, but the new ones always reappear. To deal with fear means to acknowledge it, understand its origins and background, meet it with acceptance and tools to regulate its effects. Furthermore, fear is an underlying force of much of the political extremism we witness. The rapid changes our society fails to process due to its irrational imperative of growth put us in a paradoxical situation of being a part of an irreversible change and at the same time resisting the inevitable

effects of that change. If not recognized and acknowledged, fear can become the most powerful blocking force that usually leads to violence since the tension of the paradox we inhabit must somehow be released.

Denying fear is the best way to become governed by it, may it be in this case, the fear of authority – the police and gangsters in *Dogville* or losing jobs and being excluded from the society in *6*, as well as the fear of Other (the Other being Grace in *Dogville* / refugees in *6*). When Thomas Edison Jr. claims that citizens of Dogville have “problem with acceptance,” it is not just the acceptance of an unknown woman so different from them, it is also the acceptance of themselves, their own fears, their own nature that they deny.

Therefore, initial trust and hospitality, as a moral imperative that comes out of obligation and not out of understanding, turn to exploitation and abuse, just like in Fassbinder’s *Katzelmacher*. The narrative climax of both *Dogville* and *6* takes place in a meeting. In *Dogville*, Grace, encouraged by Thomas Edison Jr., gathers the townspeople to talk to them openly about their abuse and disrespect, which results in denial and antagonism, creating a group dynamic at its worst. Similarly, in *6* the dormitory headmaster, Judita Nahtigal, organizes a meeting with parents hoping to diminish their fears and speak sense to them. Unfortunately, the meeting escalates to an open and loud conflict, aggressive abuse of power, even blackmail. Under pressure, the principal withdraws, since any further communication anyhow seems impossible.

Methodologically, the microphones that Divjak puts behind the chairs of the protagonists create some sort of invisible pedestals, where every once in a while, somebody can enjoy the privileged position of proclamation: the one who appropriates the microphone has the social power, usually with no legitimate or just ground for doing so. Moreover, the straightforward use of the official documents and emails allows the performance to outline the mechanisms of fear driven actions that obstruct social dialogue. Divjak establishes powerful revival of the critical (self-) contemplation as a way to confront fears of all sorts – of foreigners, economic insecurity, aggression of the privileged ones.

Numerous psychological, cultural, historical, ideological and economical forces intertwined with everyday human life are under the influence of fear. It is our capability of narrating and deconstructing fear that can turn it into an effective mode for transformation and growth. This is both ethically and aesthetically the main forte of Divjak’s performance, which leads us to what Chouliaraki calls *the politics of reflexivity*.

Agonism Instead of Antagonism

“It’s not a crime to doubt yourself Tom, but it’s wonderful that you don’t” – says Grace to Tom in the final part of *Dogville*, suggesting the reversed point of the director that it is the lack of reflexivity that can deteriorate even the most noble of intentions. Packed in political preaching and analogously superficial aesthetic paradigms, much of politically engaged theatre/film aims at the confirmation one receives of their own righteousness. Deeper analysis is often sacrificed for the sake of motives that fuel antagonism and reinforce binary oppositions in the most sensationalist manner. However, without interdisciplinary approach to the political agon and great deal of (self)-reflexivity, engaged theatre can hardly achieve elementary justification for its own existence, let alone more specific political agenda of solidarity, so often invoked and praised as the highest form of human empathy.

Chuliaraki identifies two aspects of solidarity that fail to reach its potential:

Pity, associated with a solidarity of moral universalism, is challenged by the scepticism towards all given truths, while irony, associated with a solidarity of moral particularism, relies upon utilitarian calculation and is often grounded in private self-doubt nourished by the capitalistic spirit. Whilst ironic response emerges as a critique of pity, neither paradigm offers politically and morally productive proposal for solidarity. (Chuliaraki 219)

Therefore, she introduces the concept of *agonistic solidarity* as a more functional mixture of judgement and empathy that also validates the pedagogical potential of staging the spectator as actor – i.e., someone capable of seeing him/herself thinking with and acting in a collective of other actors for a common cause (Chuliaraki 221-2). This, I claim, is well exemplified in 6.

Solidarity, according to Hannah Arendt, though it may be aroused by suffering, should not be guided by it. Primarily, due to the high risk of pity and its sentimental distancing, which can often lead to the glorification of its cause. Compared to the sentiment of pity, solidarity may appear cold and abstract, for it “remains committed to ideas’ rather than to any love’ of men” (Arendt 1963/1990: 89).

In that regard, I should mention that neither Trier nor Divjak use their pieces to promote ideology or invoke common humanity. Even though one’s judgement always depends on their ideology, both pieces manage

to reach beyond by showing how arrogant and potentially dangerous it may be to consider one's ideals as universal. Žižek summarizes it quite well by saying that ideology resides not only in stories invented by those in power to deceive others, but also in stories invented by subjects to deceive themselves (Žižek 55). In order to diminish the consequences of self-delusion, methods of *agonistic solidarity* may prove useful.

In theatrical staging this concept aims at the communicative structure based on perpetual reflexivity that creates an in-between place where crucial questions on justification, antagonism, otherness and historicity should be asked. This also lies at heart of Arendt's view of public action as theatrical one – defining the theatre as “the political art par excellence” (Arendt 1958/1998: 188) and a space where seeing and being seen are not stable positions, but ones that alternate with one another, which contributes togetherness and dealings of men. Being at the core of Arendt's account of public action as a matter of imaginative judgement, this notion inspired Chuliaraki for her concept of *agonistic solidarity*.

Conclusion

To summarize, the potential of documentary and verbatim theatre to address complex political issues, like the refugee crisis, is still potent, but it is a dramaturgy based on *agonistic solidarity* that can reach beyond the spectacle of suffering and encourage the disambiguation of *ironic spectators*. This kind of approach, methodologically reinforced with perpetual reflexivity, may generate new levels of awareness and reach political agon by illuminating differences between humanitarian assistance and political solidarity, as well as its inherent limits.

Works Cited

- “Remarks by President Donald Tusk Ahead of the Informal Salzburg Summit.” *Europsko vijeće* (Sep 19 2008). Internet: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/hr/press/press-releases/2018/09/19/remarks-by-president-donald-tusk-ahead-of-the-informal-salzburg-summit/>.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 1963/1990.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958/1998.
- Bregović, Monika. “Erwin Piscator's Russia's Day: Agitprop Between History and Myth.” *SIC- Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2015): 1- 18.
- Brunet, Pere. Benedicto, Anihoa Ruiz. *Building Walls. Fear and Securization*

- in European Union*. Barcelona: Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau, 2018.
- Chamberlain, James A. "Responsibility for Migrants: From Hospitality to Solidarity." *Political Theory*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2020): 57–83.
- Chouliaraki, Lilie. *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- García Agustín, Óscar and Martin Bak Jørgensen, Martin. *Solidarity and the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Gordon, Robert. *The Purpose of Playing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006
- Koutsourakis, Angelos. *Politics as Form in Lars von Trier. A Post-Brechtian Reading*. New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Marino, Sara. *Mediating the Refugee Crisis. Digital Solidarity, Humanitarian Technologies and Border Regimes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- Martin, Carol. *Theatre of the Real*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Picozza, Fiorenza. *The Coloniality of Asylum. Mobility, Autonomy and Solidarity in the Wake of Europe's Refugee Crisis*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.
- Reinelt, Janelle. "The Promise of Documentary." In: *Get Real. Documentary Theatre Past and Present*. Ed. Forsyth, Alison. Megson, Chris. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009: 6-23.
- Wilmer, S. E. *Performing Statelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
- Young, Iris Marion. *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Against the Double Blackmail. Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017