

## THE CRISIS OF SOCIETY AS A CRISIS OF THE CULT. ON THE QUEST FOR REMEDY

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**Abstract:** The study deals with progressive theatre work and their connection with the universal value system. Using the methods used – quasi-experiment, HO-PO-MO questionnaire, direct and indirect observation, expressive interpretation, content analysis – we examined the influence of the Forum Theatre on the value system of delinquent youth. It turned out that if the participants try to act in different situations, their empathy will change and they will start to look at their own and other people's problems from a different point of view. This will give them a personal experience that lasts much longer than the knowledge gained through theoretical learning.

**Keywords:** value system, delinquent youth, theatre, Forum Theatre

### 1 Theoretical background

#### Cult, culture, art

The overlaps between the art of music and/or theatre and interpretive practice are likely to be as old as humanity. Though one can hardly look into the prehistoric period (which is only possible in the historical period, i.e. reflecting on ourselves), it is particularly ethnology which offers indications suggesting that the earliest forms of theatre were rooted in a cult. By taking over the identities of other entities, a priest had to secure for himself and his community a protection by higher force, successful hunting, prosperity. From the moment when this activity won a spectator, hence God (deities, Powers) was no longer the "percipient", but also, and later exclusively, the percipient was human community, we cease talking about cult and talk about theatre.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this contribution opens with reference to such depths of history, to highlight the tie of the cult and the mythical to theatre (of which music and dance seemed to be an inseparable part from the outset).<sup>2</sup>

The tie between the cult and what we later came to call culture is symptomatic for the whole of human history, or for humanity as such. Culture is linked to the cult by going beyond our own human horizon: this happens when we address higher powers within the cult, but also when we suppress lower motives within the intentions of culture. Therefore, it is considered cultural to cross one's personal boundaries for the benefit of someone else, to step out of the comfort zone of one's individualism. Here we think of the entire spectrum of attitudes, from freeing up a place to a pregnant woman on a bus to, for instance, sacrificing one's life for the benefit of another. Therefore, cultural – in its most prominent positions – has become synonymous with the sublime, transcendent, perfect. And that is why culture and art as its part have had such an important place in the religions throughout history. In art, we touch on something more perfect than ourselves. Something beyond us. In this sense, an artistic act has the same pedigree as a philanthropic attitude.

This relationship works both ways. While the cult has been staged in thousands of different forms throughout history, theatre is perceived as something of a cult, mystical. Impersonation into other identities is, in essence, related to magic or self-giving (according to the moral nature of a particular stage act).

It is therefore no coincidence theatre occupies such an important place in human history. Theatre has always been understood not merely as entertainment, but also as a means of learning, upbringing or re-education, and, over time and with the specialisation of scientific disciplines also as a therapeutic tool. If we still perceive its aforementioned kinship with a myth

("Who am I?", "Who wanted me to be?", "Where am I going?", "What's the point of it?" ...), naturally, we have to realise that its influence far exceeds the position of spectator's loose encounter with the stage illusion in theatre.

#### Universal value system

From times remembered, progressive theatre work has always been and remain bound to a universal value system:

- The system is inherent in every regular individual, whether or not he or she is aware of it;
- Under this system, all the values and objectives of the conduct are arranged in a hierarchy, with the most universal values and goals (truth, honour, love, family, occupation, health and the like) at the top;
- Society-wide value system is also the only point of view, from which one can clarify methodically and pertinently such imperative issues of our time, as some manifestations of the alienation of modern man, the emphasis on consumption, crisis of ideals, disorientation in choosing a profession, inability to organise one's priorities in terms of the time available, etc.;
- The value system constitutes a dynamic and systematic (hence the "system") view to a fact that precludes the parallel existence of conflicting values.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, a central value (defined according to the nature of the ideals of a particular society) serves as a reference point, "around which", as Miron Zelina puts it, other values "crystallise". Elsewhere, Zelina adds that, if a generally accepted value system is absent, other, often random influences will automatically prevail in the formation of an individual – such as the social context in which he or she operates, upbringing, education, schooling or professional focus.<sup>4</sup>

Where there is a lack of a value system, defects in interpersonal ties are also exacerbated, as individuals lack a common platform of opinion. Instead, they of a noble human identity, they take on lower-rank identities (such as professional or political affiliation) and, worse, pseudo-identity (for instance, man as a consumer). If the influence of value system is absent, the emerging personality has nothing to identify with and remains in psychological, social, intellectual and moral isolation.

Andrej Sičák argues that, while in traditional society man perceived himself as part of a hierarchically organised community and needed general categories such as family or homeland for his self-interpretation, in modern society he becomes the centre of self-interpretation and judges the outside world from this position only.<sup>5</sup>

Alas, market society does all in its might to develop in young people "pseudo-identity" of the consumer. A paradoxical situation has arisen: though we have such means of communication and such interpersonal connections as never before (social networks, advertising, television, etc.), they are not very important for the development of a value system in the relationship between an individual and society. Quite on the contrary: the means of communication become the bearers of confusion, which is supposed to programmatically divert one from building one's own identity. It is the phenomenon of online space that brings with it various other dangers: obtaining

<sup>3</sup> Boroš, J.: 'Young Person and The Meaning of Life' [Mladý človek a zmysel života]. In *Osvetová práca*, 1990, 40.4, pp 9–11.

<sup>4</sup> Zelina, M.: *Strategies and Methods of Personality Development* [Stratégie a metódy rozvoja osobnosti]. Bratislava: IRIS, 1996, s. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Sičák, A.: Specifics of Value Orientation of Youth and Older Generation in Current Social Events [Špecifika hodnotovej orientácie mládeže a staršej generácie v súčasnom spoločenskom dianí]. In *Intergenerational Bridges – Entering the Year of Intergenerational Solidarity, Proceedings of Conference with International Participation, 10 November 2011 in Prešov* [Medzigeneračné mosty – vstupujeme do roka medzigeneračnej solidarity, Zborník príspevkov z konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou 10. 11. 2011 v Prešove], pp 145–155.

<sup>1</sup> Brockett, O. G.: *History of Theatre* [Dejiny divadla]. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2001, pp 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Čerušák, G.: *History of European Music* [Dějiny evropské hudby]. Bratislava: Panton, 1964, pp 7, 8.

personal passwords, spreading fraudulent chain messages, but also cyberbullying. Using modern means of communication, adolescents can insult, threaten or reveal intimate information to the public.<sup>6</sup> Inundating users with a large amount of information of various standards without determining their place in the hierarchy of importance creates, particularly in youth, a bad habit of successive understanding of reality, when reality comes across as a series of diverse perceptions of varied system and credibility, without being able to summarise their true value and context. Anything is presented as a bastion of rationality, even if for no legitimate reason. The user does not examine perceptions, or weighs them merely fragmentarily, emotionally, without a logical system of criteria. He or she is inundated and deceived by information smog. In the mind of the user, images at the top technical and often artistic level build a parallel media and IT reality, which further destabilises his true existential rooting. In such context, it is the individual without a firm value roots who becomes more of a consumer than an authentic personality.

### Identity crisis – crisis of social ties

Identity crisis is a frequently discussed today. It is not merely a matter of academic discourse, but an issue one encounters daily, an issue that is literally palpable. On the one hand, population (as a system of individuals) is lost in the confusion of information overload; and, on the other hand, in the absence of criteria based on which to develop a reasonable opinion about the information. This crisis stems from the (almost) ubiquitous relativisation of traditional values. They are not understood here as ossified customary relics (as they are often interpreted by proponents of extreme liberalism), but in reference to the aforementioned foundations of human society as they have evolved throughout history.<sup>7</sup>

Existential (value) disorientation manifests itself in all age categories as a crisis of social ties. And it is not passive in nature (absence of value criteria), but actively-destructive (replacing values with pseudo-values, and patterns with pseudo- or anti-patterns).

The following list offers an anamnesis. The crisis of social ties is manifested by:

- The absence of multi-generational families, which could fuel the society with developmental dynamism with the natural authority and knowledge of the elderly and the zest and quest of the young;
- In the absence of functional single-generation families with a natural anchoring of children in male and female patterns of behaviour;<sup>8</sup>
- In the protective bubble of the pseudo-social agenda of single mothers<sup>9</sup> as "queen bees" (a woman supported by the general community as a single parent);<sup>10</sup>
- In the growing absence of relations at school, workplace and in all walks of life that are being replaced by the ideal of consumerism and formal image;
- In a poor state of "ecology of meaning" – because the meaning of existence cannot be sought in individual performance, but only in the collective existence of free individuals;
- In fleeing from a confusing and impersonal reality into realities that support illusions: the excessive use of social networks and assigning them an inflated (or distorted)

meaning, or an escape to various types of delinquencies and addictions.

### On the quest for solutions

As teachers, we encounter the consequences of these deformations not only in individual problematic cases, but in general: we are confronted daily with a minority of socially deranged youth, which has long been the majority. Amidst the current popular discussions of inclusion a question arises: What is the norm from which minorities deviate? Do we at all still have anything deemed as "normal" standard?

In an effort to respond to all these issues of concern, the Department of Music at the Faculty of Education of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia) decided to look for a target group in which the above issues would be apparently present (i.e. a representative target group), and then look for the methods that would enable identification of and application of solutions to these pressing issues. Resocialisation seems to be the way out. In the light of the above, it was important to precisely target resocialisation as a return to cult, i.e. that man is defined as a social being not by his or her isolated performance in an amorphous society, but by the social dimension of his or her existence as a naturally highest value (thus social as anthropological).

## 2 Research

### Forum Theatre and delinquent youth

The research teams seem to have found the methods as well as target group too. The research aimed to find out how the application of stage methods affects - in this particular case the stage form of A. Boal – Forum Theatre<sup>11</sup> value orientation, attitudes towards values and incentives for delinquent youth (boys placed in the Diagnostic Centre, which is the "gateway" before they are referred to treatment, penal institution, to a youth re-education facility, into a substitute family or their own family). We did not find any mention in the literature about the application of the principles of the Forum Theatre to such a target group.

Subsequently a research question was formulated: How will the Forum Theatre methods affect the level of aesthetic, moral and social value orientation, moral, artistic, social attitudes to the values and the weight of incentives of delinquent youth?

### Research set

The research was conducted at the Diagnostic Youth Centre in Záhorská Bystrica. After consulting with experts (head of the Diagnostic Centre and the relevant psychologist), a research set was created comprising six groups. Each group had six participants – men aged 15 to 17, with the average age in each group being 16 years.

### Research methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative method was chosen to analyse the studied issues. The key research method was quasi-experiment. Before and after the research additional methods of data collection were used as well (characteristics of subjects): observation and the standardised HO-PO-MO questionnaire (J. Vonkomer). The questionnaire consisted of three parts to identify value orientations (aesthetic, moral and social), attitudes to values (moral, artistic and social) and the weight of incentives to increase activity in socially current

<sup>6</sup> Hubinská, Z.: Forum Theatre and Movement. In *Ad Alta*, 2020, 10.2, pp 145–150.

<sup>7</sup> By the functioning of human society, the authors understand standard beyond the functionality of any other system. A characteristic feature of the overlap is the ability of man (humanity as a set of people) to go beyond his own limits, to step out of a narrow circle of personal benefit for the benefit of others. It is no coincidence that such an attitude is colloquially referred to as *being human*.

<sup>8</sup> Behaviour in the broadest sense as a way of existence.

<sup>9</sup> This does not question the need to help abandoned women, but the social rise of their status on a par with family.

<sup>10</sup> Such a status of a woman as a living incubator without family ties does not emancipate her – as tends to be popularly stated, but, on the contrary, in the hierarchy of social ties, it humiliates her to a solitaire who brings the society and raises a new generation who is along with the mother and therefore unanchored socially and in terms of values.

<sup>11</sup> Forum theatre is a name for an interactive stage technique often used in the educational process. The world-renowned method, based on the dramatic techniques of August Boal, is characterised by the fact that the audience become actors and are thus confronted with the reality that takes place on the stage. (Tischler, L.: Forum Theatre and the Teaching Process. In *Ad Alta*, 2021, 11.1, pp 328–330.) Spectators can thus directly test their opinions and ideas in practice, and find out whether it is possible to achieve a positive result based on their ideas. Forum Theatre provides spectators with the opportunity to do a "test run" of conduct in situations that might arise for them in real life.

activities (interest satiation, public contribution of individual effort and peer recognition). During the individual meetings, the method of direct observation enabled to probe deeper into the motivation of participants' behaviour. Audio-visual recording was made of the last meeting with the consent of the administration of the Diagnostic Youth Centre in Záhorská Bystrica. As part of the indirect video observation, the key moments of the Forum Theatre performance were analysed in detail. In addition to the above, the method of expressive interpretation was applied in terms of interpretive interventions of the participants through various artistic means of expression (word, sound, facial expressions, movement, rhythm, etc.) on a certain stimulus (impulse). Content analysis focused on the analysis of the reflections of the studied individuals. The analysis and evaluation of the results used a mathematical-statistical method (percentage expression).

### Organisation and implementation of research

Work with clients from the Diagnostic Youth Centre in Záhorská Bystrica was carried out from March 2019 to February 2020. During the first two meetings, the participants became acquainted with musical-drama activities aimed at the development of personal and social competencies. At the third meeting, which focused on the Forum Theatre, we presented a short story to the participants. The performance of *(Un)Susceptible* [(NE)Ovplyvniteľný] touched upon the issue of delinquency.<sup>12</sup> After the performance, the participants, with the help of Joker, proceeded to analyse the story, the characters, the relationships and the setting of the story. They also assigned to each scene a song that best captured its atmosphere.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the performance was given again. When replaying the story, the participants, at their own discretion, interrupted the performance at certain moments by calling "Stop!" and entered the storyline with a different solution to the plot (thus creating various versions of the story they watched a while ago).

### Evaluation of expressive interpretation, direct and indirect observation

Through the method of expressive interpretation, direct and indirect observation, we observed how the individual research groups worked on the final shape of the Forum Theatre. At the same time, we focused on the moments at which the participants stopped the performance and adjusted the situations on stage. In the performance, we outlined five key situations in which the value orientations of individuals were to be reflected. We expected participants to intervene at the following key moments:

- Scene 1: Relationships between classmates,
- Scene 2: First contact with a cigarette,
- Scene 3: Accepting money
- Scene 4: Betraying a friend,
- Scene 5: Social exclusion from the group.

### Analysis of characters

Throughout the performance, the participants perceived the character of Richard largely neutrally. They described him as a simple and decent boy who paid for his trust. According to them, he only failed because he wanted to please Natalia. Interestingly, almost all participants identified with Natalia's character. She

reminded them of their own difficult behaviour, which they themselves were trying to change. Many saw Martin as a positive character and also appreciated the way he approached problem-solving. In the fifth scene, their view changed to neutral, as Martin did not stand up for his best friend. Filip and his behaviour in individual scenes were seen positively by the groups. According to the participants, Filip tried to take things objectively and saw everything from a positive perspective. Most participants had a negative attitude towards the character of the teacher. They perceived her as a negative figure who condemned a man without giving him a chance to explain the reasons for his actions.

### Choice of music

Groups 1, 2 and 3 chose the song *Up is Down* (H. Zimmer) to the first scene. By contrast, Groups 4 and 6 chose the song *It's So Overt It's Covert* (H. Zimmer). The Group 5 chose the song *Professor Umbridge* (N. Hooper). In the second scene, with the exception of Group 1, which voted for the song *Believer* (Imagine Dragons), the groups chose the song *Legendary* (Welshly Arms). The Groups 2, 3, 4 and 5 added the song *Royal* (Separ) to the third scene. The Groups 1 and 6 voted for the song *Kokalero* (Yzomandias). For the fourth scene, Groups 4, 5 and 6 chose *Prelude No 5 in G minor Op. 23* (S. Rachmaninov). Groups 1 and 2 chose the song *Battle on Ice* (S. Prokofiev). The Group 3 decided for the *Violin Concerto in G minor RV 156* (A. Vivaldi). In the final scene, Groups 1, 2 and 4 agreed on the song *Numb* (Linkin Park). The other three groups voted for the song *Bring Me to Life* (Evanescence).

### Scene 1

Participants from Groups 1, 4 and 6 left the first scene unchanged. The Group 2 stopped the story right at the beginning of the performance and suggested that Filip not give Natalia his sandwich or his homework. They opted for the same solution for Richard. Natalia thus stopped abusing her classmates. Participants from Groups 5 and 6, on the other hand, suggested that Natalia greet her classmates after entering the classroom and ask them for homework assignments, for which she should also thank her.

### Scene 2

The Groups 1 and 6 arranged the second scene so that Richard left for a smoke with his classmates. They also suggested that Martin takes with all his things. Yet, after his classmates left for a break, Filip's bag remained in the classroom. Participants in Group 2 insisted that Richard not smoke. They also managed to prevent the theft of Martin's money. The Group 3 altered the situation so that none of the characters smoked. Participants from Groups 4 and 5 suggested that Martin ask everyone if they wanted to join him for a cigarette. Richard and Natalia rejected the opportunity. When Natalia started rummaging through Martin's things, the participants stopped the situation. They wanted Richard to remind Natalia that she wouldn't like a stranger searching her bag.

### Scene 3

Each group altered the situation in the third scene so that Richard refused the money and found out where Natalia took it from. Yet, Natalia did not communicate with Richard and left for the classroom.

### Scene 4

In the fourth scene, Martin found that his money had disappeared. At the time, each group suggested that Richard accuse Natalia of stealing the money. Yet, she denied all the allegations. Furthermore, the participants changed the situation so that Martin sided with his best friend. After the teacher's arrival, Natalia voluntarily confessed to the theft. In this section, the participants stopped the story and demanded that Natalia apologise to Martin. They also wanted to give her a second

<sup>12</sup> The central character of the story was 16-year-old Richard, who was very naïve and easy to influence. In order to please his troubled classmate Natalia, he was willing to change his behaviour, what put him in great trouble. The boy, who had been so far well-behaved, thus became an individual who started to show early signs of delinquency. He spent his free time inefficiently, cheating, consuming alcohol and skipping school. Such behaviour gradually affected his personal life and interpersonal relationships, what cost him the trust of his best friend. At the end of the story, he was socially excluded from his classmates and punished by expulsion from school.

<sup>13</sup> For Scene 1 they were choosing from the selection of film music: Hans Zimmer: *Up is Down*, Hans Zimmer: *It's So Overt It's Covert*, Nicholas Hooper: *Professor Umbridge*; for Scene 2 from pop music: Imagine Dragons: *Believer*, Adam Levine: *Animals*, Welshly Arms: *Legendary*; for Scene 3 from hip-hop compositions: Yzomandias: *Kokalero*, Pil C: *Peroxid*, Separ: *Royal*; for Scene 4 from classical music: Sergei Rachmaninoff *Prelude No 5 in G minor Op. 23*, Antonio Vivaldi: *Violin Concerto in G minor RV 156*, Sergei Prokofiev: *Battle on Ice*; for Scene 5 from metal: Linkin Park: *Numb*, Evanescence: *Bring Me to Life*, Korn: *Falling Away from Me*.

chance and escape the whole situation only with a warning from the teacher. At the end of the fourth scene, Natalia apologised to her classmates and regretted her actions. Richard then invited her to the cinema. The participants thus managed to resolve the situation and correct the relationships between their classmates.

#### Evaluation of the content analysis of the reflections of the examined persons

Based on the collected reflections, we performed a content analysis of the text. We focused on whether the participants directed the reflection to themselves, to the surroundings or to the musical-drama activities and the Forum Theatre.

In Group 1, reflections aimed at the Forum Theatre often appeared. Participants highlighted the possibility of active involvement in the stage process. They liked that they could enter the story and amend the performance. This is also confirmed by a participant statement: "This theatre was excellent and I really liked it. I'm glad we had the opportunity to intervene in the performance."

The Group 2 focused mainly on musical drama activities and the Forum Theatre: "I liked all the activities and the theatre, from which I will learn. I would like to experience something like this." There were also texts in which the participants commented on the surroundings: "I liked the music and drama activities. The final theatre was interesting, and I was captivated. I took away a small piece of advice and it is that we should watch out for people who have bad influence on us."

In Group 3, texts focusing on self-reflection appeared often. Most commented on the correction of their behaviour: "I learned a great lesson from the theatre that I should change my behaviour and think about my conduct."

Group 4 based their reflections on the experiences they were given by the Forum Theatre. Participants welcomed the opportunity to seek appropriate solutions to problem situations together. At the same time, they understood that they should not condemn people: "The impression of this theatre was very good. It was well played. I realised that we cannot condemn people right away. We need to get to know them better first and give them a chance."

Group 5 participants directed their reflections to the surroundings and the Forum Theatre. They most often described the overall impression of the meetings: "The theatre was great, the actors performed well. Overall, I am satisfied, and I liked all the meetings. The performance taught me not to condemn people at first sight."

Group 6 commented on the Forum Theatre in their reflections. The participants were interested in active participation and the opportunity to replace the characters in the performance: "I am most satisfied with the theatre and the acting was incredible. The best part was that I could swap with the actors and enter the story."

#### Evaluation of the HO-PO-MO questionnaire

The HO-PO-MO questionnaire helped to gain information on the value orientation of the participants, attitudes to the values and weight of incentives before and after the research. A total of 36 participants completed entry and exit questionnaires. In the first part of the questionnaire (HO), the participants placed "aesthetic value orientation" in the first place, which increased by 7.85% on average compared to the initial measurement. This increase may have been due to the acquisition of new aesthetic experiences. Second ranked "moral value orientation" with an average increase of 2.66%. "Social value orientation" increased by 1.76%.

In the second part of the questionnaire (PO), a more significant increase was noted in "artistic attitudes", which raised by an average of 12.15%. The increase was likely due to the intensified

contact of participants with art. This is also evidenced by the reflections of the participants, in which they commented positively on the musical-drama activities, the Forum Theatre and the experiences with music. "Moral attitudes" increased by 11.3%. This increase can be attributed to the fact that the participants had an opportunity to evaluate their own actions and those of their context. "Social attitudes showed an average increase of 4.95% compared to the initial measurement. The increase is likely to be the result of the development of social ties in the group.

The third part of the questionnaire (MO) recorded the highest increase "experiencing the benefits of one's own efforts on behalf of the society." Compared to the pre-test, this area increased on average by 7.05%, which can be attributed to the critical reflection of the participants' own abilities, which could have been a consequence of the completed research. Second ranked "satisfaction of interests", which rose by an average of 7.03%. "Experiencing peer recognition" increased in an average increase of 2.21%.

Table 1 Average results of the HO-PO-MO questionnaire

Average results of the HO-PO-MO questionnaire			
Value orientation	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Dif'ce (%)
Aesthetic value orientation	50.03	57.88	7.85
Ethical value orientation	59.95	62.61	2.66
Social value orientation	65	66.76	1.76
Attitudes to values	Pret-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Dif'ce (%)
Ethical values	45.31	56.61	11.3
Artistic values	54.43	66.58	12.15
Social values	58.06	63.01	4.95
Incentives	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Dif'ce (%)
Satisfaction of interest	64.75	71.78	7.03
Experiencing the benefits of one's own efforts for the good of the society	44.63	51.68	7.05
Experiencing peer recognition	51.75	53.96	2.21

### 3 Conclusion

In analysing the results of research related to the value system of delinquent youth, we noted a considerably positive effect of the Forum Theatre. Based on the observation, we noted shifts in values, attitudes and incentives in a favourable direction during the work. At the beginning of the research process, each of the six groups showed a lower level of value orientation, attitudes towards values and the weight of motivational resources than at the end. This was likely to be caused by the potential of the Theatre Forum; for the participants, it was an experience they had never encountered before. By applying the methods of the Forum Theatre, we exposed delinquent youth to new conditions. They practically experienced various fictional situations, to which they responded spontaneously, and thus prepared to cope with similar moments in real life. The experience with the theatre, the priority of which was not an aesthetic or artistic experience, but its positive effect on people in connection with the value system, was beneficial for the participants. Juvenile delinquents learned to understand others and to respect their opinions. They also strengthened self-esteem, self-confidence, developed imagination and concentration. This shows that the Forum Theatre is an effective means of improving social competencies, developing personality, strengthening spontaneity, building healthy attitudes, awareness of values, and gaining motivation.

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