

## **MAJA MILATOVIC-OVADIA, BA, MA, AFHEA**

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### **PROFILE**

#### **Project Title**

Theatre, Comedy and Peacebuilding: developing directorial methodology

Project Key words: Theatre; Comedy; Peacebuilding; Devising; Improvisation; Authority; Conversation.

#### **Supervisors**

Dr Duška Radosavljević and Dr Amanda Stuart-Fisher

#### **Abstract**

This interdisciplinary practice research PhD examines the possibility of devised comedy theatre in the context of post-war reconciliation. Contextualising the work within the theatre studies, peacebuilding field, and comedy studies it argues that peripheral position of humour and comedy is powerful in questioning the authority of a single narrative and offers a valuable platform from which issues of broken communication could be addressed. The second key aspect of the overarching argument underpinning this thesis is that making a theatre performance starting from one word and nourishing improvisation within the creative process offers a fertile field from which complexity of reconciliation can be negotiated. By testing particular directorial strategies through practice as research, it seeks to discover what potential devising and collaborative approach to theatre-making can be observed as beneficial for forging constructive relationships and communication across the division. It asks in what way risks and difficulties inherent in the improvisation process foster trust and why comedy attracts communities. Finally, it questions the importance of a happy ending and emancipatory process.

#### **Profile**

I am a theatre maker, director and facilitator. Originally from former Yugoslavia and currently based in London, I have directed numerous projects, working in a range of contexts, including devised work, classical and contemporary text-based theatre, music theatre, experimental opera, multimedia performances and community based theatre. Further aspects of my work have resulted in developing socially engaged art projects, focused on the use of comedy and humour within collaborative theatre practice, that support processes of reconciliation and meaningful assimilation.

I studied Theatre and Radio Directing at the University of Belgrade (BA), obtained MA in Advanced Theatre Practice from Royal School of Speech and Drama and further trained at the National Theatre Studio in London and Directors Lab West in Los Angeles.

Previously I was associate director of NADA (New Writing Project) at the National Theatre in Belgrade for five years and associate director at Blue Elephant Theatre for the Balkan Art Season. For the last ten years I've worked as advisor, facilitator and associate director for Most Mira charity that is using art to support the process of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

## **Practice**

2020, Artist, 'Postcards in Isolation: Different Form of Exile', Counterpoint Arts.

2020, Director, 'Plaza', devised musical theatre exploring the intertwines between art and activism, MA Musical Theatre, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

2020, Facilitator, 'Picturing Climate', multi-media project looking at land and identity, with a focus on the intersection of post conflict rural environments, climate change, and local and international political economies, Open University, Counterpoint Arts and Tate Exchange, AHRC funded.

2020, Director & Facilitator, 'Romeo and Juliet', community theatre project with schools in Prijedor.

2019, Director, 'Tunnel', devised musical theatre investigating the role of music and theatre in the war times, MA Musical Theatre, Central.

2019, Director & Facilitator, 'Border', a devised comedy that shed light on life at the Bosnia and Herzegovina border with the EU, exploring the complexity of displacement and notion of borders. Prijedor Theatre.

2019, Director, 'One Hundred Trillion', theatre projects developed in collaboration with people with dementia, DOT Collective, Southwark Playhouse.

2018, Director, 'Moustaches', a devised comedy concerning the role of women in contemporary society, Prijedor Theatre.

2017, Director, 'Found in Translation', theatre play developed in collaboration with people with dementia, DOT Collective, Blue Elephant Theatre.

Pre 2017- selected work as a director:

'(Un)Decorated', devised piece using personal memoirs, interviews and biographies of Flora Sandes (the only Western woman to have fought as a soldier in the Great War) and Milunka Savic? (the most decorated female soldier in history) this performance interrogates notions of heroism, and shine a light on the war's unsung heroines, Embassy Theatre (supported by British Council Serbia & SCC).

'Hypochondriac' by Moliere, Migrants and Refugee Community Forum, London.

'Woman Bomb' by Ivana Sajko (supported by Art Council and Westminster council, Tristan Bates Theatre)

'Moonflower' opera (Tet-a-Tet Opera Festival, Riverside Studios.

'Red, Black and Ignorant' by Edvard Bond, part of the Edward Bond season, Cock Tavern Theatre (supported by Art Council)

'On Misanthrope', adaptation based on Moliere's comedy - play for two actors, microphone and two mobile phones, Etcetera Theatre.

'Bukefal' by Boško Puletić, National Theatre, Belgrade.

'The Lover' by Harold Pinter, GLEJ Theatre, Ljubljana.

'Fall on Betl' by Milica Piletić, National Theatre, Montenegro.

'Gagarin's Way' by Gregory Burke, BITEF Theatre, Belgrade.

'Kafka's Dick' by Alan Bennett, National Theatre, Belgrade.

## **Teaching**

2016 – Present, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Visiting Lecturer & MA and BA Tutor (Performance Art, Musical Theatre, and Drama, Applied Theatre and Education)

2014 – 2016, University of Kent, Course Convenor (Theatre and Adaptation) & Visiting Lecturer and Lecture Assistant (Theatre Directing, Text for Theatre, Modern Theatre, Empty Space, European Theatre after 1945)

## **Teaching Areas/Expertise**

- Theatre Directing
- Collaborative devising
- Applied and socially engaged theatre practice
- Comedy and improvisation
- Contemporary theatre practises
- European theatre

## **Conference Presentations**

2020 'Theatre and Post-War Reconciliation: the potentials of comedy and collaborative theatre making', Performance, Embodiment and the Digital Archive: Collaborative Research in Sites of Conflict, Royal Holloway University of London.

2020 'Growing up with the legacy of war in time of climate change', Collisions Festival, Central.

2019 Workshop 'Transgressive Methods' and panel discussion 'Picturing Climate: Art, Academia and Cross-Border Interventions in Times of Climate Emergency', Tate Exchange, Tate Modern.

2018 'Shakespeare's Fools', Applying Shakespeare Symposium, The Shakespeare Institute.

2018 'Silent soldier: performing comedy for reconciliation', Theatre and Memory Wars, Vytautas Magnus Universitas, Kaunas, Lithuania.

2018 'Comedy and peace-building in Northern Bosnia', Art and Activism, Steinhardt NYU, New York.

2015 'Applied theatre and reconciliation in the post war Bosnia and Herzegovina', 'I too, remember dust': Peacebuilding, Politics & the Arts Conference, University of Winchester.

## **Key Publications**

2019 'Shakespeare's Fools', Critical Survey, 31:4, pp. 29-41.

2016 'Theatre and Reconciliation: The Day of an Unlucky Man', *Journal of Arts & Communities*, 8: 1-2, pp. 121-134.

2015 'Confronting Medusa in post-war Bosnia', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 20:2, pp. 191-195.