

Slava's Snowshow and Existentialism

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Abstract: In a paradoxical manner, the clowns of the Russian creator Slava Polunin evoke Beckett's tramps, even though *Snowshow* breaks away from existentialism transcending the nonsense of life by mirroring oneself in the other. In the year of its premiere, the show talked about freedom, about that late release from the restraints of a totalitarian regime, about resistance through hope and dreams throughout the difficult communist period. Nowadays, 30 years later, its circumstantially, even historically - dare we say - modified semantics has acquired a deep philosophical substratum. In the connection between Slava Polunin's show and the existentialist movement, we can highlight two distinct plans. First, there is a manifestation of the ontological nonsense within each sequence of the performance, which causes the childish "detours" towards play. Secondly, the existentialism manifests itself through the very structure of the entire spectacular ensemble. It all starts with the clown entering the scene as if in another dimension. Then, the symbolism of the show makes its aesthetics difficult to categorize. The sequentiality that alternates in a versatile way the dreamlike state and the playful one, the oxymoron and the metaphor, manages to transform the stage discourse into a story that you don't know how to grasp, while being, at the same time, hypnotized by it. At the end, we are invited to test in a sensorial manner a passage to another dimension, a possible evocation of dissolution that takes the shape of an overwhelming snowstorm.

Keywords: clown, existentialism, paradox, playful, freedom

Motto: "I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the motivations and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free."¹

The year 1993 witnessed the birth within the Theatre Company called *Licedei* in Sankt Petersburg (ex-Leningrad), in a recently dissolved Soviet Union, of a performance with a particular theatricality, with an universal and

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¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ființa și neantul (Being and nothingness)*, translation by Adriana Neacșu, Paralela 45 Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p.597

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timeless story, with an aesthetics placed somewhere between magic and surreal, having as protagonist an outsider found at the border between laughter and crying: the Clown. Now, 30 years after its premiere, Slava Polunin's *Snowshow* can be categorized as a legendary show, unique in time and space. The dozens of countries on all continents, the hundreds of cities, the thousands of performances, the millions of ecstatic spectators, the laudatory chronicles from the world's most important publications or the track record of awards and distinctions are just as many arguments in favour of labelling *Snowshow* a "cultural phenomenon".

We had the chance to see this masterpiece *live* in December 2018, at "Le 13eme Art" Theatre in Paris. Also, watching the show on DVD had become a regular practice, a sort of family routine. We used to ask ourselves: to what extent does our *relapse* have its roots in an aesthetic need or the simple desire to escape into the fantasy of childhood? Generating questions, curiosities and perplexities, Slava Polunin's *show* demanded to be seen again "live".

Therefore, in June 2023, as part of a CNFIS² project carried out by "George Enescu" National University of Arts in Iași, we were flying (literally and figuratively) to the Hungarian capital, where *Snowshow* had been scheduled in a series of 6 performances. Hosted by the imposing hall of the National Theatre in Budapest, Veaceslav Polunin's performance was going to be a double surprise. The first one took place immediately after watching the performance - during the day - for which we had purchased tickets online. Due to certain circumstances, we obtained a second set of access cards for the performance taking place the evening of the same day. The second performance literally took our breath away. In the beginning of the 18.00 o'clock performance, the author himself, Slava, played the lead role. The atypical beginning of the stage story - the moment before the suicide that has the clown Assissiaï in the centre, holding a rope in his hand and looking for a tree - gained, through the stage presence of Slava Polunin (73 years old), an existentialist character.

Paradoxically, the clowns of the Russian creator evoke Beckett's tramps, even though *Snowshow* breaks away from existentialism transcending the nonsense of life by mirroring oneself into the other. Moreover, in the sense of what was stated above, Slava declared: "I went down a road very few clowns had trodden before, to extend the tentacles of clownery and

² CNFIS FDI – 2023 – F – 0142 unage-net. "Mecanisme de internaționalizare a educației masterale și doctorale din cadrul UNAGE Iași prin racordarea la rețelele internaționale de educație și cercetare" (*Mechanisms for the internationalization of master's and doctoral education within UNAGE Iași by connecting to international education and research networks*), Project Manager: Prof. PhD. Cristian Nae

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foolishness³ where they were least expected to show up. Diving inside tragicomedy, to measure the extent to which one can fuse drama with laughter – in this Gogol & Beckett-like language and reunite in my character, both the epic and lyrical, tenderness and passion, wisdom and naïveness”.⁴

In the year of its premiere, the show talked about freedom, about that late liberation from the restraints of a totalitarian regime, about resistance through hope and dreams in the difficult communist period. 30 years later, his circumstantially, even historically – dare we say - modified semantics has acquired a deep philosophical substratum. But in order to facilitate the discussion of the clown and the signification of his actions, it is necessary to give a definition of the latter as eloquent as possible. Therefore, the clown is distinguished from the actor by his ability to play with the audience and create a sense of complicity in the collective consciousness. The tool used by the clown to connect with his audience is the play. There is always something in the clown's being that defines him as "the other." This is manifested by the visible difference from ordinary people (make-up, costume, use of a red nose), but also by a striking feature of "otherness": the clowns' attitude towards life, as shown by their actions. When the clown fails, not achieving what they set out to do, a paradox of the approach to life is manifested, a framing of this failure in the framework of optimism and naive simplicity. Slava Polunin fully exploits this philosophical level, continuously diverting the "dead ends" his characters are marching towards. There is in every sequence of the show a childish solution, an infusion of innocence that makes its aesthetics particular. A bed, a sheet and a broom turn into a strange boat that floats through shark-infested waters. Two oversized telephones become the props of a love and hate story that will later give birth to a Beckett-like contemplation. A coat on a hanger comes to life as an expression of the clown's need to say goodbye to someone, before a journey, perhaps the most important one. And the inventory of situations can continue with multiple examples.

Following the same idea of defining clowns, it is important to mention that they can also be distinguished by their physical abilities. Unlike actors, the clowns use a wider range of body tools derived from circus aesthetics – juggling, balancing, mimicry, excellent physical control, or prestidigitation. An exponential clown for this artistic category is Leonid Yengibarov, who built his comic numbers focusing on the multiple physical valences he possessed. A true circus athlete, Yengibarov made the most of accidents or external restraints to show off his acrobatic skills, arousing amusement through simplicity and precision. Slava Polunin, not deviating from his predecessor, does not share Yengibarov's appetite for acrobatics and balance,

³ Slava Polunin named his own theatre company "The Academy of Fools"

⁴ <https://slavasnowshow.com/en/story/> - accessed on September 10, 2023

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he clearly expresses the need to communicate a deeper meaning to his audience through clowning. Thus, Polunin transcends the immediate purpose of the clowning act: entertainment. On the official website of the *Snowshow* show, moreover, we find the recognition of Yengibarov's value, when Slava claims the origins of his art: "the poetic sadness of Leonid Yengibarov's clowning, the refined philosophy of Marcel Marceau's pantomime and the humanity and comic gravity of the films of the great Chaplin."⁵ The ontologically thrilling rope at the opening of *Snowshow* is a possible paraphrase of a rope used by Leonid Yengibarov to jump the rope, only to ostentatiously tie it around his neck in order to confront his arena partner.⁶

Going back to the connection between Slava Polunin's show and the existentialist current, we can highlight two distinct plans. First, there is a manifestation of the nonsense of life in every sequence of the show, which causes the childish "diversions" towards play. Secondly, the existentialism manifests itself through the very structure of the entire spectacular ensemble. It all starts with the clown entering the scene as if in another dimension. The metaphysics of this apparition is enhanced by a mystical, transcendental music, the dreamlike illumination, and the dilated rhythm of the clownish corporeality in motion. A seemingly frail figure, a body marked by the passage of time, a tousled-haired clown is moving slowly and silently on stage. His costume – a sort of yellow overalls like the pyjamas worn by very young children, a pair of red fur ball slippers and a scarf, also red, wrapped around his neck – evokes early childhood. Unlike the clothing, the white, tousled hair suggests the character's age. "Thus, in a single human figure, a stage character who has not yet spoken a word, the audience is presented with an index of the entire human journey from childhood to old age."⁷

The finale, to which we will return later, invites us to test, in a sensorial manner, the passage to another dimension, a possible evocation of dissolution that takes the form of an overwhelming snowstorm. Thus, an epic storyline equivalent to an existential journey is closing.

The movements of the clown, child and adult at the same time, motrically combine the faltering balance of the first steps with the precarious balance of old age. And when the clown does a quarter pirouette towards the audience, to see and recognize him, we discover in his gaze the frankness of the innocent who did not understand that the insistent gaze is rude. At the same time, from the perspective of attitude, the confidence of the adult who

⁵ Idem

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNYyFltgT_k&ab_channel=ArmineGeghamyan (01:10) - accessed on October 4, 2023

⁷ Louise Peacock, *Serious Play. Modern Clown Performance*, Intellect Books Publishing, Chicago & Bristol, 2009, p.80

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embraces the public exposure is manifested. A movement of the shoulders as well as the appearance of a smile express in Slava's clown, Assissiaï, the happiness of meeting the audience. He wears a rope around his neck, carrying with it the full symbolic force of the constricting/liberating noose. Simple and direct, the thrill of death and the excruciating condition of life (a quintessentially Sartre-like⁸ formula) are communicated to the audience. Assissiaï faces the audience and begins to collect the rope that goes outside the stage. It's a long, repetitive movement that signals a certain flatness, as well as exhaustion, all against the sound background of time counting. In the end, the rope stretches, and from behind the scenes, drawn by the opposite end forming another noose around the neck, a second clown appears⁹.

In this stage debut, with the positioning of the rope ends around the necks of the two clowns, we have Heidegger's¹⁰ vision shared by Sartre, according to which mortality and restlessness are common to the human condition. The rope of the two clowns indicates the anxiety nested in the collective consciousness. The double suicidal perspective projects into the condition of the two exponents of humanity the struggle that stifles the meaning, the joy, the light. Perhaps they have reached the end of the Beckettian waiting, at that point where becoming aware of the meaninglessness of their existence becomes unbearable. However, since the clowns have recognized the audience, they cannot continue with their suicide plan, going back, like Vladimir and Estragon¹¹ from *Waiting for Godot* to their routine. Instead, unlike Beckett's tramps, the clowns will seek to demonstrate at every moment the meaning of the journey, the joy of being. Here, *Snowshow* breaks away from existentialism, acquiring multiple other valences.

The symbolism of the performance makes its aesthetics hard to classify. The sequentiality that alternates in a versatile way the dream and the play, the oxymoron and the metaphor transforms the stage discourse into a story that you don't know where to start, being, at the same time, hypnotized

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), French philosopher, writer, journalist and literary critic, publishes in 1943 his most important work, laying the foundations of existentialism in France, *L'Être et le Néant (Being and Nothingness)*: " ... I could escape (the freedom to which I am condemned, *our note*) by suicide or desertion."

⁹ It should be noted that the show is made in two versions. In the original the clown at the other end of the rope is dressed identically to Assissiaï. In the second, the clown appearing from the backstage is dressed differently, in a long green overcoat, oversized slippers and an unusual hat, the brim of which extends well above the shoulders, indicating a different kind of personality.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), one of the most important German philosophers of the 20th century, contributed fundamentally to the reconsideration of phenomenology through his major work *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time – 1927)*.

¹¹The two Beckettian characters also have a failed attempt at suicide by hanging.

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by it. It is, perhaps, a parable of the way we experience our lives, in the sense of unpredictable and overwhelming chaos. The show can be framed in the surrealist current, if we admit that the spontaneous activity of the imagination - as André Breton postulated in 1924, in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* - projects the rising of the moon from a banal barrel, while a top hat has lost its proper meaning in order to become the chimney of a steam locomotive. Multiple scenes in the show seem born from the unconditional exploration of the subconscious, from the complete freedom of the child who does not premeditate, but acts in the absence of any control exercised by reason, outside of any aesthetic or moral concern. The surrealism of *Snowshow* is based on the force of the dream in which all constraints disappear. Speaking about the clown in this world of fascinating contrasts, Slava Polunin confesses: "The tender and emotional Assissiaï has aged with me, becoming troubled and hesitant. No longer surprised by the paradoxes of the outer world, he has completely dissolved into the paradoxes of his inner life. He's become more thoughtful, his former devilish giddiness being replaced by a kind of trepidation, as if he has balanced himself by touching a mystery he's afraid to disturb, but desperately wants to solve."¹²

The show is, by excellence, an interactive one too, with the audience becoming at times actors or, perhaps, even clowns. The *flop* – an incident used by the actor as the trigger structure of the comic (the failure of the clown) – has in *Snowshow* unexpected turns and returns towards the audience, including it in the situation and in *the gag*. The idea of *the flop* can be found in the clown teaching of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier. In *The Moving Body*, Lecoq identifies two types of *flops*: the pretentious one and the accidental one¹³. By this, Lecoq indicates that although all clowns undertake an action completed by mistake or by accident, there are different ways in which the failure can be shared with the audience. In the pretentious *flop*, the clown performs simple comic structures that he considers to be relevant to his own "brilliance". Humour therefore comes from the audience's recognition – on a higher plan – that what the clown is doing is really nothing special. The more the clown shows pride in his achievement, the funnier the audience will find him. On the other hand, with the accidental *flop* where the clown fails to complete his *exploit*, humour emerges and escalates on the clown's incompetence. This type of *flop* is especially funny when the exploit is relatively simple. Thus, the members of the audience will have the awareness of easily accomplishing the task with which the clown is struggling. At the start of *Snowshow*, Angela De Castro as the green clown Rough repeatedly fails to cross her arms. This is an example of an accidental *flop*. Crossing the arms is a simple manoeuvre that

¹² <https://slavasnowshow.com/en/story/> - accessed on September 10, 2023

¹³ Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body*, Methuen Publishing, London, UK, 2002, p. 160

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the clown should be able to complete easily, and yet the clown fails over and over again. Audience members, adults and children alike, enjoy themselves in the context of superiority felt for the simple fact that they are able to carry out that *exploit*. "The idea of an *exploit* is central to how Lecoq's clowns work. They like to be in front of an audience and play with it by establishing a sense of complicity, while the lack of interaction limits their potential to create humour"¹⁴.

We would like to evoke, in what follows, several key sequences of the show, sequences that caused nuances of perception and interpretation. One such situation is when Assissiaï enters the scene carrying a small helium balloon. The string connecting the clown's hand to the balloon is long enough to outline a level of expectation of the object's reveal. When the small balloon appears at the other end, the audience's reaction marks the opposition born between reality and the imagined, expected form. To enhance the comic effect, Assissiaï communicates his feelings to the audience not by speaking, but by using a small device that emits a squeaky, clownish sound.

The duality of the clown is shown in a telephone conversation sequence where Assissiaï switches personalities to play both characters. The meaning of the sequence seems ambiguous: the two characters may be part of an actual telephone conversation, or they could be the expression of the individual's behavioural duality. Furthermore, the fact that Assissiaï plays both characters enhances a paradoxical comic effect: the viewer's ability to dissociate the plans contradicts the visible convention of a single performer in two diametrically opposed poses.

The show sums up a suite of attempts of the clown/individual to connect with peers. In the scene "Blue Canary"¹⁵, Assissiaï appears between two other clowns who, during the performance of the song, are dancing. The dance is born out of the two clowns' obvious pleasure in successfully displaying their bodily skills. This is an example of the "frivolity of the play" derived from Sutton-Smith's¹⁶ theories. All three clowns wear similar costumes, which means some unity. However, Assissiaï cannot keep the tempo of the dance. He's always a little off the pace from the other two. He carries a small butterfly net with him. It is difficult to estimate what he hopes to catch in it. In fact, he will not make us do any specific action with this prop,

¹⁴ Louise Peacock, Op. cit., p.14

¹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld3dAeFg-JM&t=6s&ab_channel=arshtcenter - accessed on October 15, 2023

¹⁶ Brian Sutton Smith (1924-2015) was a game theorist seen as a social and cultural phenomenon. He demonstrated that, both in children's play and in that practiced by adults, the expression of the Darwinian struggle for survival is encoded. His relevant works are *The ambiguity of play* and *Play as emotional survival*.

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which leads us to the idea of an infantile accessory through its uselessness. He looks at his dance partners and doesn't understand what he must do. It is an expression of the individual's attempt to keep up with society, even when it does not come naturally. As a metaphorical counterpoint to this sequence, later in the performance, Assissiaï appears in a transparent plastic ball. The metaphor of isolation in one's own universe makes it difficult or even impossible to understand the world around, the "world of others".

Defying the logic in the show emphasizes, by extrapolation, the contingent nature of existence. We fail to accept the lack of rational justification, the "facticity"¹⁷ of life. When Assissiaï descends from the boat-bed, his action is accompanied by the sound effect of footsteps in the water. Moments earlier, the other clown came down in absolute silence. Assissiaï's reaction underlines the illogicality of the moment. Without further explanation or predetermination, just like life, the audience must simply accept the factual convention.

The bonding of the individual with the surrounding world is an inexhaustible source of wonder and controversy. Slava Polunin's clowns seem to discover, while acting, the laws of Physics specific to this universe. Assissiaï becomes entangled in a cobweb he accidentally stumbled upon, mimicking the behaviour of a sanitation worker. Developing a relationship of discomfort, of conflict with the cloth that envelops him as in a cocoon, Polunin escalates a *mise-en-scène* – the snowball principle – at the end of which a curtain of the same type of cloth falls, which is transmitted to the spectators in the first rows and carried over their heads to the end of the hall. Audience members happily enter the game of sharing a common action. The background sound of this memorable scene is provided by Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*, an expression of a thematic repetitiveness rising towards a necessary climax. In a completely different sense, Romeo Castellucci uses this image of the cloth being carried over the audience in the famous performance *Inferno*¹⁸ after Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, performed in 2008 at the Theatre Festival of Avignon, France. It's an existentialist quote from Slava Polunin's show reminding us that we belong to each other as much as we belong to ourselves. In *Snowshow*, the performers on stage and the audience in the hall actively participate in shaping the spectacular universe. Like a *happening*, the action takes place in *limen* ("a moment of pure potentiality"¹⁹). The audience has no way of knowing whether spreading the cloth to the back of the hall is in any

¹⁷ Louise Peacock, Op. cit., p.83

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOv3QsyJG2I> (2:00) - accessed on October 20, 2023

¹⁹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York, 1982, p.

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way necessary for the performance to continue, or whether it is simply an activity intended to trigger amusement through play.

The ambiguity of the contingency states equally hovers over some anarchic elements of the show. The sense of accidental happenings is repeated throughout the stage scaffolding, so that it is difficult for the audience to firmly establish a coherent and particular convention of the performance²⁰. An element of anarchy, present in several moments, derives from the clowns dressed in green venturing between the spectators, while carrying trays of glasses, perforated plastic bottles and umbrella-shaped hats, or even actual umbrellas. All this prop turns into a game of splashing water all over the audience. Clowns walk around on the armrests and backs of chairs, drenching the audience every time they tip their umbrella or tray. The audience is trained to participate both as sensory reactions and as an aid to the precariously balanced clowns all over the hall. The performance degenerates into a dangerous play, and the audience slips, without realizing it, from the world of fantasy into a physical, palpable reality. The clowns overflow with enthusiasm, an enthusiasm gained from taking risks, from exceeding conventional boundaries. It is the struggle of the existentialist clown with the limitations and factuality of life. Thus, the actors show the audience another way of living.

Equally, the snowstorm at the end of the performance explodes throughout the hall to dissolve any boundaries between the one seen and those seeing. Alone, Assissiaï fights to stay on his feet in the midst of the whirlwind, the churning sonorities, the blizzard that has an incredible degree of authenticity. We are witnessing another show. It's a completely new level, naturalistic, immersive, disturbing to the point of catharsis²¹. The central character breaks free from the clown condition. He becomes the exponent of the human being at a limit of existence, perhaps the final one. The ultimate paradox of the spectacular construction, the clown is now any of us. In his being coexist Béranger²² - unsubdued and determined to continue, the poet Dante - before the descent into the Inferno of his own imagination or Meursaul²³ - at the end of the platitudes of the novelistic destiny, entered under the influence of the transcendental.

²⁰ Fernandez De Toro, *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre*, Toronto University Press, Toronto, 1995

²¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jy_JaUIKek0&ab_channel=AnaSof%EF%BF%BDAE%EF%BF%BDNMu%EF%BF%BDOz (58:00) - accessed on July 10, 2023

²² The main character in the play *The Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco, the one who remains stoic in the face of the "general rhinocerotization": "I am the last man, I will remain a man until the end! I'm not capitulating!"

²³ The main character in the novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, a literary expression of the man uninvolved in his own existence, unable to give meaning and justification to his life.

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The audience takes part to the final scene of the show with the emotion and the childish excitement of sliding down the steepest slope of a roller coaster. The energy of the performance has at this point an explosion of a virulence hardly imaginable in a theatre hall. The clown leaves aside his red nose²⁴, quintessentially a theatrical mask, and the audience's social masks fall as well. All of us who go through the storm in *Snowshow* become for a few moments authentic, therefore free. In this way, the existentialist clown encourages us to let go of the usual stereotypes and constraints of society. When the giant balls after the final *lights* are propelled into the hall, the adults and the children embark on a practice of the play that transcends the theories of Brian Sutton-Smith. The sole aim of all spectators is to touch, even in passing, one of the brightly coloured spheres. Finally, the framework of the play is very clearly established, and everyone can embrace the same single existential convention. The unanimous engagement in play establishes a sense of communion and belonging of each spectator with his fellows. The balls are projected back and forth over the entire space occupied by the paper snowflakes. After breaking the love letter at the end, Assissiaï reveals the true identity of the millions of particles that composed the storm: small pieces of the broken letters of endless and permanent loves.

Snowshow is a metaphor for the existential journey, a simple and authentic panorama of life and living. In relation to Heidegger's ideas, "authenticity" derives both from isolation and individual struggle and from the inevitable finality in death. Assissiaï expresses this understanding through the clown's world view, which is intrinsically authentic. The clown understands that there is no grand plan beyond his own path to undoing. Slava emphasizes this through the allegorical journeys of sequences populated by suitcases, clocks and trains ready to depart. The sadness of separation, the inability to fight time or the failure of connecting with the other rests on the versatile aesthetics of "role play", practiced by Assissiaï at times. After the phone scene, towards the end of the show he will play both identities of a couple who break up in a train station. This view of the world – self-sufficient solitude – is connected to the existentialists' penchant for "authentic" living by sentencing to the freedom of thought and action. The experience of the viewer in *Snowshow* perfectly overlaps the experience of everyday reality. It's a "game of life" that must be solved on the fly, as you live it, without knowing what's next or if the events have any meaning. Sartre's formula, "existence precedes essence", will outline a specific identity of the clown, a status defined by his actions.

²⁴ In the second show seen in Budapest, Slava pulled out his red nose just before the final storm – possibly a ritual gesture of passing "beyond".

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The practice of illusory mime, valid in "role play" and not only, works paradoxically on two levels. On the one hand, the audience feels admiration for the clown's skill in creating illusion: a convincing separation between two people, even though we see that only one is present. On the other hand, the viewers experience pain by recognizing the meaninglessness of the human condition: separation from the loved ones and loneliness. There are fears expressed by Didi (Vladimir) throughout the play *Waiting for Godot*. As with the work of Samuel Beckett, critics seem uncertain about the aesthetic framing of this theatre performance that seems to abandon many of the conventions of the dominant form, the realist theatre.

In the edition of January 30, 2004, of *The Times*, Benedict Nightingale published a review of Slava Polunin's performance. In the article, Nightingale demonstrated how the show is an work open to the most varied interpretations: "I was equally amused by the parody of Saint Sebastian, but especially by the episode in which he (the clown, *our note*) confuses his hand with that of a stranger who gropes him, without crossing the line."²⁵ The British critic had come to theatre with expectations directed at circus clowning and instead, he received an epic-sized parade of the existentialist clowns. The show encourages the audience to evaluate their approach to life rather than amuse through the practices of *flop* and *gag*. The mechanisms of the comic are fully exploited, but precisely because of this, the deep meanings of the stage mechanism become valuable sources of reflection. If the description of Nightingale - "the parody of Saint Sebastian" - is, in fact, the demonstration of how man clings to life despite the many arrows that pierce him, the parting scene at the station is diminished by the description of Nightingale, "a stranger who feels him along". In fact, Slava emphasizes the pain of parting with someone to whom you feel attached as part of a whole. It is, perhaps, the separation from one's own earthly identity before the transition to nothingness. Next to the fact that it highlights the ultimate isolation of the individual, the anarchic sections of the show deliberately work to connect the audience, reminding people of their connection to their fellows. The connection invariably takes place, the clowns' actions fulfil their purpose, as Paul Taylor notes in his review in *The Independent*, on February 2, 2004: "till the end, two spectators near me were still trying to break up their accidental partnership."²⁶ Paradoxically, Slava reminds us of the overwhelming loneliness and, at the same time, encourages an atmosphere of interaction between strangers who would socially, as a rule, avoid eye contact with each other. The accidental

²⁵ Benedict Nightingale, *Review of Slava's Snowshow*, *The Times*, London, UK, January 30, 2004

²⁶ Paul Taylor, *Review of Slava's Snowshow*, *The Independent*, London, UK, February 2, 2004

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partnerships, which are formed gradually as the audience members become entangled in cobwebs, when they help the anarchic clowns balance themselves, or when they play with oversized balls, sum up the meaning of the show and suggest Slava's outlook on life. Happiness can depend on the random interaction with others. This also demonstrates the elements of play theory. Its essence is "characterized by attention to means rather than ends"²⁷. Also, "the play is supposed to be unproductive and without serious consequences"²⁸. Encouraging his audience to play freely, with joy, Slava creates a bridge between the restrictive world of adults and the fantasy universe of childhood. Instead of a large-scale narrative line, the audience is presented with a puzzle that will be completed meaningfully in the end. Thus, the man is stimulated to take what he experiences as such, a journey of chance lacking a prior narrative, the last postulate of Beckett – an influence claimed by Slava artistically speaking.

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²⁷ Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Harvard University Press, Londra, 1997, p. 188

²⁸ Idem, p. 189

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<https://slavasnowshow.com/en/story/> - accessed on September 10, 2023

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNYyFltgT_k&ab_channel=ArmineGeghamyan (01:10) - accessed on October 4, 2023

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld3dAeFg-JM&t=6s&ab_channel=arshtcenter - accessed on October 15, 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOv3QsyJG2I> (2:00) - accessed on October 20, 2023