



# SILENCE

TEATR BIURO PODRÓŻY

# SILENCE

PERFORMANCE

**„I SHALL GO TO SOME OTHER LAND, I SHALL GO TO SOME OTHER SEA.**

**ANOTHER CITY THERE MUST BE.**

**MY EVERY EFFORT HERE IS WASTED.**

**AND MY HEART — LIKE A CORPSE — LIES BURIED. WHEREVER I TURN MY EYE,**

**WHEREVER I HAPPEN TO LOOK I SEE THE BLACK RUINS OF MY LIFE.”**

**KONSTANDINOS KAVAFIS**

Famed for its legendary street theatre production, *Carmen Funebre*, which explored the detrimental impact of war on civilians, Polish company Teatr Biuro Podróży present their newly sequel *Silence*. Physical theatre, fire, unusual staging, puppetry and music will pick up the continuing story of refugees and migrants caught up in a spiral of war, and the dream of escape.

In the context of carnage and cleansing happening daily in the Middle East, which results in mass exodus of people to safe havens in Europe; Teatr Biuro Podróży asks why these people left their homes and exposed themselves for the dangers and humiliation of displacement. After *Carmen Funebre*, that told about the atrocities of war in Bosnia/Yugoslavia, it seemed impossible that anything worse can happen again. However the reality exceeded the imagination. We witness the phenomenon beyond any scale, which evokes concern and fear in Europe.

Teatr Biuro Podróży observes the situation from the vantage point of the residents of the besieged city. The performance heroes are the children - innocent witnesses of the death and violence - the victims of atrocities and displacement. For these children and their future peace of mind, let`s try to put ourselves in their position for a while.

The performance has been commissioned by Greenwich+Docklands International Festival/London and Hull UK City of Culture 2017 / Freedom Festival, in coproduction with GDIF.  
Premiere: London 30/06 i 1/072016

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Directed by Paweł Szkotak

Music: Wiki Nowikow

Set and costume design: Teatr Biuro Podróży, Magdalena Deput, Sławomir Kuśnierz

Actors: Bartosz Borowski, Magdalena Dębicka, Aizah Khan, Łukasz Kowalski, Jarosław Siejkowski, Marta Strzałko, Tomasz Wrzałik, Maciej Zakrzewski/Joshua Patel



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## REVIEWS

### The Stage / July 2016

Taking a very different approach to themes of war and the resulting displacement of people, Polish company Teatr Biuro Podrozy presents Silence. A large scale, high-concept spectacle, the production blends pyrotechnics, stilt-walking and abstract physicality, set to a soundtrack of yearning cello airs and jaggedly-industrial metal riffs.

Depicting a community carrying on normal lives during a nameless conflict, the show is full of haunting images. Child-sized mannequins articulated by the performers are cast as silent protagonists, and treated with touching tenderness as they play, dance, or flee in terror. A scene where they are evacuated from a dramatically burning structure feels frantic and genuinely dangerous.

The performance takes place beneath an illuminated sign quoting Auden's Refugee Blues. "This city has ten million souls." It feels like a fitting motto for a diverse festival with an inclusive, international outlook.

### Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung / August 2016

Polish theatre company stunned the old ones and the young ones with their high-quality, open-air performance. The company presented the performance of „Silence in Troy” in the Old Market in Oberhausen. This is a memorable show and it proves that the perfect theatre is the one which fascinates, refers to the emotions and leaves the audience with the impression that they experienced something important and unique.

The story presents the reality. People experience war, they try to survive, and finally they cannot see other solution than refuge. „This couldn't be more present” - said one of the spectators.

(...)

The history is transferred onto the theatre stage, and this allows us to watch it; the story becomes a fiction. As it is. But on the other hand it happens in reality.

This is the memorial for many million of people who have not been able to become „a refugee problem” in Europe.

### Gazeta Wyborcza – Poznan / October 2017

Teatr Biuro Podrózy returns to the subject of war. The company have already dealt with it in their legendary performance of „Carmen Funebre”. In the recent one of „Silence in Troy”, we don't watch the war from the vantage point of ancient heroes, we follow the events with civilians, ordinary people who struggle to survive every day.

In the beginning the Death enters. On stilts, in a long, purple gown and he unveils the silver drape that covers the red bus, with battered, shot-through sheeting. Body parts stick out through the windows – arms, legs. Above the vehicle there is a writing lighted: This city has ten million souls”. We hear the voice-over: Once upon a time, by the great sea, there lived happy people. They smiled looking into a blue sky. One day the sky was covered with heavy, leaden clouds. Then people stopped smiling. But the fairytale is going to stop in a moment.



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We can surely recognise the parts taken from „The Iliad” (Hector`s corpse attached to the chariot- here the motorbike, captors, or description of Pyrrus` murder). But Szkotak and his company present the war from the perspective of the ordinary people, civilians who always suffer the most, without their own fault. There are no heroes, no gods, no glory and no honour. Just an ordinary life, that at one point turns into inhumane carnage, food rationing, humiliation, deprivation of dignity. In the name of what, to protect who.... War is always a tragedy for people.

Teatr Biuro Podróży can create stunningly powerful, memorable images, like for instance the last one, when the actors set out paper boats on the ground. A moment later a city-service worker in blue uniform enters with the water hose. The stream of water washes the boats away.

And once again Teatr Biuro Podróży proves that open-air theater doesn`t have to be just and only visually attractive, but it can use its tools in the greater cause.

### Nietakt – Other Sides of Theatre / May 2017

#### Carmen ad infinitum

The red bus has parked in the city square. This is the theatre set, as well as the barricade. Pawel Szkotak copied it from a picture from Aleppo, maybe Homs or Raqqah. Temporary house, the whole city on wheels, which has nowhere to go. And, of course, an easy target to shoot. Red bus is for a sniper like red rag to a bull. People are there! Shoot!

Over the bus there is neon: „This City Has Ten Million Souls”. Auden`s quote and the performance quote from Teatr Biuro Podróży`s Carmen Funebre, over 20 years ago. In 1994, in Carmen Funebre we heard the voice-over “This city has ten million souls. Some are living in mansions. Some are living in holes. Yet, there is no place for us.”

The city that didn`t open for anyone in need, is now wandering and dying.

Stilted Death is gliding across the square. White, deathly mask, purple hooded gown. It is the same Death who knocked on the city gates in Carmen Funebre. Silent, elusive, hunched. It runs like an ostrich, it flies like an empty linen sack taken by the wind. I don`t even know how to name this theatre return of the figure from Szkotak`s imagery.

Carmen Funebre told about wandering, impossible escape from war and fire. Silence tells about pointlessness of the endurance. Tales of suffering and loss are usually the same, but the mood of the new open-air performance by Teatr Biuro Podróży is different from the years old one. As if all hope disappeared from it. Szkotak cannot see any point in attempts to save the place, where there has always been life smouldering. As if he understood that finally it would stop smouldering.

Death as a figure, dramatis persona, seems to be more unobtrusive here than in the first performance. He enters twice and does nothing wrong. He only watches. He skulks, looks for life. I have got the impression that the performer who played the part entered the space uncertain, fearful, amazed that maybe him – the Death will finally be seized. He watched the red bus as if surprised with the world, war, people: you have been too clever students, you don`t need me any more, you took my place.



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At one moment, a big head of the Greek statue wrapped in net is brought to the stage. It could be one of the ancient philosophers, but it is Homer. Dragged out from a museum, dug out in ruins. The company re-enacts the barbaric ritual of destruction of art pieces by ISIS fighters. (...)

This is a big symbolic image in the performance, if not the most important one. Not only does Szkotak say through it that we have mentally returned to the barbaric times, but also he stresses that today Homer is impossible. And it is not because he is blind, after all, all of us have gone blind to the suffering of the weak. It is whimper of poetry that has nothing to get attached to. We have become indifferent, because there are too many stimuli. We have wasted too much pity. Homer`s endurance is impossible in our world, because we have stopped to understand misery and arguments of the other side.

The performance images turn around as if in a charmed circle of blood, fire and destruction. Death of men, abuse of women, execution of children, escape of the saved, momentary euphoria in the bus hideout. Peaceful image by aggressive one. Tidal waves. As if they performed on the seashore, not in the middle of the city square. Open-air theatre smells of fuel, wet cloths and paper, hot metal and fear of spectators.

In the finale the performance space will be filled with many paper boats, the people of Troy "will set out to the sea, dark as wine". A water-hose in the actor`s hand will be enough to wash all of them away. One cannot escape from Troy. There is nowhere to go. Drowned refugees are only the numbers in the journalists reports published in wet newspapers rotting on the pavement. Neon saying about ten million souls living in a city will be lighted again. Ironically. Because the city is no more. And no one is saved.

### Kultura u podstaw / October 2017

Will there not be a better world?

City service worker, wearing high visibility vest, washes away small paper boats with a hose – symbolic migrants vessels. As if they were rubbish, that needs to vanish from nice, orderly world...

With such powerful emphasis the outstanding, outdoor performance of "Silence in Troy" by Teatr Biuro Podrozy ends.

The war comes suddenly to symbolic Troy, overtaking the inhabitants and spectators...terrifying shot bangs, mayhem, suffering, destruction. Trojans` life is subjected to the rythm of deadly fights and periods of peace. When the city is once more invaded by captors – the rythm evolves into the sequence of blind violence and devastation, that they bring with themselves and the attempts to create small safe havens where normal life can be preserved. This chaotic rythm makes the insecurity and fear grow. The violence, pictured with a big gesture, is well-known from the daily news: murders, rapes, tortures and all kinds of atrocities. And mindless abuse, for fun. Normality is preserved in time between night, when sleep is a relief and day when one has to find food, laundry, (women get the moment for themselves – a bit of laughter, a bit of anger) and cleaning. Children go to school but what they can learn if their knowledge of life has nothing to do with the one from a textbook. Cellist performs his agonised concert (references to Sarajevo) and gets brutally silenced. ...



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Symbolic set: a shabby bus, with the lighted writing „This city has ten million souls” – as if suspended over the gate to the amusement park, stiltwalkers (stunning, destructive, in leather helmets, pushing burning wheels), brutal mercenaries, and puppets of children were enough to create a moving picture of life in a city at war. Image by image – it is full of fear, hope, resignation. When the city is finally burnt, the words by Konstandinos Kavafis remain in silence: „I shall go to some other land, I shall go to some other sea. Another city there must be. My every effort here is wasted and my heart —like a corpse— lies buried. Wherever I turn my eye, wherever I happen to look I see the black ruins of my life.” The people of the city set out symbolic paper boats, which will take them to „some other place”. The boats will meticulously be cleared away by a city service worker, because „some other place” is not happy to receive them. Reference is very clear indeed. Another thing is that our symbolic Troy rejected the refugees as well. When a woman with a child enters looking for cover, she is turned down, excluded from the community. Symbolic Trojans (us?) who don` t let the outsiders in, shortly become ones themselves.

In time of carnage and cleansing in the Middle East, resulting in mass exodus („This city has ten million souls”) Teatr Biuro Podróży in dramatic way tells about the ordinary citizens who become refugees. The heroes of the performance are children – alone, facing war, death of the relatives, destruction and chaos. They try to save their child`s world, incorporate the bits of the reality they live in into their plays and games; they are violent, they despise the others, they are brutal and cruel. Unable to think abstractly. They mount the trojan horse, tame the symbols of treason and extermination. They copy the world they know.

One can say they copy the world of captors, the attractive world of the powerful. But behind the children puppets there are adult actors. The war destroys everyone.

Only the dreams of escape remain. And the city stops to exist...

