

**The Holocaust May Be Important,  
But It's No Longer Original:  
Representations of the Holocaust  
in Slovak Theatre Reviews from  
2000 to 2017**

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**Abstract:** This article reports findings from a qualitative thematic analysis of 142 Slovak theatre reviews published from 2000 to 2017 about 25 Holocaust dramas staged in Slovakia. Until 2015, most Holocaust dramas employed the “Brechtian” estrangement effect, but since the beginning of 2015, Slovak theatre has shifted towards the use of realistic representation. Dramas employing the estrangement effect were in their reviews considered to be original artworks, and the social value of these plays was emphasized, while realistic representation was considered to be outdated and unoriginal. With the emergence of unoriginality in reviews, the attributed social value of these dramas diminished and the interest of reviewers in the Holocaust drama faded. The subsequent quantitative analysis supports these conclusions.

**Keywords:** Holocaust, theory of social representations, theatre, thematic analysis

## **Introduction**

In the theatre, the proximity of stage and auditorium creates an intimacy, an emotional bond, between the actors and the audience (Rokem, 2000). This bond elicits trust and allows the audience to become immersed in the world of drama. As Claude Schumacher (1998) notes in his introduction to *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance*, a play that succeeds in depicting the Holocaust is one that the audience finds disturbing, outside of its comfort zone, and that leads to reconsideration of its assumptions about history. There are however nuances between the attitudes towards Holocaust representation in different artworks. In his analysis, Jiří Holý (2014) describes two main approaches to aesthetic representations of the Holocaust: in the first, the Holocaust is portrayed through the use of reality effect. The events in such artworks are represented as a faithful reconstruction of the

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past, often based on authentic details and resources (e.g., diaries, newspaper articles, photographs, interviews). Representations of this nature enable the audience to forget that it is engaging with a work of art and suggest a realistic image of the past. This kind of representation therefore employs so called reality effect (Barthes, 1968). The reality effect emerges when the audience considers the presented events to be real and truthful. Moreover, the reality effect reassures that the represented world exactly corresponds to the ideological schemes we have created about it, schemes that therefore seem natural and universal to us (Pavis, 1999).

In contrast to the reality effect, the second approach to Holocaust representation employs the estrangement effect (Holý, 2014). In artworks that employ estrangement, we are reminded of the fictitious nature of the work. The estrangement effect explicitly points to one or more formal elements of the artwork and deconstructs them. The audience is therefore aware that these artworks are not a valid imprint of historical reality, but merely a sign, often referred to as poetic (Jakobson, 1963). The poetic sign is autoreferential and deconstructs its own codes (drama can explicitly represent itself as a drama or a movie can refer to its actors as actors etc.). The estrangement effect is therefore considered to be the opposite of the reality effect. The typical traits of these artworks are relativization of the boundary between good and evil, absence of heroism, representation of rather boring everyday life in contrast to dramatic events, grotesqueness, and black humor. In theatre, the employment of estrangement effect is often connected to German playwright Bertold Brecht, who considered the estrangement effect to be the one of the most important principles in his own practice. This kind of theatrical tradition is therefore often called “Brechtian” (Pavis, 1999).

From 2000 to 2017, twenty-five plays representing the Holocaust were performed in Slovak theatre. Up until 2015, most employed the estrangement effect, but, from 2015 onwards, Slovak theatre took a dramatic turn towards realistic representations (Mihálová, 2018). This article will explore the effect this major change in style had on the way these plays were received in Slovak theatre reviews. As our thematic analysis will describe, while the estrangement effect was considered to be original and as having social value, realistic representation was considered to be outdated and unoriginal. When plays employing reality effect were introduced, their attributed social value in reviews faded; and as subsequent quantitative analysis will show, the number of written reviews declined. This was despite the fact that audience generally preferred the realistic dramas, which meant that drama employing the reality effect had greater public reach.

## **Slovak State and the Second World War**

On the March 13th, 1938, former prime-minister of Slovakia in the Czechoslovak republic, Jozef Tiso, was invited to discuss the formation of autonomous Slovak republic with Adolf Hitler in Berlin. Hitler proposed either to create independent state subordinate to German policy or to divide the territory of Slovakia among neighbouring states. The independence was declared a day after by Slovak parliament. After the establishment of the Slovak State, the so-called “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” received legal framework and the Jewish population has gradually lost fundamental human, civil and property rights. Anti-Jewish legislation culminated on September 9th, 1941 with the adoption of the *Jewish Code* (Hradská, 1999; Rajcan, Vadkerty & Hlavinka, 2018).

The series of military failures of Germany and its allies in 1943 led to an increase in opposition in Slovak society, resulting in preparation of an armed uprising. The situation was problematized by the growing partisan activity that accelerated the German occupation of the country. The Slovak National Uprising finally broke out on August 29th, 1944, as a reaction

to the occupation of the Slovak territory by German military units (Mičev, 2009) and was suppressed by the occupation of Banská Bystrica by German troops on October 27th, 1944. To prevent the collapse of the defiance, the insurgent army was moved into mountains and continued in guerrilla warfare. On April 4th, 1945, the Soviet Red Army entered the Slovak capital, Bratislava. Exiled government capitulated on May 8th resulting in establishment of the Third Czechoslovak Republic (Lacko, 2008).

Within this timeframe, there were two waves of Jewish transports to concentration camps. Almost 58 000 Slovak Jews were deported from March 25th to October 20th, 1942. However, Germany's efforts to restore deportations in the spring of 1943 were no longer successful. The new wave of transports began only after the occupation of Slovakia by Germany. In eleven transports from September 30th, 1944 to March 1945, there were deported about 13 500 Jews (Kováčová, 2012).

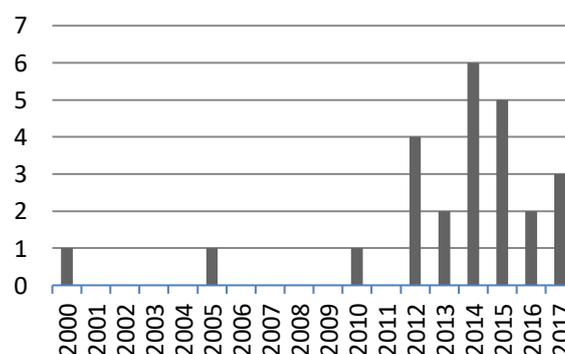
### History of staging Holocaust drama in Slovak theatre

The first Holocaust dramas in Slovak theatres were staged directly after World War II with the prevailing interest in the heroic acts, such as escaping from the concentration camps in Peter Karvaš' *Return to life* (1946) and Juraj Váha's *Silence* (1949). Karvaš returned to the representation of Holocaust in his play *Antigona and the others* (1962), when he paraphrased Sophocles' *Antigone* and situated the narrative into the concentration camp.

More plays however depicted the events of the Slovak National Uprising, which has undergone various transformations since the 1950s. The uprising was misused for different ideological purposes related to communistic regime, it was represented as heroic example of the national unity, served as a critique of the "decayed" morals and supported creation of the national identity. For these reasons the theatrical representation of the Second World War during communistic era was considered to be pathetic, kitsch, sentimental and overloaded with illustrative heroism, even though these plays were, by the regime, presented as the depiction of the historical truth (Kročánová, 2014).

After the fall of communistic regime in 1989 and separation of Czech and Slovak republic in 1993, theatres almost ceased staging dramas related to Second World War. Throughout the 1990s there was only one play, Viliam Klimáček's *Fiery Fires* (1996). Klimáček's play took a strong stand against the realistic aesthetics of its predecessors and for the first time introduced poetics of the estrangement effect in drama related to Second World War in Slovak theatres (Svoradová, 2014).

FIGURE 1 Number of Holocaust plays premiered in Slovak theatres.



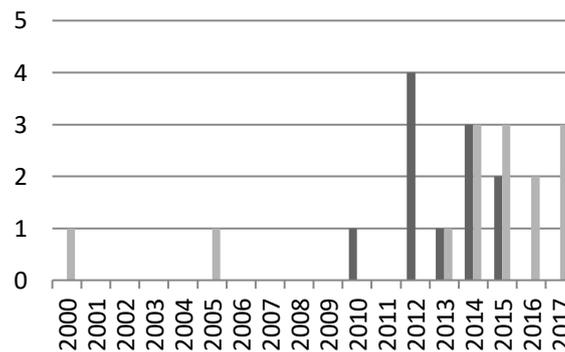
In the 21st century, Slovak theatres began to include Holocaust dramas on their stages in 2012 with the 70th anniversary of the transportation of the first Jews from the Slovak

Republic to the concentration camps; and in 2014 with the 70th anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising. As we can see in Figure 1, these dates are associated with an increase in the number of premieres.

Of the 25 Holocaust plays (see Appendix A for the full list) staged in Slovakia during this period, 14 were individual productions. The remaining 11 belonged to one of four thematic series: *Endlosung* (four plays) and *Investigation of the failure of elites* (two plays) in the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava; *Civil Cycle – Seven major sins* (three plays) in Arena Theatre in Bratislava; and *We will not forget* (two plays) in Jonáš Záborský Theatre in Prešov. The aim of these series was to revisit the Second World War era, open the wider discussion about the responsibility of the Slovak citizens in the Jewish deportations and educate the society about the risks of nationalism and radicalization (Mihálová, 2018).

As we can see in Figure 2, from 2000 to 2017 there were 14 Holocaust plays that employed reality effect and 11 that employed the estrangement effect.

FIGURE 2 Number of “estrangement” plays (darker) and “realistic” plays (lighter).



Plays are employing estrangement effect mostly in the acting, but often use several different approaches within a single performance. They could use irony and suppress the emotions in order to let the audience think rationally about the depicted events; they could play with scene and style of the performances in order to shock the audience and disturb the ordinary assumptions about the history of Slovak State. Similarly to Klimáček’s *Fiery Fires* in 1996, also these plays stand in the opposition to the realistic aesthetics of the dramas misused by the communistic regime. However, we can also find the shift in the aesthetics of the realistic dramas. They employ the reality effect mostly to allow the audience experience the intensity (and terror) of the former events in order to prevent their repetition in the present society (Mihálová, 2018).

TABLE 1 Number of Holocaust plays, repeat performances and reviews (average per play).

	Total	Estrangement	Realistic
Plays	25	11	14
Repeats	798	241 ( $M = 21.9$ ; $SD = 12.5$ )	557 ( $M = 39.8$ ; $SD = 24.5$ )
Reviews	142	68 ( $M = 6.7$ ; $SD = 4.7$ )	74 ( $M = 4.9$ ; $SD = 4.8$ )

The following sections of the article will report findings from the thematic analysis of the reviews written on these performances. In the Table 1, we can see the number of plays employing reality and estrangement effect, their repeats and reviews written.

The analysis had two main goals:

- a) Describe the development of the Holocaust representation in the reviews.
- b) Describe the differences between the reviews of “realistic” and “estrangement” plays.

In analysis, all of the 142 reviews were arranged in order of publication date to show how the themes changed over time. The qualitative inductive thematic analysis was conducted using *Atlas.ti* 7.5 by the two authors following the rules of inductive theme construction (Plichtová, 2002). To reduce the risk of distortion in theme construction, we employed the principles of Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997) where the preliminary expectations of each assessor were discussed before the analysis. As the next step, the data were analysed by each assessor separately. Finally, assessors conducted discussion about the themes and reached consensus. No inter-coder reliability was computed, the results were reached by consensus between assessors.

### **Representation of the Holocaust as a tragedy of continuing importance**

In the year 2012, the topic of Holocaust in the theatres was new and the reviews were solving rather fundamental questions: Who has the right to speak about the Holocaust, and who has the right to portray it? How can we portray the unportrayable, and discuss what cannot be discussed? How can we talk when there is just silence left (Copley, 2010; see also Stocchetti, 2017, for review)? Or in other words: Is there any artistic way of adequately reflecting the terrible experiences of the victims of the Holocaust (Alphen, 1998; Kerner, 2011; Spargo & Ehrenreich, 2009)?

Jean Améry (2009) discussed this semiotic problem in his collection of essays, *At the Mind's Limits*, in relation to his own attempts to describe his experiences of the concentration camps. He thought aesthetic representations of the Holocaust should ask questions rather than provide answers. Améry (2009) thought there was an unbridgeable gap between words and the reality they try to reflect. He came to the conclusion that words could never produce the level of pain they were about to portray (Traverso, 1997). Although reviews agreed with this claim, they thought it was outweighed by the social importance of the Holocaust for contemporary society. We may not be able to depict the Holocaust itself, but it must be discussed and remembered, and, more importantly, never repeated.

Up until 2015, the Holocaust and the Second World War were discussed in respectful and humble terms. Reviews described the Holocaust in strong, emotional language: as the most tragic period in the world's history, the darkest period in history, the blackest point in time, as a monstrosity, or, in other words, as „a time we'd rather erase from Europe's history” (Mišovic, 2014).

The impact of the Holocaust is emphasized, but with a kind of helplessness, reflecting the simple fact that we cannot change our tragic past:

The past has shown us its perversion, we can silently judge it, but we cannot change anything. One can only forget, but it would force us to repeat our mistakes (Mišovic, 2015).

Reviews directly link history to the present, and reveal the reviewers' doubts about the current state of European society. The reviews ask whether we are able to learn the lessons, whether we can in the end take responsibility and behave better.

Has humanity learnt from the world wars and become better? Are we not all just prisoners of the Western perception of the world? Because the situation is not looking very optimistic for human kind (Borodovčáková, 2015).

The reviews construct negative representation of present society and warn the audience of what the future might bring. They emphasize that problematic present makes it important for the society to discuss the Holocaust in theatre.

It's wonderful that now, at a time when all sides once again resound with hatred, the desire to exterminate, and to deny and reject the basic rules of humanity, that we are seeing this type of theatre again (Šnircová, 2015).

The educational role of Holocaust in the society is emphasized and since 2012 serves as a basic argument of why to stage the Holocaust dramas. The representation of the Holocaust itself could be therefore described as a tragedy of the continuing importance. However, as following sections proves, potential social impact of Holocaust dramas is less important than the attributed originality of the play.

### **The role of originality in receptions of the Holocaust before 2015**

Theodor W. Adorno (1977), in his essay *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, stated that writing poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric, referring to boundary between aesthetics of the art and tragedy of the Holocaust. Adorno later reconsidered his views and concluded that, immediately after Auschwitz, one literally had to write (Pickford, 2013). Adorno, after all, did not reject all works depicting the Holocaust. He appreciated those that did not employ traditional aestheticization, or ended with an easily comprehensible moral catharsis or ideological message, but that were designed to be dissonant and disturbing, such as Paul Celan's poems, or Arnold Schoenberg's cantata *A Survivor from Warsaw* (Adorno, 1973; Holý, 2014). As our research suggests, this aesthetic preference is shared by the Slovak reviewers of Holocaust plays. For the reviewers to accept a Holocaust play, it has to be different. As we stated above in Figure 2, most of the pre-2015 performances employed the estrangement effect and the reviewers considered the formal originality of these performances favourably:

legitimacy [of Slovak Holocaust plays] is often derived not only from the fact that they are the first productions on this theme in our country, but also in large part from the fact that they use language of contemporary theatre (Inšitorisová, 2012).

The originality of estrangement effect was additionally favoured because of the actual difficulty of representing the Holocaust:

artists are constantly looking for new aesthetic approaches – both comic and tragic – to depict this heavy topic, and it is difficult to portray something that is very hard to understand in the first place (Scherhauser, 2012).

To discuss the role of originality in Slovak Holocaust drama reviews in more depth, we need to describe the criteria the reviewers use to decide whether a performance is original. By contrast to theatrical reviews, Slovak film reviewers also consider originality important, but there are no criteria for labelling films as original or unoriginal. Film reviewers rely on their

own subjective judgments – their taste – when using the term “originality”. There are no reasons or explanation stated in the articles. The term original is therefore used only as an expression of one’s own preference, for a film to be described as an original simply means to be favoured by the reviewer (Urban, 2017). On the other side, the originality of a theatre performance is determined on the basis of three separate, yet interconnected, criteria:

- a) Inventions in the style of the performance;
- b) the presence or absence of emotional blackmailing in the performance;
- c) the intensity of emotional experience of the reviewer during the performance.

### *Innovative style of Holocaust drama*

Positively evaluated are only those formal practices that are consciously playing with stereotypes in order to create new and unexpected contrasts. For example in *Uprising* (2014), there are common elements usually thought of as clichés (excerpts from heroic movies or songs, pathetic gestures, emotional photos or sculptures) combined, juxtaposed and used ironically (Křištofová, 2014). As stated above, these practices are associated with dramas that employ the estrangement effect.

By contrast, practices that are considered to be conservative or traditional are viewed negatively. These are mainly realistic performances with the emphasis on the dialogue and emotional immersion of the audience, such as *Leni* (2013), *Champagne for Savages* (2015), *The Silent Whip* (2015) or *Before the Cock Crows* (2017). The reviews are opposed to immersion, because they believe that overwhelming emotions prevent audience from forming its own opinions on the events represented on stage. This is why reviewers favour performances employing the estrangement effect. The cognitive impact of estrangement is valued more than the emotional impact of immersion or catharsis.

The stage becomes a place of cold alienation and therefore the audience cannot fall into an emotional trap... The peaceful lyricism of production captures the absurdity of a monstrous world in which one person can decide about the lives of many (Juráni, 2013).

The conflict between “realistic” and “estrangement” drama becomes more apparent when we look closely at the expectation of “emotional blackmailing”.

### *Expectation of emotional blackmailing*

When making their overall assessments of the originality of the performance, reviews attribute great importance to whether emotional blackmailing is a feature. Emotional blackmailing, the eliciting of exaggerated emotions among the audience, has been criticized, and reviews consider emotionally blackmailing productions to have less artistic value.

Even a bad play can be turned into a good production, but I don’t think this is true of Klimáček’s *Holocaust* performed by Arena Theatre. The script is superficial and opens many themes and motifs, but there is no real dramatic tension and it is a black and white point of view ending in mere emotional blackmailing (Mišovic, 2013).

Performances that do not blackmail are always evaluated positively. In fact, the act of avoiding emotional blackmailing can be considered the greatest positive of a performance.

It is surprising that performance does not attack our feelings. It keeps us in the mood to think rationally over the traumas (Matejovičová, 2012).

Emotional blackmailing is directly linked to reviewers' concerns that the Holocaust is being commercialized and trivialized. Alvin Rosenfeld (2011) describes this as the transformation of the Holocaust from an "authentic historical event" into a "general symbol" and "attraction" (see also Assmann & Conrad, 2010). Sophia Marshman (2005), in her study *From the Margins to the Mainstream? Representations of the Holocaust in Popular Culture*, described the process of the Holocaust becoming the target of popular culture, with a growing number of museum exhibitions and mass tourism trips to ghetto sites and concentration camps. Marshman (2005) attributes this shift to the fact that the "memory of the Holocaust" is no longer primarily based on recollections by Holocaust witnesses, but on inadequate images by filmmakers and novelists who have no direct experience of the Holocaust. Marianne Hirsch (2012) characterizes this generation as the "generation of postmemory". According to Hirsch (2012), however, this generation can learn the memories of their ancestors and therefore "inherit" their terrifying experiences of the Holocaust with a level of detail that affects them as if they were their own memories. Therefore, works by artists bearing Holocaust traumas as the "family inheritance" can provide a trusted and authentic testimony of the events of the Holocaust (see Kansteiner, 2014, for review). Yet, the Holocaust is in many artworks also being idealized so as to bring it closer to the world of today's audiences, and so-called "soft versions" of the Holocaust are being produced (Brown & Rafter, 2013; Holý & Sladovnicková, 2015; Skloot, 1982). The events then become banal and distorted, which is something that reviewers seek to protect against.

#### *Strong emotional experience of the reviewer*

As we stated above, the estrangement effect is valued more for its cognitive than its emotional impact on audience, forcing it to think about the depicted events, rather than accepting them uncritically. Paradoxically, given the previous two criteria, when emotions are elicited through the estrangement effect, the reviews are more positive and emotional experience is becoming one of the valid criteria used to assess the originality of a performance. This is however only the case with "estrangement" drama, because realistic drama is associated with the expectation of emotional blackmailing.

Stylistically innovative metaphors associated with the death and deportation of Jews are considered to be the most powerful and impressive elements in the productions. The emotional impact of the two Jewish girls acting as clowns and reading invisible lines of the *Jewish Code in Holocaust* (2012), the portrayal of dead bodies in *Europeana* (2014) and the scenographic installation of Jewish suitcases in *The Shop on Main Street* (2014), is highly emphasized. Reviewers of *The Female Rabbi* (2012) wondered whether we aren't heartless if we don't cry over the horrors of war. In reviews of *My Mother's Courage* (2012), reference is made to strong feelings and a strong experience related to direct descriptions of the physical state of the reviewer: shivering, an inability to speak, cry. These strong emotional experiences related to estrangement effect are described as overwhelming and are considered to be a proof of the originality of the performance.

#### **Attributed social importance of Holocaust drama faded with realistic plays after 2015**

In 2013, *Leni* was the first realistic performance to premier in eight years, followed by *The Kindly Ones* in 2014. Until then, the Holocaust had been seen as both a socially important and

original theme. As has been shown above, these two arguments were used to justify Slovak Holocaust drama. However, this changed with more realistic performances staged: in the reviews, the disappearance of originality also implied a loss of the social influence of the Holocaust. The style of *Leni* (2013) is considered to be outdated, but more importantly, it is the first time we see a change in rhetoric. The piety and humbleness is disappearing, and the Holocaust is no longer treated as something striking:

when it looks like there might be some deeper analysis of the characters of Leni or Johnny, there are always just *clichés* about Hitler or the concentration camps, the millions of victims, banal speculation about a love affair between Leni and Adolf, all bound up in the most hackneyed scenes from *Triumph of the Will*, ending in endless pitiful scenes from *The Holy Mountain* (Kyselová, 2015).

The Holocaust is becoming common, ordinary topic, and there are signs some reviewers think it has been overperformed:

Some of us, let's face it, feel almost a direct aversion and resistance to frequently pertracted subject such as the Holocaust is today (Matejovičová, 2014).

In the reviews of realistic plays, Holocaust is represented as fashionable, popular and unsurprising. An increasing number of reviewers wonder whether the topic is still relevant. More importantly, aesthetic criteria take precedence over the social relevance of the theme. If the play is not performed in an untraditional way, with an injection of originality, then the Holocaust itself is considered to be potentially boring topic:

Sláva Daubnerová – perhaps the most progressive independent theatre director in Slovakia – was a fortunate choice for this production. Daubnerová injected a fresh, original and energetic, yet contemplative, feel to what could so easily have become a rather dull theatre experience (Krištofová, 2014).

To summarize, the originality and social importance of Holocaust drama are strongly connected in the reviews. The plays employing estrangement effect are considered to be innovative in their style and having strong emotional impact. As such, “estrangement” plays are viewed as original. The plays employing reality effect on the other side are considered to be outdated in their style and instead of strong emotional experience are connected to emotional blackmailing. As such, realistic plays are losing the attributed importance of Holocaust for the present society. The quantitative analysis in the following section supports these conclusions.

### **Quantitative analysis: number of reviews indicates decline of interest in realistic plays**

As we can see in Figure 2, from 2000 to 2017 there were 14 Holocaust plays that reviewers categorized as realistic, and 11 that employed the estrangement effect. Looking at the number of repeat performances in Table 1, we can see that realistic plays had an average of 39.8 repeats, while there were 21.9 repeats of “estrangement” plays. The t-test showed that the difference in the average number of repeats for realistic dramas ( $M = 39.8$ ,  $SE = 6.6$ ) and “estrangement” dramas ( $M = 21.9$ ,  $SE = 3.8$ ) was statistically significant,  $t(23) = 2.2$ ,  $p = .038$ , representing a large effect size,  $r = .42$ . This shows that the frequency with which audience visited the realistic plays was significantly higher.

However, throughout this period, the number of repeats fell for both groups. The regression analyses revealed that time had a significant effect for repeats of realistic plays,  $\beta = -.542$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $R^2 = .29$ , as well as for repeats of “estrangement” plays,  $\beta = -.643$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $R^2 = .41$ . This indicates a decline in interest of audience in both kinds of production, but as we can see comparing  $\beta$ -coefficients, audience was losing its interest in “estrangement” theatre more quickly.

However, reviewer preferences differed from the audience ones. While the number of repeats indicates a preference for realistic plays, the number of reviews indicates the opposite. The average number of reviews written on realistic plays was 4.9, while the average number of reviews of “estrangement” plays was 6.7. However, this difference between number of reviews for realistic dramas ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SE = 1.3$ ) and “estrangement” dramas ( $M = 6.7$ ,  $SE = 1.4$ ) is, due to a small sample and large standard deviation, statistically non-significant  $t(23) = -1$ ,  $p = ns$ .

More importantly, the number of reviews for realistic and “estrangement” plays changes over time differently. While the number of reviews of “realistic” plays fell throughout the period, the number of reviews of “estrangement” dramas remained the same. The regression analyses revealed a significant effect of time for reviews of realistic dramas,  $\beta = -.778$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $R^2 = .60$ , but not for reviews of “estrangement” dramas,  $\beta = -.279$ ,  $p = ns$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ . Accordingly, there is a significant correlation between the number of repeats and reviews of realistic theatre,  $r = .577$ ,  $p = .031$ , indicating that the fewer the number of repeats, the fewer the number of reviews. No such relationship exists with the “estrangement” dramas,  $r = -.03$ ,  $p = ns$ , indicating that the number of repeats and reviews in “estrangement” theatre are independent of each other. Even the number of repeats decline, the number of reviews remains stable. This indicates a weakening interest of reviewers for realistic plays, while “estrangement” dramas continued to attract the same level of reviewers’ attention.

## Conclusion

After the fall of the communistic regime in 1989, for almost two decades, Slovak theatres staged Holocaust dramas employing the estrangement effect with the aim to reinterpret history and deconstruct the common myths about it (Knopová, 2013). In communism, the Second World War was interpreted as a battle between the two general categories, Fascism and Communism, and victory over Fascism became the victory of Communism (Kemenesi, 2017; Ostrowska, 2015). Moreover, the histories of the Czechs and Slovaks after the Second World War written in the Communist era had a tendency to avoid guilt. Since Czechoslovakia was handed to Hitler without resistance in 1938, and before the organized genocide of the Jews began, its inhabitants were often described as “victims of the historical events” (Dejmek & Loužek, 2008). The plays staged from the 1990s therefore tried to analyze the past in more depth, and despite limited options, the art is a representation of the historical truth (Urban, 2015). For the first time, the theatre tried to discuss the role of Slovak state in the Holocaust. This was in contrast to the Czech Republic, it was not considered necessary for the Czechs to engage in self-reflection in relation to the Holocaust; because in their history, Jews were the victims of the Fascists, not the Czechs. But Slovak history proved to be different, since the Slovak state took its responsibility in the deportation of the Jews (Sniegon, 2014).

The aesthetics of the theatrical plays staged after 1989 played the important role in this historical reconstruction. The aesthetics of the new Holocaust dramas were in strong opposition to the aesthetics of the dramas with similar topics from the communist era; the estrangement effect took a stand against the reality effect of their predecessors (Firlej, 2016; Mihálová, 2018). However, beginning with 2013, the reality effect returned once again on the

stages in order to gain a wider public reach and attract more audience; a trend that is otherwise common in the artistic representation of the historical events (Brown & Rafter, 2013; Marshman, 2005; Podmaková, 2018; Skloot, 2012).

The analyzed reviews reflected this shift from the estrangement effect to reality effect and described it as a very negative phenomenon. The estrangement effect was generally considered to be original, because it connected the innovative style of the plays with the very strong emotional experience of the reviewer. In these plays, the Holocaust was considered to be a socially important topic that allowed the general public to reconsider its assumptions about the past. On the other side, the reality effect was bounded with expectation of the emotional blackmailing, and style of these plays was described as conservative, outdated, and thus unoriginal. The number of reviews written on realistic plays declined, despite the fact that audience generally preferred the plays employing reality effect.

The most important change, however, happened to the representation of the Holocaust. When Holocaust dramas first employed the reality effect, the Holocaust itself became represented as a rather boring and unoriginal topic, and the social value of it has diminished. The question therefore remains whether this artistic point of view on Holocaust does not conflict with the general public interest to discuss this topic widely and in the most open manner.

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## APPENDIX: List of plays depicting Holocaust in Slovak theatres after the year 2000.

Nm.	Premiere	Title	Author	Director	Theatre
1	20.01.2017	<i>Before the Cock Crows</i>	I. Bukovčan	M. Spišák	Andrej Bagar Theatre
2	13.01.2017	<i>War's Unwomanly Face</i>	S. Alexejevič, I. Horváthová	M. Pecko	Slovak Chamber Theatre
3	19.11.2016	<i>Anne Frank</i>	A. Frank, Š. Spišák	Š. Spišák	New Theatre
4	14.10.2016	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>	A. Frank, J. Rázusová	J. Rázusová	Jozef Gregor Tajovský Theatre
5	15.04.2016	<i>La Romana</i>	V. Schulzová, R. Olekšák	V. Schulzová	State Theatre
6	18.12.2015	<i>The Silent Whip</i>	J. Juráňová	A. Lelková	Slovak National Theatre
7	12.12.2015	<i>The Hearing</i>	T. Vůjtek	V. Kollár	Ján Palárik Theatre
8	29.05.2015	<i>Champagne for Savages</i>	V. Katcha	M. Náhlik	Jonáš Záborský Theatre
9	20.02.2015	<i>At Home with Hitlers: Tales from Hitler 's Kitchen</i>	A. Goldflam	H. Mikolášková	State Theatre
10	16.01.2015	<i>Cabaret</i>	J. Masteroff	M. Náhlik	Jonáš Záborský Theatre
11	28.11.2014	<i>Stars are silent</i>	M. Kováčová, M. Pecko	M. Kováčová, M. Pecko	Puppet theatre at the Crossroads
12	25.10.2014	<i>Midnight Mass</i>	P. Karvaš	L. Brutovský	Slovak National Theatre
13	24.10.2014	<i>The Shop on Main Street</i>	L. Grosman, I. Škripková	M. Pecko	Jonáš Záborský Theatre
14	28.08.2014	<i>Uprising</i>	M. Čičvák, ... P. Lomnický	S. Daubnerová	Aréna Theatre
15	02.04.2014	<i>The Kindly Ones</i>	J. Littell, D. Majling	M. Vajdička	Slovak National Theatre
16	28.03.2014	<i>The Shop on Main Street</i>	L. Grosman, B. Spiro	P. Oravec	New Stage
17	07.02.2014	<i>Europeana</i>	P. Ouředník, M. Dacho	J. Luterán	Slovak Chamber Theatre
18	13.12.2013	<i>Leni</i>	V. Schulzová, R. Olekšák	V. Schulzová	Slovak National Theatre
19	08.06.2013	<i>Rechnitz</i>	E. Jelinek	D. Jařab	Slovak National Theatre
20	12.12.2012	<i>Holocaust</i>	V. Klimáček	R. Ballek	Aréna Theatre
21	08.12.2012	<i>My Mother 's Courage</i>	G. Tabori	M. Čičvák	Slovak National Theatre
22	03.03.2012	<i>The Female Rabbi</i>	A. Grusková	V. Čermáková	Slovak National Theatre
23	27.03.2010	<i>It Happened on 1st September</i>	P. Rankov	K. Žiška	Slovak National Theatre
24	14.04.2005	<i>Tiso</i>	R. Ballek	R. Ballek	Aréna Theatre
25	15.04.2000	<i>The Shop on Main Street</i>	L. Grosman, A. Vášová	J. Rihák	Astorka Korzo '90 Theatre