

Slovenian Kamishibai in the Light of Cultural Anthropology

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Starting points

From my first visit to Japan in 2009, I brought home some *Doshinsha printed kamishibai*. I considered them a real treasure. I had found them in a medium-sized supermarket in Nakashibetsu on Hokkaido. As I bought them, I thought I would study kamishibai in peace at home and try to understand it.

I consider 15 April 2013 to be the birthday of kamishibai theatre in Slovenia. It was then that five puppet players from two puppet theatres, Zapik and Fru-Fru, gathered at the House of Children and Arts, 9 Komenskega Street, Ljubljana, and as part of the accompanying programme of the 16th Storytelling Festival *Fairytales Today* performed a 40-minute kamishibai programme at 5 PM:

- Igor Cvetko: *Little Clay Elephant* (Doshinsha kamishibai, accompanied by tiny sound toys);
- Jelena Sitar: *The Fox and the Raccoon* (Doshinsha, author's combination of two kamishibai stories);
- Irena Rajh: *Mountain Witch* (Doshinsha kamishibai);
- Marjan Kunaver: *Press Here* (interactive picture book by Herve Tullet, MK, Ljubljana 2011, adapted for kamishibai theatre) and a couple of riddles based on Japanese ones; and
- Anže Virant: *Mojca Pokrajculja* (storytelling without a *butai* (kamishibai stage), using the illustrations of the picture book).

The performance was attended by around twenty people, who left the hall delighted with what they had seen.

This kamishibai première in Ljubljana was followed by the traditional three-day Zapik creative and research educational camp in Sela na Krasu (5–7 July 2013); under the working title *Borderline Forms of Theatre: Kamishibai*, twelve invited artists thoroughly examined this new theatre form in Slovenia. The work on individual projects (organised in sections) was combined with discussions in the plenary

sessions. The camp concluded with a public presentation of the kamishibai stories composed during the camp. The response of the local audience and participants of the camp exceeded expectations.

Several new (authored) kamishibai stories were created and a new event followed 22–24 August 2013. Assisted by the Piran Association of Cultural Societies, we organised an information point on kamishibai in Židovski Square in the frame of the *1st Fairytale Evenings with Kamishibai/Serata di fiabe con kamishibai*, a kamishibai showcase, subtitled *The First Slovenian Festival of Kamishibai Theatre*. In the course of three evenings, twelve kamishibai storytellers performed in the festival.

The response of the domestic audience and accidental tourists was exceptional. All three evenings were well-attended and the performances were watched by over 250 visitors. The organisers had to promise that a national kamishibai festival would be organised in Židovski Square in 2014. And that is how kamishibai gained the necessary and sufficient momentum in Slovenia.

The first five years of kamishibai in Slovenia

Since 2013 a lot has happened:

- research and education camps led by Zapik have dealt with different aspects of kamishibai as a borderline form of theatre art;
- three- to four-part seminars, workshops, courses and practical lectures were held. They were mainly led by the Zapik Theatre (Igor Cvetko and Jelena Sitar) and the studio Atelje Slikovedke (Jerca Cvetko and Jure Engelsberger). Zapik also carried out three complete education seminars (also three- to four-parts) abroad: for the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad (Serbia), and for the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Split and interested preschools in Split (Croatia), both in 2017; and for CTA (Centro teatro d'animazione) in Gorizia (Italy) in 2017;
- To date (May 2018) we have trained around 500 *kamishibayas* (kamishibai performers) and organised a range of regional kamishibai festivals, which have been taking place across Slovenia since 2014;
- The “United Slovene Kamishibayas” met for the first time in Židovski Square in Piran in August 2013. Since then we have organised five Slovenian kamishibai festivals, including selections by three-member juries, awarding commendations and a main festival award, the *Golden Kamishibai*, for the overall best kamishibai.

To date (May 2018) we have successfully introduced kamishibai as: a medium for artistic creativity; a medium for family creativity; an educational aid; a therapeutic

aid; a creativity relief valve (aid for personal growth); an opportunity for theatre and artistic experimentation. We have also used kamishibai in working with different age groups, such as the youngest (birth to 3 years); children who do and do not attend preschool; primary school pupils; students of secondary school and tertiary school; as well as adults and the elderly. In addition, we have used it in working with people who are differently-abled or have special physical or social needs: deaf and hard-of-hearing people; blind and partially-sighted people; people with drug and alcohol addictions; elderly people with specific problems; people with behavioural disorders; people with physical disabilities; people with mental health issues; people in prisons.

Considering all of the above, one can say that kamishibai is a *medium* that has been adopted in Slovenia surprisingly quickly and successfully in many social mechanisms and continues to be easily adapted to different social groups and norms. As a long-time ethnomusicologist and researcher of folk culture, I will try to explain this phenomenon from two angles: social and cultural anthropology and folkloristics.

Kamishibai in the light of anthropological and folkloristic reflections

I will first seek to shed light on the “explosion” of Slovenian kamishibai through the prism of interesting views advanced by individual socio-cultural theorists from the last decades of the 20th century to the present.

I will first tackle two questions regarding kamishibai that I have been asking myself for a long time:

- How is it possible that the popularity of kamishibai theatre gained national dimensions in such a short period? and
- What were the (necessary and sufficient) internal (social) reasons and levers which *produced* this “movement”?

The questions are complex and multi-layered and there are no unambiguous answers to them. Let’s start our research with an additional question:

- Is the boom of kamishibai in Slovenia in any way connected with the small size and homogeneity of Slovenia, a country you can cross in a car in less than three hours or in which, after climbing 2864m high Triglav, you can go swimming in the sea (for example, in Piran) two hours later?

The convincing and unambiguous answer provided by contemporary cultural anthropology reads: There are no small countries! Every compact, internally

operational “ethnicity” is indeed an independent entity, a working system and a functional unit. The above conclusion¹ tells us that the definition of a country “as small” is rather the result of the subjective judgement of its inhabitants or the “peripheral views” of external observers, and is as a rule superficial, partial, unprofessional and without any merit. In the framework of cultural and anthropological reflections on kamishibai, the smallness of Slovenia is not really of use to us. Let us therefore try to widen our reflections.

Cultural anthropology today advances the thesis that culture is not a material phenomenon *per se*, but rather the expression of actions through which people perceive, connect and interpret reality and themselves in this reality. This means that everything people do and say, their social engagement and everything that happens to them, is the result of their culture (compare Prošev Oliver).

Let us see first which cultural mechanisms can efficiently contribute towards the model of the kamishibai movement in Slovenia. Levi-Strauss could not avoid the conclusion that culture is the most complex part of human society and pointed to language as the *conditio sine qua non*, or the basic condition for its functioning.

1. Language forms our thoughts.
2. Language enables us to get to know the world.
3. Language defines us and shapes our world view.
4. Language allows us to communicate.
5. Language helps us to socially connect.

Language is thus the basis for the functioning of culture and society, and a given community identifies itself with that language. In this community, every individual uses language to shape his/her personal identity and incorporate himself/herself in the identity of the community, society and environment. Language is the means for people’s primary enculturation,² the process of adopting cultural values, symbolic practices and their meanings.

While reflecting on the relationship between the individual and the community, let us make a digression. It will help us to reach an important conclusion, and perhaps even a (partial) answer to the above question about kamishibai in our territory. Let’s have a closer look at a part of our vocal tradition³ – the way people around Slovenia sing. In

1 This opinion was repeatedly advocated by James Fergusson (Stanford University).

2 According to M. Herskovitz, this is a process of adopting cultural values, symbolic practices and their significance.

3 The Slovenian vocal tradition is, as a rule, common, polyphonic and improvised singing often in a 5/8 rhythm. Typically, it is an uneven, composite rhythm and performed mostly rubato. This must be based on the extreme cooperation of the “performers”, who are usually joined by the “listeners” during the singing process. The tradition of single-voiced narrative singing of ancient ballads, especially in the extreme west of Slovenia, where singing (in strophes) is exchanged with expressive and dramatic parlando “narration” of particular parts of the song. Often, the melody is sung in the way of *katastihon*, an ancient way of (bardic) singing, performing a rhythmic-melodic pattern, which allows for very “free” (unspecified) messaging of the content.

my opinion, understanding this “detail” can tell us a lot about the inner feelings and experiences of the Slovenians.

People have been singing in Slovenia from time immemorial. “Three Slovenians make a choir” is an old Slovenian proverb. Whenever a group of people gathers in Slovenia, there will be singing. At work, at parties, on holidays, at a wake, at a wedding, in sadness and in joy; at home, in an inn, in a procession, at fairs, feasts and funerals: someone will start to sing and the others will each add their voice. Two singers will sing in two parts, three in three, four in four, and up to five and even six voices. Part singing has to resonate “fully”. According to unwritten musical rules, this is what beautiful singing means to people. These rules are always respected and within them individuals are allowed quite a lot of freedom. Polyphonic singing and the sound tissue are freely improvised by the singers and constantly built – they co-create for a joint final result: joint singing in tune, which they enjoy to no end.

The above leads us to a key, a code for (archetypical) understanding of folk feelings: *feel individually – work in a team*. This code may be called the “prehistoric pattern” of Slovenian (non-verbal) communication. Let us now try to widen our findings and find out if the above might have an impact on our questions regarding the communicativeness of kamishibai.

Kamishibai and its power of communication

We have known for a long time that communication (the transfer of information and messages by a chosen channel) is the most important achievement of modern (human) civilisation. Human communication (roughly speaking) consists of three segments: a spoken segment; a gestural one; and a graphic (visual) one. The last segment, graphic communication is the most specifically human. It is a great invention of mankind. It allows a message (information) to be transferred (into space) and to be preserved (in time). Since images, and through them graphic (visual) communication, may be perhaps (since the Ice Ages) the most human of all communications, let us look at how these conclusions may be of key importance to our reflection on kamishibai theatre.

It has also been known for a long time that theatre is the one art “where (pure) communication ‘happens’ most directly”, even physically (Kulenović 35). Knowing that theatre originated from so-called ritual syncretism, a combination of spoken language, gestures, movements, mimics, dance and music (sound), then its miniature derivation is the kamishibai theatre, a medium, where besides the story and narration, great emphasis is dedicated to images. The emphasised visual component becomes its specific aspect, its recognisable and outstanding part, and in the context

of “communication theatre” kamishibai can therefore be seen as a special form of theatre, in which immovable (!) images take on the function of storytelling, turning it from a spatial art into a temporal one. The images strengthen the message, make it more concrete, easier to understand, multilayered, more associative. In kamishibai, the kamishibaya not only interprets and shows images, but also creates the storytelling/ images “packages”, which the spectators internalise, interpret and, through their inner experience, connect with the world around. In short, the spectators participate in the ritual of theatre.

And what role can we attribute to the ritual inside the theatre – this ritualised art form?

Freud wrote somewhere that ritual is a social relief valve and filter, the social corrective through which society’s needs and instincts are satisfied, as well those of the individual in it. This statement is in agreement with Bakhtin’s view⁴ that ritual is in the function of balancing everything that threatens society and the individual from the more powerful (ruling) classes of society. The ritualisation of social behaviour is thought to protect the masses of individuals without rights and the community as a whole against the repression of the powers and authorities.

Having established that in some aspects (communicative ease and thematic potential) kamishibai may even be a radicalised form of theatre, we can now credit it with quite some power. And even with a certain degree of subversiveness, as is revealed after all by its relatively short history, especially during and after World War II (compare Nash). From its beginning (at the turn of the 20th century), kamishibai had a distinctly ritual and social corrective charge. It emerged in Japan at the beginning of the economic crisis of the late 1920s and it was then, but especially during and after World War II, that it showed its great revolutionary, connecting and activation power. It is probably no coincidence that it spread remarkably vitally and took roots in the (revolutionary) Central and South Americas, and that it has played a similar role in the Slovenian story.

What is the nature of the communication triggered by kamishibai?

Kamishibai combines storytelling and images in a united single message. The kamishibai performer presents oneself to the audience with one’s communication package, which one has “packed” in advance at home, and starts to gradually “unpack” it in front of the audience. Following the principles of cybernetics, a mechanism now starts to operate that is a dead ringer for the one we established in joint (folk) singing: the kamishibaya (transmitter) “leads” the event and the audience (receiver) becomes engaged; every viewer in his/her own way, a little bit different, led by his/her own (individual) experiences and feelings. Nevertheless, all the participants in this process

⁴ Bakhtin described the need and efforts of the society for carnivalisation with his famous syntagm “the culture of laughter” – a salvific invention and an effective lever of human cultural and evolutionary progress.

start to experience the message together, since they are all watching the same show! The *kyokan*, as this common feeling or collective experience created and spread by the event is called by the Japanese, is exactly the common experience felt by the audience. The energy produced at the *butai* (stage) spreads to the audience, is enriched by the experience and “co-creation” of the individuals and is, in line with the physical laws (of resonance), strengthened, completed and returned to the receiver (performer). The joint feeling of “unity” and the individual’s feeling of “multiple connectedness” with the group that is created in this process, is the hypnotic feeling of ecstasy (alienation) and inner connectedness of the group that has accompanied all ritualised activities of mankind from prehistory to the present.

Kamishibai from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology

I have already mentioned the historical context in which kamishibai brought about an interesting social activation. Let’s now have a look at the social environment, in which kamishibai – this interesting cultural *novum* – has emerged in Slovenia. How can we perceive this phenomenon from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology, a science dedicated to investigating the human as a cultural being, as an outcome of culture?

A condition for the “domestication” of anything in society, or the “modernisation” of anything existing in it, are the specific cultural traits of that society, its social logic and its traditional mechanisms of operation. In the 1980s, while reflecting about “every new social modernity”, M. Morishima wrote that “every society must achieve the condition of modernity in its very own way, which is in line with its social, cultural, economic and political history” (compare Godina 65), and in doing so use (implement) already existing and functioning social mechanisms, institutions and practices.

This idea was beautifully and wittily complemented by M. Sahlins: “The intention (of non-European peoples, those who are getting closer to the West) is not to become the way we are, but to become even more the way they are themselves”. Foreign goods are converted by these peoples to serve domestic ideas and propagate them. They use them to make their own understanding of a good life tangible, as well as their relationships and activities (qtd. in Godina 77). He called the process of this adaptation to “imported” solutions the “indigenisation of modernity”. Sahlins’s conclusion is the key to understanding most social and enculturation processes today, because (in particular because of the unstoppable globalisation processes) each and every one of them involves foreign cultural influences, domestication and/or modernisation of these influences. Indeed, in my opinion, the “indigenisation of modernity” is the very *spiritus agens* of all social progress.

In his 1970s analysis of the mechanisms and processes that propel society (not only in the economic sense), A. Inkeles listed a number of “social values” as the precondition for a society’s successful development and the well-being of the individual in it. Let me list some of them: willingness to engage in new experiences, openness to novelties, follow one’s own opinion, the importance of education, focus on the now, look ahead, managing one’s own life, striving towards set goals, rewards in accordance with invested labour and efforts ... (Ibid. 99).

Reflecting in a similar way, McLelland emphasised that the key factor of social and cultural development was to the greatest extent the “motivation for achievement”. In his opinion, this was even the motor of social development (Ibid.).

If we now have a more detailed look at Inkeles’s list of social values and the position of the individual in them, we see that all the points he mentions hold true for the activities no one, who intends to create his own *kamishibai*, *tezukuri*, can ignore. The list is indeed a set of instructions on how to go about a *kamishibai* and why.

A short review of the Slovenian cultural essence

Let us now look how much Sahlins’s “indigenisation of modernity” corresponds with the profile of Slovenian society.

During its history, Slovenian society (more closed than open and communicative with reservations) had to be open enough (especially to its neighbours), since in the long term, no society can survive in isolation or if it feels self-sufficient. Accepting things foreign has always been something that could not be avoided in this environment, while preserving and nurturing one’s own identity remained the deep motive and mechanism that preserved the Slovenians ethnically throughout long centuries at the juncture of three great ethnicities (Romanic to the West, Germanic to the North, Hungarian to the South-East) and in the neighbourhood with Croatia.

A “static culture” is the label (or caricature) sometimes attributed to the Slovenian ethnical essence; on the one hand, it often shows as an irritating element of our society, but on the other hand, it is often held to be simultaneously the necessary “survival” momentum that has kept us alive and preserved us. To avoid falling into useless historicising below, I will consider only a few facts relevant to the understanding of our questions.

The reason why the Slovenians dedicate themselves to culture massively, actively and profoundly certainly lies in the historical fact that culture has always been

the centripetal force that connected us (initially only linguistically, later also as a nation) and gave us the feeling of an ethnic community and affiliation. The year 1848 and the political programme United Slovenia, which demanded a single administrative unit and equality for the Slovenian language within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, exposed the great state-forming ambitions of the Slovenian people for the first time. In the absence of the required political support, the initiative and connecting activities were taken over by culture. Rallies, organised mass political meetings and emphatic cultural actions (choirs, brass bands, theatre performances, literary presentations, etc.), as well as the Sokol movement (physical education, cultural and political activities) engaged (organised) masses of people. Parallel to these activities and spontaneously, the same developments occurred in the countryside: choirs, folk stages, brass bands, folklore, dance groups, etc. In the interwar period, cultural societies brought people together; cultural centres were built, and during World War II, rich cultural activities spread across the liberated territories. After World War II, the socialist regime implemented an intensive cultural policy. The Association of Cultural Societies connected the mass cultural organisations as their umbrella organisation, including (and partly financing) several thousands of cultural societies, groups and individuals, while in the educational sector numerous and diverse cultural activities took place in the schools.

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, during the period of crisis before and after independence (1992), and in particular after Slovenia joined the multi-national European family, the EU (in 2007), it was expected that organising and profiling the Slovenian ethnic and national identity would become part of our national strategy. However, during and especially after the economic crisis which hit Slovenia in 2008, the government's attitude to culture became quite neglectful, favouring an ill-considered neoliberal agenda. If earlier, socialism promoted and supported the natural need of people for culture and cultural organising and activity, capitalism did not favour these efforts.

And today? With its systemic austerity policies and politically-driven measures, politics today support a more directed favouring of the "national" cultural institutions, but to the detriment of the widest organised (folk) culture. All this is consequently reflected in a harshly impoverished amateur culture and the gradual waning of organised "mass" cultural activities that have historically always been the basis of our cultural and national existence. I feel that what we are facing today for the first time is an encroachment on the abovementioned natural right to culture, especially from the government with an attitude to culture that is in a wider sense detrimental to nation-building.

Kamishibai – a new form of Slovene cultural movement?

With regard to the above considerations it seems that kamishibai was introduced in Slovenia in a time when it could provide people with an opportunity to move towards a condition of cultural self-organisation, clearly showing the way for every individual to “arrive at oneself” through one's own creativity and express oneself in a way that suited oneself and one's environment. Analogously and humanely, and in a time that is markedly impersonal, digital, virtually-driven and aggressively commercialised.

Let us now consider the above statement from the viewpoint of the rich Slovenian folklorist tradition. It is quite obvious that the Slovenian case of the *kamishibai movement* (Igor Cvetko) has outgrown the nature of a “craze”, and in many ways has come close to the notion of a *kamishibai culture* (Tara McGowan).

I found this conclusion so enticing that given the phenomenon of the kamishibai boom in Slovenia I started to ask myself:

- What is the phenomenon of Slovenian kamishibai based on?
- What are the reasons for this little “imported” theatre form to have acquired the status of a household activity so quickly, and
- What exactly is there in kamishibai that makes it “ours”?

In a society, only institutions and practices which are in harmony with the local cultural mechanisms can function successfully (M. Sahlins). Anything new can only “catch on” if it is in harmony with the existing (M. Morishima). Anything abolishing the existing leaves the individual in a social and cultural vacuum.

Let us now consider which are the (traditional) cultural and social practices in Slovenia that may be classified into the category of traditional and historically determined local contexts, for example, the mechanisms and factors which in my opinion most evidently drive and shape the kamishibai movement we are witnessing today.⁵

Language

The term embraces numerous mechanisms that have preserved, spread and enriched the Slovenian language for centuries. If there is any truth in the saying that “language built the nation”, then it certainly holds true for Slovene. The oldest preserved records in Slovene go back to the 10th century (the Freising manuscripts), the first books printed in Slovene (Trubar's *Abecedarium* and *Cathechismus* and Dalmatin's

⁵ On the eve of the opening of the international symposium The Art of Kamishibai, on 9 May 2018, kamishibai events took place all over Slovenia, organised by the Kamišibaj Association. During the 24-hour event, 775 kamishibais were performed before over 35,000 people. This important cultural experiment, aimed at “counting our numbers”, was carefully documented and archived.

monumental translation of the Bible) to the middle and second half of the 16th century. From then onwards, the notion “Slovenian” is identified with the Slovene language – with a uniform (written, used and functionally elaborated) language. Today, the combined book production of Slovenian publishers amounts to around 4,000 titles annually (3,800 in 2017), and 2005 was a “record” year, with the publication of nearly 5,000 “serious” books.

Theatre

Theatre has always been an important part of our (folk) tradition. Passion processions (since 1617, in memory and warning of the plague) and passion plays (for example, *Paradise Play*, 1670), performed by the Jesuits in the streets of the larger Slovenian towns, were beautiful dramatised processions with “living images from the life of Christ”. The “actors” in these processions were followed by flagellants and cross bearers. The *Škofja Loka Passion Play* (1721) is still a highly popular event and a living tradition (Škofja Loka, today protected by UNESCO).

Folk and ritualised folk theatre

Shrovetide rituals (Slavic carnival rituals) have been a special event *par excellence*, a classical example of ritual syncretism or radical folk theatre in Slovenia. Masks, Shrovetide processions and parades – living and surprisingly vibrant even today – represent (among others) an important part of the Slovenian folk visual and narrative expressivity and creativity. Wooden, cardboard, leather, metal, etc. masks and costumes are the products of spontaneous folk imagination and traditional (visual) solutions. Shrovetide ritual scenarios are imaginative, most often improvised and authentically performed (often danced) farces, travesties and comical (staged ritual) scenes. They are most often accompanied by loud noises (bells, whips, horns, sound sources, etc.) and music. Shrovetide in Slovenia today unfolds in its original form⁶ and function⁷ in many places, especially in the countryside; while urban Shrovetide customs have a more carnivalesque nature and attract many spectators and visitors every year.

Sung newspapers were invented in Slovenian Carinthia (Koroška) and on the Pohorje mountain range (northern Slovenia) towards the end of the 18th century, and they had a parallel in the somewhat older singing of (murder) ballads, eerie and unusual stories, and the public singing from poem leaflets. An important writer (and singer)

⁶ These are the rounds of masks and musicians. At each house they dance with the locals, who give them gifts. The main character of the Carnival ritual is *Pust*, the main offender for everything bad that has happened in the past year, who is ritually killed at the end of the ceremony.

⁷ The rite of the end of winter is a bargain with all the old and potentially dangerous and awakening of a new life.

of this tradition was Jurij Vodovnik, a “newsman”, whose songs (and those of his imitators) were a kind of sung documentaries, sung scenes from the life of people and events, with topical and erotic themes and comments (Cvetko, *Jaz sem Vodovnik*). The closest relative of the sung newspapers would be a *sung kamishibai*.

Folk storytelling was for centuries a traditional household activity at every home. It is still systematically promoted in kindergartens and primary schools. In the last 15 years storytellers have been presenting themselves in organised ways in popular storytelling festivals and the quality of storytelling is today on the rise. *Folk and amateur theatres* have been exceptionally vibrant and vital all since World War II. Of the nearly 500 primary schools in Slovenia, a couple of decades ago only a handful did not have a *puppet* and/or *drama club*. *Film* and especially *comics* are on the rise and achieve international standards.

Folk design

Examining the visual (pictorial) tradition (of folk expressions) reveals the following picture in the Slovene ethnic territory:

Folk paintings and frescoes. The little churches and chapels, dotted all over Slovenia, have been largely adorned with frescoes by self-taught artists and folk painters, and enriched with their works (statues, paintings, carvings, decorative furnishings, etc.). Since the Middle Ages, many visual art motifs (the Stations of the Cross, thematically based frescoes, pictorial scenes, etc.) are often close to storytelling in images, a way of expression that has been familiar to the Slovenes from time immemorial.

Glass paintings, which today still adorn many peasant homes and churches, were the most popular decoration from the late-18th to the early-20th century, especially in Upper Carniola (Gorenjska). They are an essential part of the rich folk creativity in Slovenia.

Beehive panels are a unique cultural and artistic monument in Slovenia, an autochthonous cultural phenomenon. They are the painted front panels of hives, featuring religious, historical, legendary or genre scenes that are suitable for storytelling in pictures. They started to appear in the 2nd half of the 18th century and were popular among beekeepers until the early 20th century. They were largely created by members of the lower (peasant) classes. The Beekeeping Museum in Radovljica and the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana have a total of nearly 2,000 (very diverse) painted beehive panels. Nowadays, souvenir shops sell newly-painted panels, copied after old traditional motifs, but in a recognisable, traditional technique and style.

Decoration traditionally includes lace-making, Easter eggs, gingerbread and candle making, woodcarving, stone masonry, artistic blacksmithing, dyeing, weaving, etc.

Conclusion

Kamishibai emerged in Slovenia as a social and cultural experiment by a small group of puppetry enthusiasts, and in a short time, has become a highly active, and in a certain way subversive, artistic theatre form. It is accessible to anyone, cheap, portable, handy, relatively simple, efficient and convincing in contacting audiences. It engages and moves the audience, nourishes it and “caresses” it.

When a kamishibaya performs, he is there because of the audience. She performs for each and every one in particular. He shares his emotions with the audience and tells them: “You’re not alone, I’m with you.” At the end of the performance the audience rewards her with an applause for the time she has spent creating the kamishibai story, for all the invested work and efforts that led to her kamishibai and for her willingness to share her intimate creativity with them. Every new kamishibai and kamishibai performer enriches society a little. Everybody gains: the individual as well as society as a whole. Moreover: with every viewer who experiences *kyokan* with the kamishibaya the scales of social values tip towards progress.

And why does the social-cultural environment in Slovenia seem to be right on cue for the development of a so-called kamishibai culture, to which Tara McGowan refers in her bestseller *The Kamishibai Classroom*?

Perhaps for the following reasons:

- because in Slovenia everybody is anyway a do-it-yourself enthusiast;
- because until recently people in the countryside used to build their homes themselves, but also with a lot of neighbourhood assistance;
- because we are a society in which most people in the countryside are volunteer-firefighters;
- because it is hard to find in Slovenia anyone who is not engaged in any leisure activity (culture, sports, recreation, non-institutional education, personal growth, travelling, social activities, etc.); and
- because money does not yet rule the world in Slovenia.

Certainly not. And also not because (later, ... “when we’ll be good enough”) we would like to commercialise kamishibai in the way publishers do, printing kamishibai and supplying them to schools and libraries. It seems to be very likely that such an attempt would be counterproductive today.

I believe that we live in a society in which:

- kamishibais are produced one after the other;

- people of all ages engage in kamishibai, from preschools to retirement homes;
- kamishibayas meet and talk about kamishibai;
- kamishibai is used as an aid in working with vulnerable and deprived groups, and in particular;
- to some, kamishibai has become a goal, a refuge and a motivation for creativity, and others (audiences) are delighted and fulfilled by it, and is a society on the way to becoming a place where culture changes from a noun into a “verb” (McGowan 86).

In many ways, this “verb” has already existed among us, but we somehow almost forgot about it somewhere “along the way”.

Translated by Franc Smrke

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Igor Cvetko, MSc, is an ethnomusicologist, puppeteer and author. During his fifteen years as a research associate of the Music Institute at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of Science and Arts in Ljubljana, he also lectured about ethnomusicology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana and at the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor. For eight years, he was a curator for spiritual culture at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana. He has published his findings in numerous scientific publications and articles, as well as in high-profile (professional and popular) books (in particular about children's folk traditions), among which are: *Slovenian Children's Finger Games*, Didakta Publishing House, 1996; *The Smallest Games in Slovenia*, Didakta Publishing House, 2000; *Aja, tutaja. Childrens' folk lullabies*, DZS, 2005; *Trara, pesem pelja. Songs and children's folk musical instruments in Slovenia*, Mladinska knjiga Publishing House, 2006. *A Big Little Finger Theater*, Didakta Publishing House, 2010; *Slovenian Children's Games from A to Z*, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2017. As a puppeteer, Igor Cvetko, together with Jelena Sitar, co-founded *Zapik Puppet Theater*, famous in Slovenia for its unique and interesting aesthetics and the principle of contact performances for the youngest spectators. In these performances, Igor Cvetko works primarily as a performer, artist and musician, as well as co-director with Jelena Sitar.

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