Interview with B. Jablanovec  
Dance Zone Prague, 9 February 2011

MARKÉTA FAUSTOVÁ

For me creation starts from the frustration of not-knowing what to do

The base of your work is the relationship between the interpreter and spectator. In your work the spectator is not only the spectator but a worker. If you should describe – how do you reach to move and vibrate the feelings and reactions of the spectator. What is this relationship about?

For me to be a spectator always means to take an active position. It does not mean that you should physically move or interact – no, you can be still, sit in the dark and watch the performance – but the viewing is still a very dynamic situation. Viewer is a receptor of various impulses and at the same time all these information must be processed, framed, decoded in the viewers mind – and only after this process the emotion can start to work. Viewing is a constant exchange of information, and the emotion is the result of it. Therefore first task of performing artist is to deliver right information in the right situation and thoughtful sequence of impulses in order to reach the result – emotion. In my view performing art is a situation of constant communication. It is an exchange that should give us artists on the stage and people in the seats feeling that we are alive, that this moment of performance is a moment of being alive.

In Casablanca Therapy is the contact with the audience the most important part. Was the reaction during the show different in the places you performed it?

Reaction of the audience does not significantly change from country to country (at least in Europe where we perform). Is it true that sometimes audience reacts more or less intensive, but this is usually a consequence of specific staging circumstances and not so much the outcome of the audience responsibility. We are fully aware that we are on the stage and therefore we are the only ones responsible for the outcome of the situation – and if sometimes interaction does not work as we would like to, it is a consequence of our acts only. In this way the audience is the most important teacher for me. For instance Casablanca was radically reworked after first performances in order to find right tuning of communicative situation.

The other side – neither the interpreter doesn’t have an easy role in your works. How do you work with the interpreter to release him and open him. For example in Casablanca you worked with very young people. How did you kick of their shame?

My basic creative demand is that performer must fight for the right to be on the stage. The stage is a situation of self-exposing – you have to be prepare to expose yourself. It is not enough to be in front of the eyes of the spectator, you must move into his mind and heart. During the work with performers I’m helping them to find the effective strategy, that will open the spectator. This is our first goal – to open spectator’s viewing, which means to open his mind, his reception. This is the most difficult part of our work. If you want that viewer will accept you, you must be authentic, simple, vulnerable, human, clear, precise etc. And with all this you make a kind of promise on the stage, the promise that you are worth to be watched, that you will deliver some kind of experience,
message, insight, that something will happen. When you as creator stand in front of all these demands you become aware that you must mobilise and invest all your being, imagination, intuition, skills, frustrations and your whole body if you are going to achieve this. There’s no other way.

Casablanca therapy ends with a scene where the spectator is asked to touch the naked skin of the performer. The border between the scene and the auditorium is crossed. What is the final effect or catharsis in this therapy for you personally?

To make this exchange possible. To create the situation where the audience is willing to fulfill something we wish. The context of therapy that we build in order to achieve this goal is full of self-irony and honesty at the same time. We admit that probably we need audience more than they need us. Casablanca is a performance that wish to be touched, it brings out the fact, which is hidden inside of every performance – although it is usually expressed in the opposite way: that performance wants to touch the audience. But this is only a first part of a true wish of the performance and at the same time the condition for making possible the second part of this wish – to be touched (loved) by the audience. Casablanca is the performance about love and love is the situation in which we are ready to cross the borders, let’s say the borders of our bodies.

As a director you worked on the text of Artaud, Brecht. The name of Via Negativa comes from Grotowski. What did you take from the thinking of those 3 personalities at the field of theatre.

All these reformers of the theatre brought out the deep, basic and constantly present need for aliveness of the theatrical situation. Although all of them approached this need from different sides in my opinion they do not exclude each other but in the contrary – they confirm that this is the most important goal of theatre. In our performances we use all techniques and approaches in order to reach it. If you want to reach the Artaudian unconsciousness there’s no other way than to approach it with Brechtian awareness and to create with Grotowski's ethics.

We are making the interview for the web about the contemporary dance and new theatre. How do you work with the nonverbality and with the movement in your performances? Could we find there something from the conceptual art?

In my believe everything is hidden inside the problem or theme you are dealing with. I do not decide in advance what form of performing art should we use in next performance. There are subjects that you cannot talk about and on the other side there are subjects that you cannot dance about. But first of all you must test them, push them to the limits, combine them. Right now I’m developing the project with one of our performer that probably will be visual, conceptual. After one year of trying we found out that we should not use speaking in that piece. We will use movement, video and music. That’s why I’m always open to different fields of creation: dance, text, music, video etc. I treat them as tools for reaching some effect, as skills that have to be used with clear purpose and not only because of aesthetic reasons. In my opinion form should follow the content, the subject, the message – in this case I’m quite conventional. I believe that if you create in this way then you cannot hide behind the skills, aesthetic or forms anymore. Instead to drill the skills and to purify the forms you are forced to clarify the thought, to fight for the reason, to dig for the message... Before I make decision to speak, to move, do dance or to present the concept, I must know why to speak or dance.

When I read some articles about your work. Sometimes I came to the words such as – shocking or anarchistic. What do you think is the reason to use these
adjectives characterise your work?

Partly this is a result of our performing strategies, which always follow open communicative situation. We like to play with a certain unwritten rules that are present in the theatrical situations or generally in contemporary art. In many performances we deliberately transgress these conventions. On one hand we like to play with expectations of the audience, on the other we test our anticipations. It is my deep believe that theatre is a medium that allows and even demands the transgressions of all kinds. Theatre is the only space where we are called to test, provoke and question borders of life, social rules and conventions, stereotypes and paradoxes of living. We like to disturb conventional gaze, and in order to achieve this we are ready to cross all kind of borders and to stretch all kind of limitations. Usually the first barrier we must fight with is a personal, intimate safety. In Via Negativa there’s no space for those that would like to hide behind the curtain.

You are in the never ending research at the theatre field. What are the main points and questions for you now (thematicly and theoreticaly)?

Still the same as in the beginning of the Via Negativa project: To prove with each performance that there is a need, a sense and a meaning in the fact that theatre is still present in our contemporary society. Questions remains the same, the biggest problem is to ask them over and over again, because you must ask them as you are standing for the first time in front of them. I do not believe in answers and I’m always suspicious about solutions, they are just one of many possibilities you can choose. Our basic drive is to question the existing and to discover new possibilities of theatrical situation, and to develop dynamic and creative model for performing arts production. If I would like to discover something new (at least for me) then I must force myself to deal with something I do not know, I must leave safe zone of knowledge, experience and skills. When I reach something I cannot understand or rationalize anymore than I know that this could be a good project. For me creation starts from the frustration of not-knowing what to do.