Interview with B. Jablanovec about Last Rehearsal for the Generation
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The minute you reach a consensus with the spectator, as an artist, you have to break it

Whoever follows what is going on in the theatre more closely must have come across the independent producer of performing arts, the project Via Negativa, whose guiding light and connective tissue is director Bojan Jablanovec, an artist of considerable oppositional passion. Tonight the theatre of Mala drama is going to premiere the performance Generation’s Last Rehearsal, produced jointly by Via Negativa and SNG Drama Ljubljana, as announced by the performers, it will offer “a settling of accounts with the common enemy of both producers” – Slovene culture. »Institutionalization of art is an unseemly, rude and mindless business. The artist can only ever be an institution in his or her own right,” thinks Bojan Jablanovec.

Let’s start with the obvious. It is not often the case that a cultural institution would collaborate with a non-institutionalized producer. Does your gesture signify some sort of a crisis?

Well put, it is a gesture of a crisis of sorts, yes – but not of economic kind. This is not the first time that an institution collaborates with a non-institutional partner; Maska, for example, has collaborated with Drama before. Not only does the need in the non-institutional field exist for merging different practices, I would even say that the greater need for this collaboration comes from the side of the institutions.

Why? Because institutions tend to fall asleep on a given aesthetic, and somehow grind to a halt?

Partly yes. Every serious institution of course needs fresh blood. But ever since the independent scene in Ljubljana has become very active – it must be roughly twenty years now – this polarisation has become stronger and people have started to close themselves into their own fields. Institutions have their backing in the academia; that is where, say, a suitable cadre for the national artistic practice is being groomed. These cadres do also flow into the independent theatre scene, whereas the directos remain highly polarised. Polarisation of course is a kind of defence mechanism of the independent scene, given that institutions with their production logic present a major danger to creative procedures.

In your statement before the premiere you have announced that in Generation’s Last Rehearsal, “the actors from Drama will be on the stage in the role of parts and the performers as their respective authors”. Does this kind of conceptualization already carry a critique of institutionalized logic within it? The institution namely has the task to fulfil a certain role, which it doesn’t always take seriously enough and only rarely assume responsibility for its consequences. Is this reading too far-fetched?

Of course not, my statement offers anybody the possibility of autonomous interpretation.
But in reality, what we are trying to ensure with this statement is that there would be no misunderstanding about what will be seen in the production. For what has emerged is the outcome of a well thought-out methodological approach about how a developed non-institutionalized practice such as Via Negativa and a developed institutionalized practice such as Drama can even collaborate. The first, indeed the key, decision was of course to insist that both must keep to their own production model and that their point of contact must be found. From my perspective it was therefore important that Via Negativa has time and space to approach the project in its own way, regardless of where it is doing it, and also that its theatre logic remains intact. What I am interested in is therefore the meeting point, the tension between the two kinds of practices, because only inside this can I find a certain quality.

**As a director why did you decide on working outside institutions in the first place?**

After seven years of working in institutionalized theatres I realized that this was a dead-end street; that the production model simply didn't suit me and that I was interested in something other than what it was possible to do within the classical model. The only path for me was to find my own production model – and so in 2000 the transition took place; I decided to quit with the institutionalized practice and threw myself into the independent production with the intention of developing through Via Negativa a method or a creative procedure that suits me and my co-creators. Which is to say that I push everyone to take up an authorial stance – and to accept also the consequences of this.

**You have used very strong wording here – “dead-end street”. Are these highly critical words intended to mean that it is only the practices from the margins or those from outside the institutions that are capable of paradigm shifts?**

I think we need to say this differently. Of course this is a critique, but it is a critique of the institutionalization of art as such. For me this is an unseemly, rude and mindless business. The artist can only ever be an institution in his or her own right. The fact that this small country of ours wants to get institutionalized down to the last inch is something that kills every artistic practice. What we try to emphasize with Generation's Last Rehearsal is that only in the most radical confrontation with this logic can we break through to some kind of a higher lever of institutionalized thinking. From the perspective of an independent producer I must stress that it is not true that nothing can be done from within institutions. The problem is not only in the institution as such, but also in our relationship to it. The Slovene character, I would say, is predisposed to kneel down before an institution.

**What then are you aiming at with the slogan “more barbarism and less culture” that you use with regard to the production? Are you suggesting violence? And what kind of violence do you have in mind?**

It is to do with the violence of an idea. A breakthrough of an idea without a violent gesture does not exist in creativity. A fight for an idea is not a cultured fight, it is a barbaric fight. Democratic values are the death of an idea.

**Is it then necessary to master a capability for conflict?**

Absolutely. Conflict is not something we should be afraid of, it is something we should seek out. We are not trying to avoid a given problem because the problem is precisely what
promises to provoke the mind and bring about creation. These are certainly main themes we want to open up and shed light on. Also because it is evident that Slovene culture over the last twenty years has turned into one big marshland.

You have presented us with a nice chain of negative definitions of art. Would you dare to offer an affirmative one?

Of course. For me art is a field of absolute freedom. But freedom is the biggest burden you can weigh yourself down with. This is the most affirmative and at the same time the most burdensome statement on art I can offer. This conflict is in itself what to my mind makes art interesting. Art in other words is a constant struggle for you to even attain your own freedom. First you need to dare risk your own self, else no one believes you. That is what you have to demand from yourself and what your surroundings expect from you. There is totally not enough of this here.

And in your view is it possible to train such a perspective, possibly learn it?

Yes. Already in the days of Via Negativa it became clear how this perspective can be quickly assimilated but also quickly lost. This is the permanent struggle of a creator with his or her surroundings: the minute you reach a consensus with the audience, the consumer, as an artist, you have to break it. This is a constant up and down. But in Slovene performing arts there doesn’t seem to be much stamina for this. That’s why all the phenomena that had burst forth on the independent scene died down too soon. There is no continuity, no creator who would be willing to push and push against the wall. The only perspective that has continuity is the consumerist one. Without a violent gesture there is no breakthrough of an idea in creativity. The fight for an idea is not a cultured fight, it is a barbaric one.