

Zarez, Zagreb

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## **In memoriam: Eurokaz(i)**

**Even accomplishment of the metaphor of sweat as a *proof of work* didn't succeed to argue audience's prejudice that the "quality" art is only the one, which has its result in "torture". It is obvious that the audience too has its own system of discriminating artists.**

At the beginning of the play *Viva Verdi*, Slovenian director Bojan Jablanovec, head of the group Via Negativa, appears in front of the audience on the scene of Croatian National Theatre announcing sequent: *Pretentious artistic concept proposed by the selectors Branko Brezovec and producer Gordana Vnuk in the festival booklet has nothing to do with group Via Negativa. Everything you've read in booklet is only concoction. We do not deal with thesis of festival directors. We do not make any difference between quasi avant-garde and other theatre expressions. That's why we've decided that this performance will not happen. This is a protest.* The irony of this statement is pretty complex. Not only because of that after quoting manifest of independence from the Eurokaz program the play in the frame of Eurokaz selection it happens anyway, but also because in twenty years none of the gestures nor program's nor critiques change conceptual machinery of Eurokaz: *the show* goes on with interesting and less interesting performances, but important here are constantly present rhetorical expression of festival narcissism as if it is mechanical device which is able to laud only itself, and not institution which accepts at least one voice of dissent of the milieu it is dedicated to. Personally, I'll remember Eurokaz as manifestation which director routinely, from one year to another, insults critics only because *we do not agree* with her editorial with untouchable glorification of the festival, or because we dare to ask questions she's not able to answer. Jablanovec has right: the only thing man can do is to make a public protest and continue to participate. And it was the same this year too, jubilee, when the book for the twentieth anniversary of Eurokaz was published. Guess who is the author of the evaluation of its twenty years? Gordana Vnuk, of course. For the purpose that we wouldn't, in any case, read or hear any *arguable* dimension of thinking about the festival.

### **The fall of extractions**

But the critique has been smuggled on the festival. Team of the play by Bojan Jablanovec (Kristian al Droubi, Petra Govc, Barbara Kukovec, Marko Mandić, Barbara Matijević, Sanela Milošević, Katarina Segnar, Dylan Tighe, Petra Zanki, Grega Zorc) used the interesting dramaturgy of mad juxtaposing of performative, acting and opera protests because of the fact that the play is "called off". They pissed on Eurokaz booklet, drained the sweat into the glasses, watered the plant seated in the mouth of

performer, who, in the gesture of transforming his body into the fertile soil saw *the only purpose of himself in the art*; mixed the beer with urine and than with their mouth formed a small Duchamp “water fountain”, vomited. With the exception of bleeding, they played the full repertory of general places of performance as genre, and presented how something that was in the sixties egregious gesture, in the meantime become distinguishing, clichés protocol of scenic behavior. They posed a large amount of questions on what theatricality is. By the words of Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davies (Theatricality, 2003): *As theatricality was used for centuries to describe the gap between representation and reality, for what usually exist perfectly precise and correct term mimesis, theatricality is used also to describe “heightened” state of reality which is attained exactly by representation.* The actor who comes out on the stage and tells the story how his girlfriend left him because he is actor, explaining: “You are such a nice man. Why are you actor than? You are not like *them!*” – in essence is an echo of the ancient platonic debate on the adversity of theatre on life, especially of theatre as a place which escapes the *decency*. On the scene of the performance *Viva Verdi* at the same time is a love for theatre which finds “certain challenge” in everything: Barbara Kukovec, whose optimism is transformed into the parody of torture. After she firmly claims for twenty minutes how nothing can reassure her from standing by the performance, Kukovec climbs up to the small stand with two pan bags raising them highly into the air, and than tries to fulfill this effort of straight stand, *victorious* standing with smile, which fades on her more and more tortured and face distorted by pain. While her hands and whole body are trembling of effort, behind on the scene, opera choir of slavery sings ecstatic tones from Verdi’s *Nabucco*. Yes, it is hard to persist dealing with art. Katarina Stegnar claims how she never received any bad critic and nor she will in performance *Viva Verdi*. Than she says how Jablanovec “didn’t know how to make the play and thus so he *called it off*”.

## **Systems**

With the tone of furious teacher, Stegnar demonstrates typical performance protocol: tying her body with different adhesive tapes, choosing physical activities (here: jumping from the chair to the first range of the scene, where artist lies on the floor and stands up again and jumps back to the chair), with a goal, accentuates, *truly exhausting body*, after what is *usual to switch to something “disgusting”* (Stegnar pisses in her trousers, wallows in her urine), and than says: *But this too becomes cheap effect*. She does not understand why she even consents to do that. *Why? Probably because typical actors always need some system*, says Stegnar. This scene of the play is particularly important because it demonstrates how *System* by Stanislavski and other ineradicable procedures of much younger art of performance really shape specific performative protocol, so it is completely unreal to treat them as contrasts. For Barbara Matijević *system* is connected to paternal imperative on “useful work”: only if she’s dancing *with the sweat on her face* she made a “job”, how her parents would say. For that reason, Matijević danced for ninety minutes or moves through the second plan of the stage, finally sweating only thirty two drops of sweat out of the whole drill. It is obvious that art is not the same as digging tunnels: the sweat here is not used as argument for the utility of performance. But many people in the audience continued pointing out how she was the only that “named” her part of the play, while others “only presented something”. Thus so, accomplishment of the metaphor of sweat as

a proof of work didn't succeed to argue audience's prejudice that the "quality" art is only the one, which has its result in "torture". It is obvious that the audience too has its own system of discriminating artists.

### **"Self-consciousness"**

Petra Zanki exposes to the audience information about her private life: when and what has she graduated, which workshops she participated in, with whom of artists she collaborated in performances. The list is impressive. Her golden dress and golden shoes should convince us how she really is self-conscious young dance artist, and the same function has a dance solo she performs lying on the floor, highly rising and lowering her legs, turning her hips. We believe her too, until the end when she presents the information how she "performed her most important performance while she was 23. It was the abortion of fetus." In the light of positioning this data at the very end of her addressing to the audience, as signature to the whole performance image, artist's previous *Just do it!* gesture becomes problematic: it seems that in front of us we do not have incarnation of artistic freedom and enterprise, but someone who is trapped by his personal ambition. Numerous ethical studies proved that decision about abortion presents for all women traumatic experience, but Zanki does not play any "public pain", nor transforms private drama into cultural capital. Petra Zanki simply accentuates *the price* of ambition. Personally I would estimate her performance as very touching, because behind that decisiveness of her voice and loft guard, runs out something we can't qualify as "success" and exactly this *self-control* of painful experience is more important and obscure than any social achievement. Petra holds in her hands small round aquarium *without* golden fish, also signifying the "lack" with which the performer gets along with in a stoic calmness on a declarative level, while under the surface crawls unspoken word, "death" avoided on the scene. In theatre we can rarely see performance comparable to the strength and performative energy of Petra Zanki. Speaking about self-consciousness of performers, Zanki definitely has the reason for it.

### **The play which wasn't there**

The way Verdi's arias are introduced in the play is also interesting. They are not the sign of "anachronism" of the opera, but they are posed as a certain sublime object of artistic longing: they are too emotional, too melodramatic, but at the same time unachievable solemn, divine in their "uselessness", without the urge for excusing about dealing with melodious, seducing music. The only extraction which performers can't extract by their own will and which is extremely attached to the theatre as media, are tears. Tears can be the *theme* of the performance (as in the play by Emil Hrvatin), but can't be also "just one among" other extractions. Crying on the scene surpasses the frame of irony. But, tears are not the only way of crying. Almost all performers in the play by Bojan Jablanovec witness on some sort of hurt, but they are not talking about it in a compassionate or self-compassionate style. More freely speaking, we could say that all the used extractions *are acting* the inexistence of tears, but the audience pretty precisely feels that behind humorous confessions there is no unaccomplished utopia, but specific cry for numerous taken plays; for culture that simply does NOT EVALUATE the art of performative creation itself. If theatre performer *must perform* the worst thing

that can happen to him is the impossibility of thinking the scene, and nice witness of such suffering is the play *Timon of Athens* directed by Branko Brezoec, which will be discussed some other time. Considering Bojan Jablanovec, the formula is clear: if we do not have a scene, if we do not have a right on scene, than we have "nothing". Playing that "nothing" was the most exciting event of this year's Eurokaz.