

Játéktér, Timisoara

26-5-2015

**Kovács Bea**

# In the beginning was the TEST

**TEST festival – Timisoara**

The Timisoara Theatre cafeteria has a famous staircase, where the familiar and the unfamiliar gather at TEST. Some of us are first-timers at the festival. We immediately spot each other: less detached, more attentive. You too...? Now, for the first time? Let's be friends. Timisoara is a city of encounters; the organisers emphasise this in the spirit of TEST: it's more than a festival, it's about common, human things beyond theatre. I will have eight days to give myself over to the possibilities of encounter.

After a suitably short and pithy festival opening, we're going to watch a premiere. Directed by Bojan Jablanovec, Manipulations is a co-production of four associations and companies from four countries - Via Negativa, Csiky Gergely Hungarian State Theatre, MASZK Association, Kosztolányi Dezső Theatre and Infant - and since the director is affiliated with the Via Negativa group, we expect that the eighteen hoop on the poster was not accidentally exposed.

Manipulations is somewhere on the borderline between performance and theatre: it is not a theatre production in the classical sense, its interactivity and open dramaturgy bring with them the uniqueness of performance. The creators explore issues of trust within the framework of theatrical co-creation. What kind of trust between director and actors, performers, audience and creators is needed to make the production meaningful, believable and authentic; to not feel cheated? In the opening scene of the performance, the absent-minded teacher (Csaba Formanek), who enters in a suit and carries books, asks us not to free the musician (Boris Kuchov), who is naked and strutting out on stage with a guitar, from the harp bands that paralyse his hands and feet, because he is a terrible musician. As Formanek leaves the stage, Kuchov mumbles and begs for help, his mouth taped shut, and an audience member in the front row is already rescuing the helpless artist. The returning teacher looks on in amazement, writes the word TRUST on the huge black wall opposite the auditorium, then crosses it out in a huff. Had we regained the artist's trust? Doesn't the theatrical interaction carry just as much the fear that the spectator is equally afraid of having his trust abused? Therefore, most of the time, he stays outside, does not join in, does not take risks.

In Manipulations, risk is always present. A risk on the part of the director that his methods will drive everyone out of the audience, a risk on the part of the actor that he will injure himself or

his partner - in one scene an actress drinks several litres of water - a risk on the part of the spectator that his passivity could cause irreversible damage to the performer if he does not intervene. In Jablanovec's vision, trust is not a given, but a relationship that can be acquired and constantly redefined and redefined, and which is strengthened or weakened by different situations. The questions posed by the audience after the Manipulations, the questioning of our limits, indicated to me that TEST had started with the right production.