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TESZT of Trust: The Hungarian Theatre Festival started with a performance like a knife between two dancers

The eighth edition of the TESZT Festival started with a premiere whose poster reads +18. Forbidden to minors, the performance Manipulations can be described as an exciting experience, the co-production-event bringing together for the first time Via Negativa (Slovenia), Csiky Gergely Hungarian Theatre (Romania), MASZK Association (Hungary) and Kosztolanyi Dezso Theatre (Serbia) under a strong directorial signature: Bojan Jablanovec. A tough, intelligent, introspective performance about trust as "a knife between two dancers", sharp, deep, cruel, played at the intersection of the actor's "masochism" and the audience's "sadism".

Seven actors from Hungary, Romania, Serbia met for the first time in January 2015, with each other and a famous director, in search of a performance subject. A director who refuses to stage his shows in conventional "state" theatres, so he founded Via Negativa, a contemporary theatre laboratory, a platform for researching theatre art, exploring performative practices, which attracts actors from all over the world. Bojan Jablanovec and seven actors, strangers to each other, have chosen trust as their subject. And the manipulation of trust.

"Trust is a knife between two dancers. Trust is the smoke that gets in your eyes. Trust is chewing gum that, when it no longer tastes good, you spit out. Trust is meaningless unless it's always put to the test. It's a game. An ancient game," says the director.

Assertions, only apparently poetic, that the actors test, word for word. After six weeks of work, Magyarai Etelka offers Esztella Levko "the knife dance". One step, one wrong move, one infinitesimal betrayal of trust and the knife resting between their naked breasts becomes a weapon.

Bojan Jablanovec then understands that trust has drawn its volatile circle and takes the investigation deeper. He explores areas on the edge of the (un)bearable. The show begins

with the question "why?" and leaves the audience time to think and choose, gives them the option to get involved, to decide. Or not.

Spectators witness the naked exposure of the vulnerability of the human being. They witness, with a dose of cruelty, the struggle that began tenderly and ended violently for a piece of gum chewed "together" by a couple who end up devouring each other, the torture of Estella forced, with her eyes closed, to drink water until she almost implodes. At the meeting point of the actress's "masochism" and the sadism of the spectators, a female spectator succumbs to the "irresponsibility and cruelty" and storms out of the auditorium, angrily shouting "stop that!". But everyone else remains riveted, fascinated, eager to see the sequel. To see if betrayed trust becomes a deadly weapon. Relying on the freedom of the actor, on the free will of man And ever more aware that for Jablanovec theatre is not a convention, but an anti-convention. Manipulation does not give definitive answers. It does not solve the "problem" of reliance on repeatable formulas and recipes. It is a theatre of searching, not of repetition. The only kind of theatre that makes sense today.