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OOPS, Via Negativa new performance

The performance Oops, directed by Bojan Jablanovec and performed by dancer and choreographer Anita Wach, shifts its target of research to a rather unusual one this time – a something, or by now we should rather be saying a someone who is present, without fail, at every performance, though mostly does not get a chance to speak. This target saw every performance under the sun, hosted countless performers, had to swallow many stupid an idea, as well as ingenious ones; it was quartered, »erased«, worshipped. Not to mention the excretions, foul language and maltreatment it endured when it came to 'hosting' Via Negativa. What or who could this target be … what an idea to start a review with an enigma!

Who has already got it, well done, and who has not, here is the answer: the “what” or the “who” is of course the stage. The stage setting which Via Negativa always so ambitiously and provocatively unsettles by shifting its boundaries, exploding received notions, and perversely undermining its functionality, nudging the spectator into a new awareness and whenever possible, destroying any collective comfort zone. The personification and transformation of the object into a living and indeed talkative subject in the performance Oops is what endows the stage with a dimension of a dramatis personae, and that with a good deal of engagement and intellectual rigour. Its communication is enacted as a projected script, while the style of language and content are ever so jabbing, ironic, entertaining, presumptuous and proudly self-assertive.

While the phenomenology of the stage is timeless, megalomaniacal, even transcendent, if you wish, the performance itself manages to skilfully dodge this with a characteristic balancing act which effectively humanizes the stage as an object, bringing it closer to us. Even compassion can at times find its way into its reciprocal relationship with the spectator. The stage addressing us in the dark is universal, prototypical, while at the same time made lucidly concrete and personal. In short, it becomes the protagonist of the action, for the most part drawing attention to itself, while its true character emerges only in dialogue with the performer (Anita Wach). Even the stage can have stage fright at times, or it is lazy, ill-disposed or simply fed up of the entire circus on it. »What if tonight we dropped the whole jargon of audience, performer, artist etc.? Can't we just be people for once and can I just be space?«

Oops can be said to already border on a kind of lecture performance since its approach towards the historical meaning of error and its continuous regeneration as well as »false repetition« is philosophical and sociological as well as artistic and creative, paradoxically representing error as a

vital link in progress. The pedagogical streak of the stage enlightens us: for our being here today – at this particular event – we should be thanking four historical actors: Louis XIV, who was a decisive supporter of the professionalization of dance; Jean Baptiste Lully, who was responsible for bringing women dancers onto the stage; Pierre Beauchamps, who conceptualized five basic positions, out of which classical ballet developed; and Molière, whose invention of comédie-ballet brought dance out of the royal courts and into the streets.

On the other hand, in its communication with the dancer, the stage is rather aggressive, vulgar and offensive – »I feel sorry for you. You are made not to speak. Even Jean-Baptiste Lully knew over 300 years ago that you have nothing important to say. He wasn't wrong. At least not in this case.« She resists in whichever way she can: with vulgar dance, obsessive and inarticulate movements, soft »body art«; with red lipstick, powerless repetition of »Fuck you« and the banned lighting up of a cigarette, of course. In other words, a settling of accounts on the one hand between the stage and the performer, and on the other between history and the present, all together predictably underlined with renaissance music, references to Kant and his critique of the Enlightenment, then Louis XIV and reforms of modern states, to Tesla and Edison... even men of genius erred amply; except that an error is not always an error when it happens. What defines it as such is mental distance and civilizational progress. But how goes the saying? It's easy to be smart in retrospect. And in any case: we learn from mistakes.

OOPS is an educational and interesting performance, which in an innovative and inspired manner emancipates the overlooked and suppressed potential of the stage, revealing it to be both an intellectually and emotionally equivalent component in performing arts. In this context the performance is neither offensive nor overly radical. It is perceptive/sharp/sensible? before it is controversial. But isn't that the same thing?

The essence of mistakes has been supported by Zala Dobovšek.
*PS: STAGE: »I feel like a complete idiot. I should have spoken up long ago. My mistake.«