

**Marzena Dobosz**

## **'Sorry' by Anita Wach during the 17th International Dance and Performance Art Festival Ciało/Umysł (30 September - 5 October 2018) in Warsaw, Poland**

During this year's installment of the Body/Mind festival, we filled out a survey asking the public whether the festival interests, integrates, inspires, educates, helps, liberates...? Everything! Body/Mind opens eyes, heads and shoulders, encourages action, changes perspectives. Every performance wanted to be talked about, talked about, written about. I'll start with Anita Wach's Sorry, a performance piece for which the term 'acute' fits best.

This was not my first encounter with Anita Wach and the artists from the Slovenian group Via Negativa. Anita Wach and Grega Zorc performed two years ago in Bojan Jablanovec's performance 'Ninth - a Beethoven-powered anthropological machine', which Anita Wach also choreographically supervised. The ideas of the duo Jablanovec & Wach in that performance surprised not only audiences like me, who are just learning to watch dance and performance performances, but also many professionals. I heard that opinions were divided and extreme: either delight or distaste. For me, that performance - a story about the body, about man's animal nature fettered by culture, about how we come into the world naked and leave it naked - delighted me, knocked me into my seat and took my breath away. I wrote afterwards that I was surprised by everything I saw, what I didn't expect, what I would find difficult to even name.

And it was the same now. Although this time the Polish-Slovenian collective performed with a much more modest show, the impression it left was just as riveting. And again it divided the audience: a large part of it left the auditorium during the performance. I can understand these viewers, because what was happening on the tiny Malarnia stage at the Studio theatre might have left them bewildered. The three performers - Anita Wach and Grega Zorc and the musician Andrej Fon - spent two hours creating (largely improvising) a story about the annoyance of all kinds of interaction: man with man, man with thing, man with himself, with his imperfect body (I wrote: man with body - but isn't man a body? It seems, however, that he goes beyond the body, the body restrains him, the body dies... So what is man in this sense?).

Anita Wach and Grega Zorc showed a kind of shorter or longer etudes on mutual parasitic interactions: they started the story with the words 'I would like to apologise...'. And this apologising was for different things and on behalf of different things: the hairdryer apologised for being too hot and the kind of annoyance when we don't want to make an issue and don't protest - we put up with it somehow; the semaphore apologised for having a red light all the time; the herp for spoiling the evening with its exuberant presence, the ATM for saying the same thing all the time, the Croatian rocky beach apologised for being uncomfortable to lie on, the yogi's back for not being flexible enough, the ground in Iraq apologised for no longer having oil in it, the dead body of a soldier abandoned on the battlefield apologised to the villagers for themselves.... It was impossible to remember everything, and the situations were - as you can see - neither simple nor obvious. And to make things more interesting - what the artists did on stage with their bodies (and the musician still with his instrument - I didn't know you could play the saxophone with your foot in the tuba!) seemed to have nothing to do with what they were talking about. But in its incongruity it nevertheless fitted perfectly, illustrating the anguish on both sides perfectly. Anita Wach and Grega Zorc hung on each other, drilled holes in each other's stomachs (literally), put their fingers (hands!) in each other's mouths, bit each other, nibbled, twisted their arms, bent their limbs, ruffled their hair. They teased each other and endured inconveniences, showing how difficult our relationships with another (human or object, phenomenon) can be, how unequal and coercive, yet at the same time teaching patience and full of humility, violently violating our integrity, yet making us feel that we are a separate entity, self-contained, separate and independent, yet also dependent, susceptible to manipulation, interference and influence, perpetually ashamed and apologetic, yet often insecure, unable to say 'yes' or 'no', unassertive, lost.

The Via Negativa artists make creative use of their bodies, composing unfamiliar and difficult-to-interpret stories out of them, constantly confronting us with our comfortable positions in the audience, with their naked or semi-naked bodies, not ideal at all, disrupting our idea of the dancer's or dancer's body, of what dance theatre might look like. Andrej Fon has also shattered our idea of how the saxophone can be played, or rather - what the saxophone or its individual parts can be used for, and how music can sound and what music does and can do in theatre.

By shattering my idea of dance theatre, the artists of the Via Negativa collective are at the same time giving me the feeling that I don't have to - if I don't want to or can't - treat myself and my body in some externally imposed way, according to the requirements of fashions, ideas of social or gender roles. I am very grateful to them for this and regret that they are opening my eyes only now. That it is only now that they are helping me to shed my preconceptions about shame, purity and impurity, ideas about what is beautiful and what is ugly, an attitude of apologising for circumstances beyond my control, of denying my needs, and so on. "Sorry" is a performance after which one leaves refreshed, cleansed, tired but happy. Bojan Jablanovec (director) and Anita Wach (originator) have again shown world-class theatre.