

23/09/2013

Una Bauer: Tender concentration and noisy resistance, BALCANCANCONTEMPORARY.NET

Perforations Festival, Zagreb edition, 17-21 September 2013

Perforations, a small-scale Croatian performing arts festival initiated in 2009 by Zvonimir Dobrović and his team from Domino Association, that takes place in Autumn, provides a healthy alternative to large and established Zagreb festivals such as Dance Week Festival or World Theatre Festival. Designed as a place for support of innovative artistic events in the framework of local performing arts scene, primarily the ones bypassing institutional frames and established production circles, Perforations have been showing a range of interdisciplinary independent performance work, including theatre, dance and live art. Organized as an umbrella festival bringing together a range of aesthetical choices and interests, unlike many established contemporary arts festivals in Croatia that are conceived with the intention of showing, presenting, co-producing mainly international production, Perforations is focused primarily on the support of local and regional artists. Since its foundation, it was important for Perforations festival to break through the centralization of Croatian cultural scene, which usually means Zagreb cultural scene, and to stage events simultaneously or consecutively also in Rijeka, and since 2010 in Dubrovnik. The idea was not to present the same things in various places, but to try to accommodate for different interests of particular locations. Founded by Domino, whose main project was Queer Festival, Perforations were also focused on improving production conditions of those marginally positioned Croatian artists, who are at the same artistically highly relevant. One of the strategies was to organize Perforations in New York in March 2011 (at La MaMa), but also in France, at Le Quartz in March 2012, and at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in 2012. Not many performing arts producers



This year's Perforacije in Zagreb were launched with Petra Zanki's *Ephemerals*. It is a highly introspective work, without being boringly self-reflective at the same time. It could also work well as a live installation in a gallery, because its temporality is circular rather than linear. It can be revisited and engaged with at any point, and it is also highly atmospheric, reminiscent of the bittersweet feeling of early '90s grunge indie films. It doesn't require a focused but a more dispersed attention, that one can afford in a gallery, as there is always the possibility of returning to it. *Ephemerals* encourage some sort of simple being in the space of the audience, even turning attention to one's own thought processes and bodily functions, as it requires tender concentration. Introspection that Zanki engages with occurs via images of open spaces, mountains, clouds, and city lights as in romantic travel writing, where it seems that the environment perceived is a statement on subjective processes of the one observing, rather than something that has an objective existence. The exceptional music by Adam Semijalac, and carefully considered and elaborate light design make this work a pleasure to the senses.



A very different feeling is created by the authors of the performance *The American Assassin*, Damir Bartol Indoš and Tanja Vrvilo. Looking into the case of Stjepan Dojčić, a Croatian patriot from Ludbreg, who went to work in the States, as many at the time, to escape hard living conditions in their homeland at the turn of the 20th century, only to be faced with worker's exploitation, and different types of hardship in the promised land. Dojčić blamed Austro-Hungarian (economic) oppression in Croatia for the waves of emigration in the States, and writes that "many Croats had to leave their beloved homeland and go abroad to look for bread, whilst had Croatia been free, they would have been able to find it at home". He returned to Zagreb in order to assassinate royal commissary Ivan Skerlec, a symbol of unjust rule in Croatia. Indoš and Vrvilo, together with their collaborators, performers and artists Vili Matula, Mislav Čavajda, Ana Hušman and Ivan Marušić Klif, view the failed attempt at Skerlec's assassination in light of economic hardships, and ask the question of personal, but also collective ability and responsibility to act in a just and fair manner, against exploitation and abuse, yet with an attempt at full understanding of the weight of social and political pressures. The scene, filled with various metal objects and props, wash-basins, screens, traffic mirrors, vintage telephone headphones, is bubbling with various sounds that these objects produce in interaction with performers. The usage of all of these objects is very logical: one does to them what they as objects can do, even if that was, perhaps, not their initial function. But the process of performing with respect to the material base, to the physicality of the object, meaning doing that which arises from the material characteristics of objects used, links the formal level of the performance with its thematic focus. Unlike meditative *Ephemerals*, this performance is very active and aggressively in the world, demanding responsibility and resistance.



Bruno Isaković's *Denuded* (Nečastive in Croatian original) is a perfect example of how the title of the performance frames its perception to a great degree. More precisely, while "denuded" simply means "stripped of its covering, possessions, or assets", "bereaved, robbed" Nečastive, as in "nečastive radnje" is an adjective which in its masculine form, Nečastivi, is used as a noun, or rather as a name, a synonym for Satan, Devil, Beelzebub, Lucifer, Antichrist. As I am not convinced that such direct invitation of mainstream Christianity references into the interpretation of this work, does the work any particular favors, as it produces a rather banal fixation on a symbol, I prefer to read it as *Denuded*, or laid bare. Isaković performs the gesture of stripping bare not by removing his clothes, and standing naked in front of us, but by somewhat inverting the inside and the outside of his body, in an attempt to dance with the sound in his lungs and spasmodic movements of his abdominal muscles, which create an interesting sensation that what is really happening, happens on the other side of the barrier provided by the skin. That physicality could be further explored, preferably without the burden of "demonic" references.

This eclectic collection of works presented at this year's Zagreb Perforacije, which also includes the presentation of the project *Dreamlab communitas* by Mala Kline in collaboration with Ganz novi festival, *Sisyphus' Pink* by Martina Nevistić, *It sleeps Behind the Sun* by Pavle Heider, that premiered at this year's Dance Week Festival, *Intermission* by Matthew Day, an exceptional Japanese choreographer Mikiko Kawamura in collaboration with Alen and Nenad Sinkauz, and Performance Night leaves the observer inclined towards a firmer curatorial concept somewhat puzzled. However, it was clear that an elaborate curatorial concept is not what Perforations were after, as a loose form allows for a greater freedom in the presentation of the new works by local artists, and that is Perforations' main focus.

A very important segment of this year's Perforations was the conference Imagine 2020 which featured New Economics Foundation from London, in an attempt to open the discussion on new economic models that would be based on sustainability and equality.

The works of Davor Sanvincenti and Room 100 had to be postponed, however Gerald Kurdian's performance *1999*, presented in collaboration with Ganz New festival, provided a joyful Friday evening combining live recorded SF storytelling, with his adorable clumsiness and charming vocal and lo-fi (electronic) instrumental skills.