

CONCEPT AND *CONCERT*

The project People Pacing Back and Forth originated from a desire to create a new play in the traditional space of Alfred ve dvoře theatre with the traditional group of people. What broke the tradition was a proposal for co-production with Terén collective based in Brno, so we accepted it. It was during our discussions with Terén that we decided to return to musical roots of Boca Loca Lab, though indirectly without the use of musical tools. We started thinking about a concert from a visual arts point of view. We liked the idea of letting our stage forms simply “resonate” without thinking about their meanings and interpretations which usually dominate theatre. Since then, we have had a grand piano in our performances, and that is not a complaint.

Another challenge that shaped the project People Pacing Back and Forth – whether covertly or directly – has been a wish of Tomáš Procházka, the art director of Alfred ve dvoře theatre in Prague. After watching our play Oči v sloup, he wanted to see something similar but without words. To a former voice-band theatre group, this has been a conflicting but tempting challenge.

Besides both challenges, as inspirational as they were, the project has been mainly formed by Jiří Austerlitz's faith in music and its abilities to bring us to certain states of being directly as opposed to thoughts and words.

IN THE PLAY, YOU WILL HEAR (PRODUCED BY ACTORS' MOUTHS)

Voiceless canon for two voices by Jiří Austerlitz
Nine words from Cantata BWV 106 by Johann Sebastian Bach

IN THE PLAY, YOU WILL NOT HEAR (WHISPERED OR DROWNED IN OTHER SOUNDS)

Soliloquy
Prayer
Joke
Anecdote
Praise

IN THE PLAY, THIS WILL NOT BE UTTERED AT ALL

“The whiteness of the paradise lost is falling on my head, I am standing, mouth wide open, gasping for air.”

(The only sentence in the original screenplay that was meant to be uttered.)

RESONANCE AND EXPRESSION

We knew that if we abandon words, we will not offer any substitutes. It was even harder to figure out how to carry the play in time.

We found noise and several types of silence which, we believe, can resonate. We used them in our composition. The silences that are expressive enough to resonate are: a lack of motion, a lack of sound, invisibility, a lack of speech, absence, and tenderness. Though they appear separately as well, silence and noise are more often found together in the play. We are not sure but we presume that silence and noise do not disturb each other.

We have borrowed the term murmur of existence from a French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas which helped us put some of our intentions into words. We dared to adapt his ideas. According to

Lévinas (and us), everything is drowned in an ever-present, background murmur. This murmur may be expressed by a French grammatical form “il y a”, similar to the English phrase “there is/are”. Lévinas avoids direct specification of this “there-is-ness” and chooses to describe it in terms of acoustic/spatial metaphors. For example, he calls this “il y a” a “silent noise”, or he talks about “an empty space filled with silence which seems to resonate”. We are not a priori in contact with this murmur of existence. It seeps through fractures and cracks which let us peek into it.

We believe it is possible to find a similar mode of being behind a fabricated world of any theatre play. We also believe it is possible to create a play for the sole purpose of letting these cracks appear. The audience is required to have a good deal of concentration, patience, and careful attention. It may be rewarded with an experience of “rattling silence”, breaths of Lévinas' “il y a”, this “full emptiness” inviting us to the unidentified “space beyond” which, for the purposes of this play, we decided to call our paradise lost.

SILENT PIANO

After our preparations, we could not help thinking about the expressive silent piano that nobody ever plays, just like in the famous piano piece 4'33" by John Cage. However, the main inspiration for us has been the orchestral and chamber music of contemporary composers. For example, Hans Abrahamson's composition Snow starts with a delicate rustle of violin bows on strings which are, however, never played. We heard a composition full of squeaky sounds and rustles where the only “real music” flowed in muffled waves from the speakers. Boca Loca Lab regularly collaborates with a Czech composer Martin Smolka who often tiptoes on the edge of audibility in his works, or cuts his music with progressively longer pauses until it dissolves into a complete silence terminated by a single, barely audible tone.

These are all examples in which silences, noises, and rustles resonate without being provocative – in contrast to John Cage's “silence” in the 1950s. This could very well serve as a testimony to the position that silence has since gained in the area of music.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU FOR THE LOAN OF NOT SO MUCH USED MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS GOES TO:

Michal Nejtěk for the piano

Braňo Holíček for the trumpet

CLUTCHING ONTO SPACE

The opposite of a gap or a crack could be an anchor. There is something. If something is there, we can approach it, touch it, pull away or turn away from it, or even kiss it, which is a very advantageous situation for an actor. However, the same goes to a viewer and their perspective. If something is there, we can look at it, not look at it, focus on it, or

disregard it and rather only think about it. For everyone present (actors and audience), anchoring functions as a direct way to safety. Nevertheless, the whole situation can be easily reversed. That is why we cannot say with certainty that to clutch does not mean to caress. That looking at something does not mean hugging it. Regardless of how many objects that serve as such anchors are placed in the space.

It was clear right from the beginning that we will have to come to terms with the grand piano which is simply there. We were searching for stage partners who were able to share the space with the piano without looking submissive. Another step was choosing objects that can compete with a human form and thus lift the weight of playing the leading role off actors' shoulders. Some of these objects even directly refer to a human form and the actors are sometimes placed in a position in which they seemingly turn into objects. Sometimes, somewhere inside this ever-changing net of objects, figures, and bodies, a crack may appear leading to where I am standing, mouth wide open, gasping for air.

Klára Hutečková and Jiří Austerlitz (formerly Adámek)

People pacing back and forth like trees in a deep forest (Zen koan that we failed to trace back)

BOCA LOCA LAB

Experimental platform for a theatre of open mouths, theatre of words and sounds, theatre of objects, theatre on the borderlands between a concert and an art installation, theatre of silence.

The theatre group Boca Loca Lab was founded in 2007 by a director and creator Jiří Adámek. The group works with staging forms stemming from the principles of musical composition, lately extending to the area of art installation. Their work can also be characterised by minimalistic acting, experimenting with text and vocal production, as well as a specific use of objects akin to the approaches of puppetry and conceptual art.

The main ensemble consists of the following actors and actresses: Vendula Holíčková, Bára Mišíková, Pavol Smolárik, Daniel Šváb, and others. The group collaborates with music composers such as Martin Smolka, Michal Nejtěk, Michal Cáb and Ladislav Železný. In terms of scenography, the group has collaborated mainly with Jakub Kopecký, Ivana Kanhäuserová and Zuzana Sceranková. Their regular conceptual and dramaturgical collaborators are Martina Musilová and Klára Hutečková.

Boca Loca Lab has received a number of awards in the Czech Republic and abroad. To list a few, they won the Kontakt Theatre Festival prize in Toruń, Poland; the Music Theatre Now! prize in Germany (Tiká tiká politika); their play Evropané won a prize for direction at MESS Festival in Sarajevo; their spoken opera Seznamte, otevři se! (later on presented as Bludiště seznamu) won a Divadelní noviny Award 2014; and their radio play Hra na uši won the Czech Prix Bohemia Award as well as the international Karl Sczuka Preis and Grand Prix Nova in Romania.

The group is currently working with a director Jiří Austerlitz.

FIVE AUTHORS

To this day, the authors – Austerlitz, Adámek, Hutečková, Sceranková, Železný, and Havrda, in various constellations – have staged the following projects: Skončí to ústa (DISK, 2016), Oči v sloup (Studio hrdinů, 2019) and Po celou dobu představení probíhá představení (HaDivadlo, 2021).

In these projects, the authors are developing a theatre language full of doubts and ambiguities with considerable demands on the audience's attention. They carefully choose theatre tools that make the viewers wonder whether they should speak out or even get up and cross the stage. Should they grab the objects or simply look at them? Has a sentence been uttered to convey a message or to divert one's attention? Are the door hinges a mere part of the theatre hall interior or do you see the full door?

These tools shake the audience's confidence. They believe they are in a safe space of the auditorium and the rest will be provided. Instead, they receive a friendly confession. In a full of doubts, the authors offer any certainty.

In terms of art direction, these projects characteristic for level of subordination-specific architecture. They are rather they as much as possible through careful interventions. In other aspects, the scenography preserves an almost insolent autonomy. Objects are often placed on the same level as human beings and the scenography firmly leads the audience's attention.

The objects, strikingly plain, non-functional, or placed in a deranged context, are aptly sticking out of the space so that they cannot pass for a mere decoration. A thing is accentuated as a thing, not a stage prop, and it confronts the audience with its unyielding presence.

The team of authors in Boca Loca Lab uses an acting approach which has been continuously refined by Jiří Austerlitz (and Adámek before him). It can be characterised by a low intensity of expression and a high intensity of tension, stemming from a constant stepping out of the comfort zone of one's acting quirks and habits. It is important to stay on thin ice of human insecurities – doubting, waiting, wavering, hesitating, and being clumsy. This creates situations reminiscent of everyday life, which are often being removed from theatre for making the actors and the audience uneasy.

Despite being dominated by discrepancies, a sense of randomness and all the productions are a perfectly precise result of composition.

BOCA LOCA LAB PEOPLE PACING BACK AND FORTH

FOR BLIND AND A FEW DEAFFORMERS

Theatre so hushed that it becomes music. Music so muted that it becomes a gap in time. A rift leading there, where I stand, mouth open, swallowing angels.

The concert grand piano stands on stage in excellent condition. The actors walk back and forth around the instrument, with no certainty that a single note will be heard. And they believe. As do the authors, fascinated by music's ability to transport us beyond concepts and meanings, where being is diluted or concentrated to the point of becoming noise.

Directed by: Jiří Austerlitz
Dramaturgy: Klára Hutečková
Scenography: Zuzana Sceranková
Music, sound design: Ladislav Železný
Lighting design: Pavel Havrda
Performers: Fedir Kis, Štěpán Lustyk, Pavol Smolárik
Choreography assistance: Zdenka Svíteková Brungot
Text of the programme: Klára Hutečková a Jiří Austerlitz (formerly Adámek)
Graphic design: Jozef Ondřík / Deep Throat Studio
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