

GOD'S BLESSING ON ALL COOCHIES

WHO LONG AND WORK FOR THAT BRIGHT DAY

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/ TEATER V ETER

To be free. The meanings of this mind-blowing sentence can be extremely different, always depending on an individual, who decides to be free. Autonomy of any sort actually begins with a personal decision to be free. The decision in question is highly individual, which doesn't mean that it can actually come to life in an isolated situation, since freedom always plays part in the socialization process. To rephrase the matter in a somewhat simpler manner, it is basically about practicing personal freedom in an oppressive society. This can be extremely complicated and frequently strenuous, but it is nevertheless the only option for emancipatory political action. Performers, dancers and choreographers Leja Jurišić and Teja Reba assert: "The Other freedom doesn't mean that everything goes, it rather means that no one is excluded." Based on this exact premise, their forthcoming performance **Druga svoboda/The Other Freedom** is staged as a mixture of performance, dramatized situations and dance. Petra Veber's set design, dramaturgy and costumes accompany their sequence of dynamic and diverse scenes that we constantly see sticking out from the conventional theatre framework. Even though the title of their performance could have us believe that the authors are looking for an answer to the questions of what freedom is and how to achieve it, their project nevertheless comes across as a play on limits, restrictions and unwritten commandments of the conservative mindset. Actually, when watching the performance, I had an association to all those achievements, findings and experiments of modernism that have never succeeded in gaining a broader consensus. By this I am particularly referring to the forms and manners of artistic expression that carry an inherent aspiration for liberation in the sense of simultaneous activation of the field of the artistic act in itself and of the field of mental landscape that encompasses the particular in the universal. In other words, the aspiration in question is about abolishing the limit between an artistic gesture and "life as such".

Which segments in the performance *Druga svoboda/The Other Freedom* actually open the gates to real life? This happens for example when one of the performers does the splits without any particular reason and then says: "When a coochie does the splits, there's a real danger that it will stick to the ground." Or, then again, when she roguishly plays with the national anthem: "*God's blessing on all coochies who long and work for that bright day, when o'er earth's habitations, no man's dick shall hold its sway.*" The imaginary communication with the audience also produces an internally funny situation when the performers flirt with philosopher Mladen Dolar, who is believed to be sitting in the audience. Hello there, Mladen. Why do you think Hegel once said that dialectics requires counting to four? You'll surely agree that one-two, you-and-me is more than enough! After this intervention, not even Hegel's division of four spiritual principles of development, extending from the lowest level of freedom to the highest – Oriental, Greek, Roman and Germanic – no longer seems all that serious, also thanks to the self-irony inherently present in separate feminist intermezzos.

What gains momentum in the second part of the performance is the process of deconstruction aimed at the myth of a coded body, pushed ever more forward by the modernist mindset. The performers transform themselves into Mrs. and Mrs. Mutt and then sign their new name over a piece of art called a puddle that they created by pissing in the middle of the stage. The act of urinating that fills the lack of Duchamp's fountain – and especially the fact that it's a female urinating up in the air – is the very liberating gesture that erases the limits defined by the normal, the conventional and the routine. To urinate up in the air, to piss against the wind and to pursue similar practices as a symbolic retreat from the civilized routine, to return to the sensual that the body itself is capable of without any visual devices. The symbolism of the physiological gesture, of the feminine, transforms on the background of light-sound into a hedonistic, aestheticized and romantic experience that uncovers the strength as well as the vulnerability of the protagonists. On the other hand, we can stand witness to this same symbolism collapsing into a pissed-over scene. What we see emerge is the mental barrier between our perception of excrement as something desired or as something undesired, the barrier between freedom and the prohibition.

When the performers further on appear dressed in men's dresses, the previously seen structure of the performance is called into question or relativized. What we see open in front of our eyes is a necessary and unavoidable perspective on the absurdity, helplessness and hopelessness of the situation, perhaps also a perspective on the absurdity of existence as such. The mechanical movements of the dancer accompanied by the heavy techno sounds refer to the dramatic confusion of everyday life, the phantom of liberation that borders to psychosis. What becomes evident during the continuous balancing with numerous balloons that come out of nowhere and the persistent maintenance of their fullness, is the entire nonsense of effectiveness, servility, everyday tasks, habits, hyperactivity, obligations, duty, work for any price etc., whereas at the same time the entire existential split emerges between desires, needs and instinct to survive in the demanding conditions of capitalist exploitation. The two bodies on stage become gradually undressed, as the confusion in this most energetic part of the performance leaves them no other option but to relax in the cacophonous whirlwind of sounds, images and passions, piled up on stage. Couldn't perhaps exactly this sort of corporeal relaxation be considered the only possible relief from ecstasy of exertion – somewhere between escapism and queerism – the only possible path to freedom?

In *Druga svoboda/The Other Freedom*, the authors paste together some motives from their previous solo and co-authored pieces and then develop them in an experimental manner, without obsessing excessively about the exact dramaturgical limits of the performance. In this diversity of roles, images and transformations the potential for reflection and self-reflection arises and we see it run smoothly during the performance itself. Cross-dressing could be seen as a common thread of their performative actions, leading the way to multiplicity of viewpoints on the theme of the performance, which could be defined as introducing flexibility into mind patterns that were under the sway of identity commandments. The fear against freedom thus once again turns out to be the symptom of inhibited sexual or political emancipation that calls for self-organization of the liberation process. In this respect, it might be prudent to consider the possibilities for horizons of the performance to open further in order to more directly address the border between the audience and the performers and thus allow for a more radical transgression from stage aesthetics into the landscape of politics as that very space where anyone can enter without being excluded.

The phantom of freedom was played with by Nenad J