

Reverse Play

- a theatre performance by Jan Mancuska

“Reverse Play” is a new performance by Czech born artist Jan Mancuska. U-TURN, Quadrennial for Contemporary Art has invited Jan Mancuska to produce “Reverse Play” in Copenhagen and to show the performance in Copenhagen as part of the Quadrennial exhibition (5 September – 9 November 2008). Furthermore U-TURN cooperates with two other Nordic partners, Moderna Museet (SE) and Perpetuum Mobile (FI) on the realisation of the performance by Mancuska in Stockholm and Helsinki in the fall/winter of 2008. U-TURN is organiser of the realisation of Reverse Play – a theatre performance by Jan Mancuska and thereby also applicant on behalf of the partners in the project. All partners share a common interest in bringing the oeuvre of Jan Mancuska to a new stage in terms of professionally produced performance theatre.

“Reverse Play” is a theatre performance on simultaneous forward and backward performance of the same script on stage, and is the intended result of an intense cooperation in the summer 2008 between Mancuska and a selection of five Scandinavian dancers/actors as performers and one author (live voice-over). Mancuska will take up a residency in Copenhagen in the months of July and August 2008.

“Reverse Play” is the continuation of Mancuskas recent projects conversant with the topics of gesture, theatre and form of narration in relation to time as condition for historical consciousness. Previous performances by Mancuska was realised at Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, 2007, “The Invisible – Acting in Sequences”; in Svetořor cinema theatre, Prague, 2006, “If there is anything good about me I’m the only one who knows”, co-production with tranzit.cz; furthermore Mancuska has shown the work ““Reverse Play” – film“ at Bonniers Konsthall (2007) in Stockholm and at Kunstverein Hannover (2007).

“Reverse Play”

The realisation of “Reverse Play” in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Helsinki will be the most extensive presentation of Mancuska in Scandinavia so far. His work touches upon themes such as how the form of narration influences the content of the story told, a significant theme central to innovative contemporary art production. The idea is that one team of actors play the 40 minutes script written by Mancuska chronologically forwards while simultaneously on stage the same narration is played backwards, acted out in backward actions. The two teams of actors then meet in the middle of the narrations in a central moment where an ethical decision is made – e.g. A thief

steals a wallet out of somebody's pocket in the forwards playing team and a person places a wallet in somebody pocket in the backwards playing team of actors.

With "Reverse Play" Mancuskas work combine a number of artistic fields - theatre, performance, drama, literature and conceptual art. This propagates a simple condensation and artistic product based on a complex conceptual tying together of filmic, literature and performance effects on stage. Mancuska represents a scriptwriter who like Ingmar Bergman treats the human condition and existential topics such as ethical choice, the individual choice and the restraints as coincidences that lead to a certain cause of action. He treats existential topics in a confident manner in terms of knowing the history and tools within both narration and performance as film language. This work needs special attention in the Scandinavian context of contemporary art. Mancuska is an artist working thoroughly with narration and literature, which is a skill and characteristic that is not present among many artists in Scandinavia.

Mancuskas is occupied by the literary tradition of storytelling that seen in a central European and specific Czech tradition is very strong. The realisation of "Reverse Play" will bring one of Czech Republics presently most recognised contemporary artist to Scandinavia to carry out the production of a work that will confront the Scandinavian interdisciplinary literary, film and art context with new highly confidently executed approaches to narration. Central Europe has fostered a great number of important writers that differentiate from Scandinavian writers in their strong references to historical traumas in these countries. This offers an actualisation and re-evaluation of historical moments and their significance for the present time.

Mancuska is clearly interested in language and the narration of everyday life stories and with his obvious reference to the tradition of American conceptualism he can rightly be characterised as an artist emblematic of our time. On one hand occupied with a distinctive central European literary tradition on the other with on of the foremost significant artistic discourses of western art tradition in the 20th century.

Already there has been interest in the works of Mancuska in Scandinavia. He participates in the exhibition "Against Time" at Bonniers Konsthall (12 September – 25 November 2007). The extensive presentation of Mancuska in 2008 in three Scandinavian countries would thereby be a chance for the Nordic audience to develop further their awareness of one of the most recognised central European artists of his generation.

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“Reverse Play” deals in a complex manner with the concept of time in relation to history and the subjective understanding of time as interchangeable condition on the one hand and as manipulator on the other.

The element of repeatedly playing a story backwards at the same time having it told out loud in its original form activates a new kind of historical understanding. Scandinavian countries are often characterised as being in a constant condition of amnesia when it comes to historical conciseness. We have not in the last centuries experienced conditions that to a predominant degree suppressed our way of living. In term we experience that we tend to fall in obliviousness because we have the possibility to wind back and forth in history as we please. This to a high degree reflects the present day society where the awareness of story telling has been replaced by ever-fast changing information without a narrative story consisting of a beginning and an end.