





FATIGUE? GOOD!

TOO MUCH OF EVERYTHING

script and direction:

Michał Buszewicz

stage design and costumes:

Doris Nawrot

choreography:

Katarzyna Sikora

music:

Aleksandra Gryka

video:

Michał Dobrucki

lighting director:

Klaudyna Schubert

director's assistant:

Katarzyna Gawryś

stage manager:

Monika Tuniewicz

production manager:

Aleksandra Szklarczyk

stage designer's assistant:

Julia Zawadzka

cast:

Karolina Bednarek

Dobromir Dymecki

Mateusz Górski

Natalia Kalita

Rafał Maćkowiak

Adam Woronowicz

premiere:

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technical manager:

Michał Golasa

deputy technical manager:

Andrii Pogorielov

sound engineers:

Piotr Domiński, Andrii Pogorielov,

Jakub Sapka, Jerzy Szelewicz

video producers:

Łukasz Karzewski, Marcin Kaszyński,

Marcin Metelski

lighting engineers:

Daniel Sanjuan Ciepiewski,

Jędrzej Jęćkowski, Konrad Kajak,

Kacper Stykowski

makeup artists:

Milena Jura, Dominika Zatońska

wardrobe assistants:

Elżbieta Kołtonowicz, Teresa Rutkowska

master carpenter:

Łukasz Winkowski

propman:

Marcin Puanecki

stage crew:

Mariusz Basiak, Paweł Iwaniuk,

Marcin Puanecki, Tomasz Trojanowski,

Łukasz Winkowski

decoration constructor, welder:

Tomasz Ciężarek

carpenter:

Tadeusz Tomaszewski

photograph:

Tomek Tyndyk, Adrian Lach

programme text:

Anka Herbut, Justyna Lipko-Konieczna

programme graphic design:

Grzegorz Laszuk

Fatigue is a state with which we do not have good associations. Rather, a lack of strength and energy causes anxiety and represents the opposite of vitality, wellbeing and health. In a reality based on movement and change, qualities such as pausing and waiting (which suggest a state of suspended activity) throw us off rhythm, create confusion, irritate. We assume by default that fatigue should not manifest itself in the workplace, whilst resting has to be justified, if only by, for example addiction. We are quicker to forgive someone several cigarette breaks than allowing themselves a nap at work. And if fatigue shows on our faces, we feel the need to explain ourselves. Of course, it is great to have some kind of accomplishment up your sleeve, a well-completed task, some kind of excuse for staying up all night. Anything to avoid saying “I can’t cope.” Admitting to fatigue means admitting to a limited capacity or exhausted resources, which forces you to confront your mental and physical buoyancy.

We can talk about healthy and unhealthy fatigue, just as we can talk about healthy and unhealthy exercise. In both cases, the measure of the positive or detrimental impact of our activity is their relation to our reserves. A world whose culture is based on forever improving our effectiveness, and where individual performance is a measure of our own worth, has been poignantly described by Byung-Chul Han in his collection of essays *The Burnout Society*. “In this society of compulsion, everyone carries a work camp inside,” he writes. And whilst these words can suggest resistance to putting responsibility for systemic oppression on the individual, there is something intriguing about them, something that makes us pause. Han alludes to a panoptical model of power described by Michel Foucault, in which the central position of master allows them to supervise others at any time and to any extent. It may not even require their presence at all, since the mere awareness of being watched and punished is enough to keep us under subjugation us (fr. *assujettissement*).

Han posits that today’s reality does not even need a master understood as an external institution and that excess of work and performance escalate into auto-exploitation.” He links culture based on auto-exploitation with the universally applicable imperative of positivity and freedom to self-actualise. In essence, any work we do within this triad speaks of us and we become, in a way, its product. This seems to resonate with Simone Weil’s approach to work, fatigue and reflection on how to break the spiral of exhaustion. According to Weil, “we have to act, renouncing the fruits of action.” She also offers a collection of responses to fatigue, namely “tangible joys, eating, resting, the pleasures of Sunday ... but not money” (*The Need for Roots*). The question is: Are we capable of renouncing the overworked part of ourselves and taking a break (if only for a moment) to free ourselves from the spiral of auto-exploitation?



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