

Who Cares for the Caregiver?

Once again Jasna Layes Vinovrški places the body at the centre of an inquiry into social structures, this time through the lens of invisible care work. Continuing her exploration of power, control and human vulnerability through wit and subversive humour, *Care – The Three Shift System* is a choreographic study of exhaustion, repetition and constant vigilance. Premiered at TALA PLE(j)S in Zagreb on 15 February 2025, the work asks what it means to care for others—and at what cost.

On stage, Koraljka Begović, Melita Spahić Bezjak and Larisa Lipovac Navojec move between the roles of caregivers, organisers, therapists and fitness instructors, while gradually revealing the exhaustion of individuals trapped in an endless cycle of duties. Physically relentless and mentally stretched, they inhabit bodies that can never fully rest. Their initial restraint and composure gradually unravel into a frenetic rhythm of chaotic spatial reorganisation: objects are carried, rearranged and discarded, while bodies begin to stumble. Their wooden clogs, an integral part of the costume, restrict movement while amplifying the relentless soundscape of repetitive labour that never truly ends.

In the second half of the performance, Vinovrški questions the commercialisation of care through a series of satirical scenes. The performers transform into wellness coaches, healers and New Age gurus, leading preposterous rituals and fitness programmes that promise false paths to recovery. Larisa Lipovac Navojec delivers a particularly compelling performance as one such charismatic leader, whose authority is both absurd and unsettlingly familiar within today's self-help industry.

The performance skilfully balances humour with discomfort. In one memorable scene, Melita Spahić Bezjak sits in a suspended chair, breathlessly reciting the lyrics of the Beatles' 'Help!', creating a deeply unsettling moment in which the plea for help dissolves into an endless loop of automated responses. A dialogue with artificial intelligence further reinforces the work's dystopian atmosphere, suggesting a future in which care has become an algorithmic process devoid of empathy.

At its core, however, the performance asks what happens to the body when it can no longer keep up with the relentless demands placed upon it. In the final scene, faced with a choice between technologically enhanced avatars and her own worn-out body, Melita Spahić Bezjak rejects the upgrade, choosing instead to remain within the limits of her own fragile physical reality. Her final question to the AI assistant Jane—“Will you stay with me until the end?”—lingers as a poignant meditation on the future of care and those who provide it.

Jasna Layes Vinovrški combines a precise choreographic vocabulary with incisive social commentary, leaving the audience suspended between laughter and unease. *Care – The Three Shift System* exposes the mechanisms of the care economy—within families, institutions and the commercial sector alike. In doing so, it engages with one of the most pressing issues facing contemporary society: an ageing population and increasingly overstretched systems of care for children, older people and the sick.

As inadequate public sector pay continues to drive people away from these demanding professions, the burden of care falls ever more heavily on families, and most often on women who are expected to balance caregiving with jobs that rarely allow for a standard eight-hour working day. At the same time, the growing privatisation of care further widens the gap between those who can afford support and those who cannot. Against this backdrop, the performance poses a pressing question: can artificial intelligence take on the role of caregiver, and if so, how much of that care can remain genuinely human? Or is the real challenge to create a system in which caring for the most vulnerable, rather than expanding bureaucracy, becomes a fundamental social priority?