



A

Problematic Book

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Critical Practice
(Made in Yugoslavia): 2

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CRITICAL PRACTICE: A Problematic Book

A Problematic Introduction

A few weeks ago I met a woman who looked like an exaggerated version of my mother. All of the harsh, sharp features, her deep-set blue eyes and severe slash of a mouth, were stretched across a gaunt bone structure that extended far beyond itself, accumulating towards a fixed point in space where all particularities met in the blunt nodule at the termination of her nose. This central point of her face suggested its own gravitational pull. She walked with an air that could easily confuse dour grace with the calm confidence of the egoist. She altogether had the sensibility of an aristocratic eighteenth century Parisian *Madame*.

It isn't wholly accurate to say that I met this woman, as I don't recall us being formally introduced. We clashed in the corridor after a talk on the philosophy of art, in particular on the question of the end of contemporary art, a sort of awkward rehashing of the *Entkunstung* [the end of art] conceptualised by philosopher Theodor W. Adorno on the dissolving forms of cultural production, where media and art contaminate one another. The talk was predictably delivered by European white male philosophers who tossed around the age old question, "what is art?", wheeling out the usual ghosts from history to inform, validate or pivot upon their respective positions: "For Hegel, art is the sensible form of the idea!"; "For Heidegger, art functions as truth!"; "For Adorno, art is a counter-position to society!"; "In the Soviet Union, art was a machine of subjectivation; it participated in the project of becoming subject!"; etc. It was one of the public lectures presented at the week-long gathering in Mülheim, a sleepy German town close to Düsseldorf; *Learning Plays – A School of Schools*, was its name. Participating in this temporary art-space gathered a cohort of artists, art teachers and scholars, curators, students, actors, performers and other figures variously associated with their 'art scenes' from around the world.

As the lecture hall emptied out, the woman who struck an unbearable likeness to my mother turned to face me and announced her hatred for the discussion just witnessed, as if it left a foul-tasting residue that needed quickly to be expunged. Her defence: The question of art's ontology – what it is and what it could become – is futile and irrelevant, especially for artists. This over-worn, tattered and worn-out strand of philosophical speculation hampers the artist's ability to create. (She stiffened as she spoke but allowed her hands to waft freely to the sound of her speech.) At the time I remember conflating her dismissive attitude with a distinctly

'anti-intellectual' stance frequently adopted by my mother with rolling eyes and folded arms, a stance against the very idea of analytic thought, expended with an attitude of indifference, an attitude committed to non-commitment. Timidly, as she towered over me with her suspicious nostrils, I went to rebut her though without much skill (timidly because the resemblance to my mother was by now inspiring both fear and admiration, becoming increasingly uncontrollable at each further sight). Before buckling at the knees I tried, at the very least, to maintain that as an artist, theorist or critic the question of what art is remains important and valid.

Aside from the fact that I have mother issues, there is this: whenever there is a crisis of art it is usually around the problem of definition up against a rapidly changing current in whose reflection art struggles to recognise itself. Shifting spaces of value, matter, materiality and production feed into the next phases of crisis and crippled renewal. Problems of these kinds are then addressed through art, criticism and institutional validation. The crisis of contemporary art – and of course contemporary performance is crucial in this – is its synchronisation with the liquid, affective, immaterial, cognitive capitalism that exploits subjectivity, experience and situations. While the artist plays critic and critic plays artist, the art institution invites critical positions as long as the risk it poses isn't strong enough to imbalance its grip on the experience and knowledge economy. It is easy to wonder about risk. What sort of risk do art workers take nowadays? Art no longer occupies an 'autonomous', mythical or mysterious space somehow separated from the social division of labour; it is now "formally subsumed under capital" (Marx) and so Art and Industry wear bejewelled, nuptial crowns while their servants – the art workers (artists, assistants, critics, researchers, cleaners, technicians, administrators, curators, café staff, project managers, producers, runners, directors, interns, volunteers) – labour for, with and against the wage.

When Susan Sontag, in her collection of essays, *Against Interpretation* (1961), wrote that "Art today is a new kind of instrument, an instrument for modifying consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility..." she spoke to an attitude that placed art as an intensifier of life, responsible for inspiring different currents of human perception. Art is still trying to do this. But art is also doing something else. Could it be that art today, where it is not instantaneously dissolving into culture industry, is attempting to reassert or reclaim the lifeblood of this space? The instrument of art, to use Sontag's words, nowadays could viably be seen as one of organisation, critique and world-building. (Could it even be *revolution*-building? Where is the space of art here?) Performance, notably the experimental European performing arts, while synchronous with the present mode of capitalism in their circulation, orchestration and delivery, have for a while been recognised as the champions of an integrated theory and practice that displaces emphasis from an object and towards a pre-meditated or spontaneous flow of actions, movements or moments. This is not new. But I would like to wonder how this mode of production, before its inevitable exhaustion, can be used as potential for when 'sensibility'

can be politicised, namely, in practical and preparatory terms, as interactions and relations, one could say, in order to reshape ourselves and each other against the logic of a subsumed art-industrial-complex. However, I would not here revert to exulting a display-oriented culture whereby processes abides by the same industrial logic (process-as-product still capitulates to the same value form). Rather, in the space of art it could be afforded that one can find cracks to dip one's toes into the undercurrents of counter-building and counter-organising.

This is a book about 'the problematic', which can be characterised here: the posing of problems as a method of being critical at a time of criticality's enmeshment in crisis, its impotency and its disintegration. When 'collaboration' seems to be the buzz-word for salvaging a culture of individualism, we can respond by problematising forms of collaborative activity (Critical Practice/ this book) when it takes place in the space of art. Why congeal hours of conversation and hours of writing into an assembled and curated book? Is that the best we can do?

And so we ask: what is Critical Practice? What is it theoretically and what is it actually? The writers filling the pages of this collaborative book have over the past 16 months been brought together from Bulgaria, Belgium, Holland, Slovenia, Sweden, Israel, Germany, Hungary and Britain to assemble in Belgrade, Skopje and Amsterdam. We are all engaged with artistic production from across geo-political zones, and shared space for a set length of time to actively question why critical practice matters in the space of art and to re-articulate modes of working together. Readers will discover that the texts are presented dialogically – to encourage dialogue – on topics that regardless of the writers' intentions bring together art and politics, for these are the overarching concepts, practices and relations that also internally constitute the conditions for this work, determined by the social practices and institutions of a culturally nomadic, politically volatile and hostile EU. Our societies produce poverty in a world of plenty. Freedom for art implies the slavery of artists to industry, where 'art professionals' navigate mazes of bureaucracy, where carefree movement across borders is a privilege for some, and an exception for those millions displaced who make it out alive. These are the times we're living in.

And we must talk about time. Ecstatic time (non-linear, dilated, dialectical, dissolved into experience) strangulated by capitalist time (compartmentalised, constant, dominating, structured) struggles towards a time when people can be free to do what they want, self-governed by their own inner needs and desires, rather than by external coercive influences. In our "free time" we try to deliver moments of self-nourishment, in other words, towards the activities and practices we choose in order to reproduce a semblance of a life authentically lived.

And so when one is gifted with time, the question must then be asked: what would I do with it? Between the time of the present and the time not yet lived, there are preparations to be made. How can we begin to define critical practice if not through this lens? To critically practice a form of collective cooperation as resistance to capital, against politically brutal circumstances, we could try embodying principles of

reflexivity and accountability into our daily lives, as practical symbols of a meaningful future at a time when we have to learn of a social world that doesn't yet exist.

Without becoming an apologist for the EU, it was with funds endowed from the pockets of the EU's Cultural Ministry that aided our capacities to spend time together throughout the year to re-think, re-imagine and re-invigorate over again in an era where the necessity of doing so must be seized by art as well as by politics. I do not mean to suggest a crude form of 'artist', or otherwise 'socially engaged' art that never amounts to more than shocking the public with the real at best and short-lived validations of policy at worst. Rather, I am advocating an art that is oppositional, transformative and challenging. Challenging established assumptions allows for building unprecedented and unpredictable ways of navigating complex social and political life. To live with vulnerability, to be constantly questioning – problematising – established values is where art sees itself allied to social movements and not as a substitute for political activity. Working in the realm of the symbolic can be reorganised as political activity if it adopts a critique of its present and actual form of producing value, and with it, a persistent speculation on its potential for grounding new forms of production; of overcoming capitalism through resistance to dominating structures of work and oppression. To overturn there is first the necessity to build an alternative set of value relations. A radical re-organisation of labour presupposes the transformation of value necessary to set sights upon its abolition.

We have to make preparations – with critical pedagogy and play, intimacy and movement, consciousness and critique, art and work, organisation – together. If the space of art is not to collapse into a vanity-project then it can be a space of refuge and action for where politics can be re-imagined, where scattered individuals can temporarily come together to find commonalities and differences, meeting in conditions set aside from ordinary daily life to experiment with the possible. It resonates with the Lefebvrian notion of festival, a momentary seizure of time and space for the unashamed playing out of subjectivities in their formation towards a collective state of consideration. These temporary 'communities' are formed where experiments of art and critical pedagogy can raise questions rather than give answers. As spaces constantly in movement, they inevitably contain traces of contradiction that creep "inside" and slowly become integrated, problems demanding to be teased out. Removed from everyday life, the relationships formed within must also be problematised.

In *Dance to No Ideals*, Livia Andrea Piazza and Shir Hacham ask of the critical and political potentials of irony through revisiting a performance of Willy Prager and Sonia Pregrad called *Sequel for the Future / a dance in 2043 / a dance in 2044*. The performance loads a demanding question on to its audience – "what the fuck is contemporary dance?" – fusing absurdist humour with banalities of the institutionalised dance world. Our authors argue that irony functions as a crucial moment of suspension to open a gap in an art form dominated by discipline.

Ana Schnabl and Ida Daniel are provoked by *Streamlined*, a performance by Serbian artist Igor Koruga presented at Skopje's Lokomotiva Festival in 2015. Koruga presents an image of the young artist who works in choreography in a cultural scene that demands an unrelenting "labour of the self", where self-exploitation and underpayment seem to cast a fair deal for relative autonomy. As Koruga questions the complicity of artists to a system that coerces precarious labour, Ida Daniel reflects on the aspects of sharing space with this live performative installation, whereas Ana Schnabl in *Cyncism – A False Entry*, asks "what does the cynical position in art produce?", encouraging our attention towards the alliance of art and cynicism in the present political context.

Stina Nyberg reaches into herself to confess the profound emptiness of contemporary artistic life in *Sick Management*. Taking an axe to the regime of creativity and work, she takes us into the daily life of a state-funded choreographer and asks whether we can reclaim creativity without negotiating our valuable free time. Meanwhile, Kristóf Farkas wonders about the circumstances affecting creativity; is it oddly pleasurable, or not?

In *The (Artistic) privilege of Public Speech?*, Ida Daniel recalls her fascination with a choreography she saw as part of the German Dance Platform in Frankfurt, which prompted an interview with its co-author and Critical Practice mentor, Ana Vujanović. In asking about her practice, they delve into the notion of critical practice and the controversy of the performance *On Trial Together*.

Then featured is Ana Vujanović in conversation with choreographer and performance artist Mårten Spångberg, who talks *Spångbergianism*, the price of problems and thinks about the critical potential and power of poesis over and above cynicism.

Stina Nyberg then takes an ironic approach to festivalisation in *At The Festival*, reflecting on her experiences in Belgrade and Skopje with the Critical Practice crew, and Bojana Cvejić takes us back to the question at hand with a paper on "the choreographic method of problems" in contemporary theatre and dance, specifically addressing the regime of representation.

The themes that pervade this book come back again and again to the issue of work, of precarious artists' work in neoliberal capitalism. We therefore return to labour, time and power as the unholy trinity for all activity. Is this what it means to do critical practice? (and let's say our practice is art.) We may not make the art but we facilitate the dialogue, the conversation and the implicit openness of a form. We view ourselves and others as situated in the world and with valid experiences. We come to know ourselves through others. From the collapse of collective responsibility a common approach can emerge. This book was put together with little time. I hope that it gives you something of us.



CYNICISM:

A FALSE ENTRY INTRO

Before we delve into Sloterdijk's analysis of cynical reason, it is important to mention that he does not give an account of what cynicism, or, falsely enlightened consciousness, might produce in the context of art, nor does he examine what cynicism in that context might be. I aim to continue his analysis by applying the theoretical tools he develops onto *Streamlined*, a performance conceptualised and performed by Igor Koruga.

Sloterdijk's project focuses on – with Kant's words – the daily usage of reason as it is converted in the contexts of the military, power or leadership and in the context of knowledge (knowledge production). The problem that is mainly discussed is the modern cynical consciousness in relation to now helpless traditional ideological critique. Sloterdijk's undertaking is led by the conclusion that those types of "false consciousness" that have been recognised so far – lie, error/illusion, ideology – need to be completed by the forth one, namely the cynical phenomenon.

Ana Schnabl

CYNICISM: A FALSE ENTRY

THE PHENOMENON OF CYNICISM

Cynicism – the Twilight of False Consciousness

“A Psychologically contemporary cynic could be understood as an extremely melancholic subject, who is able to control his own depressive symptoms and remains involved in work.” Sloterdijk’s wit in discussing a diffuse, cynical consciousness and its subjects is endless. Those subjects are constantly facing Emptiness and Nothingness where their actions lead, but are also constantly aware of what they are doing and that that is how it is supposed to be done. The secret of this reasoning is in the modality that was presented by Kant: I am tied to all immediate public, social and private actions, even though I doubt their capacity to help me survive. Because self-preservation and self-coercion are reciprocal, this new integrated cynicism feels to itself as a victim and experiences itself as being constantly sacrificed. This feeling leads to despair and mourning, where the modern mass cynic does not want to agree to the restriction that she can’t acquire better knowledge. Despite knowing that the innocence of trusting a meaning is lost, everything she does is directed towards that innocence.

From here Sloterdijk deduces his first definition: “Cynicism is a falsely enlightened consciousness. It is that modernised, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.” With this paradoxical formulation he introduces a very simple discovery: doing something despite the fact that it is not fair or optimal, is the contemporary global superstructure. Sloterdijk explains: “It knows itself to be without illusions and yet to have been dragged down by the ‘power of things.’” Thus what is regarded in logic as a paradox and in literature as a joke appears in reality as the actual state of affairs. Thus emerges a new attitude of consciousness toward “objectivity.”

The main task of the author’s project is then to revise enlightenment, to present the relation of enlightenment to “false consciousness” and finally to revise the process of enlightenment itself and other projects of ideological critique that have enabled “false consciousness” to acquire the content of enlightenment.

Enlightenment as Dialogue

In Sloterdijk's view enlightenment could never really ally itself with any mass movements, moods or occupations. He writes: "Obviously enlightenment is fragmented through the resistance of powers opposed to it. It would be wrong, however, to regard this only as a question of power arithmetic. For enlightenment is fragmented equally by a qualitative resistance in the opponent's consciousness. The latter fiercely resists the invitation to discussion and the undermining talk about truth; even talking itself is resented because through it conventional views, values, and forms of self-assertion are brought into question. The interpretation of this resistance as a basic principle of ideology has become one of the main motifs of enlightenment." If the opponents of enlightenment do not want to discuss and talk, the enlightenment moves freely and voluntarily from discussion to discussion, it deals productively and progressively with the ferment of self-doubt. Enlightenment, as Sloterdijk humourously describes it, is to itself an utterly peaceful event: "One of its axes is reason; the other is the free dialogue of those striving for reason. Its methodological core and its moral ideal at one and the same time are voluntary consensus. By this is meant that the opposed consciousness does not change its position under any influence other than that of convincing argumentation." Enlightenment strives for an active usage of reason in the face of ready-made and unsupported opinions. For Enlightenment itself enlightenment is a Utopian archaic scene, in which an epistemological dialogue is being performed by those who voluntarily seek knowledge and truth. Truth in enlightenment is slightly more than a strong argumentation and the method of enlightenment is a double-bind; it consists of forming a better position and of surrendering an earlier opinion. This at least is the metafictional or the regulative idea of enlightenment.

In reality, enlightenment is not a peaceful correspondence, but a battlefield. There is nothing reasonable or cool about how enlightenment meets its opposing, preceding stances of consciousness: hegemonic positions, class interests, established doctrines, desires, passions, and the defense of "identities". At this point Sloterdijk deducts that the enlightened type of dialogue needs to be schooled again; this re-education is the only way to nurture a useful fiction of a free dialogue as the "last occupation of philosophy". He notes, that enlightenment itself was the first to realize that it will not achieve much by enhancing tolerant reason-based methods in trying to deconstruct the archaic notion of truth that sticks, almost clings to the old and problematises the new.

"The threefold polemic in a critique of power, in the struggle against tradition, and in a war against prejudices is part of the traditional image of enlightenment. All three imply a struggle with opponents disinclined to dialogue. Enlightenment wants to talk to them about things that hegemonic powers and traditions prefer to keep

quiet about: reason, justice, equality, freedom, truth, research. Through silence, the status quo is more likely to remain secure. Through talk, one is pursuing an uncertain future. Enlightenment enters this dialogue virtually emptyhanded; it has only the fragile offer of free consent to the better argument. If it could gain acceptance by force, it would be not enlightenment but a variation of a free consciousness. Thus, it is true: as a rule, people stick to their positions for anything but “rational” reasons. What can be done?” Enlightenment develops a sort of a combative stance, it suspects that the one, who does not want to contribute to enlightenment, hides his/her true reasons for not doing so. Enlightenment translates this rebellion into its own object and offers it as a theoretical problem. From here Sloterdijk deduces the thesis that “ideology critique means the polemical continuation of the miscarried dialogue through other means...(…)... Strictly speaking, ideology critique wants not merely to “hit”, but to operate with precision, in the surgical and military sense: to outflank and expose opponents, to reveal the opponents’ intentions. Exposing implies laying out the mechanism of false and unfree consciousness.” For a false consciousness enlightenment has only two explanations to offer: either error or ill will. A lie keeps its own kind of responsibility; an error on the other hand is more innocent, because it is not being pursued consciously. It divides into a simple, easy-to-fix type of error and into a systematic error, an ideology that is hard, even impossible to root out. Thus arises the classic series of forms of false consciousness: lie, error, ideology. Ideology critique which arose out of the satirical tradition and carries a specific kind of seriousness, imitates surgical procedure: “Cut open the patient with the critical scalpel and operate under impeccably sterile conditions. The opponent is cut open in front of everyone, until the mechanism of his error is laid bare...(…)...From then on, enlightenment is not satisfied, of course, but it is better armed in its insistence on its own claims for the distant future. Ideology critique is now interested not in winning over the vivisectioned opponent but in focusing on the “corpse”, the critical extract of its ideas.” So, the plan is not to convince the opponent into an enlightened position anymore. The critical act is now not more than a bare interest in the error. The gesture of unmasking, the cardinal tool of the ideology critique, now means an experiment in building a hierarchy between the *unmasking* and the *unmasked* theory. Sloterdijk warns us that this strategy can become irritating, the ideology critique leans on satire more than it does on respect just to be able to open up new paths to and for a conversation. A functioning dialogue is not something that would – in Sloterdijk’s stance – take place in the process of ideology critique.

Enlightenment is, if we repeat, a process of unmasking errors, transformed into ideologies that unfortunately never reach its final stance or, in other words, it never finished its own job.

After the unmasking

Enlightenment broke on the counter-reaction and counter-resistance of opposing forces, which can be explained with a history of anti-reflexive politics: knowledge, challenged by “other” knowledge has to fight to be able to remain in the center of knowledge. Dominant forces must therefore separate the opposing, marginal forces from the sources and tools of their self-reflexion. In practice that produces, for instance, censorship, whereas in general it applies to moments, in which people have matured enough to acknowledge the truth about themselves and their social status, but which the ruling class or the rulers always managed to sabotage one way or the other. The main project of enlightenment is, in other words, to light up the scene, turn the lights up and then to remove all the obstacles that prevent the light spreading. Three monsters that disturbed the light of knowledge were: superstition, error and ignorance. Those were articulated quite quickly, but the fourth remained unseen: the knowledge of domination in the hegemonic powers. “Those who rule, if they are not “merely” arrogant, must place themselves studiously between enlightenment and its addressees in order to prevent the diffusion of a new power of knowledge and the genesis of a new subject of knowledge about power. The state must know the truth before it can censor it.”

In spite of all inhibitions, breaks, and self-doubt in the course of its development – which Sloterdijk diligently explains - enlightenment has unleashed an enormous potential for reflection, especially into the heads of the intelligentsia and state employees. Hereby we quote a longer excerpt:

●● The diffusion of power in the modern state has led to an extraordinary dissemination of the knowledge of power, which simultaneously intensifies the cynicism of the knowledge of power, as sketched earlier, that is, the self-denial of morality and the splitting off of insights that cannot be lived out into a diffuse collective mentality. Here we flesh out our initial thesis: Discontent in our culture appears today as universal, diffuse cynicism. With the diffusion of cynicism to a collective mentality of intelligence in the gravitational field of the state and the knowledge of power, the erstwhile moral foundations of ideology critique collapse...(…)... Cultivated and informed people of today have become aware of the essential model of critique and the procedure of unmasking without having been shaken. The existence of such models of critique is perceived today as a contribution to the sad complicatedness of relations in the world rather than as an impulse for an existential self-reflection...(…)... that the moral foundation of enlightenment is decomposing because the modern state simultaneously demoralises the enlightened and makes public servants of them, the perspectives of what was earlier called commitment are becoming blurred. When someone tries to “agitate” me in an enlightened direction, my first reaction is a cynical

one: The person concerned should get his or her own shit together. That is the nature of things. Admittedly, one should not injure good will without reason; but good will could easily be a little more clever and save me the embarrassment of saying; “I already know that.” For I do not like being asked, “Then why don’t you do something?”

CYNICISM ON STAGE – FALSE ENTRY

Streamlined cynicism

“Then why don’t you do something?” could be a question directed at the author of the performance *Streamlined* Igor Koruga. For the sake of the argument, we will – before we delve into analysis – first describe the performance itself.

On stage Igor Koruga, the choreographer and author of the piece, produces a figure of a precarious artist Igor Koruga. In the fifth part of his performance he declares: “I am a young artist with potential, very active in the fields of performing arts, who sits in his home...which is, by the way, I don’t know exactly where or what./ Somewhere between a hotel room, the couch of a friend, my mother’s flat in Belgrade or the flat in the city where I am currently based...(…)...I am a mingler. At festivals. On a drink after performances...(…)...in the sauna, at a lecture, at an audition, at a workshop...(…)...And with programmers. It is always important that we are incorporated into their two-year vision of how performances are supposed to look like.”

His main and central action is walking and running on a treadmill while performing speeches on different topics, which are linked by theoretical and personal (emotional) realisations about choreography. He begins with a presentation of his new choreography – the speech is based on an introductory speech to a work-out, performed by Cindy Crawford, but the reference itself is not given, it is up to the spectator to determine it. After the intro the figure Igor Koruga speaks about his beliefs – they range from his belief in the power of public speech to the power of choreography. Among other things we hear him say: “I believe in choreography as a means to fight dogmatism, patriarchy, imperialistic power, state power and violence./ I believe in choreography as an anthropological practice for explaining society.”

While he remains walking on the treadmill, the scenography behind him changes. We enter a new landscape, now we see a video of pink, yellow and red lit dunes. He begins his speech about the self-doubt of an artist and possible ways of exiting that state. That is performed ironically, as a self-help moment. He describes possible development and decision-processes of an average person, who considers him or her

to be (or to become) an artist. The strategy, described by Koruga, includes internal and external changes and efforts, either becoming a better and more stable human to eating macrobiotic foods and engaging in different kinds of social rituals. The description ends up with a tantalising and totalising statement, implying that no matter what procedures or decision a subject undertakes, he or she will never close the gap between him/herself and the desired identity: “So, I can freely guarantee that you will never become a genius artist./ And the reason for that is crude and simple: You didn’t eat an egg per day for breakfast.” The sequence is followed by a series of videos, in which we see Madonna, Jeff Koons, Marina Abramović and other well-known and established contemporary artists. This series is accompanied by an original video, in which Koruga builds a figure of a star-type artist, dressed in a black short sweater, black trousers, wearing black sunglasses and preparing some sort of sauce. In this sequence the host of the evening, the figure of Igor Koruga sits in front of the video projection screen and in a voice-over way mimics the speech of the artists projected. The speeches of projected artists mostly oscillate around the question what a quality of a good (or even genius) artist might be. In the final act, where Koruga retreats to the treadmill again, he speaks about his own experience, an experience of a precarious artist who gets to travel, but doesn’t get to earn a living, an artist who easily slips into overproducing, an artist who is overworked and under-nourished. In this part of his speech a turning moment arises; after declaring all his beliefs and love for his work, for choreography, for public speaking, he declares: “But fuck it, I am a cynic. And you are a cynic and he is a cynic and she is a cynic, Madonna is a cynic, Marina is a cynic, Karleuša is a cynic...(…)...Cynics, yes! We all know very well what we are doing, but we keep on doing it.”

The declaration of cynicism is an honest one, if we regard what the figure of Igor Koruga says or declares before that. On one hand he is an enlightened individual, who is aware of how the mechanics of social and cultural appropriation of art works, who is critical towards the capitalistic mechanisms in which he as an artist is entrenched: “Plus, this depressive realisation that I am paradoxically someone who tries to convey his politicality through the same artistic work I do to be able to earn a living, but in the very moment I do it for a living, my hands become dirty, for I become an accomplice of the same social and political system which I criticize and against which I protest”. He nurtures certain reforming ideals and visions about art’s societal role and the role and power of choreography, he is hopeful and believes his critique is a productive one; but on the other hand he is hopeless, disillusioned, does not know how to leave the capitalistic mechanisms he criticizes. He seems to notice his speech, his beliefs and efforts are not making a change he would like to make, he notices how every critique is rapidly appropriated and even commodified by the machinery of the societal and political system, he notices how he as an artist is contributing to this dangerous machinery, but keeps on contributing. He keeps on doing what he is doing, despite knowing and even uttering it is wrong on many levels, only because he

doesn't know how to do what he wants to do any differently. In his piece Igor Koruga produces a quick panoramic presentation of the genealogy of cynicism – from belief to a melancholic realisation that ideology critique is not productive.

In *Streamlined* Koruga is focusing – to use Sloterdijk's wit – on the corpse, he lays out every fiber of ideology critique he can think of. This laying out remains verbal and declarative. Once he presents his critique, he distances himself from it by claiming cynicism, by claiming a depression of focus and will. Instead of using the art sphere for production, he uses it for a vivisection of something that he already knows does not work anymore (or in other words: is dead). The perpetuation of the meaninglessness of critique is supported by the treadmill, an object which "keeps on going" once you turn it on and start using it (it will continue its motion even if you don't use it anymore). The gesture of unmasking is performed wholesomely, to the point where Koruga's own mask peels off. Under it we meet a cynical young man. Koruga owns knowledge about the system, but is dissociated from that knowledge, because he and his knowledge are being used as public servants.

If a cynic is a mass figure and the cynical position is something we are completely accustomed to in the sphere of public opinion, in the normative sphere, the question is why reproduce this situation in marginal mentality, in art. What does a cynical position in art or, more precisely, in theatre produce? Does it produce anything at all? If art is in a perpetual state of exception, if it even is a sphere of exception, then regular consciousness, namely cynical consciousness, could only enter it as itself an object of critique, as something not to be affirmed, but something to be transcended. This shift is not something we witness in *Streamlined*, the performance is not a call for action, but a call for another autopsy. The piece is wrapped in cynicism almost air-tight, it does not regard the violent, but beneficial question: "Then why don't you do something?" It establishes cynicism as a viable method of doing and thinking, it establishes art as an occurrence that is on the same boat as collective mentality: a highly theoretical occurrence, an occurrence that would rather not act, because acting is meaningless. If speech was a dangerous tool in early ideology critique, it has very little power over the corpses of ideology critique. Declare what you will, the corpse will remain dead.

From the tonality of the piece, the criticality of it, we, the spectators, can understand that Igor Koruga is dissatisfied with what art has become and with his own cynical position. This dissatisfaction could become a push to think and act further, but the author decides not to do so. And this decision against action is the neuralgic point of his performance and his statement. Cynicism as is described by Sloterdijk is a historical stage of a critical consciousness that was suddenly left blank: no solutions, no answers, only corpses, left after the great unmasking. But in *Streamlined* cynicism wears a new set of clothes – it is a consciousness that suspects

solutions, suspects activities, suspects possible beliefs and resistances, but *chooses* not to try them out and experiment. Koruga's piece is a symptom of the new cynical era, a far more complicated era in which the cynic is aware that he/she belongs to a mass movement and willingly gives up his/her free will to oppose, contradict, contrast or resist the system. "If we are many, there is no need that we all take action. A couple of us would suffice," is what every contemporary cynic thinks.

STREAMLINED INTRO

To what extent can you be aware of your own position and be critical from within, without turning into a cynic? The critic and the artist seem to share this problem. In his performance *Streamlined*, Igor Koruga raises that very question. “We are all cynics on a treadmill,” he exclaims, running himself exhausted in front of an audience. In the audience Ida Daniel sits, for the third time, silently wondering, why doesn’t Igor just step off?

As the critic has become an embedded part of the art scene, the once esteemed critical distance has been replaced by a critical entanglement and the constant re-formulation of a situated stance within the practice of critique. Simultaneously, the artist seems to go through a similar transformation. The once honest and self-expressive artist has developed into a self-aware art worker, involving in their work and performances representations of the artistic process and working conditions. As the critic and the artist are closing in on each others’ work, they start to tackle the same kind of problem. Within this introspection, this ongoing re-articulation of the conditions within which the art work/text work is itself produced, we must ask: at what point does it stop being critically productive and end up being cynical and self-obsessed?

Daniel and Koruga share a common interest in articulating problems in the medium of text. And as both of them freely move between the role of the artist and the critic they take part in a longer conversation, manoeuvring the blurry landscape of criticality and cynicism.

Stina Nyberg



STREAMLINED

First of all

This is my first Critical Practice: Made in Yugoslavia text.

I am from the Balkans. But not those Balkans that only take ex-Yugoslavian republics in itself, but from the broader geographical area. I am from the country that holds the Balkan mountains. I am from Bulgaria.

I am a fan of Nomad Dance Academy.

I am part of the Bulgarian Independent Scene. As such I participated as speaker in the Advocates of Dance event by Nomad Dance Academy Bulgaria. During this advocacy meeting I saw Igor Koruga's *Streamlined* for the first time.

I saw it twice more. At Skopje's Lokomotiva, a festival by Nomad Dance Academy Macedonia. The second time was at Kondenz Festival, by Nomad Dance Academy Serbia.

My name is Ida Daniel. Igor Koruga answered an e-mail of mine saying: "Finally, I would like to say that I am grateful and happy you are writing a text about this performance. And I am looking forward to reading it. If you have any doubts or questions, please feel free to ask me. I will find time to answer and share thoughts."

So I asked him several things to make sure that I know how to describe the performance for those who haven't seen it, and also to be aware of what Igor was aware of while performing it.

Two descriptions

This is my description: Sitting in the audience, we see the performer centre stage, on a treadmill. The music is loud and cheesy. Behind him there is a daringly disproportionate screen that shows white puffy clouds in the blue sky. Opening words: "Here we are again! This time with my new choreography." Koruga goes on with this description of his new choreography and at the same time keeps in line with the speed of the treadmill, walking like model on a catwalk. The discourse is definitely a reminder of TV, public media, lifestyle magazines, advertising of positive emotions, good physical health and appearance. He insists that this choreography promises to make you look and feel great, however, you need to consult a doctor and listen to your body. Light changes. Discourse changes. Language changes. In Serbian, I can hear a list of beliefs. Koruga's body allows itself to be dragged by the treadmill and falls off it. He then climbs back on it and allows himself to fall off again

and again. Gradually, an awkward virtuosity of how not to fall off appears. The text becomes more and more concretely engaged with society, politics and the artist's precarious existence. The body's movements on the treadmill are now somehow too creative, too much of a reminder of contemporary dance, too independent from the monotonous pull of the running track. From analysis-like statements such as: "I believe choreography is a tool for tracing a dysfunctional, obsolete character of the present and turning it aesthetically into a publicly exposed corpse of a dead past. I believe choreography can retroactively criticize conventional procedures and disrupt them, but also turn them into another convention. I believe in choreography as praxis wrestling with dogmatism, white supremacy, imperial power, state power and violence." the text becomes more and more like a manifesto: "I believe in choreography as a practice of hybridism. I believe in choreography as a practice of the future. I believe in choreography as a practice of change." And then heroic music appears, making this confession tragic for a moment; a Hollywood effect that hurries to disclose itself through the way the performer suddenly leaps on to the handles of the machine into his always-smiling fitness persona. He lets his hair loose and walks on the treadmill again. The lights have changed. The style of speaking and walking has changed. He reminds me of a cartoonish man walking happily while gazing at the sky. After enumerating what is needed for being a genius, Koruga takes a box of eggs and starts throwing them to the floor, letting them splatter around him. This is combined with complicated, political, ironic statements. The screen takes us and the performer, in his role of some generalised spiritual speaker, to the desert where "the Jesus, the Moses, the Mohammed... everybody went... like nobody, and came back as somebody." This produces unanimous laughter in the audience.

The treadmill is controlled by Koruga to get faster and faster. His breath gets shorter and shorter. A short video shows us people masturbating. He sits. On a chair. Starts speaking in English. Says something personal which sounds somehow like a quotation. Then Marina Abramović appears on the video wall in a popular YouTube video. Gradually, this part turns into a dialogue between popular videos of Lady Gaga, Marina Abramović, Jeff Koons and some others. They are on screen and Igor Koruga is here with us... but not quite so, since his speech still feels somehow not his own. "That's why I want to start a revolution. But this revolution it won't be televised, it won't be on the internet, it won't be an app available on your iphone. You won't be able to download it. This will be the revolution of thinking for yourself, of having your own opinion and not giving a damn of what people say." And gradually it becomes certain that it is not his own. He only has a mouth and a gesture. On the screen, gradually, the face and hands of Madonna take shape. The final words that we hear about art and revolution have been hers. Igor takes the chair off the stage.

And here there is the first longer, sudden moment of not seeing Igor Koruga on the treadmill, but rather on a video clip on the wall. Self-made, he has captured his image in an awkwardly intimate moment. We see a low quality video on an unusually big screen for that purpose. The colours are pale. The angle is wrong. The space is

either a non-photogenic kitchen or bed or bathroom or living room, or something else. We really do not know since what we see is a collage of video selfies where the face takes up most of the shot. It is a series of efforts to start a conversation with a simple question: “Can I ask you? May be you will let me ask you? I ask myself... I am Igor Koruga and I am a choreographer. I can’t... No, I can’t ask that! I don’t understand how can they expect me not to question?”

Lights change. The treadmill has started running again. Igor Koruga takes his place on it again. He walks in a somehow neutral way. He says, “Let’s talk about my life now. I am an artist. I am a promising young artist in the field of performing arts.” This time he is enumerating the elements of his precarity, the evidence of his nomadism, the things he needs to have by two, instead of one, since he lives in two different realities – EU and non-EU, West Europe and Ex-Yugoslavia, Germany and Serbia. Two SIM cards, two library cards, two bank accounts... two tax declaration documents... two favourite coffee cups, two favorite fish markets, two languages to communicate through, two mentalities to operate with...” He also enumerates the procedures of production, pre-conceived understandings of how a young and promising performance artist should behave “in society”. He continues walking on his treadmill. I feel this is where he is supposed to be all the time. He talks in a friendly way, as himself. In his language. Making a point that we are all cynics on a treadmill: “We all know very well what we’re doing, yet we’re doing it.” Now with every step Koruga shares insightful thoughts using heavy theoretical notions and constructions, using the frame of “with every step I recognise”. This goes into a poetic rhythmicity, transforms into beat-boxing and then dissolves into the text and melody of a cheesy, yet somehow heroic, pop song. Madonna’s *Like a Prayer*.

Here is how Igor Koruga introduces the performance: “As a hybrid choreographic performance of public speaking, dance and video, this work exposes the different kinds of popular rhetoric from the art world that nowadays reflects the conditions for art production that emerging artists continuously face. By critical and analogical questioning of the status of such rhetoric within the wider context of popular culture, the aim of this work is to publicly analyse a general popularised image of the artist within society nowadays and the space of his (non-) act of politically within it. On a formal plain, this work also analyses choreography within the sphere of immaterial form – language – producing the “language choreography” as an extended form of stage expression.”

Multiple split

Throughout the three times I saw *Streamlined* it was strangely the same and not. Of course, this can be seen as the obligatory quality attributed to every live art event that while following a structure it remains the same, but due to being live and connected to the ever changing present moment, it is different. However here

I want to rather focus on a very strong double vision that the performance produces. There is one image that appears on the level of understanding what the performer is stating, and another one on the level of negotiating with yourself what kind of reaction/affect it produces in you. And if the first level is rather clear and stable, the second level experiences many permutations.

I perceived several performative gestures as clear and stable. For example, the fact that the topic of the young performer's precarity is rendered in a solo piece thus amplifies the ever-changing living and production conditions which do not allow for constellating bigger companies or longer relationships. One can only rely on oneself, and this is also not always reliable, since being one often makes you too alone.

Then there's the treadmill as the single active element on stage which, apart from giving the piece its Serbian title (*On The Track*), functions between an obvious symbol of the oppressive stress of social expectations and a very loyal operative partner that gives the performer's body real things to do and so keeps his body streamlined not solely on a symbolic level.

On the level of the text, the "language choreography" verbalises so many of the recognisable fears, paradoxes and wounds of a contemporary performer. It does so through texts that while sounding very intimate also come across as presentational and manifesto-like. All these have their registers shifting between phrases that are both very subjective and very theoretical. The tone is a mixture between blaming, complaining, mocking and criticising. It is a collage of original and ready-made texts. Often the margin between these is indiscernible. The rhythmic patterns are intense. They communicate very much on an emotional level. Their inner movement may be seen both as attacking and defending, thus creating a situation in which we can perceive a subject on stage who is vulnerable and yet beyond vulnerability.

There is this one statement towards the end of the piece that feels like the official message of the author. It is the claim that "we are all cynics on a treadmill." We, who at that moment are sharing space as performer and audience, are all cynics along with Madonna and Marina. Quoting Slavoj Žižek, Koruga says: "We all know very well what we're doing, yet we're doing it."

This is where suddenly the clarity of messages splits into two and I wonder if it is because it is the first time the address towards the audience feels direct, immediate. Somehow, for the first time, this clarity of symbols that builds the performance starts to coexist with an actual happening. An act of recognising the audience in the space. I wonder if it is the force of the act of blaming that creates the moment. Or it is the power of mobilization? A mobilization that appears when suddenly awakened by aggression, directed towards you. Or, is it the force of dissent? A sudden disagreement is aroused. A determined lack of readiness to find yourself labelled when no one has checked with you how you feel about that label.

"Who are you to tell me who I am? I am here for you, not for you to put labels on me. This is not how I understand tonight!" This is one of the lines of thought that pops up in my mind. It is at this moment when I realise I am following two thoughts.

The second is still dealing with the clarity of the artistic gestures – “I see. This is a critique. Not only towards me. He also includes himself. This is an insight that should enlighten me. I should see myself as enlightened now.”

But here a second split is produced between the clarity of the gesture and the question I have towards myself: “Am I enlightened now? Isn’t this an understanding that exists in my consciousness most of the time? Is it an understanding that has been pestering me but also one that had motivated me to observe most of my actions and negotiate with myself to what extent to go with the flow or to oppose?”

These two splits are enough to retroactively make me realise that there was a long second line all throughout the performance. A constant activity of me doubting, taking a decision and then letting go. Sometimes, it was a very satisfactory procedure of letting go of a ghost of fear or a ghost of shame. In other times, an unsatisfactory situation of unfulfilled promises.

Inclusive cynicism

I will try to go a bit out of this inner streamlining and come back to the matter of the performance, which in the course of watching and dealing with the performance has become very substantial for me. I see this as an outcome of me finding it easy to identify myself with the author. And here is where I can grasp another split – what kind of substance does this performance create for those who do not share the same professional field? Is there in the performance a substance of inclusion, a substance that makes them knowledgeable, or on the contrary, a substance that makes them feel as outsiders? In other words, I wonder if I experience this substance as complex enough to keep me engaged for over a year with taking a decision on whether I agree or not; what did I appreciate and what did I not; in this respect, I perceive it as transformational substance. Yet, is the performance *Streamlined* able to create such an intense experience for those who do not share the lifestyle of Igor Koruga?

The Critical Practice: Made in Yugoslavia group participated in a student conference, organised by students from The Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in Giessen, Germany in February 2016. It bore the title, “YES CONFERENCE” In a collaborative presentation on our common work, we focused on two performance strategies that we had observed and discussed together: irony and cynicism. We had come up with theoretical constructs and references for both of them, which can be found in texts especially dedicated to them in this book. There was however one speculation that was mostly written for the purposes of the conference. Here I quote:

🍷🍷 After we managed to come up with these abstractions from intuitions, observations and concerns we had while watching performances, we decided to go back and speculate on what brought these performances to be acting as cynical or ironic. We said yes to the possibility that they may have consciously used

tools of irony and cynicism to build their performances but may have not really consciously built a cynical or ironical performance.

Let's accept that both types of performances aim at critiquing the production modes in which they were created and are expected to exist.

In this speculation, logic dictates that a fallacy leading to the ironical behaviour of a performance is the one in which the makers allow themselves to lose control; cynicism is the mode of fallacy in which the makers cannot help but save themselves from losing control.

So it is the ironic strategy of becoming a fool and opening up to failure that allows for some responsibility to be given to the audience, thus creating the potentiality for change, for interaction, for transmission, and most of all for critical thinking.

While the cynical strategy is the one that constantly stays 'in the know' it claims power by skilfully keeping all possibilities of reaction and movements of thought under control. The cynical strategy becomes the one that takes away the chance to share responsibility and leaves the makers alone – even powerless – to produce immediate change or genuine impetus of critical thinking in the audience.

This is our speculation on how a performance that had at its core the understanding of the system and the aim to bring it into visibility in order to contribute to its transformation, can end as either ironical or cynical, potentially leading to the audience's critical engagement, or leaving them into a mode of passive perception.

One of the reactions to this claim, from the participants of the conference, was that the times of irony have come to an end; irony has presented itself as too soft a strategy and only through the firmness of cynicism can we really advance in challenging the stability of the status quo.

But let's go back to the first split – what does it mean to be addressed as a cynic? Upon hearing: "All of us who perform for politicians, all of us who perform on the openings of hotels and shopping malls, all of us who occasionally flirt with advertising, all of us who conquer abandoned public buildings via the CNN, all of us who organise revolutions on Apple machines and on Facebook, all of us who took credit in a bank. We are all cynics on a treadmill." do I as an audience member immediately put myself in the role I have been given? What does this role give me as audience member? What does this role give the performer? Is there a next step that is waiting for me to be undertaken together with the performer once I find myself in the same role as him? Is this only a constatation? Is it a game in which if I accept to take the role of the cynic I will finally find myself somewhere I had never been before? Why is this statement making me frozen rather than agile? Am I given a choice or an ultimatum? Is freedom of choice a luxury? Am I pushed to find myself in a non-luxurious position? Maybe in a position of deprivation? If so, do I feel abused or empowered?

The opening

It has been ten months since I last saw *Streamlined* and seven since I started to write about it. These months have been more and more intense in terms of the world's situation and how our expectations of agency are constituted within it. Our precarity gradually makes its own split. In comparison to the thousands of displaced people seeking for stability through days of walking and then months of waiting in institutions that are not able to cope with the pace of the events, the contemporary performance artists find themselves rather stable in their instability. On the other hand, looking into the parallel intensification of terror - inducing acts that put under question the social value of culture and public commons - we are even more unstable.

I do not know how these circumstances have affected Igor Koruga's understanding of cynicism. I know I will ask him when I meet him again. If I can see it through the lens he offers in *Streamlined*, I would say that at the moment our cynicism has grown immensely. But, since I couldn't identify with the position of the cynic in first place, I would rather want to think that our knowledge of what is going on - and our participation in the process - keeps informing how we experiment with new strategies that are still open and elusive. All of this is happening at a streamlined pace.

There is also another opening that I want to keep in this text, before I close it.

As I mentioned, I had seen the performance three times and each added to the previous one new layers to my understanding of it. In Belgrade, when I saw it for a third time, it opened up a new topic of debate. Or rather shifted a perspective. The most prominent part of the piece was neither the vulnerability and precarisation of the contemporary performance artist nor the heavy social responsibility that I should accept or not, but an open question:

Are we witnesses of an evolution of the Pop Star that places her/them in a position that she/they can truthfully replace (the role of) the Artist in the Society?



SICK MANAGEMENT INTRO

Dear Stina,

A few years ago a friend of mine made an interview with me about the creative process of writing poetry, because I'm writing poetry, though I'm not a poet and I don't consider myself a poet. She knows, she's a psychologist. One question she refrained from asking – because it is commonplace, though I'm sure that once in his/her life everybody has answered it already – was: What do you think, can you draw inspiration from a neutral state of mind, or do you need “negative” energy? What I mean is, isn't it different from when you're content – can't you be any happier?

Reading your text “Sick Management” reminds me of poetry, where the creative process is not institutionalised because you don't need an institution where you can practice in contrast to theatre. Though, when you decide upon publishing you will be definitely in touch with the system, which will take care of your intellectual property. You still don't have to be institutionalised, but your property will be.

Because I was facing depression during that time, I can surely say that sometimes those bloody bastard things and thoughts could be really impressive, so yes, you can find pleasure in them. But, I'm pretty sure that on the other hand you can hardly find any leisure in it or without knowing if it will be contaminated, by the depression, by the sickness.

If you belong to an institution as a creator (actor, dancer, director, choreographer etc.), you don't have to pay attention to the capitalist part that makes itself available to you, even though it will be the one to tell you what to do and when. It will manage your time and in exchange you can manage your free time.

Trying to avoid being naive, or annoying, what I'd like to say is why I wrote this reflection on your text, "Sick Management". I won't manage to write a proper introduction you deserve. Is creativity and creating one and the same thing? Creativity can find its way in creation under certain circumstances. But what are these circumstances? What if they make me sick and unable to write, even to write poetry?

But if you, as an individual out-of-the-system-creator (but, do not say outsider) tries to make a living, it is impossible to not to be a single system, named guilt. Is it a guilty decision? Is that the question your text asks from me? Can contemporary creators really become self-abased after a long self-paced method, but not self-based? I don't know. On what does the outcome depend? Is it the real weight of the power structures of individualisation, and/or of the mono- and ego-polisation? Or is it the load of recognising its superficiality?

All the best,

Kristóf Farkas

SICK MANAGEMENT

My name is Stina Nyberg and I have pretty bad eye sight. My hearing's bad on my right ear too and inside of it is a wound that keeps on bleeding because I scratch it. I have a slight scoliosis, which means that my spine is making a curve in the wrong place, and one of my legs is longer than the other. I have rosacea, a skin disease that makes my face blush when I get hot or cold or drink red wine or do anything else that might upset my face. Every now and then the pH status of my vagina gets out of balance and then it starts to smell pretty bad. I have a phobia of seeing blood. I am most afraid in the cinema and particularly if it includes slow violence against genitals. I faint real quick if that happens. I have a low blood pressure. I still wear braces on the inside of my upper teeth.

This is me and some of my flaws. Here I am, writing down a trail of thought about how creativity is making me sick but that maybe I don't mind. I think that I am getting a cold.

Are the days past in which the melancholic, hysterical or hypochondriac is considered artistically productive? Has creativity become such an integral part of contemporary, western, capitalist life that my individual creativity has become too big of an economic asset for me to leave it out of work? And if creativity has become the norm in my work, can sickness and disorders be interpreted as healthy symptoms?

My work as a choreographer is 50% creativity and 50% management. The thing is, usually management comes first. With management I mean all the things I do in order for the creative acts to take place within more or less paid working hours. It is the phone calls, the emails to collaborators, the writing of applications, the calculating of budgets, the reports for the unemployment agency, the reports for the funding institutions, the technical specifications for the theatres, and the presentation for the board of the touring network. All of that. However, if I do not manage to organise myself and others to set up a structure, a time and place for things to happen in an organised way, I never get to creativity. (I wonder if the other way around, starting with creativity, would simply leave me out of the economic system.) I am creative in a lot of things that I do in life, but as soon as I start to tell people about them, they tell me that I could get a grant for that. They mean well. And I buy it. And I apply for the grant. And I manage my artistic life over and over again.

The hunt for further and further creativity, the many years of investigation into methods and procedures for creating work, the strategies for more or less intuitive dancing, the doing nothing in an interesting way, the reoccurring talk about how everything I do – from talking to drinking to reproducing – is already capitalised upon and creativity is the motor that spins the wheels too fast until I will crash into the wall and get burned out. All of this. All of this. I hear this and I sometimes believe it and it makes me think harder on how to create outside of creativity as we know it, and I start to get really fed up with it. And then, the critique of criticisms of capitalism and the fear of political depression and apathy. An understanding that this description of life, a description leaving no space for something actually new to happen (and where creativity is a bad word) functions as passivity. Leaving no space for resistance. No desire for meaning. And I start to think, how can I exercise my way out of political passivity caused by obligatory creativity, by an embodied capitalism, by self-control? How to un-control myself? So I put my sweatpants on and I go to the gym. My curl-ups become a symptom of the self-controlled creativity-demand that keeps me in the realm of the potential, as a promise. I know that I can always, in all ways, get better and that I am never, ever enough. So people get fit. We get politically fit. And the artists keep working. I, the choreographer, keep working. I choreograph a movement therapy against passivity. I construct a somatic practice for materialising emotions. I make deskercise for workers. I am creative, nevertheless, and I also know how to be critical to creativity, so I am a bit cynical. But I am also funded, because being critical and creative is rewarded and state supported. So I am fine, really, I have an apartment, a partner and vacations that are not paid but that are for free. Because I have a friend in Barcelona.

It is from this point that I keep on writing, hoping that I will write myself out of the frames of what I already know. And through movement therapy and critical reflection I realise that being sick is completely normal. It is simply the most reasonable reaction to the current state of being. I think, well, if the current state of society is disturbed then maybe being sick is a sign of health? Maybe sickness is as a means out of society as we know it? And I look at myself and others with our diseases and illnesses and laziness and symptoms and try to think that here, in the unfit, I can rest.

And I rest for a few minutes, finding a distant comfort in the outsider's nest.

But I get disturbed by the unsettling feeling of being far too well to have any idea about how it really feels to be sick. There is nothing romantic in being ill, nothing cool in being sick. Being sick hurts, sometimes it even kills, and besides that, other people find you really disgusting. There is no social acceptance of bodily fluids flowing from places where they ought to be contained. And inside, somewhere inside, there is a small doubt that there is something bizarre in this turnaround.

There is something bizarre in spending so much hard work to get to the point where I can be creative, only to get tired of serving a constant demand of creativity and turn away from it only to find myself rather uncomfortably joining the laziness praise. Is being sick really a comfortable place to be in? Sure, no creativity is expected in that place (there is nothing inventive or creative that can be capitalized upon), no potential (you are not a promise of a future to come), and no self-control (because the cancer controls you), but is anything expected at all? Besides what it is *not*, what is it?

I find myself again, following the line through a long history, balancing myself on a dichotomy between polarised zones. The sick and the healthy. The active and the passive. The productive and the consumptive. And when the demand for compulsory health, for potential, wellness and fitness, becomes too much for me, from my critical viewpoint all I can see is the *other* side, sickness. I am only able to see from the position of the already well. But we are not born healthy, we become healthy. Being healthy is not a natural state from which we fall in despair or distance ourselves from with the help of critique. We were not healthy then and we are not sick now.

I will try to think about what is already here. The sick *and* the healthy and all the messy zones of allergy and common cold, of having concentration disorders and procrastinating. Susan Sontag says that the kingdom of sickness is a place where all of us go. To be healthy seem to no longer be defined through the absence of illness but as a constant project of self-improvement. When health becomes a matter of cultivating the body, an activity of producing a self that can always become better and where only I myself can say if I am good enough, I will never be fully healthy. And yet there is no one to blame but myself. Am I sure I am my best self? Could I not become even better, healthier, stronger? Or, just more at ease? To be un-sick is different than being healthy. The kingdom of sickness is a socially constructed monarchy.

There was a time when the tubercular was a public intellectual. When a hint of hypochondria was a suitable male accessory and when melancholic women made marvellous paintings “discovered” years later. There was a time when girls invented anorexia as a pretext for leisure, and for dismissing bourgeois obligations in order to live only for one’s art. A diet provides an elaborate system of self-control, a constant search for well-being and personal improvement when living as a prospect. This is a time when culture-workers run fast. Keeping up to speed with short (but not very disruptive) outbursts of crisis until they hit the wall. Burned out. My work as a choreographer is 50% health and 50% sickness.

The creative person used to be sick. At least the rich and reasonably acknowledged one. She used to sit in bed and paint with water colour, be a gentleman with hypochondria or a bohemian know-it-all with clay on her fingers.

Now, the creative person is fit. At least the rich and reasonably acknowledged one. I want my free time back. I want the activities that happen outside of work to never be able to become work. My free time will not fit into your project. My sit-ups will not make me stronger for your production. But you will also not stop me from enjoying them, neither my free time nor my sit-ups, because they are mine to share with whom I want. Regardless of how creative your project is organised around my free time, I will not succumb. My morning run will never reach the deadline and it will never be an interesting process. And if I can't get my free time back, if we cannot any longer draw the line between work and leisure time in order to safeguard creativity from work, I want to reclaim creativity. Can we reclaim creativity from the stigma of the unpaid, autodidact, home craft artist as well as the managerial life of the entrepreneur? Can I dare to be creative and avoid being it for its own sake? I do not want to get cred for being creative, neither do I want to avoid creating, I just want creativity back.

If you have a job with a creativity demand you should call in sick. And if you can't have leisure time because you do not have any work to have leisure from, or a work without work hours, just call anyone else and tell them you are sick today. Call your teacher, call your employer, call the union, call your kids, call the unemployment agency, call the theatre, call the church, call your dog and tell them that it is free to roam the streets. Sorry, today you are sick and you are not planning on getting any better within a foreseeable future. Stop trying to cure anything, stop trying to curate anything. Stop calling to order the disorders of the psyche. Stop managing your creativity. Call me and tell me that you will not manage your time because you are suffering from creativity, and in a bad way.

THE (ARTISTIC) PRIVILEGE OF PUBLIC SPEECH? A Conversation with Ana Vujanović ^{INTRO}

A critical thinker is not necessarily a critic, although to be a critic definitely requires some critical thinking. I don't want to put labels on critics since I write criticism, nor do I want to put them in boxes, but in the way they are watching and thinking about a performance you can always differentiate two major attitudes; never in their whole purity, but of course in some wholesome mixture, sometimes in the name of *aurea mediocritas* itself. Where borders melt into each other, this artificial act is performed often just to be digestible. (But the saying, "The middle is better in every business" maybe isn't that adequate in *this* "business", especially when we talk about Central Europe.)

What I mean is that when I separate the critics who are more performatively sensitive from the other ones who are more socially sensitive, we can draw a distinction between a socially sensitive performance and a performatively sensitive society. In the first, I talk about critics who talk and write about a performance, and in the second about critical thinkers, who "make the work of theory public and visible" for society. But as I said, never in its whole purity.

Ana Vujanović – researcher, writer, lecturer, dramaturge, curator – interviewed by Ida Daniels, is a two-way-thinker for me. Reading through her answers in the next few pages written for the purpose of the performance *On Trial Together* in Offenbach – in which she was not only a collaborator, but a participating performer – the reader will see what it means to not be directly, definitively descriptive, but participative and slightly performatively prescriptive, moreover socially "scriptive", where through social observation you can form an opinion on how things prompt, structure and choreograph behaviour. And you can also read about us, the second cycle of the programme *Critical Practice: Made in Yugoslavia*, who had the chance to write this book you hold.

Kristóf Farkas



THE (ARTISTIC) PRIVILEGE OF PUBLIC SPEECH? A Conversation with Ana Vujanović

On Trial Together is a hybrid between choreography, social game and happening that raises the questions of what is the theatre and what is choreography. This is how the authors, *Sasa Asentić* and *Ana Vujanović*, introduce the piece.

I meet only one of them for this talk - Ana Vujanović. I wanted to know about the dramaturgy of the piece, about the initial interest to create such a performance, and how it considers the audience on one side as the main participant/actor/agent and on the other as the main platform/territory/field where the action of the piece is taking place. What is it that makes such an approach valuable?

I also want to know more about how Ana Vujanović sees the different aspects of critical practice in her own practice. I once heard her describe herself as someone who has “played both social roles – a subversive intellectual and a critical academic”. In *On Trial Together* she transposes herself in a theatrical framework, keeping both of these roles in action. At the same time, she is sharpening them through a self-referential Brechtian gesture, that is, wearing her own self as a stylised mask in front of the audience. For the duration of the performance she knows only what she can know as the one Ana Vujanović that exists in the dramaturgical framework of this particular performance. Here, in my eyes, she adds a third role – that of the playful performer.

On Trial Together is one of the performances selected for German Dance Platform that took part in Frankfurt and other cities in the Hessen region in March 2016. The audience first had to find a building belonging to the electricity company in the city of Offenbach. They then had to wait until everyone had arrived. While waiting, a sentence on a poster could be read: “Every dance of the future is everything else but dance. Ana Vujanović.” It was reminiscent of something in between a propaganda slogan in a factory and a fancy inscription in a restaurant toilet. The space felt vast. We, the audience, couldn’t find any seats, so we naturally grouped together in anticipation. Two people climbed up the tribune and started talking to us. In English. In a specific accent. They were wearing white wigs – as if coming from the time of Mozart; as if coming from some criminal justice court.

They read a fictional dialogue between a man and a woman that had supposedly happened a few minutes earlier, which was continuing in the background as they were reading it. It was imaginable that if these people existed they could have been two of us. One of their thoughts matched one of mine: “Do you think there are people from Offenbach here? Like, real people?”

They then invited us to choose a place in the space: The Collective Intelligence test, The Other activities for the Others, or the Amusement Park. We made our choices and the Offenbach episode of *On Trial Together* began.

Ida Daniel : Ana, I will start this conversation from a small material detail. On the photos from the previous episodes of *On Trial Together* the setting seems different and you definitely didn't have white wigs. These wigs struck me in the context of some of the things you were touching upon in the performance, namely, dance, future, community. The image of the wigs totally sent me thinking of *Sequel for the Future* by Willi Prager and Sonja Pregrad. They had their crazy moment of wearing white wigs. I had to ask myself, do you somehow get into a dialogue with their gesture or it is something that is in the air now? When we talk about the future of dance, do we in fact first need to go even further back in the past, so far back that we of today are that past's far-future?

Ana Vujanović : It is interesting what you are saying about the wigs, but our idea was to fictionalize the event in a trashy way. We went back to the 18th century; the wigs are from the mid-18th century. And everything is from there - the setting, and so on.

We have three types of spaces. Of course, our set design is not realistic; it is much more Brechtian or like Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. We reference a court, a street and a coffee house. All three belong to the public sphere of the 18th century in Great Britain, France and Germany. This period is interesting for us because at that time we still had monarchies and also the rising middle class or the so-called bourgeoisie. And, also, there was the beginning of a public sphere with a free press and coffee houses which were kind of egalitarian places where people could meet. And, of course, it was not ideal but, from my perspective, there was the possibility of conquering some freedoms of transparency and democratisation, which we missed, historically speaking. And that is why when I speak about, for instance, the German dance scene of today, and also other dance scenes like the Serbian one, I say that, instead of egalitarian communities, we still have intrigues and power games. So the 18th century wigs and setting were actually going back to that missed opportunity.

ID : How do you work on the new episodes of the performance? How do you decide what to keep and what to change?

AV : First of all, there is a formal interest in theatre, if *On Trial...* can be considered theatre at all. That is a kind of question that I am interested in. With our local collaborators, who are cultural workers like us, we discuss social situations, serious social issues, and problems of the moment that we put in three acts.

The central one is called “Up and down with people’s/workers’ self management.” Here we are looking into situations where mass gatherings of people could make a change, while in reality it had become difficult. For example, we had a strike of public transportation workers for the New York episode, then for another episode we had workers of a factory in Serbia that was privatised but workers strived against privatisation and managed to keep it a self-managed factory. At BITEF festival it was about floods; in Slovenia about refugees from the Middle East and volunteers and camps. In this part, we are generally interested in how people can self-organise and self-manage, and with our local collaborators we try to figure out which current situation is interesting to be discussed or about which group of people have something to say. Or, we find a situation that in reality excludes us, the ordinary people.

Act two is also usually quite different from the one you saw at the German Dance Platform. It is called, “The test of collective intelligence”. The material is always a political speech from the local context, which is kind of well known, so everyone has an opinion about it. But then there is always something controversial in the speech and at the end nobody knows what was said exactly. We perform speech. In Serbia we dealt with one very controversial speech of Slobodan Milošević; in New York it was with a speech of George W. Bush before they attacked Iraq; in Athens it was a George Papandreou speech about Troika; in Berlin it was an Angela Merkel speech about multiculturalism. During these parts we want to transform public opinions. Something like, “OK, we all know Slobodan Milošević and that he was an asshole and that the speech he gave in 1989 in Kosovo was terribly nationalistic. But OK, let’s try to listen to the speech and see what was nationalistic, what is nationalistic and how the context transformed it.” So that is the point of that.

ID : So it is a process of turning opinions into arguments.

AV : Yes, also. Insisting on the facts of what was said. But through arguments and public reasoning you come to public opinion, because more often than not public opinion is based on hearsay and prejudice.

ID : You have mentioned that there is a big difference between all the versions of *On Trial Together* in different places around the world and the one you created for the German Dance Platform in Offenbach. We have also already pointed out the reference you were making with the missed opportunities of the mid-18th century.

You are clearly drawing a parallel to the missed opportunities in German and other European dance communities today. How did the audience in Offenbach influence the “Collective Intelligence Test” part?

AV: It was important for us to find an issue that could create a situation for actual critical practice tailored to the audience we were expecting. We knew that on all four showings we would only have people connected to dance. We had the names of the audience based on lists of accreditation some time before the festival. We had started the usual local research on Offenbach but afterwards we came to realise that there would be no audience from the local community, so I stopped the research. I said I do not want to have a performance that deals with Offenbach for this audience. I didn’t want that situation of feeling good, this cool thing of going to Offenbach, talking about *Gastarbeiters* [‘guest workers’ invited from abroad by the German state to work in Germany –Ed.] and believing we do something good for these people not having them in the audience.

For the “Collective Intelligence Test” and the other parts, it became a very big problem for me to work on them because there isn’t any kind of context or concern that gathers us together. The people that belong to the dance world are very different – they are students, some artists, who are leftist, then there is the Goethe Institute – all different perspectives.

My starting point was that the dance community is not a community, there is not any kind of “communitas” that can change anything. There is competition and intrigue when I observe the German Dance scene, as well as private connections, power games, and “who’s who”.

ID: Another difference I can see is that the speech you presented in Offenbach for us to discuss through facts and argumentation was not well known. It was more of a hidden, even mysterious, document.

AV: Yes, we played with this, that there are many hidden things we need to discover, that we need to know about. But the fact is that the German Dance scene in the late 1920s was so disunited and fragmented, that they never managed to make this document, the manifesto. I completely invented that.

ID: Yeah! I was sure!

AV: But the text is also not something that I wrote. It is a Habermas text about public sphere and then I only changed what was necessary to be replaced. When he says “democratic public sphere”, I say German Dance Scene. For me it was an experiment that revealed what the German Dance Scene is not.

ID : For me it was really interesting to see how people who have no connection to the problematics of the dance scene at first had even an aggressive reaction towards the text, towards its complexity, the specific topic, the fact that it was only in English. They then gradually developed an interest and curiosity, and some even developed understanding and sympathy for the working conditions that are discussed in the text, while others gave it a chance by staying until they could say, “No, we are not interested at all.”

AV : It was also interesting for me but I also struggle as a moderator.

ID : And how about the third act?

AV : The third act is called “The Others”. All three acts are based on simulations and games that come from the military service and business sector. This one, especially, is based on a simulation that was used by the American army in the 70s and now as preparation for missions in foreign countries. As a plot I usually take Fassbinder’s play “Katzelmacher”. It is a very smart play that shows the chains of stigmatisation in society. We usually do this part with two groups. This time we had four. And usually these are two locally based marginalised groups but they do not share the same vision of society. They are not necessarily enemies but they are not compatible, for instance, Albanian workers in Serbia and the LGBT community organising a gay pride. Sometimes, from that insinuation they really develop some kind of negative attitudes towards each other. Sometimes, people break the simulation and they go for transparency. The groups build their own identities but they have to learn about others without revealing too much about themselves. So these are our three concerns and through these lenses we do research of the local context. For the German Dance Platform though it was not about marginalised groups but about different interest groups. How they see each other and how they can collaborate with each other. We had, for instance, students of choreography and dance heritage, union of professional dancers and choreographers, cultural activists and curators. They had different tasks and we wanted to see how they can communicate.

ID : At the exit you made us take a vote on our expectations of change from the performance. Did you observe in any other way the behaviour of the audience or of their impressions?

AV : We do not document anything. It is not a serious social experiment. It is not a research. It is just an artistic performance so I can give you my impressions but my impressions only come from moderating one small part of the performance. I am not a big fan of documenting everything and apart from that we don’t have money for documentation.

ID : It is an interesting situation because in that way the performance, which in fact gives a lot of opportunity to turn the audience into observed participants, doesn't aim for results in terms of statistics but sees everything through the prism of personal experience.

AV : That is why we do not have a big conclusion at the end.

ID : In the first part that you were moderating you insisted on facts, and in the second part you were surprisingly but very seriously selling rumours... was this coincidence? Is there a specific connection you are looking into?

AV : It is not a coincidence. I used rumours and gossip to frame the speech in that first part. I explained that I had discovered the document through the lover of Mary Wigman, who was also lover of Mara Magazinovic. In this way I think the whole speech, the manifesto and the discussion about the manifesto should point at the lack of such an egalitarian discussion in public; a discussion that is free and where people in the dance scene are not afraid of consequences. And that is why a logical continuation of showing all that is missing is to turn to the usual activities like selling and buying- of rumors, which is how we who participate in the contemporary dance scene operate.

ID : Everywhere?

AV : I cannot say everywhere. I can say yes in Serbia, and especially yes in Germany. In Serbia maybe we have other specificities. For instance, you need to be a member of a political party if you want to have good career, or you need to sleep with someone in order to have good position. In Germany, I do not see these as main principles but as rumors and gossip they are very powerful.

ID : When you started insisting on us looking into the speech and what it is actually saying, I had to think of that line by Brecht that says something like, "Only if we see reality as pieces of facts, we can change that reality."

AV : This is interesting. I didn't know that line but for sure I try to foster a kind of materialist approach to this speech. Not to jump immediately into conclusions such as I like it or I do not like it, or it is this, but what does it say?;, what does it really say, do we hear what is said to us?

ID : So you were saying that from this understanding you expect opinions to change into public opinion. Do you think that other changes can take place? Or must take place?

AV : I think it is struggle against prejudice, and is also struggle against rumours, hearsay and gossip. What is also important for me is that it should show a need or a benefit from collective thinking.

ID : How do you see the performance in the overall structure of the German Dance Scene? What is it doing to it by participating in the German Dance Platform. Educating? Questioning? How does it see itself?

AV : I am obsessed with that but I am also in a melancholic period of my life so I think that practically speaking it doesn't change anything, but I can tell you the reasons for having it in Tanz Platform.

The idea is that we as artists have the privilege of public speech and that it is our responsibility to take all possible opportunities of public speech to say what we think we should say. That was my reasoning behind that idea.

I heard that for many people it was a very controversial piece. I also know some very negative reactions. And we really raised anger in the Goethe Institute people – it was almost funny, I have never experienced that amount of aggression towards me. There were also many positive reactions. So, it is definitely controversial but I am not interested in that spectacular controversy like in reality shows. I think it is good that we can ask ourselves if work with social choreography can be considered choreography and dance - that is the main issue for me. The other issue is connected to what I said about the opportunity and responsibility of public speech. This performance is an act of critical practice for me. It is not a lovely piece, it is not pleasant or pleasing, nor is it nice.

Maybe one more hope is to think about the case in which there is no representation. You can see this in "The Others" or "The Amusement Park". Can we still think about theatre then? I also like representative performances. I like to sit in the audience and watch. I am also not crazy about participatory performances, but this was a question Sasa and I wanted to raise. There are a lot of problems in political life in representative democracy and I think these two things overlap. We have the same comfortable positions in representative theatre and in representative democracy and maybe we share the problems, and that is something I want to open up – to be in the chaos and in the uncomfortable and awkward position in a theatre without representation.

ID : This performance is made to achieve some kind of change in times when change is unpredictable. When you sit in the room with other audience members where in fact together you are the participants, you can feel that there is some expectation that something will change somewhere in the room, that something will happen. But there is no way to know what will happen. In fact, for sure, there will be a lot of different changes that will take place. And that whole situation gets

me back to how I feel of the world at the moment. It is not that nothing changes. It is that everything changes, all the time and we have no clue in what direction that change goes.

AV : Since there are several groups there are several fields of possibilities that something could change and usually if something extraordinary happens in the performance it happens in only one of the groups. And then it is either contagious and it affects all the groups or it stops the performance.

ID : Stops the performance? Did you really have such a situation?

AV : Yes, we had some people who took it over. It was very interesting because in the Collective Intelligence Test in Belgrade we played a lot with Serbian nationalism. The main figure was Serbian prime-minister Aleksandar Vučić and he was a bit fictionalised into the chef of the national kitchen. When we had the floods two years ago, Vučić came there and said to the people: “Now you continue working and every three-four days I will be back to see how you are...” Then he left and never got back. In the performance the performer said: “Now you should come here and start cooking and every three minutes I will be back!” Then she left and never came back. People were wondering if she would return and then they made a party, during which they over-identified with Serbian nationalists and started conquering other spaces, shouting: “Big Serbia!” They got really wild and started abusing other groups, disturbing the other people, destroying their talks, and then we had to decide to stop. It was interesting. Many people left because they were terrified with these guys, which was also interesting to me. But at that moment we had to stop.

ID : I know you as a researcher, a critical thinker and a writer, and here you are as a researcher and also a performer. I am wondering how you feel in the position of the one that will be potentially criticised?

AV : I started with lecture performances maybe before I became a theorist. *Walking Theory* started with a group lecture performance, a theoretical performance...

But I do not have any artistic pretensions in performing. My career is in theory and that is my love, the main thing I am interested in. With art, it is not about liking it or not. It is about claiming art. I can be on stage and we are all on stage. I think theatre today is not a public space and is not a public forum and we still have the question of virtuosity and representation, and I am not so much interested in that. For me the stage should be there but the people who are making the performance could be on the stage and discuss something, or say something. That is how I see it. My interest in performance comes from my

interest in theory and the wish to make the work of theory public and visible. So it is not a bodiless creature that lives in Academia that does research but it is me, and you can see me, and I can say something to you....

ID : Does criticism affect you?

AV : It can affect me but it depends on what is judged. There is a lot of very relevant criticism that speaks about what I just said, but if it judges the virtuosity of the moderator, I think, it will be irrelevant. We do not have professional moderators but cultural workers who stand behind what we do. So if someone would judge our virtuosity it is like criticising Duchamp's *Fountain* for not having enough beautiful white curves. But sometimes we get very good criticism – and it means a lot to me.

ID : When we spoke about this conversation initially you warned me that we should be careful not to make a recipe out of it. But I want to know what your recipe is for Critical Practice.

AV : Ah, my recipe. My recipe. OK! ...Since I come from where I come from I have very strong political and ideological standpoints and that is something that I cannot get rid of even if I would like to. On the other hand, I am also curious and never lazy to learn a lot about things that I do not like. I can really go deep into things I do not like. And I react quite often from the perspective of these standpoints that I have always with me. So being critical maybe means that you are not completely open to everything. I would say that there is no big difference in criticising something and confirming simultaneously something else. Karl Popper, philosopher of science, once said that when we criticize a hypothesis this means that we already have another one up our sleeves. And I think that just because I have this unusual life experience from former Yugoslavia and these political and ideological standpoints I am not able to accept everything. That is maybe the main mechanism of my criticism.

On the other hand, I think I am also not that interested in being accepted, so I have no problem of speaking against everyone at a conference. To just stand up and disagree with everyone. And even if they want to swallow me after that, I can stand it. I am not afraid of breaking the consensus.

I am much more interested in the discursive situation than the consensus, and that is why I would stand up and speak. For instance, if there are ten of us and an asshole starts promoting fascistic ideas, and maybe many people are just saying, "OK. Who gives a shit, I do not want to confront." But for me, all ten of us share responsibility of who occupies the discourse and because of that I will speak up and I wouldn't think too much about myself.

ID : You say you would readily break a consensus. Does this mean that consensus is something you do not accept based on that specific background you have? Or would it depend on the type of consensus?

AV : It is very difficult to achieve consensus and that is why I am very doubtful about that. But maybe some consensus I can accept, as a working mode. If you want to do something at a certain moment you have to define things and take it as a point of departure. So I do not have a very clear perspective on that, nor very radical. But for me what are most dangerous are tacit consensuses. The consensuses that are not discussed.

ID : So your recipe is: Be aware of your own hypothesis!

AV : Yes, definitely. I do not believe in objective, mutual and transcendental criticism.

ID : Being aware of your own hypothesis, do you want to make other people aware of it or do you want to convert them into followers of the same hypothesis?

AV : That is a very interesting question. Yes, I do it at least for the sake of debate. And to make the hypothesis I stand behind a part of the public discourse.

ID : So your efforts will not go into making sure that everyone agrees with you?

AV : No, I even sometimes like to be challenged. If people are sharp and have interesting thoughts and good argumentation they can also help you understand your own thoughts: "Maybe I was wrong, maybe this is really better." I am also not stubborn.

ID : Now that you have already spent time with the first two groups of participants in Critical Practice (Made in Yugoslavia) and you have already met the third group, do you feel that being a mentor to us changed you in some way, or provoked you, or sharpened you?

AV : It is exciting to me to work on that programme. Especially since the participants are not my friends. They are not the people with whom I am used to discussing things. I like fresh thoughts coming from different frameworks and backgrounds. It is important for me that CP is an extra-academic programme. When Marijana and Biljana invited me to write the programme structure I worked temporarily at the university, where there was a very strict framework. I thought it would be very nice to go back to some kind of independent framework which is not that hierarchical.

Now when I look into how we actually do that, I think that we are all influenced by the framework of the project which is very different from the framework of the university. But on the other hand, it is that it is not without any framework. And it is not so independent. I used to work for these types of programmes, many times, too many. It was five-ten years ago. I am now aging and wish to understand that new generations are coming, and also people from Western Europe are joining, who really have different backgrounds and mindsets. So back in the days, I never had this, “Aha, we are framed by the project”, and here I experience it more. The other thing is that the time has changed – I would maybe experiment more with that in the project.

But what I like about the project is that it is loose. It is not very strict, it is not that we need to do something every week. So I think if it is loose and there are people who are interested in and curious, and who are really willing to develop their critical practices then there are all kinds of organic dynamics that I like. All of us are on and off but that is interesting. I am interested to see the texts and I would like to do something with the texts. Apparently it doesn't go easy – but when we have them we will know what we have done apart from the talks that we had. Then I can say more – was it just one year of having new collaborators and nice people around or did we do something more far-reaching?



DANCE TO NO IDEALS INTRO

10 Steps To Diminish Cynicism In Your Person

1.

Don't mind your own business.

2.

Distinguish between what needs to be taken seriously and what doesn't. For instance, what the artist exclaims about her art is not important, whereas what is actually experienced is important.

3.

Try to nurture a belief. For instance, believe that cats are genuinely good animals and that art is not just another means of survival.

4.

Read whole works, not excerpts. It can happen you by accident choose a cynical excerpt and miss the point completely. Even smart people are not always at their smartest.

5.

When on the internet, don't scroll through the page. Imagine what would happen if Walter Benjamin would only scroll through his thoughts. Blasé much?

6.

When you are out of ideas of how to save art or how to make art that is not an indicator of a general despair. Maybe you are only tired. Come back to it another time.

7.

The sad fact that things have been done or tried out before, should not affect your persistence. Bees have to fly very fast to stay still. (If you missed the metaphore: history repeats itself in order to invite upon itself a difference.)

8.

Distinguish between your personal failure and the failure of art.

9.

Think negative and develop a bit of a saviour complex.

10.

Repeat these steps until you are out of cynical inclinations. If it doesn't work, then you weren't cynical enough in the first place.

Ana Schnabl

DANCE TO NO IDEALS

Thinking with *Sequel for the Future* / a Dance in 2043 / a Dance in 2044

In common language, irony and cynicism might be perceived as similar registers. Yet, according to Franco Bifo Berardi, the origin of this equivalence is to be found in late modernity, when the two concepts were equated although they belong to two completely different ethical positions¹. This misunderstanding results from a distorted effect of the deconstruction of belief, initiated in the 4th Century BC by the philosophical movement of Skepticism, which also constitutes the common premise of both the ironical and the cynical position. Bifo sums up Skepticism as “the suspension of judgment at the level of knowledge and the impossibility at the level of morality”². This is useful to describe irony and cynicism as rhetorical tools based on suspending an assumed fixed relationship between reality and language. Still, according to Bifo, cynicism is “a form of enunciation within a regime of disbelief” aimed at “attaining or maintaining power or at least something in complicity to power”³, while irony could emerge as a powerful tool of critique against power. Relying on Sloterdijk’s reflection, Bifo maintains that this is true especially today, where a modern form of cynicism, which has nothing to do with the refusal to bend to power that characterised Diogenes’ school, is becoming the prevailing mind-set of the average man.

As capitalism finds its way through art production and discourse, questions on what is possible, on change and on the future are continuously raised. Capitalism’s absorption mechanism blurs the boundaries between the neoliberal and the resistant, nurturing a widespread sense of ambivalence that on the one hand feeds the system and on the other risks to disempower resistance. Here, humour is often channelled into satire in the public sphere and assumes a cynical aftertaste in the private one.

The general sense of ambivalence between what is neoliberal and what is subversive didn’t spare contemporary dance and seems to bring up different responses in terms of poetics and politics. Among them, irony represents for us a particularly interesting territory of exploration because it exposes this ambivalence and also – by meaning the opposite of what is said – conveys a meaning fundamentally different from the words it uses, creating a suspension in representation.

The performance *Sequel for the future / a dance in 2043 / a dance in 2044* (2014) created and performed by Sonja Pregrad and Willy Prager, inspired us to investigate

irony as a mechanism that exposes this ambivalence and constitutes the main topic of this article, as we think together with this work, developing around the question “what is contemporary dance?” and putting concepts in brackets. The piece, we argue, operates a gap, interrupts a coherent narration and thus provokes a moment of suspension in which different directions appear as possible regarding an over-disciplined art form. This feature, which belongs to irony at large and puts it in a privileged position in comparison to other forms of humour, deserves a thorough reflection with reference to contemporary dance and critique. Here, irony is addressed mainly within the realm of humour and while satire is a form based on knowing the object of critique, irony finds its premise in a “false ignorance” of the subject matter that places critique on a different starting point. Interestingly, this suspension of knowledge characterises also cynicism and cynical humour but, according to Bifo, irony produces a potential for critique that cynicism doesn’t.

On this basis, we think together with *Sequel for the future / a dance in 2043 / a dance in 2044* and its two authors and performers. The work deals with the future of dance as an art form. The choreographers are not busy with inventing its future; instead, during the research phase, they documented dance practitioners’ statements about the status of the art form (how they choose to do dance, and ask questions around their practice’s past, present and future). In the performance, their stories become paradigms of reality, visions for potential aesthetic and geo-political alternative futures.

The piece is divided into two parts: the first deals with the future from the stand point of what already happened; meaning, the present tense of the first part is 2043. The second part begins with a slow count down into 2044, the future *per se*; meaning, to what never really had happened, but is presented in present continuous tense. Especially in the first part, *Sequel for the Future* speculates on the future of contemporary dance as fiction. It does not predict the future; it doesn’t produce knowledge about it. It experiments performatively with certain images of contemporary dance, which depict the future of dance as a form of representation from the perspective of time travellers, of voyagers presenting us with a virtual 2043, in which “everybody is a contemporary dance artist”.

The second part is extremely different from the first in its presentation, and especially in its production mechanisms, spelled out in a voice over at the end of the first part: the two performers received a surprising support of 25,000 Euros from the Berlin Senate, which was announced after the piece was already completed. The second part revolves around a “simple” presence of the body and a “neat” sense of the economy of dance movements, performed in slow motion, movements and gestures that were performed in the first part.

Throughout the whole piece, the performers act as “fools” and this general foolery is what we would like to single out here as a subversive mechanism of irony. This work inspired us to think about irony as an instrument for emptying out the medium of dance of all its representation and to thus expose its immanent

connection with institutional critique. Moreover, it triggered our reflection on the consequences of this operation, raising the question “what is left?”

The piece also offered some thoughts on the possibilities of gathering a collectivity around a notion that, devoid of representations and yet full of potentiality, opens up a shared reflection on the future of dance in order to propose an exercise of collective speculation that regards the future at large.

Speaking about institutional critique

Sequel for the Future is not a simplistic, positivistic speculation on the future of contemporary dance, but a methodological one. The performers were not sitting and talking about what will happen in the future of some dance practices, they were not transmitting or trying to convince of any information, were not future tellers or activists building an ideological framework and imperatives regarding the future of the art form. In an interview with us⁴, they described themselves as “pseudo-scientists” and stated that their research included putting dance practitioners statements in brackets. They asked two choreographers – one, who is 60 years old, who produced her crucial work in the 80’s, and another, who is active today – about their practices in the past, present and future, creating a script from their answers.

For us, the mere fact of reiteration in brackets was an ironic act installed as an instrument, which avoided the flux and coherence of representations of any knowable kind of dance, in order to interrupt it, to create a malfunction or a void in dance’s capacity to signify itself as administered art form.

For example, one of the choreographers interviewed during the research phase, prescribed dance as a manifestation of the universal law of extension, a branch in physics. “What is contemporary dance?” He said, “it does not exist. Everything is movement, as we know from the Big Bang... Everything is energy and information... To give time to things. This is choreography. Big stars cannot appear anymore... My parents said I was taking a big doll and dancing with it in 1983. I hope people will dance, not watch dance in 2043.”

Jacque Alain Miller states that the ironical persona is not a militant’s persona.⁵ The ironical persona is like Socrates, she makes the ideals of the city tremble and sway, sometimes only by placing them in reiterative quotation marks. He posits the ideal-signifiers of the city – ‘freedom’, ‘property’, ‘mother homeland’, ‘equality’ – as empty signifiers that cover unconscious pleasure. Socrates annoyed the generals by discussing about ‘courage’, and pissed off the artists by discussing about ‘beauty’, he was strange in the way he kept asking questions, says Miller, kept repeating other’s statements, did not understand anything and generally acted like an idiot.

Irony is a linguistic register difficult to prove; it can sometimes appear as simple repetition of what has been said, and it is fully dependent on the style, kind of gesture, social conventions and intonation in which it was said. Miller says: “the ironic excels in only mocking other people’s projects. First he waits for the other to speak, then he makes him stumble.” Socrates fills exactly this function of the eccentric, the one with contempt for other people’s ideals. He threatens the ideals protected by the city. Socrates himself does not appear as a subject trapped between the ideal and his drives, he is not a subject of a dilemma. He is the one who doesn’t love, the one you can’t categorise in any way. Socrates fills a nullifying function in relation to the social context because the fool’s position is not a position of a subject tortured between the ideal and pleasure.

In sum, Miller defines the position of the ironic as a “neither-nor” position, as carried out by the double negative of the two political positions that Lacan presents in Seminar 17. The fool, or leftist, indicating social values as mere semblances hiding the division of pleasure that benefits the few, and the knave, the rightist, who believes that any change is reiterative and protects the ideals of the city in order to maintain the distribution of wealth. The ironic plays a scandalous neutrality by not occupying any of these two positions, which bought their particular importance when society got rid of the aristocratic dominance in the French Revolution, because she does not know that needing to protect ideals (liberty, fraternity, equality) in order to continue to take pleasure is the political *modus operandi*.

Prager and Pregrad used old-fashioned 80’s science fiction stories and different rhetoric of celebrity scientists who gather information and make public speeches about the future, in which the kitsch paradigmatic example is of course the TED-Talk. However, their research wasn’t weighing an anthropological or metaphysical tone. Irony, we suggest, is what creates a distance required to begin a critical action. Irony opens a critical gap in the analysed thing, it suspends it as a signified by putting a certain signifier on hold. Irony will appear not as certain content, but as the gap of not really knowing, of being “pseudo”, of a foolery that only creatively repeats what others say, for example, contemporary choreographers. The gap in *Sequel for the Future* appears as a distance between dance as a capacity for human expression *and its social profanation*; a profanation which transforms dance into a market commodity, a sum of artistic and theoretical trends and an over-administered cultural product. The ironic undertone arranges dance’s artistic trends as unstable; it creates a friction between them and mobilises them against each other.

The piece presents some over stylized “dance” representations and exhausts them. For example, the performers wear opera costumes, perform codified modern dance movement, scream and moan while doing contact improvisation, and write on the wall “we are professionals” and “this is a business”, just so we won’t forget the critical stance that accompanies their excitations. In that way, they show the commodification of dance products and styles, what dance is doing now in making the future, the now as a vacuum of sense and artists that are in the service of a capitalistic super ego

that demands them to take pleasure. Instead of hiding their working conditions, they ask us to construct a dance project that will answer the imperatives of the neoliberal art market, and that's how they expose it and contradict its transparency. Meanwhile, in the centre of the piece a fundamental question continues to echo the hysterical Socratic position: "what is contemporary dance anyways?"

A Socratic inquiry is one of the most subversive dialectical mechanisms, because it empties out all knowledge regarding a certain 'x' and exposes a reality that 'x' used to suture. The answer for "what is contemporary dance" in *Sequel* is the performance itself, its material conditions of production as a commodified dance piece and its ironic locus of dance images and trends. Meaning, the artists assume that this kind of question is a performative one, and should be tackled via performative means. Using irony, they open up a possibility for re-imagination of the art form, of a distance between "dance" and all its past ideals and master-signifiers. In that sense, *Sequel* belongs to a series of art works that perform an institutional critique. The two performers play with it in the first part, 'a dance in 2043', through words and irony, to fully embody it in the second part, 'a dance in 2044'.

The performers played their institutional critique also by using consensus and banal statements regarding dance, for example: '30 years ago you had to learn some movements from a French guy to be a dancer', and repeated them. Quoting the dogmatic historical and geo-political common sense of dance made visible the historical representational machine of dance, from Pina Bausch to contact improvisation, from pedestrian movements to classical ballet, all under the guise of idiot-professionals. Consensus, such as how we enter the theatre and know that the dancer will be there, that he is available, that there is a choreographer's thought, that there is a sense of contemporaneity, a repertoire or re-enactment of movements or suspending them, or a total work of contemporary dance in which the light, sound and costume are all devised, were exposed under the historicity of the machine of dance as totally administered art form, without residue.

Professionalisation

The two dancers remain in the ironical gap they opened throughout the performance as, while asking the audience for their wishes, pull out two very professional folders and start inquiring about the existing co-productions, the gender and equality policies during casting and the details of the project-wish expressed by a member of the audience.

What does it mean to be professional is a question that does not affect contemporary dance only, but interests society at large as the neoliberal system pushes individuals towards never-ending self-optimization, such that the space between what one is and what one does shrinks. The authors' interest in

professionalism lies primarily in raising a question: by doing that through irony - and thus acting as fools - they created a sequel for the future to reflect on the border between what is subversive and what is appropriated by neoliberal capitalism.

The artists reminded us that today the position of the ironist is also a position of a professional fool. But the professional fool knows that “dance” is a Western invention, like “progress”, and that we are all trying to be more and more professional, and by exposing this, they problematise the question of professionalism. The tragedy of professionalism is that it is a condition for society but also for contemporary dance, a symptom but also a space for possible subversion and discussion. The performance criticizes professionalism as something that is already dissolving, because in the future “everyone will be a dance artist” and there will be no need for expertise anymore. At the same time, they engage with actively abolishing professionalism from their professional position. Professionalism works in *Sequel* as a prism that asks the question of the pseudo-universality of the conditions of labour in capitalism. It shows that by becoming “professional” the artists give up any ideological content or passion. As we picture a future where everyone is a professional contemporary dancer, we start to navigate between the utopian and dystopian visions brought up by such a statement.

The nulling mechanism of irony worked differently in different places in which they performed. In western European countries, the artists told us, *Sequel's* first part wasn't so much understandable but other things were, such as the scene, in which people were asked to elaborate their fantasies in a discourse of commodified art products. In the premier in Zagreb some expressed the wish for Turkey to join the European Union quickly and in the show in Berlin, some even exposed their religious aspirations, and said that they would like Saint Mary to appear on stage.

Due to the history of socialism, irony proliferated in Eastern Europe, and perhaps it was used as a critical tool for the inability to act politically. Because people who lived under eastern European socialist regimes couldn't change or condemn the system openly, irony was a tool for creating a critical distance and to open a space for possible re-considerations of how the regime should function or is actually functioning. The world situation today is that people are beginning to understand more of the trap of capitalism and the bottomlessness of surplus value, that there is not so much freedom as it may have looked in the 60s, 80s or 90s.

What is left?

It is following this direction, that *Sequel for the Future* gradually empties the notion of dance of all its representations and more importantly, raises the question: “what's left?” by interpellating the collectivity around the empty notion of dance itself, transforming the question “what is contemporary dance?” into a territory of collective speculation.

This movement differs deeply from works that, exercising with critique, end up with notions that are not only devoid of representations but also of potentiality. By gathering a collectivity around a hysterical question, the latter stays open and alive, filling with potentiality the gap it creates.

The conditions for this to happen were set by Willy Prager and Sonja Pregrad already in the research phase, where also a gap between them and the material they chose was created, preferring not to choose an aesthetics with which to represent the future. This operation creates first and foremost a gap between the two dancers and the performance privileging the appearance of the gesture over the proposition of a certain aesthetics in the first part. Extracts of science fiction materials are combined with the thoughts of the choreographers interviewed on dance's past and future, and what emerges is not so much a representation of future dance but how possible representations are constructed and organised. Here, they exceed the field of dance: treating contemporary dance's specific representations as fictional materials is a way of identifying symptoms or paradigms of how the future can be constructed aesthetically also in other fields, starting from certain fields of science today, whose formulations and ventures are already fictive, as they can speculate the existence of aliens through the same truth telling they use when elaborating astrophysical datum.

In the first part of the Sequel, we witness the images composing contemporary dance history just to hear then a voiceover, mentioning that contemporary dance "has been teleported" and "is not existing anymore". What is left on stage is an idea of linear temporality – the same shared by science fiction narratives and common speculation on the future – where Prager and Pregrad operate some gaps in order to expose its consequences. Even if contemporary dance has been teleported, the dancers on stage know how to do art and are not afraid of stating it or writing it on the walls. At the same time, we see one of them cracking under the pressure of having to describe the future to a paying audience: "*What do you want from me?!*" Here critique emerges in a specific mode when the two dancers inhabit the purposefulness implied by linear temporality in order to pierce and interrupt it, departing from the very same material produced by and unfolding within, that linear temporality.

Using an episode (i.e. contemporary dance) as a paradigm of how the future can be constructed, they take a methodological decision that opens the way for an interrogation at the collective level that happens during the performance in different instances.

After having performed a lot of "contemporary dance", the two performers hide in the corner in order to exchange some opinions – a private conversation endowed with microphones– on the possibilities and impossibilities of dance in their contemporary time, 2043. Bringing to the surface one of the directions underlying their research, they clarify their ironical position first by making sure that their personal and confidential thoughts are amplified by the microphones and then by

formulating it through the dialogue. As we overhear this conversation we understand that the situation is much better than thirty years ago, when first of all one had to learn some movements and only the best might get the chance to be on stage. On the other hand, today “it’s amazing” that one could win the *Jardin d’Europe* prize just by expressing oneself. In the corner, they comment on the work they just did onstage and connect it to the dance context in 2043, inhabiting the ironical gap they constituted being insiders and outsiders at the same time. As performers they live and grow in the distance created through irony in order to raise some critical questions on contemporary dance but they don’t produce this critique from a completely external position, and on this basis they involve the audience in the critical reflection triggered by the newly emptied notion of contemporary dance: “Contemporary dance is great; you can do what you want and say it’s contemporary dance.” But who knows what contemporary dance exactly is? This question is soon brought to the audience.

As professional dancers – a position that they underline several times during the show, even writing it clearly on the walls – they are fully ironic, their knowledge is not a way of giving answers. This premise allows them to turn the question “What is contemporary dance?” into a performative question that really inhabits the gap operated in representation. To such performative questions there is no clear answer and while asking them is very important, answering them might be dangerous.

“In 2043 everyone is a professional dancer” – they say when the question addressed to public remains unanswered and inquire on the composition of the audience – “then we’re really close to the future”. As they share an open question on dance with the audience, the reflection shifts and becomes an exercise in opening the future to its different possibilities. Recalling the past, the two dancers retrace the events that happened before 2043: from 2033 when they celebrated Sonja’s birthday drinking and talking until dawn, to 2020, when the Festival Tanz im August took place in Ankara, as a result of Turkey joining the European Union.

Entering the threshold between different times, and telling the future as if they were remembering the past, they involve the spectators in an exercise of imagination that can unfold its potential only at the collective level: the future is not only the future of dance but our future at large. Are we really remembering together with them, the end of capitalism in 2023? Remembrance, for Walter Benjamin, has a specific temporality, which opens up the past from its apparent completeness and keeps the future open by paradoxically looking at the past to a yet unrealised possibility⁶. If *Sequel for the Future* doesn’t help its audience imagine the past, it helps them imagine the present as incomplete. As we listen to them, we cannot help but think how these visions might shine back on our present.

In discussing the contemporary condition, Franco Bifo Berardi traces a possibility for resistance in irony, which with a reference to Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm, operates as a connector of the collective body and as a movement for the rethinking of ethics based on a form of ironic rhetoric at the collective level⁷. In

fact, irony works on the premise of complicity between who talks and who listens; or among the artists and the audience. It's also in this sense that *Sequel for the Future* succeeds in arranging a collective reflection based on imagination and in nurturing at the same time the ground for the institutional critique it produces. Consistently with the ironic attitude, this reflection doesn't unfold through a negative, cynical attitude – a mode that has appeared in politically engaged works that sometimes lean on sharing information rather than opening up questions - but engages in what Sennet would define, relying on Mikhail's writings, a dialogical conversation, “a discussion, which does not resolve itself by finding common ground”⁸. Throughout the *Sequel* the search for a constructed dissensus leaves space for a subtler engagement with critique, which reaches its full embodiment in the second part of the work. In this sense, the audience here is not only interpellated on a notion of contemporary dance devoid of representation; also the modalities in which this interpellation is realized fulfill their potential only at the collective level and only after the performance itself; producing an imaginary dialogue where the parts are not perfectly fitting together. What stays is not a void, but rather a space of potentiality filled not by a single subject called to name and categorize the unknown but by a collectivity called to set conditions for the future.

Embodied institutional critique

Sequel for the Future comprises a dance in 2044, without which the aspects discussed above wouldn't be visible and at the same time clearly exposes the mode of production of contemporary dance in all its neoliberal aspects, bringing the artist not only to raise questions on the future but also to make a clear statement on the present. After having listened to the wishes expressed by the audience on the future, we actually move to 2044 and yet, there we find no invention. What remains are two bodies that indeed point at the past, so that what has been raised can “settle and unsettle”. Here the “physicality of remembering” is juxtaposed to the desires and projections of the future in the first part. The question of the second part is first aesthetical and methodological – how to continue with a performance that is already finished – but soon becomes political.

The funding of the piece is the extreme example of how the production conditions were manipulated in an ironic manoeuvre. The Berlin Senate announced the support for the piece (25,000 euros) only after five months into its production, when it was already completed, 20 days after it premiered in Zagreb. The artists were working with a small amount of money (5,000 euros) from Croatia. As “ambitious East Europeans”, as they call themselves, they thought they should continue the piece with the 25,000 euros, but still not treat the surprising financial support as a transparent and a-political contribution. In a gap between the first and the second part, they share with the audience the absurdity in which they had to work, a

surprising support of a relatively big sum of money, as the reason for even producing the second part, by making its cause obvious and literal, quite the opposite from denying it or simply dismissing its revelatory and political nature.

In between the two parts there is a small break. A recorded voice tells the audience that the first part was made in 2013 with 5,000 euros in the “Eastern art market” and the second one was created in the “Western art market” with 25,000 euros, meaning, the costs of production are higher in the West, a difference that has aesthetic consequences. When they received the 25,000 euro grant, their major problem was to continue with something that they already had completed, and the artists decided to deal with the second part as the “other side of the future”, as they say, the only future tense per se in the work. The second part is therefore extremely different from the first, it becomes about the physicality of remembering, and bears a resemblance to a moving sculpture of what was already ingrained in the corpus of ‘contemporary dance’ in the first part. The second part shows the absurdity of the epitome of dance as an eternal body. It exists thereof in a totally different realm, because what has been ironically projected can be pondered upon using the materiality of the body as a capacity for “dance”, whatever that represents, with no apparent ideal signifier. The second part is received therefore as a hidden speculation, a latent mode of the subject matter of ‘dance’ that was filled and covered with historical representation and workings of the ironical gap in the first part.

In the second part, in sum, the performers embody the totality of the memory, working with a non-body, the body that doesn’t speak, maybe the uncritical axiom of dance. When the text was taken away, the movements shifted from a representative mode – aerobics, Pina Bausch, ‘French’ movements, codified ballet – to a somewhat neutral presentation, to a ‘neat’ sense of the economy of dance. It opened up the question of what happened with all this irony and the exhaustion of notions in the first part, and what is left is an allegedly non-representative, non-critical, non-pastiche, non-readymade performance, yet still not nostalgic or romantic in any sense. After they got rid of ‘dance’ in so many different methods, attempts, regimes of attention, they managed to show that we are not left with nothing, that irony can exhaust all values and notions but something stays, a left over, the capacity of contemporary dance as medium that doesn’t vanish in what it makes appear, the pure form as the material presence itself.

Have no mistake, the ironical gap never stopped working also in the second part, which might seem more conventional in terms of dance’s practices. Except for the fact that the reason for its creation was 25,000 euros from the Berlin Senate, and the disclosure of this fact in the performance, Prager’s T-shirt in the first part, for example, cost two euros, and in the second part it’s Hugo Boss and costs 95 euros.

The second part gives time for a digestion of all the irony and criticism. It’s about coming back to being present in the medium of dance as a common. It’s as if they were telling us that we are here in the room in the body, leaving the ideological

weapons behind, that something stays, that a performance is an ephemeral experience but we are left with something; an experience which gives another level of knowing, which is affective and collective, embodied.

Conclusion – Exhaustion of Ideals

Sequel is an artistic proposal that exposes its conditions of production and is not manipulated by them, not trapped as having no other possibility to produce a dance piece. This is where the power of its irony lies. In *Sequel* dance is not praxis, a pure aesthetic dimension, yet neither *poiesis*, a means of production with a commodified end. It is a critique and a suspense of these two regimes of action, in the means of the historical representation of ‘contemporary dance’ as voided and absolutely administered, which exposed ‘dance’ as a human possibility for art that *maybe exhausted all its ideals*. As professionals, their job is not only to deliver the product and get paid, but also to create excess of effects of information which reminds us that we are not only buying and selling. Because of that, *Sequel* resembles an ironic manifesto for newness of contemporary dance. Different kinds of humour are part of the equation but only the ironic one entails a critical potential for the future of contemporary dance.

Irony can interrupt modern capitalism, because power struggles and creative resistance and development of human resources are ways to resist the highly exploitative format of power distribution; it is a way to distance ourselves from the present state of affairs. Contemporary dance, and this is what *Sequel* performs, provides physicality and embodiment as a resource of aesthetic resistance. It recognises how the system works but doesn’t go along with it. They are artists who are insiders-outsiders, a malfunction in the machine of contemporary dance as commodified object stuck in the discourse about professionalism.

Endnotes

- 1 Franco Bifo Berardi. *Ironic Ethics. 100 Notes 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 027*, 2012.
- 2 Ibid: 16
- 3 Ibid: 16
- 4 The interview took place in the form of a round table conversation entitled “That Irony Thing” in the framework of Kondenz Festival 2015 in Belgrade, where Critical Practice (Made in YU) hosted some public discussions on the questions and topics raised by the artists and works presented at the festival.
- 5 Jacques Allan Miller Psychoanalysis, the City and Communities Psychoanalytic Notebooks no. 24.
- 6 Walter Benjamin. “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*. 1968: 253-264
- 7 Franco Bifo Berardi. *Ironic Ethics. 100 Notes 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 027*, 2012
- 8 Richard Sennet. *Together: the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. Yale University Press. 2012:19



AT THE FESTIVAL ^{INTRO}

As any average control freak I'm into lists.

Next to them, I like glossaries, indexes, and dictionary entries... pretty much whatever organises content and helps its categorisation.

At the same time, I like to think of myself as an informed person who, in terms of politics falls in the left category, and in terms of interests chose to engage with the arts, reflecting on and trying to practice critical thinking. As such, I am constantly reminded of the dangers of categories and of the lies they conceal.

Yet, I am really into lists. They privilege points over proposals, they make a statement, and they're bold. And cool. As an admirer of the genre and a practitioner myself, I first read "At the Festival" by Stina as a list.

At the beginning, I was suspicious because its title reminded me of Tim Etchells' "Alphabet of Festivals" that we read during one of our group gatherings in Belgrade. I remember not liking that text so much but being captured by the discussion it created in our group: as we reflect on and try to engage with critical practice, should we dismiss festivals as the territory of the worst possible capitalist exploitation? On a broader level, the discussion revolved around the question on the need of a new vocabulary for the art scene and the necessity of inventing new words to oppose capitalism's co-optation of our words and categories. During the discussion I was thinking that, besides being into lists and categories, I am also into festivals.

When I read Stina's "At the Festival", I realised that not only it had nothing to do with the "Alphabet of Festivals" but also that rather than guiding the reader through the points of a list, it accompanied her in the navigation of a map.

It is a productively incomplete composition of our being and doing together.

Like a list, it is made of points that touch upon the many problems we face as we engage with critical practice, managing to expose their depths with lightness. Some points struck me with their courage, some others with their generosity. Many expose a misunderstanding. Like in a map, the space between the lines is filled with our togetherness, playing with those misunderstandings and creating new ones.

One of the things I like most about categories is that they represent a form that could always be emptied out of its content to invent a new one. I started to think about new and old words and about the potentiality of misunderstanding.

I also like misunderstandings some times, as they can turn out to be a powerful tool to crack a category open. Exploring the potential of misunderstanding within the arts could be about rethinking the politics of use of formats and words, opening up unexpected connections and posing an interesting juxtaposition with the need of creating a new vocabulary.

In one sentence, I really like it when a list turns into a map.

Livia Andrea Diazza

AT THE FESTIVAL

At the festival I have a back pain because of the uncomfortable bed with the too big pillow.

At the festival I work in rooms that smell of years of smoking.

At the festival I stand outside the theatre because my friends are smoking.

At the festival I stand outside the theatre because the one who has the key is not here.

At the festival I am always hungry at the wrong moment.

At the festival Shir says that a performance had as little reason for ending as it had for beginning.

At the festival I go around looking for food.

At the festival I think about how I shouldn't sit so much cross-legged since I have heard that it is bad for the blood circulation.

At the festival Igor tells us that the first time he went to his psychiatrist, the psychiatrist asked him his opinion about Marina Abramović.

At the festival I didn't pay my own flight ticket, accommodation or performance tickets.

At the festival I eat Shopska salad.

At the festival I find the swimming pool and I go swimming. The woman behind the desk tries to teach me Serbian through repeating the word for "300 dinars", "receipt" and "thank you" several times. I get changed in a small cubicle, leave my belongings to the young woman in the wardrobe, and get a metal plate with a number on attached to a string. Then I get lost trying to find the showers and when I find them there are only men in there so I don't know if I can go in or not. I wait until a middle-aged woman in bikini appears and goes into the shower until I shower too.

At the festival I look Swedish because I have a new outfit on every day and still I haven't used all the clothes in my suitcase.

At the festival the festival centre is used as a black box, a white cube, a cinema, a workplace, a rehearsal space, our space for arranging public discussions, an office for the organisation, an office for another organisation, a meeting point, a dance studio, a lecture hall, a corridor.

At the festival there is no toilet paper.

At the festival my generalisations gets questioned.

At the festival the festival director is happy with your contribution.

At the festival we were supposed to have a Skype meeting with an academic from Macedonia that teaches writing but at some point it was postponed until

Amsterdam. I wondered where I was when this was decided. I am left with a feeling of not being where it happens.

At the festival I thought we were going to meet at 12.

At the festival Kristóf goes to his room for no apparent reason.

At the festival I sit at a café and write. I feel guilty for not buying more than I do but on the other hand I know that I will never go back to this café ever again.

At the festival I can only write a text with references that I recognise. There is so much that passes me by.

At the festival the festival map is not detailed enough for me to find the way.

At the festival Shir asks me what Mårten Spångberg would say about this.

At the festival I copy the style from a book by Joe Brainard.

At the festival we have already read a text by Tim Etchells called *Alphabet of festivals*. I think it is quite good, but it is not my text.

At the festival I look at the friends of the performer. They smile during the performance.

At the festival I hear that some people are at some other bar and I think that that bar is probably a bit better than the one that I am at right now.

At the festival I meet performers' gazes and they look at me differently on stage and off stage.

At the festival I talk more about the performances than with the performers.

At the festival two dancers get naked. It is nothing special, but every time the genitals come out it causes a particular ambience in the audience.

At the festival the festival director is ill.

At the festival the internet is slow.

At the festival I am from the West.

At the festival I book a flight ticket.

At the festival I sleep next to Livia, trying not to touch her.

At the festival I sleep next to Shir, nervous about farting in my sleep.

At the festival two dancers move in the same way to an electronic soundscape. I have a feeling I have seen this performance before.

At the festival two performers write a political message on a wall.

At the festival there are costumes and then there are costumes that are supposed not to look like costumes. I usually prefer the first kind.

At the festival I have a stomach ache from eating too irregularly.

At the festival Ash is always at the toilet when we are about to leave.

At the festival I have dry eyes because of the smoke and the swimming pool.

At the festival I get a cotton bag. I have never been to a festival where I did not get a cotton bag.

At the festival I take sexy pictures of my tits to send to my boyfriend when Shir is in the bathroom taking sexy pictures of her ass to send to her boyfriend. She shows me her picture; I don't even tell her about my own pictures.

At the festival I forgot to bring toothpaste. So the first day I just steal some,

thinking I will buy the next day, but then I always forget and I just steal for the whole period.

At the festival I get annoyed when Kristóf thinks that I am cute when I wear a skirt.

At the festival I try to look feminine and powerful and intellectual at the same time because I want to impress someone (anyone).

At the festival I talk too much without having enough things to say.

At the festival I fantasize about my partner suddenly coming in through the door of the theatre, and how I would sneak out from the show and we would kiss, and how I would normally never do that.

At the festival I ask for the code to the wi-fi.

At the festival hostel a man gives me coffee for free and asks me where I am from. Then he starts to talk about Zlatan Ibrahimovic and another Swedish football player that I cannot remember the name of.

At the festival I eat the only vegetarian option on the menu.

At the festival I am relieved about the fact that no one around me seems to have an eating disorder.

At the festival the floor is concrete.

At the festival I arrive on an airplane from Sweden, noticing how I depart from rain only to land in rain, depart from west and land in east, depart from a festival with expensive filter coffee and online streaming and arrive at a festival with Nescafé and a sound recorder.

At the festival Kristóf asks us if in our countries we drink beer from a plate.

At the festival I go home early to watch a documentary about the death of Yugoslavia and masturbate.

At the festival I ask why we talk about Yugoslavia. Where I come from, to say Yugoslavia is a sign of not knowing the names of the countries in the region. It is considered ignorant and slightly racist.

At the festival I find the young dancers in the audience sexy. I think about how many old men are thinking the same right now.

At the festival Ida says something that I don't understand and I think that she thinks that I am pretending not to understand in order to avoid the question.

At the festival Shir asks me about what Ana asked me about "practice".

At the festival I don't have enough clean underwear and so I turn them inside out.

At the festival I recognise the parliament building from the documentary about Yugoslavia that I saw the day before. It gives me a feeling of having learned something.

At the festival there was a demonstration outside the parliament that I didn't know about.

At the festival I try to explain why I understand a dance performance by Angela Kecinski as an attempt to present a transformation from ordinary movement to dance.

At the festival there are no visiting curators. Or they just don't look like the curators I have seen.

At the festival Ana asks me if there is no organised hang-out between the critics and the artists and I reply by asking if she wants to join us for dinner and drinks tonight. She says that she is going home tonight.

At the festival I look at Ash's tits over dinner and hope that she didn't notice.

At the festival Shir asks me what Mårten would say about this.

At the festival there are two photographers from Germany that take pictures of our public conversation. Ida asks one of them, "Are you taking pictures of my notes?" and she answers, "No", but I suspect she actually was. Later, I get to know that they are paid by the European network.

At the festival some choreographers are "Frisch Eingetroffen", which means "Just Arrived", while others are just choreographers.

At the festival there are no drink tickets, no festival bar, no curators, no welcome package, no free champagne, no band, no entrance fees, no VIP bands, no pick-up, no dance classes, no workshops.

At the festival there are cotton bags.

At the festival Shir asks for the code to the wi-fi.

At the festival Ida tells me that her grandparents were communists.

At the festival Shir tells me that her brother is a schizophrenic. Then she asks me if I don't have anyone with psychological problems in my family.

At the festival I tell Ana, Livia and Shir that I don't think I am best suited to be in the jury for the next year's program. They seem to agree.

At the festival I write two applications.

At the festival I wake up at 4:20 to go to the airport.

At the festival I borrow 2,000 dinars from Ana.

At the festival I give 300 dinars to Ana.

At the festival I am too tired to give feedback to Zeina, although I think she might be interested and I feel like it is my job.

At the festival Shir describes giving artistic feedback as a social service.

At the festival I learn to speak slower and listen more carefully.

At the festival Ana says that she doesn't understand what this performance is trying to do. I am thinking that none of us do and that our work seems to be to try to figure it out.

At the festival the piece is 10 minutes long because the creator ran out of money.

At the festival the piece is 10 minutes long because it was created for a competition for choreographic miniatures, where it won second price.

At the festival the smoke machine runs out of steam.

At the festival there is too much salt in the food. It makes me miss my best friend who always adds salt to any dish before she eats it.

At the festival I am a feminist.

At the festival I become a representative of the western European dance scene every time that I try to describe the dance world as I know it.

At the festival there is a an award called Dalija Acin, rewarded to the biggest brain drain of the region.

At the festival Ana makes a protest by waiting downstairs until the price ceremony is over.

At the festival the taxi is late.

At the festival the taxi gets lost trying to find the venue.

At the festival Zeina tells me that she sees no difference between the east and the west of Europe when you compare them to Lebanon. She tells me that in Beirut, people have started to light garbage on fire with the help of rat poison. She is starting a project where she is looking for people that have a desire for dance.

At the festival Shir says that she doesn't like to touch men's asses.

At the festival one dancer has a hole in her shirt and I wonder if it is on purpose.

At the festival I fill in my unemployment cards online.

At the festival I am younger than the festival director but older than the performers.

At the festival Ash is always at the toilet when we are about to leave.

At the festival I leave with an air plane because I have a Swedish passport.

CRITIQUE OF THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION AND REPRESENTATIONAL THOUGHT*

The choreographic method of “problem” begins by critically revealing the conditions that structure the field of dance as problematic: the synthesis of the body and movement and the entanglement of the act of performing with audiences’ attending a performance in the theatre. At the outset of the creation process, the choreographers have often explicitly stated their intention to examine the regime of representation in contemporary (theatre) dance through the following aspects: the genesis and perception of bodily movement, the identification of the human gendered body, and the represented subject matter or (thematic/conceptual) “aboutness” established through the reception of the audience. Thanks to various procedures of their own development, designed to disjoin the body and movement, and to disrupt co-presence and communication in theatre or to render perception difficult, these choreographies have explored the limits of sensibility by inhibiting recognition. The procedures arise from experimentally setting up the constraints in which a new field of experience is conceived, one that cannot be subsumed under knowledge, but should instead be regarded as a *problematic* encounter. The notion of “encounter” invokes Deleuze’s critique of representation. According to Deleuze, the encounter with a sensation that is on the limit of sensibility engenders a sort of violence upon recognition, a “discordant play” of perception, memory, imagination, understanding, and judgment. The encounter with that which can only be sensed and not recognized from the point of view of common sense – understood as the harmony of all the faculties of the thinking subject that agree on the form of the same object – gives rise to a problem and an “act of thinking in thought itself” (Deleuze 1994, 139–140).

Now we will briefly turn to the analysis of two performances in order to explicate how representational thinking inhibits both the creation and reception of these performances. The first choreography to be considered is called *Untitled* (2005). This performance is announced as an untitled work whose author is anonymous (in its creation; authorship later assumed by the French choreographer Xavier Le Roy), and for the majority of its duration, the stage remains dark and is inhabited

* Excerpt from Bojana Cvejić, “Problem as a Choreographic and Philosophical Kind of Thought”, in *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Politics* (ed. by Gerald Siegmund, Randy Martin and Rebekah Kowal, Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2017).

by an uncertain number of human-sized puppets. It is a commingling of inanimate dummies and human performers disguised as puppets engaging in barely discernible movement. The spectators are given small battery-powered flashlights with which they can illuminate the stage. After and attached to the event, there is a talk that simulates the so-called post-performance artist's talk, which is at the same time part of the performance; the audience interrogates a "representative" of the performance as to the meaning of what they saw on stage. Their questions are driven by anger, and can be summed up in one sentence – "Could you please tell us what we saw?" – but they also reveal a feeling of shame regarding their own behavior in the role of spectator, as it appears they have taken over the role of the performers, yet they are performing inadequately, either too little or too much. The shock of depriving the audience of a scene presenting clearly distinguishable figures in movement and the difficulty arising from the loss of a clear object of perception in the indiscernible meshes of puppet-figures leave the audience completely destabilized in their role as spectators who perceive, imagine, conceive, and judge. Their questions and remarks testify to an inability to generate a new experience from the impossibility of recognizing the event. A few voices, however, reported that the performance was too short for them to learn how to sense it. In that way, they may have been at the threshold of creating a new experience in duration, had their thought not been shackled in the representation of a non-recognizable object. From the perspective of the choreographer of *Untitled*, there was nothing represented in this performance that the audience failed to recognize. Le Roy's idea was to explore the relations between the living beings (performers dressed as puppets and spectators) and inanimate objects (puppets, strings, flashlights, etc.) as relations of weight, color, motion, rest, and attention in a situation radically obstructive to vision.

As this example demonstrates, if we are to account for the creation of a new experience beyond recognition, then we must seek an alternative to representational thinking, which can be found in Deleuze's anti-representational conception of thought. Deleuze assigns to thought a power of creation: "to bring into being that which does not yet exist" (1994, 147). But to do so, thought must take as its point of departure a radical critique of representation, a destruction of the image of thought as a violence or shock to sensibility that disjoins the subject-object unity of faculties and thus, as "something in this world forces us to think" (1994, 139). This does not happen by means of any method, or as a natural possibility of thought, but rather through a fortuitous encounter with a "sign" as that which can only be sensed and not be perceived or grasped by other faculties, a kind of semantically emptied signifier without a signified (if one were to apply semiotic terms, despite Deleuze's aversion to it). The sensibility of the "sign" is not a quality of an object of recognition, or even a purely qualitative being; it is "the being of the sensible" (*sentiendum*). From the point of view of the empirical exercise of recognition and common sense, the sign is imperceptible (*insensible*); from the point of view of a transcendental exercise of sensibility, the sign is the bearer of a problem, because it forces sensibility to

confront its own limit and therefore can be felt or sensed as its limit-object. By “limit-object” we reinvest Deleuze’s eponymous word to designate the force-agency and material resistance of a radically estranged sensation that has no correlate with any familiar, recognizable experience. Such sensation qualifies as a twofold object: it resists the sensibility forming one’s horizon of expectations and it defies recognition of a known object.

The encounter with a limit-object of sensibility is exactly the problem posed by *Nvsbl* by Hungarian choreographer Eszter Salamon: how to synthesize two contrary sensations, stillness and movement, in a movement that cannot be seen from the empirical point of view of extension (shape, size, trajectory) – as the displacement of a mobile – but can only be sensed as a transformation of the body in time, as change in duration. The point of departure is a fundamental questioning of the perception of bodily movement:

🟡🟡 I set out from the false dilemma of two possible ways of looking: one based on believing in what is seen... and the other on vision as tautology, meaning what I see is what I see... I sought a different form for creating another perception, one that wasn’t the simple opposition of the two.¹

Another sensibility is sought after here, one that critically departs from a vision that either asserts the subject in her faculties to recognize the perceived object as a believable (i.e., identifiable) movement of the body, or that satisfies the subject by accepting the perceived without understanding what it is. What is the movement that can be sensed and experienced without its mode of execution being seen? When there is almost no movement to see, what states of the body can become visible and sensible? In search of an answer to these questions, Salamon attempted to reverse the relationship between bodily movement and sensation: if displacement is rendered invisible by an excessively slow movement, then visibility gives way to the sensations that develop in duration as a process of ongoing changes in the body that result in movements but are not perceived as movements.

The performance of *Nvsbl* evolves in a process of drastically slow movement by which four female performers gravitate toward the center of the stage from the four points at the outer edge (four corners) of the stage, traversing 4.5 meters during a period of about 80 minutes. The trajectory they effectuate is so convoluted and extended in duration that neither spectators nor performers themselves can fully grasp it. While spectators can register transformation in retrospect – by looking away and then looking back to verify if any change has occurred – they can hardly discern movement. The result of such composition is that movement cannot be discerned as displacement operated by the body. All parameters by which movement is habitually perceived and recognized in shape and size are suspended. First,

¹ All subsequent quotes of Salamon, Burrows, Ritsema, and Le Roy have been obtained from their notes and through the public interviews I conducted with them in Montpellier in 2007.

no one element can be singled out – such as a step, gesture, or movement of a certain body part. The four bodies move in a continuum without discrete units, as in one-bound motion – the opposite of sequencing or phrasing. Second, when the observation of this motion is tuned to its slow pace, it appears that the whole body is involved in movement, wherein the many different parts are simultaneously engaging in diverse processes. Multiplicity results from the impression that the body is not moving in one direction, subordinating and actuating all body parts to reach one goal, peak, or end by which the movement would be completed; instead, many body parts are entangled in divergent paths, which nevertheless seem to coalesce in one motion, concentrated in one body.

The problem of a genesis of invisible yet sensible movement was fully determined in this last condition: how to convert the external into the internal space of bodily movement and make it inaccessible to the spectatorial gaze. Inaccessibility here implies the imposition of a limit onto the gaze, the constraint or deprivation of the ability to control the body's source of movement from the viewpoint of the spectator. The techniques Salomon developed with four performers in order to produce a radically slow movement – a traversal of 4.5 meters in 80 minutes – point to the cases of solutions to the problem. One entails a principle of movement thoroughly different from that of the theatre-dance heritage, developed on the basis of Body-Mind Centering® (BMC®). As an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical, and developmental principles, utilizing movement, touch, voice, and mind, BMC® explores how awareness of various systems of the body (fluids, tissues, organs, the skeleton, the senses, the neuroendocrine system) can motivate action based on perception. Whether this knowledge is adequate, or is a matter of feigning inspired by pseudophysiological metaphors, is not crucial here, because the application of the BMC® principle of initiating movement from a sensation is just an instrument that enables the dancers in *Nvsbl* to attempt to “unlearn” the conscious, yet automatic habitual mechanism of imagining and performing motion. This effectively means that they shift focus from movement as an effect to its cause. They move attention from an achievement of a certain image and form of movement to an exploration of a place inside the body, a sensation of physiological processes, which they vaguely imagine. The sensation turns out to be a product of a voluntary action: a will to imagine and strive to sense and feel movement within the body. The striving is what takes time and differentiates duration, hindering the image of movement or preventing everything from being given all at once. Invoking is then the process of giving rise to sensation and movement at the same time. The procedure of constructing a sensorial relation with the imaginary place in the dancer's body results in a partitioning of the body. To locate, detect, and build a sensation from a specific body system (e.g., lymph of the system of fluids) the dancer differentiates, or separates out the perceptions she associates with other parts of that system (e.g., arterial blood).

The resulting slow, one-bound motion is not a natural continuum. It is the effect of capturing a sensation from within the body and issuing a movement that is adequate to it. This capture is disjunctive, as it constructs an external link between the body and movement by way of imagination and invocation, a kind of feigning of sensation. Movement fuses with sensation within the body and its disobjectivation consequently extends to its extreme. The continuum here is a veritable coalescence of the body and movement, where movement seeks to expand space *in* the body by way of a composed sensation. Thus it loses any stable form, giving way to a heterogeneous duration where the bodies are folding in and unfolding, transforming themselves by involution. The spectators, on the other hand, are denied access to this process. What they can see gives them no insight into the intricacies of partitioning and manipulating sensations from which the motion is initiated. A rupture between performing and attending to this choreography occurs as a temporal asymmetry, a gap between the duration of the bodies on the stage and the vision of spectators, which is provoked to attune with it.

Choreographing problems not only causes a rupture in the organic regime of the body-movement bind; the rupture extends to the set of specific functions of representation proper to the apparatus of theatre. In a retrospective view of the most radical works that have developed the method of posing problems in the last two decades, the following various functions of theatrical representation have been critically undermined: the recognition of the staged object of perception (as in the preceding analysis of *Nvsbl*; but also in Bel's *Name Given by the Author* [1994], Meg Stuart's *Disfigure Study* [1991], Le Roy's *Self Unfinished* [1998], Nikolina Pristaš/BADco's *Changes* [2006], Burrows and Ritsema's *Weak Dance Strong Questions* [2001], Spångberg's *La Substance* [2014]); the stability of the position of the spectator, whose faculties allow her to see and identify the object of perception (as in the earlier analysis of *Untitled*; but also in Baehr's *Un après-midi* [2003], and Dominguez's *All Good Spies Are My Age* [2002]) or to mirror herself as a subjective correlate of the staged object through identification and empathy (Ingvarstsen's *50/50* [2005]); address and response and the evidence of the co-presence and community of audience (as in Charmatz's *héâtre-télévision* [2002]; but also Bel's *The Show Must Go On* [2000]). All these elements appear subsumed under the model of recognition that Deleuze associates with theatre, the paradigm of representation that he targets his critique upon in the name of a new non-Aristotelian kind of "theatre of problems," or

●● a theatre of multiplicities opposed in every respect of the theatre of representation, which leaves intact neither the identity of the thing represented, nor author, nor spectator, nor character, nor representation which, through the vicissitudes of the play, can become the object of a production of knowledge or final recognition. Instead, a theatre of problems and always open questions which draws spectator, setting and characters into the real movement of an apprenticeship of the entire unconscious, the final elements of which remain the problems themselves. (Deleuze 1994, 192)

The critique of representationalism, exemplified by theatre, particularly focuses on the model of recognition – the harmonious exercise of faculties on an object (here performance) that is identical for each of these faculties, in theatre constituting a “sensus communis” of the audience, manifested in communication and consensus. By contrast, the kind of thought that gives rise to these choreographies and is also produced by them cannot be accounted for by representational thinking, but rather by expression.

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APPENDIX

The Appendix is initiated and edited by Ida Daniel, and is consists of contributions by: Ida Daniel, Kristóf Farkas, Shir Hacham, Aisling Marks, Stina Nyberg, Livia Andrea Piazza, Ana Schnabl and Ana Vujanović.

problematic > 1. (*n.*) That which complicates, obfuscates or violates. 2. (*adj.*) An ambiguous, contentious or ‘sticky’ situation or thing that produces discomfort and lacks clear answers or resolutions. 3. (*n.*) A knot that requires a coordinated, meditated, negotiated and structured process of untangling; the likelihood of further knots is to be expected. SYNONYMS (*adj.*) unwieldy; (*adj.*) distressing; (*adj.*) complicated; (*adj.*) uncomfortable; (*adj.*) puzzling; (*adj.*) difficult. ANTONYMS (*adj.*) simple; (*adj.*) totalitarian; (*adj.*) easy; (*verb, expression*) to take [something] for granted ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD Beyond. USAGE “This is problematic. Let’s scrutinise it.”; “I find your point of view problematic.”; “We are presented with a problematic vision of the future.” RECOMMENDED USAGE it all comes down to context THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING Where do I begin?! WHAT SHALL WE DO Get organised, practice mutual care, demand fully automated luxury communism! (at least be open to possibilities of an always otherwise.)

to problematise > (*verb*) 1. To problematise means to not accept the obvious as given, to try to look into how the obvious is constructed, to question it, to analyse it, to subject it to a critical analysis. 2. To make waves, to cause trouble, to oppose *doxa* and challenge habitual ways of thinking and perceiving. 3. To be curious. SYNONYMS (*verb*) to question; (*verb*) to ponder; (*verb*) to formulate a problem out of the topic; (*verb*) to analyse. ANTONYMS (*verb*) to accept; (*verb*) to not question; (*verb*) to create; (*verb*) to produce; (*verb*) to affirm. ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD Very good and often challenging: in the domain of critical thinking; Good but painful: in self-reflection; Bad but useful: in the moment of urgency, in love; Bad and harmful but could be of some later use: when you try to fall asleep. USAGE In discussion, in analysing, in the process of education, when you are surrounded with the people who all think the same. RECOMMENDED USAGE “The Austro-Hungarian Empire brought civilization to the Balkans. Sorry, we have to problematise that.”; “He is a genius. Hm, I’d problematise that.”; “He is not talented. Oh, stop, I must problematise that.”; “I would problematise the way we have collaborated so far.”; “I see you’re a jerk, but I wouldn’t problematise it.” THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING That we live in a deeply antagonistic society, which pretends to be plural. WHAT SHALL WE DO Problematise it! Unveil the hypocrisy of that society, try to change it on one’s own micro-scale and hope to contribute to its fundamental change on the macro-scale.

problematic > 1. refers to a thing being not exactly what it seems to be, but actually a bit worse. The word can be used in two ways: the first one (*adjective: problematic*) referring to a negative judgement upon something seemingly great. *Example: To buy a cute dog seems really nice, but it is problematic.* The second one (*verb: problematise*) refers to a positive judgement on something seemingly banal. *Example: This horror movie problematises the relation between axes and women.* 2. “I find it problematic” is a convenient expression at hand for any situation where you would like to express critique but are not sure in which way to do it. To exclaim “I find

it problematic” is a simple way of expressing your sceptical stance and your ability to see more than what first meets the eye. To problematise is to look under the surface. *Warning: the usage of this expression risks that someone might call your cards. In most cases, “I find it problematic” will be met by a “Yeah”, since most people don’t want to take the risk of not seeing what you see. In rare cases, the expression will be by a “Why” in which case the expression no longer functions as a simple trick but transforms into an actual discussion. Double warning: the warning above is especially applicable when travelling in Serbia, Germany, Macedonia, Finland and during conferences, where the odds for confrontation are higher. The expression is used most safely in Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Estonia.* **SYNONYMS** (adj.) complex; (adj.) incorrect; (adj.) undebated; (adj.) arrogant; (adj.) fake-superficial; (adj.) troublesome; (adj.) oopsie; (?!) wrong; (adj.) unreflective; (adj.) shallow; (adj.) untimely; (adj.) old; (adj.) ignorant; (adj.) dissected **RHYMES** (adj.) astigmatic; (adv.) undulating; (phr.) bomb the attic; (adj.) desperate; (phr.) pro the matrix; (phr.) bond the manic; (adv.) voddlermatic; (adj.) prosthetic; (adj.) porndebaclac; (phr.) roller-cat lick **ANTONYMS** (adj.) clear; (adj.) conceptual; (adj.) superficial; (adj.) sweet; (adj.) lovable; (adj.) waterproof; (adj.) contemporary; (adj.) shallow; (adj.) well-knitted; (adj.) steady; (adj.) expected **ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD** The Problematic is situated in the two opposing extremes of the spectrum of good vs bad. In the bad corner, problematic puts the finger on bad stuff and asks for them to be corrected. In the good corner, problematic puts the finger in the jar of jam, stirring everything that looks just sweet and makes it an interesting mix of different components, uses, and contradictive meanings. **USAGE** “- I find this performance problematic. - Yes, really” (see point 2 above); “It is problematic to try to pin down the exact meaning of the word problematic.”; “-Don’t you find it problematic that we have a racist party in the parliament? -No, I find it outrageous.”; “Every relationship is problematic.” **RECOMMENDED USAGE** The problematic is preferably used in situations where it might serve the role of the necessary kill-joy (as taught by Sarah Ahmed). At any situation where most people seem to agree on a certain immanent truth, an “of-course”-ness, the kill-joy using “I find it problematic” can function as an effective way of rocking the boat. **THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING** Capitalism **WHAT SHALL WE DO** In the worst cases, nothing. In the best cases, meet up with everyone else, cook something together, eat it and write something about each other, dance a dance and make a plan for how to never simplify the problematic.

problematic > 1. (adj.) describes, signifies, points out that there’s something wrong, that it is not good. When used in a negative way it is unacceptable. A problematic thing has the power/possibility to be *else*. The *problematic* is *else*. And *else* means that we can/could/should/might talk about it and discuss why it is *else*, but not necessarily to the effect to change it. 2. (n.) requires plural form *problematics*. Because if something can be coupled with the definition problematic (*singular*), it presumes different approaches of analysis, which presumes again not a possible

“error”, but possibility of “errors”. In this case the focus is on the possibility now. *Problematics* is not necessarily merely negative, as it offer(s) a chance to deeper understanding - which is a contrast to the common opinion of problematic. 3. I think I can/could/should/might stop here. SYNONYMS (*adj.*) different; (*adj.*) dilemma; (*adj.*) complication(s); (*adj.*) else; (*adj.*) quandary ANTONYMS (*adj.*) non-problematic, “There are no opposites only phases of the same state” ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD if chosen the neutral(!) value of it brings it a bit on the “bad” side. USAGE “I can imagine and I can mention any context you can imagine or you can mention where the word problematic is used in a(n) (un)spoken and/or (un)written way. Moreover, if *something* is problematic for me, but not for you - where is the problem? Is the problem with you and/or with me and/or that *something* itself? The main core of every discussion, of the whole holistic conversation itself is always *something* which could be spoken/written about - this, always presumes differences and, because of the differences the problematic(s) is always immanent.” RECOMMENDED USAGE

A: This is problematic.

B: Let’s talk about it.

A: Do you find it problematic too?

B: Nope.

A: This is problematic. (*This is problematic. / This is problematic. / This is problematic.*)”

THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING The fact that there is always someone who doesn’t want to talk about it. Whatever it is. WHAT SHALL WE DO The first thought is so naive it is unshareable. The second: Be problematic. Whatever problematic means and/or does.

problematic > 1. (*adj.*) can refer to a word, concept, discourse, etc. that raises a question in terms of ethics. “Problematic” can regard words and things that pose an ethical dilemma or an issue where different views cannot be easily conciliated and/or an objective solution is not available 2. (*adj.*) commonly used within contemporary arts worlds and surrounding circles as an intellectual synonym of “bad art”; it constitutes an easy way out of conversations on works that people do not really like and don’t want to spend time thinking on the reasons why. 3. (*adj.*) used with reference to artworks or discourses in order to encourage the interlocutor to elaborate more on the topic, sometimes in order to get a better idea yourself SYNONYMS (*adj.*) controversial; (*adj.*) unethical; (*adj.*) divisive; (*adj.*) tricky; (*adj.*) bad; (*adj.*) superficial ANTONYMS (*adj.*) straightforward; (*adj.*) simple; (*adj.*) able to make a statement; (*adj.*) uninteresting ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD Pretty much in the centre, depends on the context whether it tends slightly to positive (i.e. “thought-provoking” or negative, i.e. “superficially unethical” USAGE “it is problematic to use this kind of performers on stage”; “I find it problematic to talk about diversity and ignoring this aspect”; “doing that journey with the train could be problematic” RANDOMLY CHOSEN FROM GOOGLE “the framework for the proper functioning

of the State is problematic”; “for this reason, Iran is a complex and problematic actor in the Middle-East”; “to be precise and concise on those points that are still problematic” RECOMMENDED USAGE “I use the word in the arts context to describe a work that in my opinion was not thoroughly thought through: something was considered/managed superficially or the work was not able to make any statements, or the one that was made was controversial.”

problematic > 1. (*adj.*) STUPID, the word “problematic” is a euphemism for content not worthy of anybody’s attention, the word itself functions as cultural capital’s building block. 2. (*n.*) DANGEROUS CONTENT, the word “problematic” depicts ideas which seem coherent, but can produce dangerous results if realised. SYNONYMS (*adj.*) lazy; (*adj.*) naïve; (*adj.*) rigid ANTONYMS (*adj.*) safe; (*adj.*) thought-through, (*adj.*) flexible ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD On the side of bad USAGE “This article promotes problematic ideas.”; “I don’t think we should follow this plan, I think it is very problematic.”; “The performance we just saw is very problematic.” RECOMMENDED USAGE “Believing that it is possible to achieve freedom and safety at the same time is very problematic.” THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING “Believing that achieving freedom and safety at the same time is possible is very problematic.” WHAT SHALL WE DO Exchange a little bit of freedom for a little bit of safety.

problematic > 1. (*adj.*) something that causes problems, provokes troubles 2. (*adj.*) the intrinsic quality of the non-resolvable controversy SYNONYMS (*adj.*) troubling; (*adj.*) annoying; (*adj.*) complex; (*adj.*) thought provoking; (*adj.*) unsolved; (*adj.*) heterogeneous ANTONYMS (*adj.*) clear; (*adj.*) unanimous; (*adj.*) easy; (*adj.*) homogenous ON THE SPECTRUM OF GOOD AND BAD All over it. USAGE “His work is very good, although we must say that he himself is problematic.”, “The practice of some performance art festivals to put their student participants in tent camps and not address nor problematise it in their overall concepts is problematic.” RECOMMENDED USAGE “Do not use it, rather describe the elements that create the controversy!” THE MOST PROBLEMATIC THING the craze of change WHAT SHALL WE DO interfere, make space, bring it to explosion.



FROM CYNICISM TO POETICS: A Conversation with Mårten Spångberg

Ana Vujanović : The Critical Practice publication *A Problematic Book* deals with the notion of the problem in critical thinking or art making. Knowing your work in dance and choreography for several years and comparing your recent performances with what you did previously, I noticed an interesting move from a generally cynical approach to a poetical approach. Does it make sense to you? You can go broader, but I am thinking mostly about your approach in, on the one hand *Spangbergianism* and to an extent in *Powered by Emotion* and, on the other, recent performances like *La Substance*, *but in English*, *The Internet* and *Natten*.

Mårten Spångberg : I think you approach something interesting here, something that also concerns me in the artistic work that I do but also in teaching, writing and in respect of life. I was never interested in cynicism as an approach but ended up there perhaps mostly because of a sense of despair, as in *Spangbergianism*, and earlier more in respect of a—how can I say— post-structuralist resignation in front of the decline, or relativisation, of value; the artistic act as always appropriated, subjectivity as show off rather than authenticity, and so on. For example, *Powered by Emotion* is a solo, appropriating dances from a film with Steve Paxton and, in a similar attitude, singing songs by Buena Vista Social Club. Totally cynical, in a way, but of course the piece I made was a kind of meditation around notions of coding and decoding, territory and deterritorialisation *vis a vis* capitalism. It goes without saying that those ideas again were hijacked from *Mille Plateaux*.

Concerning *Spangbergiansim*, a book that attacks everything and everybody in dance and its business, the over-the-top cynical approach was also a means to annihilate myself. The cynicism in that book was supposed to be so, (an embarrassing word), “badass” that I, the author, should come out as the most ridiculous, to degrade myself to the extent that whatever that book produced, with a sort of machine gun attitude, it could never be understood as “good” advice. The title’s megalomaniac tone was of course also deliberate, both in the sense of “I am God” LOL, but also that I wrote this book, and I’m gonna be around whatever argument you want to have, fistfight included.

At that time, 2010 or so, during the recession, dance, from the perspective of the makers and doers, were so obedient, nice, polite, sympathetic and nobody dared to have any opinion at all – same now obviously – that I felt that I could not write that book at least to shake the dormant climate that I lived in, and felt despair from being part of. I didn't leave, but wrote a book. This is getting long but one more thing, it is important for me that *Spangbegianism* was distributed for free and had no publisher etc. To put together such a book for the bookstore, impossible as at that moment, cynicism becomes high on itself or whatever.

Cynicism is not something that I have researched and I guess it's evident that I cannot take much more than a page or two by Sloterdijk. Then again there are quite some interesting approaches to cynicism historically, even though perhaps I'm more drawn to a kind of pessimism, Schopenhauer definitely. I consider two approaches to cynicism, a structural and a strategic. The first one implies to detect circumstances, structures, and go around them. It is totally cynical to start with analysis of, for example, a commission, instead of with desire or spontaneous happiness. First we see how bad everything is, which it always is – cynical – but based on this initial passive aggressive attitude let's now turn it all around and figure out how the cynical vantage point can open up for happiness that will not backfire, isn't sustainable and, more importantly, is a happiness that we have enabled and not bumped into. In other words this is a cynicism that insists on becoming king of your circumstances, which also offers a kind of transparency. We know what we are doing and we are attackable, no one to blame. This, though, is an approach or attitude that can be experienced as threatening because, as much as it makes my operation transparent, also potentially exposes the operation of the structure inviting, or whatever it is. Strategic cynicism is more or less the contrary, in other words, we should just mention that, formally speaking, structures are always stable and open whereas strategies are malleable and/or closed; so, when structures proposes a certain openness, transparency that in its turn gives way to the possibility of change and re-distribution of power, as an example, then strategic cynicism does the opposite, it basically enables power and closes down the possibility for discussion, opposition, etc. So strategic cynicism is the instrument for the declining dominant discourse, thus the obvious strategy of today's male patriarch threatened as he is by more or less everything and knows it. Then again, such positioning can also from time to time be gainful, if the point is to make yourself into a fool, and that again is complicated because as dominant discourse you make yourself a fool on your own territory, perhaps the worst of the worst cynicism.

AV : It suggests that cynicism is also about not taking the position of “the undercommons” – to use the term from Harney and Moten – because it would mean leaving the stage, the battlefield, or disappearing somewhere else. So cynicism is still

about taking the challenge and trying to work with the circumstances as they are, and then maybe twist them. Can we say that?

MS : I don't particularly support the notion of undercommons, in particular in respect of the European political landscape. Considering say minorities in the US or people living in the border zone between Mexico and the USA, perhaps we can talk about an undercommons, but the way that Moten and Harney do, it's again a position taken by the one that can afford it. I find Harney seriously cynical and not in an inspiring way. To me, the undercommons becomes a new chill territory full of exciting vectors that scholars can appropriate. Ouch. What's the next book then dealing with the super undercommons, or the naked commons with an accent on Agamben – zoe commons. Endless regress. I think this hints towards a shift, towards a poetic attitude, in the sense of a very different search or journey, which doesn't go from commons to under, to super-under – which is all a matter of staying in a discourse and operating through likelihood. A poetic, and poetic needs to be clarified as it has very little to do with poetry, instead remains and takes as its responsibility to set in motion the possibility for a different kind of change, a difference in kind instead of difference in degree. In other words, it esteems the possibility for contingent change, that obviously therefore also contingently undermines itself as discourse and power. The cynics stay on the scene pretending it's a different one, where the poetic stays around producing the possibilities for the stage to prominently change and contingently. That is to say, cynical transformation is always and harnessed in re-active transformation, whereas poetic approaches engage in the emergence of possible active change.

AV : If you think these two approaches in historical categories, what would be, in your view, the cases – authors, artworks, artistic practices – that exemplify them or probe them?

MS : There was something, I refer not least to conversations with Valeria Graziano here, wonderfully naïve with the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, both the political and artistic avant-garde. It is somehow beautiful to remember those men that with a heroic gesture considered the possibility of enlightening the ordinary citizen that they were worth fighting for, that emancipation was within reach. Avant-garde was not cynical, it was naïve; kind of cute that a bunch of white men already inscribed in the dominant discourse would bring emancipation to the people. What beautiful heroism. When the plug was pulled any form of avant-garde became impossible, around 1970. What moved in instead was really, terribly cynical, and has become more and more so. I'm talking about institutional critique which I think was a terrible idea, exactly because it is something that can only be practiced by those who

are already invited, the ones that carry the key to the VIP space. Institutional critique was reserved for people like me, white guys from the west. Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Tino Sehgal, it's only Andrea Fraser that contested the male empire. Obviously institutional critique was never a critique of institutions. It was just a tease, playing hard to get, or like kids testing boundaries, but of course always making sure that Mama's gonna love her little boy. Institutional critique suffered from the same problem as Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonism. All great but there is just that problem: one can only have an encounter with someone that has access to a political context, the ones that already have a voice, have been acknowledged by a majority. To me institutional critique can be an example for the worst kind of cynicism, one that it took me long to detect but also kind of nice, you know, things you learn late in life.

AV : And actually, it can function only within the system that presupposes it, that's the problem...

MS : Exactly. Nevertheless, I think Mouffe made some impact even though it backfired. A few years ago, a curator of a major European museum told me that they don't curate artists anymore but "urgencies". I nodded my head as one does just before some panel discussion got going and we all sat down, but I was thinking, urgent for whom? Under what circumstances? When and where? Urgency is one of those horrid terms that boils down to urgent in respect of the one with the wallet, the museum or whatever it is. Always urgent enough, never more than that because obviously what the museum can recognise is already not urgent for real.

I don't really know, but there is something pressing about this also concerning cynicism and poetics. I think poetics can live with it but cynicism can't for sure. If we want change, prominent change, it has consequences, collateral damage, so to say. Something's gotta go; with the introduction of something new something else will be pushed aside, a new currency will make other things incompatible. One has to recognise, in other words, that radicalism comes with a price, and there can thus not be gentle radicalism, or radicalism with a nice face, to paraphrase Žižek. It just doesn't happen. Liberalism and cynicism used as a smoke screen for one's liberal affinities, cannot handle radicalism for two reasons. First because capitalism requires radicalism and the liberal cannot sign up, and because secondly, the liberal cynic cannot live with the possibility that the ground, the foundation, is not stable. The liberal and the cynic argue, change, by all means, but only as long as it builds properly on the past and maintains the historical narrative as we know it. To approach something with a radical attitude implies to undo givens and to insist on not judging, only then can some thing emerge contingently.

AV : Speaking about radicalism and the price to be paid, I would like to go back to *Spangberianism*... While observing the life of the book, I think it made many people

angry – probably mostly people who hold certain positions that defined the art world in which you operated – but at the same time you got many “admirers”, or many people who sympathise with you, especially among younger artists, students, or the people coming from very marginal contexts, like the Balkans. You have always been very welcomed in that context, probably because it has been very marginalised...

MS : I’ve always been welcome by people who have no money. I’m totally a favorite for the ones without means, but those are also the ones that invent new kinds of resources and turn stuff around. Those are the ones that have no choice but to use first instance, or structural, cynicism. We are fucked so let’s go to work. Or, we are totally fucked anyway so let’s make sure we are fucked well.

People who are privileged can afford to be greedy, and as soon as somebody that is not already authorised has a good idea, they get scared and feel threatened. It’s not exactly news, but the situated tend to wish to sit on their resources. Sit on them until bitterness hits hard and they have to realise that they are just another sad rerun on a channel with three digits. In less situated parts of the dance world there’s simply nothing to be snobbish about, so let’s get down to basics and then we talk. No need for politeness and fancy ornamentation, but to be a true friend also means to say no, to understand but not agree.

Spangbergianism was put together like an evil omen, it was a matter of nailing everybody and let them, including myself, taste their spineless lack of conviction and desire to lean against convenient life. Where is your devotion? Because, if you’re not in dance because of devotion what are you doing here? It’s badly paid, no fame, bad parties, small cars, cheap wine and flights. So, and here comes cynicism, you are here because you’re not good enough for anywhere else.

So guess who got mad and don’t invite me any more. Exactly, the ones that stash the money in the mattress, including Sweden. All the rest have been hands in the air. It’s pretty cute with Sweden, the book has been read by many, but the Swedish arts council or anybody that’s an authority in dance, art or culture up there has never mentioned the book. Pretty sick considering that it’s read from—and I’m serious—Argentina and Mexico, to Korea and Japan and back again, the whole of Europe, including the US and Canada. It’s pretty comical to have written the most read book in dance in this century and my own context totally ignores it.

Yet, however cynical it was, it was also, at least, meant to be an unconditionally positive statement, around self-empowerment, autonomy and the will to create one’s own circumstances. Shit – I know it’s tacky, but – *Spangbergianism* was a just call for independence, and mind you, it worked.

You know, it’s what I like best, to prove people wrong. Kind of like, you didn’t believe in us, in what we did, what we were devoted to. Now it’s too late, so good luck in your comfy chair in your corner office with a freaking glass and please go on complaining about budget cuts. We’re out there changing the world in the meantime.

AV : Now, when you are explaining the cynicism you practiced in *Spangbergianism*, I think that in fact “problematizing” is something most characteristic for your work, although it takes different shapes. So to speak, in *Spangbergianism* you formulate the problem from a *cynical approach*, while now, you are trying more and more to formulate it from a *poetical approach*. But in both cases it is about problematising and also attempting to formulate problems. What would you say about that?

MS : As I mentioned, that book was written out of despair, a sense of being unable to continue. But at the same time to give up is not an option. I don't mean to reference Beckett, obviously, but never the less in this inability to stop, I think there is passion. It is exactly devotion that doesn't allow me to stop. But devotion must always be contested and double checked, otherwise one risks becoming coquettish. Devotion is always on the move. To me, the price to pay for love, for devotion, is that I must always be, in a way, out of balance. Love implies to insists on always living a moment of constant *ungrounding*. Concerning love and art, my, *our*, responsibility is to never regulate or to stabilise, to never make something consolidate but instead generate openness to an ongoing process in which the self, my self is perpetually undermined.

AV : But where does that whole attitude come from? You know, it is unusual. That's why maybe you are a very good person to speak with about “the problem”, since it's not typical that artists, theorists, etc., in the contemporary European dance scene problematise that much, and you do it all the time...

MS : If you, in your social context of Serbia and former Yugoslavia, started to problematise because of necessity, I did it because if I didn't what would that make me? I'd turn into an obedient surfer that would have difficulties having a look in the mirror. To problematise—if that's what I do—was my answer to growing up and working in a privileged context. Growing up in, and I definitely did, a social democracy—and Swedish welfare was absolutely wonderful—but the political climate I grew up in was extremely effective at sedating the people. At some point I figured out that I had to stay alert, always alert, and the way to do it was to problematise.

It's perhaps valuable to say that to problematize is not the same thing as having problems or solve something like a problem.

In fact, behind it all is probably a personal trauma. That's the first – you don't want to know but yes, I'm strongly revenge driven. The second is that devotion keeps me from getting bitter, which would be easy after such a long time in the business. Nothing in the world has been so violent to me as dance and art. Nothing has broken me more and nowhere I have I encountered more evil people. Cynicism is one obvious solution, but it's way too lonely for me.

It's also something about refusing to be world-champion in Stockholm. I left in the

mid '90s partly because I couldn't stand the self-pleaseness of choreographers making a little quintet spending quarter of a million euro. It's really easy to be the champ in Stockholm, better to not be interested in the rest of the world, or tour, because we might just have to realise that what we do is not interesting, original, exciting, cool, smart, theoretically advanced, you name it. The only thing extraordinary with Swedish dance is that it's Swedish.

Finally, you know, I've always been bad at everything. I have no degrees in nothing. I can't dance, I'm a lousy musician, mediocre philosopher and all kinds of things, but it's great because I have nothing to fall on, I have nothing to defend. Cynical in the first instance, but at a second glance, perfect: I can do what I want.

AV : Do you know of the term “dilettante” by Brecht? And in former Yugoslavia Aldo Milohnić wrote about “radical dilettantism”... It suggests that if you are outside the paradigm, then you can ask the fundamental questions about the paradigm, just because you are not complicit with all the tacit knowledge and rules that you get through official education or by being professional in the field. It's a kind of position that cannot be complicit with the *doxa*, that is in a way free from it.

MS : Absolutely. A colleague, an architect, he has five years of education that he could not not defend. Not because he loves architects but because “I spent five years learning that shit”. The piece that you mentioned in the beginning of our conversation *Powered by Emotion* was quite explicitly addressing dilettantism, radical or not, and indeed as you mention the dilettante, so to say, carries with him or her the possibility to reveal. Like the child and the emperors new outfit. There's just a little problem. At the same time as the educated is blinded by his debt he has something to sustain a practice. The dilettante is “free” but can easily sink into the mud of sensationalism. It's a bit embarrassing to build a practice on revealing emperors, and the tendency is that it ends up in the dirtiest form of cynicism. I'm thinking Maurizio Cattelan. The recent toilet in gold installed in the Guggenheim entitled *America*, give me a break.

There was something very important working in close proximity to architecture, especially with this extraordinary man Tor Lindstrand. It taught me a lot about differentiating between structures and strategies; reading circumstances and understanding protocols, briefs etc., and differentiating organisation from expression. The educated is somebody whose practice is embedded in structure, but this can establish a strong causality in relation to expression, and this blocks “wild” navigation. On the other hand, the dilettante is somebody that can maneuver like a crazy person, or be super strategic, exactly because of structurelessness, but the back is that he has nothing to push against, nothing to produce a generative resistance. Good art, if you know what I mean, happens when the delicate boarder zones between structures and strategies start

to vibrate and as a result crack open the dichotomy between striation and smoothness. It is there, which is not a where, that problems show up, where “New” problems emerge.

AV : I have a straightforward question, to which the answer probably cannot be straightforward, but nevertheless... Since we have agreed so far that the problem is not about complaining or being indecisive etc., I’m interested in how you theoretically or philosophically understand the activity of problematisation and the notion of the problem. It is a standstill in the regular flow of action, a moment of resistance, of zooming out, so to speak, no? How would you reference these notions?

MS : “Problematisé” as you said, to me has to do with a sympathetic relation to Deleuze & Guattari that I, as a “true” dilettante, obviously never read. I think that the work of the philosopher, scientist and artist fundamentally is to make truth, make fact and make new kinds of experiences show up, rather than consolidate what we already know. An important sentence from *What Is Philosophy* comes to mind. From the top of my head: the responsibility of the philosopher, the scientist and the artist is the production of the possibility of an altogether new something.” Western philosophy, largely Kantian philosophy, certainly is work of excellence: the philosopher clears all the debris and all the mess away, and here is the concept, the truth, what cannot be otherwise. Deleuze & Guattari rather work in the middle of the mess, as a means to generate other kinds of order. Instead of philosophy that consolidates truth or a science that proves this or that fact. This is a productive or generative philosophy. It’s not a matter of consolidation of truth, fact and experience but instead a matter of generating truth, generating face and in the case of art generating new kinds of experience.

For Deleuze the “tool” used, or that he recommends, as we know is called a concept, but concept is a complex term not least in respect of its etymology. In Deleuze it is rather difficult to get what he means with a concept as it fluctuates from book to book.

The understanding of “concept” in English comes to a large extent from the translation of Kant’s *Critiques* into English. When those translations were made, the German word *Begriff* could not really be translated to “term” or “notion”. Finally the translator decided for “concept” – can’t remember his name but Mario Perniola writes nicely about it in “Enigmas” – and this totally transformed the entire ideas of concept. *Begriff* as we know is a settlement, it’s about nailing something. The fundamental *Begriffe* of a thesis, for example, should carry the same meaning from the beginning to the end – stability, consolidation, determination and in no way confusion.

The Deleuzean concept is altogether different; it’s instead a machine for the production of indeterminacy. A concept in Deleuze is not a consolidation, a

clearing of the grounds, but instead a machine, an abstract machine that generate some thing, very different from conventional machines. A toaster, for example, is a machine that is successful, or good, when containing strong determinacy. Every toast should come out the same, that's the point. We can also understand a conventional machine through established modes of causality. This leads to that, and so on. The Deleuzian concept is an abstract machine producing indeterminacy, and being in itself indeterminate, one could even say singular and singularity obviously don't have determination.

Deleuze opens up for an alternative etymology, a Latin background where concept rather refers to conceiving something, *concipere* would be the Latin origin.

Concept here instead means bringing together, but to conceive is not just to bring together as in collecting a bunch of sheep. It's a matter of bringing together and forth. In ways it refers to drafting something, in particular in the sense that it is a bringing together of things, of stuff, of thought that is incompatible. To bring forth as an assemblage what appeared to be incompatible. To work with or on a concept therefore means not only to bring together incompatibles, but for this to happen we, the one engaged, need to change his or her understanding of what grouping, assembling can be, and contingently. What follows is a question from where then do these capacities "come"? Bringing something together that is epistemologically not possible to bring together?

What Deleuze is interested in is not knowledge but rather the indeterminate stuff that leaks out of the virtual, the immanence or a plane of consistency. What leaks out, if one can use such a metaphor, is not knowledge but the stuff knowledge is made of.

But why all this Deleuze mumbo jumbo? Deleuze might be arrogant and "French" but his philosophy is never cynical. Instead, to me, his thinking resonates strongly with the Greek notion *poiesis* that we encounter in Plato's *Symposium*. Summarised by Agamben in *The Man Without Content* (translated to English on in 1999 but published 1970), he differentiates between production – which is to make another one – and production as manufacturing.

AV : Technical reproduction.

MS : Exactly, which obviously can also be to bake bread, make children or whatever. Wait a second, children is a bit complex, maybe. Next to production then, *poiesis* which instead, proposes Agamben, would be "pro-duction", a matter of bringing some thing forth, previously unthinkable. This has nothing good or bad which is always something, but instead of bringing forth *some thing*. Production is a matter of organising another one (something) for the world, perhaps an alternative or version, and this production is based on knowledge; it is measurable and effective. *Poiesis* (pro-duction) instead, is bringing some thing *New* into the world, such production can not be knowledge based; it is immeasurable

and therefore affective. Not for Agamben, but for Deleuze it is important to add here that production always remains in the real of the possible (reality/the world), whereas pro-duction, *poiesis*, implies an engagement with the possibility of potentiality, and potentiality can be said to stuff that leaks out of the virtual into reality and the domain of possibility, a process that Deleuze, referring to Simondon, define as actualisation.

AV : Agamben wrote on *poiesis* of today, but he relies a lot on Aristotle. When I said “the poetics” at the beginning of this conversation, I also had in mind that classical idea of bringing something new, to appear in the world. But then, if we think about poetics in your case, like in many other cases, we don’t need to speak about bringing matter into a shape, but bringing together matter and shape. That’s why the works like *Natten* (premiered at Kunsten Festival 2016) are so intriguing and make us think or speculate. And it seems fruitful for me to go beyond Agamben and Aristotle, and think about just bringing something into the world, you know, without having that preconceived image that you project on to the thing that you bring. That’s also a relatively open poetical proposal. But why I think poetics is still about problematising things or even criticising – just a different approach to the problem – is that when you propose something, when you bring something new, you also put it in the world, in place of something else. That kind of proposition could be also an implicit criticism or deliberately filling the world with the things that you think are worth filling it. This open possibility of the thing that you bring into the world might resonate with what you have done recently, hm?

MS : Certainly. I’m just thinking along with Agamben and I sympathise with his historical analyses that’s obviously intimate with Aristotle but perhaps more in bed with Heidegger.

Over the last many years we’ve had a lot of debates around critique, its possible decline, resurrection, how capitalism has co-opted it, etc. On the one hand, it’s been argued that criticism fails in scrutinising the position of the critic, making it into a positivist practice. On the other, one can argue against criticality, that prides itself with a superficial reading of the late Foucault but, as Foucault clearly warn us, ends up in being simple neoliberal opportunism, track-pad criticism. I’ve been, after putting out *Spangbergianism*, not least interested in problematising these positions and locating them specifically in artistic practices, and in dance in particular. In a few words. Critique: not as a means to an end, but as modes of companionship during and through processes. Critique: not in respect of probability and responsibility, but as contingent and irreversible, which implies practices whose outcome, revenue, is indeterminate and therefore not subject to interpretation, but instead offers the implicated to engage generatively or in processes of possible pro-duction, poietic production. It of course goes without saying that this pro-duction, the bringing forth is also indeterminate to, and for,

me. In this way I cannot know what to fill the world with, I can only “hope” that it can be filled with something else, something *Else*. And as you say, the bringing forth implies to put something in the world instead of something else. *Poiesis* comes with a price, collateral damage.

It's thus pretty comical how liberal people deal with *poiesis*, especially liberals in academia and the arts that tend towards a more classical value conservative liberalism. At the end of the day I want my work, *Natten* for example, to be minimally guiding. We are guided enough in life, directed and etc., by the state, the economy etc. We are placed in front of pre-fabricated choices – sushi or sashimi – which is choice as production. I've had it. My shows are there exactly for the possibility of *poiesis*. Things are there but no matter and form are brought together, no manual is passed out. Respect, every audience member can decide for themselves, the ones that decide to walk out probably have something better in mind and I'm not up for being convincing. My dances, my work since at least *La Substance, but in English* is not conceptual, they are concepts, passed on to not the audience, but to each spectator individually, each individual understood as a singularity.

AV : Would that be what differentiates it from cynicism? That of unleashing the guidance? Withdrawal of the “master-mind”?

MS : I am thinking that the cynical is somebody who detects anomalies and attacks them, but always contained in the discourse through which the anomaly has been able to appear. What I am interested in, and about what poetics can do, is rather to break with discourses. Poetics is not strategic in this sense, it's in a way, hope for the best, it's outcome is contingent, what the collateral damage is, who knows, it can even be the obliteration of the artist or the work, or the world.

Natten is a through and through a critical work, but it's poetic in a way, detecting anomalies and replacing them, not with something that we know but rather replacing it with something. In this respect, the move is also a matter of making my position unstable, ungrounding my position. The *poietic* moment necessitates a departure from subjectivity, from identity, and implies a sense of trans-subjectivity. In a way, poetics is always a matter of *queering*, not bring matter and form together.

The cynic makes sure he comes out on top. Like Jérôme Bel's performances. They know what they are talking about, attack this something and turn to the audience to make sure everybody gets what is attacked. Here we have the audience and everybody in the audience, a good multiplicity, go home to their husbands, colleagues, neighbours, dogs and cat telling them how amazing it was. “He is so spot on, so clever, so intelligent”, and everybody agrees. Effective and completely stupefying.

Then, for us, scholars, etc. we are very happy in the foyer afterwards, because we understand everything and can apply it to loads of sexy theories. Because of this, Jérôme Bel can be successful, it's very economical. The investment to write about Jérôme Bel is very small, because it doesn't contest mine or anybody's relation to Lacan or whatever. Right?

AV : Maybe it's because it's in a way prepared to be written about.

MS : Exactly, which I think was very important at some point, but not today. I mean, especially when being prominently situated in every kind of privilege. I instead vote for practices of ungrounding, myself in particular, especially in respect of our current political situation. If we experience – this is the brief version – omni-present capitalism, any proposal or statement, any criticism must be a capitalist ditto. So rather than stating something – in the sense of Kant and *Begriff* – I'm interested in withdrawal, which is not just any kind of withdrawal, but that's for another day – withdrawal from coagulating form or tying it to matter. This is also what the performance passes to the audience, a kind of minimally active withdrawal that never becomes anything before the individual steps in, makes a move, generates.

Conventionally the audience is understood as a multiplicity. Not good, and we read this with Rancière and beyond, hopefully with Lyotard, etc. I want it the other way around; there must be no audience, only individuals: a specific kind of multitude – a set of individuals that cannot be brought together as group. There is no community here, if there is one it is one that we as individuals that don't belong to each other have to bring forth.

This mess is coming together. In front of a performance that offers itself as a concept, the individual audience member is possibly engaged in a process of coagulating, poietically, some things that are neither form nor matter. It is in this twining of withdrawal and individual (singular) coagulation or capture, or not coagulating but just being, of minimally formed and mattered, that the work is located. It is, to me, at this moment that something can show up.

After *Natten* people often come out after the show, it's 7 hours and 6 minutes, saying things like: "Not now" or something else like "Gotta go" and it seems it's because the experience, the twining is simultaneously too big and too weak, too personal and too generic. I like that.

AV : That is maybe the moment of creating the problem. At the end I would like to return once again to the problem of "the problem", and ask you about the role or the function of the problem in your thinking and creative process. Not every problem has the same strength and potentiality...

MS : Basically there are two kinds of problems. There are false problems, like: should you or should I pick up the kids from the kindergarten? I did it yesterday, you do it today, or we could hire somebody to do it. There are a number of solutions already available... not really a problem just negotiation and rhetorics. A real problem – this is, by the way, kind of picked up from Deleuze’s book on Bergson. Real problems are problems to which there is no available solutions, they cannot be solved. Real problems are problems that “force” us to generate solutions, but again from where, or out of what, then these solutions are generated because if they were generated out of language, or through probability analysis, for example, they would indeed be conventional – a false problem. A real problem can generate solutions only through an encounter with the virtual, so to say, forcing a leakage out the virtual, immanence or whatever we choose for the real of the potential. Real problems are what one, or that’s what I, cannot not engage with, when making art.

Thinking about this, I consider that art obviously isn’t here to make the world, our lives or anything, better. That’s design or simple economy that surrounds art extensively but is not synonymous with aesthetic experience. I rather think – and that’s definitely not me thinking but general Kant – but I do think that art’s job, or responsibility, is to make the world, modes of life, phenomena and things come to an end. Like Duchamp made sculpture come to an end around 1913 or so, and how Andy Warhol made originality, in a way, come to an end, or *Finnegans Wake*, Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz*, Gerhard Richter’s out of focus paintings and so on. They all made something come to an end. After Duchamp, sculpture wasn’t the same any more, he brought sculpture to an end, not as simply destruction but so that new positions of sculpture had to be articulated or take place, but it was not Duchamp who did, or was responsible for, this articulation. He was only responsible for the to-an-end, and contingently. With this in mind, the engagement with problems and to problematise is not a matter of articulating questions to which there might or might not exist solutions, but instead to provoke new answers, answers to which there are no questions. The poietic moment is one that generates answers to which we have to articulate accurate questions.

What I want, or what I think, art should pass on to the audience is the necessity to articulate a new question. For me, there is something about the difference between a modernist project and what I am interested in. Modernism was equipped with a shovel. If you just dig deep enough, then we would find essence and if we could find it we could have or gain consolidation. Capture essence. This was wishful thinking.

In accord with Deleuzian generative philosophy, I am thinking that my job is to engage in the production of the possibility for essence to show up, like from the future, in a way. What I am doing, what art’s job is, is to make new answers

come to us from the future. Those answers, that are New, that are essential and must be, are obviously true, but only until the moment they have engaged in the process that we know as actualisation, which is the moment when they, so to say, enter representation, and be proxy become conventional. In other words, generating truth in order for it to vanish, and that's important because if truth would remain, life and stuff would not be better or worse, not come to an end, but simply freeze in a moment of eternity.

So my job as a person, and especially as somebody engaging with art, in production or audience, is to be alert, because those answers are not telling us when they are coming. When they arrive from the future, and this is embarrassing – I can't fucking believe I'm saying this but I also believe in the soul – okay, they come from a non-causal, non-regional opportunity and are prominently horizontal. In other words, they arrive from immanence. This is why I cannot stop making art, to engage in the possibility of the production of new answers. Answers that carry with them the possibility of contingent worlds. To engage in problems is to engage in the destruction of what is and through this destruction bring something forth. To leave cynicism behind and be courageous enough to open up for the absolute dread unleashed by *poiesis*.

Vienna, 16 August 2016



THE CRITICAL PRACTICE (Made in Yugoslavia)

programme was created through collaboration of Station Service for contemporary dance, Lokomotiva – Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture (as partners of Nomad Dance Academy) and Ana Vujanović as the programme's mentor. The programme is oriented towards empowering discursive reflections on contemporary performing arts while enabling their breakthrough into the larger public.

In contextual terms, it is focused on, but not restricted to, the post-Yugoslav region. Among the reasons for such an orientation are, on the one hand, a lack of continual and publicly visible critical writing about contemporary performances and performing arts events in the region and, on the other, the strong recent development in performing arts theory coming from this context. Therefore, this venture draws on the already existing platforms generated by the magazines *TkH* (Belgrade), *Maska* (Ljubljana) and *Frakcija* (Zagreb), as well as the Nomad Dance Academy (The Balkans). Its purpose is to advance the professional development of emerging authors (writers, critics, researchers, theoreticians) from the region and elsewhere and to encourage a more profound, more visible and more accessible critical reflection on the contemporary performing arts, enhancing their visibility and stimulating dialogue with audiences.

Within this programme we understand the notion of critical practice not only as a topic to be studied and an activity to be done, but also as an all-compassing politics and ethics of working together. This obliges all of us involved in the programme to engage in self-reflection, to give thought to our doings in critical dialogue, learning how to question our approaches and positions by means of analysis and argumentation while fostering processes of learning by doing.

Accordingly, the participants and the mentor are seen as a working group of colleagues facilitated by the mentor, wherein mutual respect and confidence constitute the backbone of collaboration.

The Critical Practice programme is part of Life Long Burning project.

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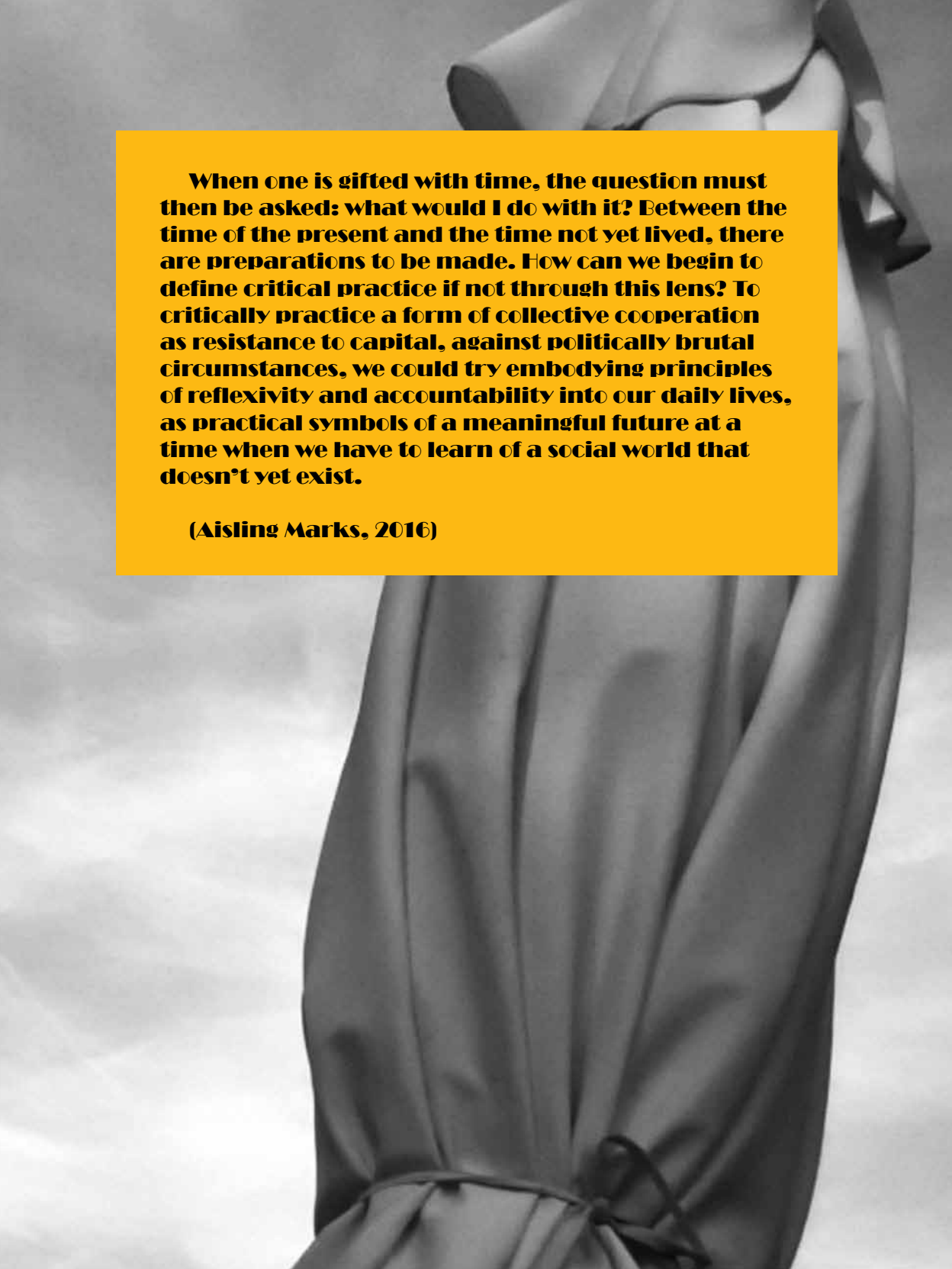
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When one is gifted with time, the question must then be asked: what would I do with it? Between the time of the present and the time not yet lived, there are preparations to be made. How can we begin to define critical practice if not through this lens? To critically practice a form of collective cooperation as resistance to capital, against politically brutal circumstances, we could try embodying principles of reflexivity and accountability into our daily lives, as practical symbols of a meaningful future at a time when we have to learn of a social world that doesn't yet exist.

(Aisling Marks, 2016)