



## All for Everyone: Thoughts on Collectivity in Performative Context

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The idea that I am trying to affirm in my performance-related theoretical and practical works, both individual and collective ones, is subjectivation manifested in performance as situation. I am aiming to do the same in this text while thinking on collectivity in performative context.

If we think about incorporating theatre production into agenda of the culture industry—critically conceptualized by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno—, we can notice a systemic alienation of performance's dimension of collectivity tied to political. To refresh memory, the culture industry converts critique of institution in its means that is to a large extent evacuated in advance, by very acquisition of certain rights. As institution itself is apparently critical, we can allegedly trust the task of (self)critique that it takes on. As the criticalness is immanent to the political, the collectivity tied to the political tends to dilute and be represented as something else in the existing conditions.

Namely, such perverting of criticalness—in terms of transferring a critical potential to an exclusive managerial instance that governs institution—is the feature of again and again updated institutionalism. It goes hand in hand with the neutralization of performance's political dimension on the level of representation, reflected in performers' and spectators' bodies, and, overall, in depoliticization of the time-space of performance. In depoliticized context collectivity is at most an empty marker: the term describes a form, for instance, a form of collective choreography, a collective work, even a collective acting body, yet it does not reflect a situation of speaking beyond hierarchical relations of powers. The term collectivity is actually neutral, as it does not necessarily refers to politicalness of certain context, though it can be used as its false substitute.

Various classifications, one of most obvious is the division performer vs. spectator, reflect the dominant stage-related order. Resisting that order requests specific thinking of notions of collectivity and audience: collectivity as a certain potentiality of the performative context that

supports or provokes or inspires awareness of everybody's function in it, not only function as such, but as interrelated in non-hierarchical sense.

The least that theatre can do to be political is to suggest opening of space of political, which actually means co-creating conditions for socialization in a space of common, therefore co-creating that very space, which, however, requests abolition of paradigm of audience. To succeed in such attempt, theatre should at the same time un-theatralize or, with other words, dis-institutionalize itself, so instead of speaking about theatre I rather speak about the performative in the context of politicization.

Such radical turn—radical from the perspective of usualness of the existing production mode—requests thinking of the performative's space constellation and juxtaposing of all present bodies, both performers' and non-performers' bodies, or, better, performers who are performers from the starting point, and potential performers. I am talking about—with Jacques Rancière's term—such reconfiguration of the sensible that is capable of opening a context and joining it with an author's concept. The audience is abolished in that co-relation, here we have to do with a community of individuals who are interested in sharing experiences in the very situation. I name this sharing of experience *the performative situation*.

So if we are affirming collectivity in terms of co-creating a community (with)in the performative situation, we are actually politicizing the time-space of performance; the political is here understood as, referring to Emmanuel Barot, what emerges from contradiction between the real and the possible, and also as, paraphrasing Rancière, a constellation of setting up speaking instead of noise.

What is in fact essential is a shift from accenting an act, therefore a performance reduced to a unique (one-time) gesture, to the performative situation, which is an extended or stretched time-space of pleasure. The pleasure here means realization of desire and immersing into that realization. The performative situation—that evades the stage canon—reflects a body's desire to cut and stop every single process embedded in the existing, a desire of anti-production, of stopping any production, all the machines, all re-production—which is, nevertheless, always superfluous as it is intended to create the excessiveness, the surplus. However, the point of the rupture as a break with the existing is in producing a different kind of surplus, a surplus of desire's realization, a surplus that does not reflect a redundancy as in case of artifacts of commodified reality, but—with Georges Bataille's *L'Érotisme* in mind—an overflow, therefore

a motive and a driving force of life. So, in the performance that consciously abolishes audience, we step into some other art, into non-spectacularized creativity, therefore into a non-art, that, maybe on the first sight paradoxically, might also use certain spectacle's tools. Not to be misunderstood: the audience abolishment by itself is not a guarantee for successful break with the existing, yet it is an important decision, among all possible others that are part of a performing strategy, that tends to cause certain rupture.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *L'Anti-Œdipe* show that “every position of desire, even insignificant one, has in itself something that might question the existing regulation of society; not by being asocial, on the contrary, yet the desire causes a turbulence as it is in its core revolutionary /.../ and no society cannot stand the position of true desire without compromising its exploitation structures././ Suppression of desire is therefore of vital importance for society, and inventing something even better than suppression, to make repression, hierarchy, exploitation and enslavement desired. /.../ Desire does not 'want' revolution, it is revolutionary by itself and so to say unwillingly, by wanting what it wants to want” (94–95).

Spectacularization and institutionalization are in fact manifestations of that perverted inventing of something even better than suppression: as much as hierarchy and exploitation are desirable and internalized, the sooner it is taken for granted that an institution should regulate and normalize hierarchy and exploitation; and it is also encouraging their internalization, while securing spectacular dimension of representation. As the desire does not want revolution, but self-realization, the theatre performances framed in institutionalized engaged theatre fail beforehand in conceptual sense. Even if they are based on a need to declare/stage/perform some revolutionary desire, it dilutes in the given context of production, consequently such shows slip into desire's re-presented/staged/spectacularized opposite. Exactly that is the basic problem of the theatre that wants to be political, yet it cannot be realized as such within institution (internalized in its agents), or, with other words, in circumstances that are not truly political.

Back to the Deleuze and Guattari's thesis on revolutionary as something inherent to desire. There is an emancipatory potential in desire's (self-)realization: a promise of a conflict as breaking the existing and as an act of exiting from status quo. Self-realization of desire is a realization or happening of “impossible” or “impossible” (within a) situation. The impossible situation is actually a break in the existing, a rupture as a happening. Certainly, it requires establishing of production conditions which are qualitatively different from the dominant ones, which means self-organization of production that enables realization of that “impossible”; yet,

it does not mean that it guarantees it. It is not neither about changing institutions “from inside” nor their demolishing, but about the gesture of *performing the desire* (that is by no means a staging of the desire's projection) that means actual liberation in the very space-time of its performance, which is the other name of break with the existing. In this context the question of institution is radically deconstructed and turned into another question: what and how after institution. And that question becomes important at the moment we decide to act without following institutionalized canons and production ways, and when both limits and supports provided by institution fall off

Speaking on performing the desire while questioning institution and canonized relationship between performers and audience, I have to more explicitly draw attention to the trap of apparent politicization that actually strengthens impermeability of theatre territory. The apparent politicization can be noticed in trendy efforts to push a participatory and interactive impression into actually conservatively devised plays. When co-participation is not organically rooted in context and concept of a play—that means a true author's need to make such conditions to achieve it—, its audience is often addressed in ways that are far from cohesive and that actually only stress usual incorporation in theatre canon. But politicization requires exiting the canon, a step across the border or, better, forgetting it, which also means exit from ourselves, in terms of relativization of our identities, including ourselves as canonized functions (director, actor etc), that is to say disidentification. The functions of co-creators of a performance projected within certain performing strategy are, not to be mixed, something else.

The artificial, structural, but above all the unconscious dividing between spectator and performer calls for intervention in it, for rethinking, deconstructing and reconfiguring of that core—spectacular—relation. We are speaking about the very dividing that directly, in physical sense, too—on the level of embodiment and bodies configuration—reflects ideology of the existing (alienation, reprogramming and automation of desire) and its influence to the potentially critical performance. One cannot totally exempt him/herself from wheels of that ideology, however, everybody can make a step into situation that can be initiated and co-created beyond the dominant production way. Necessarily across the border of good taste. The only rule that we as its initiators have to respect is that the “guest” is always right. Everything else is matter of strategy, not of art, but of non-art.

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I am using word “guest” in context of two performances that I will talk about now. I will share my own experience of performing in The Oath and in PopParty. Both performances are conceptualized by tandem Kitch, which I am a part of, and I was also coordinating production of both. I will look at similarities and differences between two performative strategies emerged during these experiments on the edge of theatre.

A reflection on meaning and position of audience was incorporated already in designing of both performances. It was so to say a fundamental reflection of this issue. In both cases we could only “work” with audience live, as it was actually present during the performances, so for the first time at premieres. As the term audience does not correspond to our conceptual and ideological intention, we rather adopted the term guests, for the first time in case of The Oath, where the word guest suits invitee's initial function in the performance. We therefore invited people to be our guests in the physical space of theatre and at the same time in an imaginary, but not less real space (setting) of performance. The space (setting) in case of The Oath is kafana—the word is for Balkan sort of pub, usually with live music—, and in case of PopParty it is night club.

Our commitment to get rid of the usual comprehension of audience demanded inventing ways, methods and approaches that are not intending to “include” people in illustrative, programmatic meaning of offering and forcing cooperation in an event, but taking them into account as key factors, therefore understanding guests on the same level as performers, inside the procedure that provides certain fittings for initiating and developing the situation; the procedure that actually and by priority situate our totally personal moment as a basis of the concept we have been building. A specific strategy had to be invented, through which we share our views, comments and feelings in an attractive and open way, and above all co-create an atmosphere that we wanted to have among all the present, performers and guests. That personal moment is therefore transposing rather into an atmosphere than into a message as such, while the message itself is being somehow deformed, curved (bended), so that it arises and occurs as a trans-message. The trans-message provides unobtrusiveness and at the same time a strong statement position. Consequently the statement does not collide with the audience (right this collision is what makes theatre a pillar of the existing), but is being co-created together with the guests. Enunciation as well as atmosphere are co-created by all bodies and voices. To achieve that we did not start with consideration of relation based on watching and listening, but with designing—imagining—relations that support the construction of the desired atmosphere,

feelings and ambience, and that “work” in favor of our concept. In short, we wanted a core constellation of cheerful, unbridled (unconstrained) and specifically shifted mood as a trigger precondition for such atmosphere as the major factor in the time-space of performance.

In relation to that wish I want to stress the meaning of space-time and thereby the conceptualization and design of the space that are of key importance for any situating related to performance; while on personal level, the one that is directly intertwined with performing from oneself, it was very important for us to know who, where and in what way we are—especially Lana and Nenad as tandem Kitch—in that constellation, which also means in connection with all performers: how do we feel, how do we build feeling and being, how do we share it with guests, and how do they feel.

Performance The Oath is an experiment based on personal experience of moving from the East to the West, in fact on the experience of being the Other forever and being it consciously. Being the Other as ideological decision. It is therefore about getting rid of identity relying on a placement, belonging and roots, it is actually about disidentification. The consequence of that intention is the performing strategy sketched above, *the strategy of kafana performing*, as we named it.

PopParty is more radical experiment in terms of investment in fabula or text. In The Oath we mediate text in very strongly reduced fragments in order to speak about specific personal experience, while in PopParty we practically totally dismiss text. From the performer's point of view we are only two DJs, our function is readymade. Dance performers are rather bare functions, too. Consequently, the very space of performance is more obviously a space of meetings, gatherings and interactions. Night club as a setting and as a place for potential pleasure, as a common place of potential socialization, flirting, weaving new and nurturing existing social ties, but also as a place that openly flirts with the spectacle economy of the existing when, for instance, combines popular music hits and lighting effects with commercial offer of fancy drinks, entrance fee and stage attractions such as go-go and pole dancers. The night club space invaded the theatre space, not only to allude to theatre's commercial and spectacle-related dimension, but above all to create conditions in which guests, who are here only visitors of the club and fans of pop music—together with performers—are faced with themselves. We are all immersed in possibility to perform manifestations of our own desires. We developed performing strategy to achieve such constellation and named it *the strategy all for everyone*.

How did two strategies affect the qualitative level of attendance, if we look intentionally exactly to the context of production? We attracted a lot of young people to the hall of the Old Power Station in Ljubljana, people who otherwise do not visit that place, those who do not often come to theatre, some mixture of generations, so called permanent and professional visitors. Some of them attended twice, some even more times. It could be interesting that we promoted the performances publicly with no budget dedicated to advertising and without a PR person. So we were not building the audience—referring to the trendy phrase audience building—, but we invited guests to performances, to kafana and night club. And they came.

Both performances are experiments with borders between performers and spectators, they both shake the common theatre format and its standard procedures. Their distinctively collective character is emerging from the very here-now situations, supported by various means, yet with a common feature: all procedures basically strive to provide comfort, pleasure and enjoyment to everyone present, and at the same time to contextualize certain critical notions—The Oath plays with the Other in us, while PopParty turns the spectacle agenda upside-down in an attempt to provoke questioning our positions (positions of our desires) in it.

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After taking a look into two performances in order to contextualize them in wider frame, I must stress the importance of personal experience of making them, taking part in them, and talking and writing about them. The thought that rises as one of most important during all these actions or activities is expressed in questions: What kind of declaring or statement position do we take when we criticize, theorize or teach a matter related to contemporary performance? Do we question collectivity having in mind and in body some experience of being a part of a politicized performative context? And above all, do we want to immerse into performative situation to co-create it, or we rather stay on the secure territory of theatre and frame our speech in its canon? By doing the latter, we risk pushing the questions we deal with into agenda of the culture industry.

The question of collective work is ontological as far as it is understood as a political one. It is ontological in terms of a need to include its various connotations and intervene in them in order to politicize them. Affirming collectivity is not only about being together, and certainly not about making art production of it, but about never-ending situating ourselves in the context that everyone can enter. And meaning of affirming, not to forget, is not about carrying of or taking

things on your own, but about liberating and relieving what lives, and also about knowing how to laugh, play, dance (Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, 149, 151). Affirming collectivity is not a question of a collective as such, in terms of a group and its behavior, or the collective form itself. It is not a question of consensus; every consent is dissonant (81), and right this dissonance challenges our intervention and invention on a way to immerse in our desire. It is rather an impossible creative projection of the common-in-us into here-now, in terms of politicization. Tending to reach that impossibility is the only possible (emancipatory) way of practicing and reflecting our need for such situating. It could be realized as a fulfilled desire of our own, as a *performed desire*.

## Abstract

Incorporating theatre production into agenda of the culture industry (M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno) is tied with systemic alienation of performance's dimension of collectivity. This alienation is visible on the level of representation, in performers' and spectators' bodies, and, overall, in depoliticization of the time-space of performance. Various classifications, the most obvious one is the division performer vs. spectator, reflect the dominant stage-related order that is not familiar with the idea that I am trying to affirm: subjectivation manifested in performance as situation. Resisting that order requests specific thinking of notions of collectivity and audience: collectivity as a potentiality of the performative context that supports awareness of *everybody's* function in it, as interrelated in non-hierarchical sense.

As related examples, I am sharing my performing experiences from two performances—The Oath and PopParty—conceptualized by tandem Kitch, which I am a part of. The Oath is based on *the strategy of kafana performing*, while the PopParty is based on *the strategy all for everyone*. Both performances are experiments with borders between performers and spectators, with common theatre format and its standard procedures. Distinctively collective character of both works is emerging from the very here-now situation, supported by various means, yet with a common feature: all procedures basically strive to provide comfort, pleasure and enjoyment to everyone present, and at the same time to contextualize certain critical notions—The Oath plays with the Other in us, while PopParty turns the spectacle agenda upside-down.

Collectivity (with)in a theatre-related situation is not political by itself, but it holds potentiality of politicizing the time-space of performance. Challenging and liberating task for everyone involved in a theatre/performance event if the political is understood as something that, referring to E. Barot, emerges from contradiction between the real and the possible, and as constellation of, paraphrasing J. Rancière, setting up speaking instead of noise.

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