

During twenty-two days in the fall of 2020 Mårten Spångberg wrote equally many essays reflecting dance, aesthetics and politics, its possible relations to ecology, the post-human, public space and imagination. Written ten years after the legendary and infamous Spångbergianism a different gentler tone is established in which kicking in doors has been exchanged for meandering.

First published in Korean, in the context of Ob/scene festival, this is the first time these essays are made available in English.

**THEY WERE IN THE WILD**

**MÅRTEN SPÅNGBERG**

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Mårten Spångberg

Berlin, Germany

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# Acknowledgement

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They Were In The Wild was made possible through all of us that have devoted our lives to dance and choreography. It was written during dark times, times haunted by the pandemic, striving to hold on to and trust the healing and caring powers of our artform, as an aesthetic as well as social landscape. For my own well-being, but also as an attempt to nourish dance and its dancers, because that's likewise a form of dancing. The dance of being there for somebody, just because and in movement, also from a distance.

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# Preface

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The preface is what you conventionally author last. Quickly before the pages vanish into other's hands, too fast and with growing anxiety that something has been forgotten. Because something always has. It's the worst and best pages to write scary and relieving, something is after all coming to an end.

Spending a little time with those introductory words that are supposed to hold the entirety of what follows, is also a looking back, a moment of reflecting on the process, mishaps, moments of insight or maybe a lingering fear of being accused of plagiarism.

Recalling how this collection came together brings back an almost visceral sensation if not discomfort. A particular form of embodiment or, if that is possible, lack thereof. The reverberations in the body from the more intense periods of lockdown, where social interaction was brought to a minimum, vaccine was still not available and people, friends and family were taken away too early.

To some extent, I guess, the words that follow reflect the sense of limbo that was present in the world at the time, written through a condition of isolation and uncertainty of what the future held for us, not least in respect of dance, after all, it was the fall when theatres were closed, festivals were postponed and it was prohibited to spend time in the studio. Maybe, those essays can be listened to as a call for a missed community, a continuation of interactions that had been cut off or a form of care work for lost dances and dance opportunities.

In some ways they might point forwards detecting symptoms of an artform whose future in many ways was challenged, maybe in other They Were In The Wild could be read as a reckoning, making something come to an end. Perhaps a bit of both?

During the summer of 2020, I was approached by the festival Ob/scene in Seoul in regard to a contribution to the festival that due to the pandemic had to take place in alternative settings. After some time, a proposal started to take shape, a dance for four performers to be executed by two dancers in Seoul, one in Berlin and one in London synchronically, and in parks. No video, no images, no Zoom, but a prominently set dance. Scored in regard to set materials – phrases – so precise that each dancer knew what the others were doing even though 8000 kilometres apart. Could a dance be performed together although the dancers were not next to each other, not seeing each other? Could dance travel across those thousand kilometres and connect us energetically thus defying the social regulations that the world faced? At six moments we danced together and it was felt both in the dancers and in the audience present, first and foremost in Seoul but also in Europe. It wasn't exactly possible, but when the dancers danced in the company of the setting sun, we danced, almost, to it rising here in Europe.

With the support of a streamed click track that the four dancers had in the ear, they could know exactly where they were in relation to each other, moments of canon, unison, parting and sharing movements. They danced together from far and still somehow they were there, or their dance was. Something was dancing from there to here, spirits were shared, dances of the universe were thinking of string theory, a minimal, but still, eruption of utopia.

Parallel to the dance, I wanted to create something that instead of being transnational took place only in Seoul or at least only was accessible for a locally connected audience. Something that gave context to the dance and because of the pan-

demic should be accessible from your home or similar. I proposed to write a shorter essay to be published each day of the festival on its webpage. I would write in English but the texts translated and published only in Korean. Perhaps a tad megalomaniac. Who would be interested in whatever I wrote in the first place, but in any case, these texts were for Korean readers only, and until now this is how it has been. It was quite an effort since I had set up the task to write each day of the festival without recycle material or starting the process a few weeks in advance. I didn't entirely succeed but what was important was to write through, perhaps not urgency, at least a sense of day-to-day report from inside lockdown and the pandemic, to hopefully communicate a vibrance of thought or perspective of a single day, of a there and then.

I don't know. Maybe it's a personal flaw but I'm attracted to the slightly idiotic idea to write, in this case, 35.000 words or some 115 manuscript pages (of course it's not about the amount), knowing that nobody might read it all, that the accessibility is minimal, the possible reader totally unknown and anonymous, and still insist. Perhaps there was one person that read those texts and felt alive, felt that she, he or they existed and were seen, one human being to whom one or two of those reflections made life that day lighter, easier, a tiny bit more loving, knowing that the words although they could have been made available for a much larger audience, for the entire English reading world, wasn't. It was translated – the originals put in a folder somewhere – to be accessible only for a smaller group of people. Nothing personal, never the less only for you guys, the Korean-speaking dance community.

Now the pandemic is over, or maybe not, and almost three years later the time has come to pass the texts on to some more people. Make them differently available and package them for a second time in a physical book. A first version was published in Korean with the support of Spectrepress and Workroompress in Seoul, translated by Kyonghoo Lee.

At some point, I thought of the possibility of contacting a publishing house but finally, I decided against. I wanted to make and publish this book myself, without the filters of a publishing house or the awkwardness of distribution networks. I wanted to give it to you myself, as many as I want, to whoever you are, a friend or an anonymous person, perhaps as a thank you for letting me write this so that I managed to live through the dark times we experienced.

So here they are, a bunch of texts around dance, aesthetics, politics and who knows what. They were great fun to write and I hope you have an equally good time reading them. Some of them are directly about dance others personal reflections on how dance and art can approach ecology, the post-human, public space, imagination and a lot more, bits and pieces. I wanted to write light and not take anything for granted, not fall for the temptation of addressing experts but be more of a conversation partner. Maybe that's why we - some of us - can't stop dancing. Dancing is something you do with a partner, something we do together. To partner is to care and give space, to be there for somebody and that person's dance, knowing that somebody will be there for you too. Dancing is another word for trust, not in this or that, because of this or that. Trust without conditions, just because.

I once more want to express my gratitude and happiness in making this book possible together with Seonghee Kim, Shinu Kim and Kyunghoo Lee. It's an extraordinary privilege to be surrounded by human beings so deeply committed, precise and generous, and to be part of a festival context that makes ideas flourish and knows the real meaning of both experimentation and trust.

# I Like Theatre

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I like theatres. They usually have really nice stairs and the artist entrance is most of the time minimally depressing. It's good with theatres, I mean the buildings, because it makes it a tad bit more difficult for malevolent politicians to banish subsidies. Theatres are really so lovely on the inside, especially after having been refixed a few hundred times and altered to accommodate lifesaving modernities such as IT something and impossibly placed elevators to send wigs and people up and down unknown destinations.

Theatres are great because people work there. Not just actors, dancers, musicians, the sweet gang in the costume department and all the front of house people but all the others too. Those that are occupied with things that has nothing to with theatre but still work there, in the theatre. That's really uplifting to think about.

Theatres are also somewhat admirable because they have conflicts. Theatres are really reliable. I can't recall a single one that isn't marinated in conflicts, especially conflicts that from beginning to end are all about pride. Or even better, envy.

What other workplaces have conflicts? In particular conflicts of the kind that expands into the public sphere and media. Today conflicts have been transformed into resources that are making money as much as anything else, be that stuff, information or something performative. And if somebody makes a mistake they immediately roll over and make a poodle, whereas in the theatre a blunder has never been admitted and has never

ever been forgotten. Theatres are remarkable considering their focus on the long lines of time.

In the theatre there are actual conflicts, conflicts that waste tax payers' money, piss people off, hurt innocent bystanders and are so entangled that they ruin *mise-en-scènes* that otherwise would have changed the world. You know, created an escape route out of capitalism or something similar.

There are obviously uncountable conflicts in the theatre that should never have happened. Enough many to close every theatre from the beginning of times, enough many and so filthy that theatre will never recover. It is a mystery that they are still there.

Theatres are brilliant examples of failed optimisation. The number of square meters completely cramped with activity, stuff and history, with working environments breaking every possible rule and law, is combatted only by gigantic areas that are used so rarely they are often altogether forgotten. Nowhere else is the canteen so perfect as in theatres. Mind you, the bigger the theatre, the better the canteen. As long as theatres are around, the welfare state is not entirely dead.

If I worked for a delivery company I'd do anything as long as I could deliver to the theatre. How chill it is to slide into the artist entrance even if it's just to hand over an Amazon package. I'd peek in advance for the receiver's name. It must feel so good, so empowering to pass over an international shipment to the person on the other side of that glass, with a "package for Mrs. Huppert," or even somebody who is just a little famous locally, like Bruno Ganz or so.

Oh, and nowhere else does it feel so good to be given a visitor's badge. Wow, I love that, not to mention all the doors to which you have to punch in a four-digit code.

Theatres are fantastic. It's not just the building. No, it's like it comes with the activity that's in there. In fact, it doesn't matter what or if it's any good as long as it's theatre, but once the theatre is no longer there the building also loses its cool lustre, its power, its inevitability. This to me is reason enough.

I like theatre. What feels better than to prepare oneself for a visit to the theatre? Buying the ticket, especially when buying two. Looking forward to a glass of lousy champagne during the break already before the curtain opens. The knowledge that it will be way too long and probably rather boring, regurgitating some or other conflict that we have had so much too much of already. It's awesome to sit there in the dark being completely immobilised, absolutely unable to make my own choices. In the theatre the lights are out, where else in neoliberalism does that happen? The theatre is a place that doesn't know multi-tasking. Just think about it, where else do you sit for hours not doing anything else than sit. There's so much freedom there and I don't even expect it to be stimulating, fun or exciting. I'm not even disappointed if I didn't learn anything. Theatre is really well spent waste of time. Congenial, and the information flow is so gentle and sparse. A bit too much video maybe but otherwise zero focus on user experience. But really why projected subtitles, I'm not in the theatre in order to get them.

Theatre, the social situation is simply amazing. I mean on a structural level, it's awesome. So astounding that it doesn't really matter what happens on stage. As long as it's theatre, the social can't go wrong. We are there and together, not like in the cinema or the museum, but for real together. Sometimes it might have forgotten and that's when theatre is trying a bit too hard. Occasionally it can be tempting to confuse the social dimension of theatre with social theatre. But as we know there's quite a difference between practice and representation. At times theatre has engaged socially so intensely that the barrier between representation and practice has been breached. Those moments, however, must not be rehearsed, or the innocence of engagement transforms into oblivious manipulation. There's also a huge difference between when the social enters the stage and when the stage enters the social. Theatre, the social situation, is great also exactly because of the division between stage and auditorium. There's certainly no coherence between the degree of separation and the freedom of

the spectator. It's not a matter of breaking the contract (such a cliché) but using it, and since the contract of theatre is fundamentally disciplinary, as much as it regulates it also offers diverse modes of navigation. In our current societies theatre, the social framework, is in itself a form of activism. The question is if political comes before or after activism, and what forms of homogenisation the different positions estimate?

Theatre is terrific because it doesn't encourage us to stand in front of it and take a selfie. It insists on being in front of us, hence confronting instead of boosting our subjects when we show ourselves in front of some minimalist painting, offering a supposedly neutral space. Theatre, whatever it is, is never neutral. It might be bad or good, political or trying not to be, fresh or dusty, big or small, it nevertheless fails at being neutral. I love this about theatre and that I think is reason enough.

Theatre is wonderful because of its lack of guarantee. Where else do people ask for their money back? Isn't it fantastic that there still exists an institution that doesn't promise a complete, waterproof, dinner-is-served experience? There's no Gerhard Richter retrospective that went sideways, or Hyundai-sponsored Turbine Hall event that ended up with a booing premiere audience. In the theatre even classics can fall over and they do repeatedly, but whoever heard about a Picasso exhibition that was a fiasco? With Picasso everything is agreed and settled, whereas Shakespeare still is or can become a pain in the butt.

Theatre rests on will and determination, something we can feel not rarely all the way to the second balcony. No filter, where else is that still possible? What other cultural institution that hosts art hasn't eliminated that form of risk, if not any form of risk.

That I think is reason enough. Every day.

Theatre is smashing. We just need to remember to let theatre be theatre and not try to give it reason. When we do, it quickly ceases to be theatre, stops being art and ends up at best being culture but more often pedagogy and management. This



is also the moment theatre loses its sense of publicness and becomes private, when it becomes an instrument of power and loses its openness and emancipatory potentiality.

But what about responsibility? Don't theatre workers and makers have an ethical urgency to respond to the world that surrounds us? Yes, certainly as workers and maker but that responsibility is not identical to the responsibility of theatre, the art form, and we should perhaps be careful not to transform art into an instrument, an extension or prosthesis of ourselves. It might sound paradoxical but perhaps it is especially important to let theatre be theatre in times of crisis and hardship. Perhaps these are the times, Spring of 2022, when we urgently need a space that doesn't guide our experience, that doesn't tell us what to think or what opinion is appropriate. A space whose form is familiar but where experience remains open, indeterminate and generative.

That I think is reason enough every day.

# When Anything Goes

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If dance can be anything, how come so many try so hard to make dance that is as little dance as possible? Why devote yourself to dance at the same time as avoiding any and all of it?

If dance, or as long as dance had issues and were surrounded by barriers, I get it—it was important to jump, cross and knock them over—but in 2022? What is it that choreographers and dance makers need to prove?

One would think that if all doors are open why insist on running into walls, or if anything goes it's no longer a matter of if or not, but how? If difference always is relative (post-modernism) the meaning of "breaking out" kind of loses its appeal. The moment everything is possible it is perhaps time to listen to another mantra than the litany of the avant-garde, and instead of ground-breaking—which by default leaves a trail of wasted opportunities—engage in different forms of artistic ecologies. Ones that are not based on the same formula as extractivist capitalism.

What if the avant-garde was nothing more than a smoke-screen covering up the real reasons for thinking outside the box? Thrashing borders and threading the uncharted after all resonate far more with extractive and ruthless capitalism than with compassionate and gentle sharing of resources, renewable energy, or cultivating surroundings. Isn't what art and dance history has baptised avant-garde moments, equally possible to identify as instances when markets, territories, or discourses

reach saturation, burst, and pave the way for new grounds over which to claim ownership.

When conventional markets invite to compete—May the best product succeed—art markets for obvious reasons don't. The artistic avant-garde has more to do with claiming territory, a kind of colonial behaviour, where "I was here first" is a way of dismissing any and every form of exchange and shared advancement. The artist, in whatever expression or genre, is creating monopolies and what he or she sells are shares of the precious monopoly. In fact, it's monopoly, singular, because since there are no agencies to safeguard monopolies in art, most of the artists' time is spent surveilling his, her or their creation. The artist as a kind of Gollum.

It is however questionable what position the artist has in this game of dominance. Might it be so that artist in corporate business is equal to R&D or innovation, and doesn't that make curators, programmers and the likes comparable to stockbrokers, investment bankers or businesses that channel money into start-ups?

It is curious that the agreed-upon narration that proposes the end of art's relation to the avant-garde more or less coincides with the birth of neoliberal capitalism. Say 17 December 1971, the release date of David Bowie's album *Hunky Dory* which didn't even sell very well in the beginning.

The problem though is that even if the avant-garde attitude was violent, male, white, colonial, and capitalist, at least it—which certainly is no excuse—was a project, a drive or a concern about and around a certain medium, expression, quality or approach. It was a matter of being passionate vis-à-vis, obsessed with or driven halfway to insanity by something external to the self. It was the medium that was to be broken, form that should dissipate, norms that had to be shattered no matter what. The price might be high and there was a code, however romantic: to not aim at breaking ground was to betray oneself, the artist community, even art itself.

The avant-garde was ideological. Obviously not in a political sense (which it probably also was most of the time), no, I mean ideological in respect of art. It was carried by commitment, by cause, of unconditionality. Moreover, ideology is not the same as politics; on the contrary, while politics is all a matter of negotiation, ideology stands tall and would rather die. Hence ideology in practice is always political whereas politics can do without ideology or at least pretend as if. Indeed, neoliberal economy and governance are generating endless deviations in order for the common person to live the illusion that underlying structures are ethically tip top and decent. For politics anything can be everything at any moment and all doors are open. But wait a second, doesn't that mean political affiliation is groundless and based only on subjectivity, because if anything goes and everything is everything, I can also base my political alignments on somebody's dress code or choice of eau de cologne? If ideology's business is matter and actuality, politics is all about appearance, and it goes without saying that ideology parties with geopolitics and forms of existence, when in truth politics shares bathroom with biopolitics and have swapped existence for performativity.

The dominant Western aesthetic canon proposes that art brings something into the world. Something that exists but cannot be pinpointed. There is no app to capture it and yet it is there, actual yet not reproducible. Throughout history this something has had many names: poiesis, originality, autonomy, genius, the oblique or unknown, you name it, and has been discussed until many ears fell off a second time. It's been the headache of philosophy since 1735 or at least for a really long time, and it still is. How can we talk about or define aesthetic appreciation, without either undoing the very notion of art or elevating it into "touched by God", transcendence or eternal beauty?

A less pronounced question is where this something is located, where ingenuity rests. Is it in the artwork or is it in the artist?

I believe one of art's big problems today concerns how to deal with—what in the early 70s was seen as a blessing—"the personal is political"—which soon became a curse—namely a gradual shift away from the artwork in favour of the artist. Sure, it cannot be somebody else other than the artist and her, his or their processes that generate or bring this something to life, but it is a magnificent difference, whether the gesture is pointing towards the artwork and further to somebody having an encounter with the work or it functions more like a boomerang returning to the artist, elevating the artist to be a chosen one carried by some mysterious force. It's up to you and me to make our minds up with respect to where we want to situate the something. Do we believe in art as in artwork or art as in artist?

If art and art worlds correlate with the rest of the world's developments or conditions, which they do, it is evident that today the something is in the artist and someone's artwork is secondary to the person's subjectivity. This is also why the contemporary artist must articulate a form of politics, but obviously a politics void of ideology and formulated only around appearance.

Before we reach a conclusion, just a reminder that this shift is nothing unusual. On the contrary, in art as in any other economic landscape, what once was identified as commodity—painting, sculpture, etc.—now encompasses everything not stopping at installation or performance but also including the artist's subject. As a matter of fact, that is the real deal, subjectivity is the product par excellence, especially and in particular as long as politics rules and ideology is generally cursed.

So why insist on making dance that is as little dance as possible? Well, what else can you do, if the dance starts to smell of anything "conventional," articulated, advanced or complex, the artist runs the risk of the work being stronger than his, her or their subjectivity and at that moment the something in art slides away from the subject and into the artwork. This is obvi-

ously also one reason why today the choreographer almost always is on stage and identifiable as the choreographer or creator. And why a dance-maker cannot not have a solo presenting his, her or their practice. A practice that is "in" the maker and not a work separated from or external to the subject. Or why costumes in today's dance tend to be more or less identical to how the solo dancer/choreographer looks when dressed up. Even the costume has to confirm the subject. Not to mention why every second visual artist has to make performances, obviously.

If anything goes, the real challenge is not to evacuate or to abandon, but on the contrary to remain in the middle as if for the first time, changing speed. To insist and stay put, cultivate the here and now, and engage in changing the conditions, the ecologies of the environments we have been given, the ones we are devoted to and cannot stop obsessing about.

# Cunningham's Paradox

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"When I dance I dance, there's nothing more to it" was one of Merce Cunningham's slogans and a bunch of words that have haunted dance ever since for different reasons. Initially the sentence can be fended off as modernist nonsense, as it can be understood to convey a sense that there is essence to dance. That dance is something in and of itself thus communicating or cuddling up to modernist visual art where self-referentiality and media-specificity were elevated to a sort of heroism. Sometimes through a negative or withdrawing gesture as in the sense that the real hero evidently has no need to claim or manifest his position.

On the other hand, it is also possible, perhaps even necessary, to comprehend certain abstract and minimal practices as strategic in respect of pulling out from dominant regimes of representation—that as we know are hegemonic *tout court*—in particular in respect of strong binaries and identity.

In several interviews Merce Cunningham has made hints in the direction that the choice of abstract and aleatory procedures was a means to still "fit in" to the, so called, uptown Manhattan dance scene (somewhat more conservative, etc.) still without expressing a male heroic, untouchable subject. After all, using chance operations or turning to I Ching in order to derive a work's dramaturgical outlines is evidently giving the finger to contained forms of composition and Aristotelean dramatic tension, that both celebrate male potency and the notion of being in "absolute" control.

In connection to the popular introduction of drugs generating altered states—LSD, peyote, mushrooms and so on—two different approaches emerged. The more successful suggested that drugs can generate an augmented experience of reality, expand the senses and give the individual access to hidden realms of consciousness. Tripping supposedly opened pathways to your true self and enriched your subject. A second understanding instead argued that the substances offered a temporary annihilation of the subject, an erasure of the self in favour of the experience of oneself as oneself, or oneself in the sense of “nothing more to it.” Perhaps one could call it the experience of existence without human or otherwise subjectivity. The world without filter, or even the world without world. The experience of experience, or just experience.

Without making an affair out of the fact that Cunningham’s life partner was a globally acknowledged expert on mushrooms, can we consider that what the quote proposes is nothing smaller than “when dancing one enters a certain form of altered state”? A condition in touch with the second perspective, an annihilation of the self. Evidently, otherwise the quote would have argued something in the direction of “when I dance I see amazing colours.”

So rather than dancing as a way of gaining awareness of the self or finding one’s true self, which becomes central to dance from the early 1970s, it appears that Cunningham is vouching for the possibility of losing oneself altogether. A kind of surrender to the dance, a space and time that is not constrained by the boundaries of subjectivity, relations or power.

The tendency towards awareness and relations in dance, established since more or less 50 years ago starts with the basic premise: freedom with responsibility. The basic idea is that through training our awareness and finding agreements in respect of responsibility, these skillsets enable the individual to take creative decisions and discover new pathways. Perhaps wonderful and helpful but doesn’t it move in the precisely opposite direction of Cunningham? In the temple of awareness



we train ourselves to never let go of our devices, to never lose sight of the self and to never end up somewhere unknown, or only an unknown we know all about and how to get out of. Awareness is not a means to free oneself but implies the pleasure of mastering and perfecting one's own decisions and their consequences in the world. In the case of Cunningham, it is instead the letting go of awareness and responsibility, and just dance, trusting that the dance takes responsibility for you that is central. It is thus not a matter of freeing oneself—in particular not from something this or that—but instead, experiencing freedom. An experience that for obvious reasons can only be fleeting and never captured.

The tension becomes even more interesting when taking into account different strategies. A widespread motif is that improvisation in dance offers the dancer and the dancer's subject a sense of freedom. The improvising dancer being liberated from the commands of the choreographer, or the "rules" of a dance technique and thus able to express him-, her- or themselves. Fair enough, but isn't this a form of freedom that pressures the dancer to consider at every moment every possible and impossible decision and its possible and impossible consequences? Which means that awareness implies the ability to know and optimise what a "good" decision is at every moment. Hence improvisation in dance in fact has very little to do with freedom and instead with the experience of being in control. Cunningham on the other hand seems to move in the exact opposite direction. Instead of improvisation he establishes a precise set of rules and a quite rigid technical understanding of dance. But is it thinkable that the rigidity functions as a means to undo the dancer's occupation with decision making, etc., in favour of a dancing that withdraws from consciousness to a state where one's subject, or being, becomes occupied by dance and dance only?

Where improvisation tends to start with freedom and then piles up endless responsibilities, although responsibilities that

always seem to be based on more or less vague agreements (obviously because the assumed freedom would be endangered otherwise), Cunningham flipsides the conditions, starting with a rigid "system" in order to rid oneself of responsibilities and also non-responsibilities. In somewhat more abstract terms this proposes that improvisation has an inclination towards being strategic in relation to vague, more or less, "non-existing" structures, where Cunningham's idea instead suggests strong structures that are open to anything and shake off the deadlock of strategies. On a political scale concerning the understanding of art, this proposes that Cunningham is a Marxist with a tendency towards metaphysics and spirituality, and improvisation, somewhat categorical, is neoliberal with a propensity for endearing populism.

Viewed through a different lens, it could also be considered that improvisation with its general understanding of freedom, awareness and responsibility is a means of practicing being human better, or being a better human. Improvisation homogenises what it means to be human and strengthens hegemonies of power. As long as you take responsible decisions you can do or be whatever you want, but only as long as you submit to our agreed-upon norms and conventions, and whose norms might those be?

Improvisation is human and moralistic. Cunningham on the other hand proposes an immutable structure for the possibility of practicing being human in radically different ways and without preconditions or inclination to evaluation. "When I dance I dance, there's nothing more to it" in other words is a post-human practice that exchanged moralism for potentiality.

In another commonly used quote by Merce Cunningham, he whines about how dance gives nothing back, how it offers no guarantees and doesn't generate something that makes the creator immortal. And at the end he comes to: "nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive." There is however an important perspective to take into account, what

does alive mean here? Does it mean alive as in waking up and feeling ready to seize the day—feeling alive as in my life and a fresh start—or does it rather mean alive as in the experience of life itself—not life but Life. For somebody who takes on the challenge of “When I dance I dance...,” as we who dance know, it can only mean Life.

# Public Space

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Something weird is happening with public space, something new and different. Over the last few months, movement and presence in public spaces have taken on new dimensions not least due to state-sanctioned regulations. Directives that will have long-lasting and indeterminate effects on the understanding of what public space is, and what it means in respect of democratic and political life.

Public space has been a hot topic for quite some time. In particular in respect of a tension between re-animating forgotten, derelict or unsafe parts of our cities on the one hand and gentrification and a general tendency towards privatisation on the other. Art and artists have been “used” to discover grey areas but have often ended up being the beginning of corporate gentrification projects.

A central argument in favour of public space, and a good one, is its necessity for a prolific political life, the opportunity to engage in forms of political manifestations as well as spreading political information. It is further of absolute necessity to protect public space as it ensures access to all people, individuals and groups. This is of course not true as we all know, but without public space there is not even a space in respect of which this can be claimed.

Moreover, public space today is never public enough. It's always governed, sometimes through obvious powers but equally often by sneaky protocols that nobody seems to be able to

explain. At some point in history there possibly were actual public spaces, spaces subject to no law or norm. In more contemporary societies, those spaces are still around but manifest in different and more shattered ways. Individuals without papers or permanent addresses, large populations of refugees and immigrants, for example, are forced to conduct lives which the law cannot protect. Public space is a complex affair as it is on the one hand a space where different voices can gain listeners but equally a space potential of extreme forms of violence. Paradoxically it is precisely this complexity that needs to be protected. Certainly not as a defence of violence but of spaces that are not reachable for surveillance or other technologies of control.

A less actual yet acute reasons to insist on the necessity of public space concerns the importance of spaces where alternative forms of fiction can proliferate. These are actual spaces that need to be defended. I'm here referring to theatres, libraries, museums as well as public squares, sidewalks, parks and other forms of commons. It seems pretty obvious to me that we today live in political realities where those spaces regularly are sanctioned, censored and pressured by politicians as well as by a general public not least through social media. Libraries are being given policy documents providing clear indication of what literature to purchase. Theatres are equally threatened often by populist media when presenting politically complex work or, perhaps even worse, when offering resources to experimental art that might only reach a small audience.

Libraries, theatres, universities, museums—perhaps not always understood as properly public spaces but yet—are of utmost importance not only because of their programs, books or exhibitions but because of what they promise. They carry the promise of autonomous thought, of alternative narratives, histories of the repressed, fictions that never will be successful but nevertheless contribute, and of sounds and images that demand unusual forms of attention and that tell stories that make the worlds grow.

All too often have we taken those spaces for granted but we should remember that once they are gone, the moment they perish or die, it will take a lot of effort to get them back. We should remember that those spaces exist because individuals, groups and peoples have fought for them and not seldom lost their lives in the process. What makes those engagements even more difficult is that they are not struggles for this or that liberty or freedom, but for the possibility of freedom, any freedom. Forms of freedom that we might not even be able to recognise or consider, that we might find silly or unthinkable. It is exactly those freedoms we need to protect, and protect without asking questions. Especially not, why?

What defines public space, actual or metaphorical, is that they cannot be owned. The park that I spend time in, the bench that I read on, pavement that I discuss local political issues with my neighbour on are owned by the city and in the end the state takes responsibility for keeping them clean and making sure they're more or less safe. But we should recall that the state, at least formally, is the people. The republic is us and the park is ours together—all of us.

Public space is ours but cannot be divided into small parts so we each take one home. Public space withdraws from ownership and it's in and through that gesture that it provides something extraordinary. Because what is generated, thought, sensed, experienced is also public and cannot be taken home, cannot be made private, at least not without transforming into something entirely different. This process of privatisation is not negative. On the contrary, it implies processes in which knowledge is challenged and transformed. Because what public space generates is exactly forms of knowledge that are public, that cannot be owned, which means that the process of privatisation, of making them yours, to an equal extent transforms the knowledge as it transforms you.

An intricate side effect of public space is that, precisely because it is none of ours and the knowledge or experience it can generate cannot be owned, those spaces also cannot, in order

to maintain their capacity as public, be measured in respect of efficiency or economical revenue. Any form of measuring technology provides protocols for the inevitability of privatisation or ownership. Parks, the beach, a meadow can certainly be useful but they cannot be “designed” in order to optimise a use or value. Public space is fundamentally useless, but as much as they are useless they can also host whatever, there are no limits to what can happen in a park. Since public space cannot be given direction, cannot be useful, it also means they carry the potentiality of making completely new thoughts or things happen. Privatised space is always carried by forms of probability in respect of, for example, activity whereas public space supports contingency—in other words anything including some thing that is completely foreign.

Perhaps there is something that connects public space with art, although it seems that art in public space often cannot help itself from privatising those spaces by creating strong frames or replicating protocols or contracts that we know from institutions such as theatres, museums, concert halls or, for that matter, shopping malls. Yet, is not art precisely of importance in respect of the spaces, actual and symbolic, it can create and the fictions and histories it can generate? And isn't our times a time when those spaces need specific attention, both for what they can do and because they are under serious pressure? It is time that we make a difference between art in public space and art that is or generates public space.

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Art in public space is rarely anything other than art changing its location from a confined or private space into the public realm. Something more is required for art to dissolve its status as property and its engagement in ownership and forms of economic exchange. But how often have we not bumped

into performing arts brought into the park that still remain or even strengthen its framing, bringing the theatre along and thus ensuring individualised forms of participation although in the company of others. Indeed, we need to make a difference between the theatre as a derived form of public space—you know, with its roots in Greece and all—and modes of attending theatre at least since the end of the 18th century, which to the letter replicate bourgeois culture or what is conventionally known as the liberal subject. This is a form of subject that has lost touch with properly public spaces as well as with sovereignty; the loss, however, was paid back through parliamentary democracy, steadily increasing individualism and modern forms of capitalism. Biopolitics in short. This moment, obviously not by accident, coincides with the formulation of modern aesthetics, the aesthetic regime that still dominates the Western understanding of art and has colonised art and aesthetic practices on a global level.

For an art to become public, its first objective must be to let go of the desire to be recognised in respect of conventional forms of appreciation. It must understand that the modalities of appreciation available are based on an art that always is or easily can be privatised and transformed into property. Thereafter it also needs to make a decision whether it wants to be private or community art in public space or an art that formulate encounters that are public.

An overwhelming part of art in public space submits to the first form, especially art and projects that arrive with social, community and political agendas or incentives. The moment there is something, something defined and measurable that should be communicated or obtained, the essence of an art approaching the public realm evaporates. At that moment art transforms from being an open-ended, indeterminate experience or exchange to the exchange of information; it tends to become hardly more than a vehicle, not much different from a newspaper or The Discovery Channel. It is of course tempting to want to communicate something valuable, especially con-



sidering how much suffering the world carries, but from the perspective of public space such an art, rather than contributes to and maintains the specificity of public space, is actually counterproductive. Unfortunately, this is the kind of art that contemporary societies want artists to deliver and it's getting worse by the day. Perhaps one could even consider that the very society is somewhat afraid of an art that rigorously approaches public space?

To return to the notion that public space is a space that defies ownership, that slips away when trying to capture its essence and withdraws from conventional forms of attachments to value, even the notion of interpretation: art that approaches public space with the intention of amplifying or making available this particular form of experience must underperform expression and instead establish itself as a form of constant rather than as a dramaturgical apparatus. It also needs to accentuate form rather than content, as well as hollowing out or the performance of subjectivity, and emphasise instead a kind of gentle anonymity.

More or less contemporary psychology argues that humans need to be confirmed in order to generate a stable identity. Not necessarily in a positive way, just confirmed or acknowledged. One's self-image is only completed once we are looked back at and can negotiate our presence in the world. Sounds good? Yes, but the price to pay is that every form of identity (self-image) is based on power and recognisability. Be whoever you want as long as power grants you recognition, and you cannot not be somebody because that poses a threat to established powers. Paradoxically, however, also the repressed desire power to be maintained because an image/identity, although violent or repressed, is still something.

But what happens if a space, situation or encounter insists on not looking back or just a fleeting glimpse? Or if there are spaces that because of their structure aren't able to confirm an identity?

Public space carries this capacity; it is a space that doesn't side with anybody, it's more neutral than neutral and it looks back completely randomly. It's public space which means it is exactly not something, and hence it not only cannot but also cannot not confirm somebody that dwells within it. Something, an identifiable entity, can and will always confirm a subject (positive or negative) so for public space to be public space it has to withdraw from being or becoming something. In such a situation, the individual has two initial opportunities, either he, she or they look away, close their eyes, repress the situation. It didn't happen or pretend as if nothing. A second opportunity implies letting go of oneself, being carried away or even surrendering to the withdrawal of confirmation, to the absence of some-body or -thing looking back. This process could almost be understood as a moment of becoming anonymous. Not just anonymous to the world, like when you get a call on your mobile phone from an unidentified caller, which is still somebody calling you, but anonymous also to oneself and thus open to the experience of oneself as oneself. Not as this or that oneself, more or less me or me on a bad day, but to oneself as something in its entirety different, oneself as absolutely foreign. No, this is even scarier, or more amazing because it is the experience of oneself as every possible, impossible and potential version of oneself, and at the same time. An encounter with public space, or perhaps better The Public, is the experience of experiencing.

There are extremely few means or pathways to such an experience and it's incredibly more demanding to make them become available—even just for a little moment—than sticking with design or something socially engaged. Art, and I believe in particular dance, carries this intensity, the ability to glance back at us just enough for us be unable to resist coming along. But what is even more amazing with dance is that it's not just the audience or a witness that can have this experience but also the dancer. To dance, to really dance ("and there's nothing more to it"), implies to give oneself up and become any-

mous, to become public. To dance means to spend time anonymously, knowing the experience is fleeting and never again. In such a moment the dancing reverberates in the body reminding us that this way of being human, of inhabiting the planet, of being afraid and exhausted is just one of endless possible versions.

Public space is not a grey zone in the city, a park or any particular space. It's a practice and form of intensity that can emerge everywhere, even and in particular in theatres, museums, dance studios and concert halls.

It is our responsibility as artists and dancers to cultivate and guard those spaces, those spaces that carry the promise of autonomous thought, of alternative narratives, histories of the repressed, fictions that never will be successful but never the less contribute, of sounds and images that demand unusual forms of attention and that tell stories that make the world grow.

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After a run-through the choreographer tells the dancers they were great. Of course, there's some small adjustments and a few mishaps but all together excellent. Now, you just need to make it yours, the choreographer concludes. Some choreographers or rehearsal directors might even add: you need to own the material.

Make it yours, own it? Sure, on a superficial level I get it. It might just mean have some confidence, stop bothering about making mistakes and dance. Said to an actor it might also seem appropriate from some sort of Stanislavski meets method acting realism point of view but to a dancer?

At some point dancers needed to distance themselves from choreographers and the vulgar notion that dancers are simple instruments. The notion that the dancer is the dance implies

that the dancer has subjectivity and agency and that the job in any respect is no stupid say-after-me practice. Perhaps it is also important in respect of how, if, or under what circumstances we understand dance as a mimetic practice and how dance relates to representation. Dance is fundamentally non-mimetic (at least since the 1950s) or non-symbolic; it represents itself as itself and does not claim the dancer's agency.

When improvisation grew into an autonomous dynamic within dance, it also became important to state that the dancers and the dance were interchangeable or a practicing symbiosis. A less stimulating perspective, with its roots in the same beautiful era around 1968, was when "the personal is political" was mixed up with taking things personally and a somewhat paranoid view on ownership and agency. In any case, the idea that the proximity between the dancer and the dance should be as minimal as possible is still fairly active, through improvisation, contact improvisation, movement research in the 1980s and so on all the way up until contemporary somatics, post-colonial dance and dance related to identity and queer politics.

The importance of "the personal is political" and "the dancer is the dance" is undeniable for a certain historical moment, but today circumstances are obviously very different and perhaps ended up in a rather unpleasant mess corrupted by individualism, FOMO, cryptocurrencies, cheap flights and Berghain derived club culture. What about if dance offers a different perspective? Perhaps dance can animate a space where we for a moment don't need to own ourselves, our identities (which certainly can be understood as a privilege but maybe not only), our relations, our actions and decisions, even our memories, dreams and thoughts?

The starting point for such a space to engage, to vibrate and form itself, however, is to insist on not making the dance yours, or owning it, but instead letting the dance be its own and live its own life. To dance might have something to do with living

together with a cat. You live together but you never really own a cat and from time to time it might seem as if it lives together with you but without overlapping or ever claiming territory. The moment I make the dance mine I also withdraw its agency, whereas when I dance parallel to the dance, insisting on keeping my distance, I can learn something from the dance. Not to dance it better, or why I have a traumatised relation to my mother, but learn from the dance about the dance and its existence in the world.

This is what I want to do when I dance to learn about the dance's world, obviously not through some sort of dialogue or discussion but through being there, parallel and together. Through a kind of dry intimacy or closeness without wants or projections, an intimacy and closeness that becomes so much more complex and difficult because the dance, at the same time as it is there, also is only a fleeting moment, something that disappears in and through its own becoming. It is on the other hand precisely therefore that dance and dancing are overwhelming. It can be as light as having a crush on a stranger on the subway, but it can also be like letting go of somebody you love with your entire being. That paradoxical sensation to love somebody knowing that if I don't let go now the love will perish.

When we dance we have to decide whether we want to show the dance or to do the dance. The moment we show the dance we not only make it smaller but dissolve its agency. Perhaps we also make it admirable, but this means taking away the beauty it conveys simply by being a dance. I'd like to think about the beauty of a dance like I experience the beauty of a tree. Unimpressive yet there. Instead of surprising and still conventional, ordinary yet overwhelming.

Instead of trying to make the dance yours but dancing it as if it was just beside you, parallel and overlapping but never coinciding with you. Instead of making the dance yours, can we entrust it with ourselves, our identities, relations, actions

and decisions, even our memories, dreams and thoughts without asking for anything in return? If that is possible, and it is, I believe that means becoming public and generating together with the dance a shared, however temporary and fleeting, public space. A space that can be shared by somebody looking at the dance, perhaps with his, hers or their eyes closed. Ordinary yet overwhelming.

# What Is a Public?

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Having seen dance and performance for what feels like an eternity, there is something that all, at least almost, really almost all of them have in common. The expression, themes, topics, set, light, music, politics, form and so on are under constant scrutiny and the variations are endless. Still they all have something in common. Some have only one, some a lot, some might even be online, but they more or less always end up being the same good old audience. One wonders why the audience, the public, is always sitting there in a more or less dark room, contained in their seats almost falling asleep or counting minutes until they can multitask again. Christ, the theatre is the only place where multitasking is a major no-no, and totally verboten. Where else does that happen?

Where else are everybody silent listening to one person talking and looking like it's important. From a vulgar liberal perspective the theatre is a completely totalitarian space that forces itself onto the individual, making everybody in the room into that grey mass we call the audience. The audience, is like the people, individuals grouped together against their better knowledge and the price to pay is losing their individual voices, degraded to utter nothing more than a collective complainative murmur.

Theatre has changed a million times over the last few hundred years but has the audience? Sure, it's older or younger, more or less politically hungry, differently engaged in class

struggle or middle-class comfort, but how they are installed in the theatre remains largely identical. It's just less fun nowadays.

A theatre, dance or performance that aspires to any kind of social change must, even before it starts thinking about what it wants to say, reconsider where, who and what is the public.

One of the reasons it feels so good to visit the theatre—may that be an actual theatre, a studio, a gallery space, an old warehouse or a park—is because as long as the frame is strong and intact we know nothing out of the ordinary can take place. In the theatre it's extra exciting and so nice to engage because we know whatever it is has no or minimal repercussions in respect of ourselves, life, the world, you name it. It might not be so different from watching horror movies with hands in front of your eyes. It's very easy to turn off or just kill the illusion by looking at your watch or out the window. It's not pitch-black out there and you're not in some terrifying forest, but in Seoul, Berlin or Buenos Aires and because of the pandemic nobody goes out after dark anyways.

In certain political contexts the theatre and art might be subject to censorship or even intrusions by a regime, but that very very rarely concerns the audience. Not to underestimate the violence that art can be subject to, it's pretty unique an entire audience ends up in prison. What happens in the theatre stays in the theatre, the strong frame regulates this and very efficiently so.

Perhaps it is also a little confusing or paradoxical to visit performances that present different kinds of life, different kinds of being human in front of a ticket-paying, seated, middle class, urban, to a large degree professional audience. How often don't those moments end up in displaying otherness that is not so different from 19th-century freak shows? This might be important, even though to a degree counterproductive, as the first step towards a more inclusive and tolerant debate, but it can also possibly be tempting to maintain the situation precisely because for what it confirms, the safe environment and the economy it provides.



Dance and performance, all forms of art, at the same time benefit and suffer under the fact that the frame is stronger than what is presented within. Theatre or dance, the activity is part of the dispositive theatre or dance and can neither evacuate, subvert or dispossess it.

By the way, isn't it slightly embarrassing to witness performances that try to pose a critique to the frame? A little bit like extremely attractive people dressing down because they are constantly reminded about how beautiful they are. Institutional critique, which dance and theatre probably haven't really experienced, similarly ends up as vain or arrogant (in the wrong way). Well hello, easy to criticise the museum when you're already invited, and again, the museum has after all given you permission to make a hole in a wall, postpone the exhibition or exhibit email exchange between board members. So how badass are you?

Examining institutional critique, it's also all too obvious that its cadre of artists is to an overwhelming part white straight men (there are of course exceptions, most importantly Andrea Fraser).

Add to that museum directors that can't wait to support a critique of the institution they represent.

Of course, institutional critique also lives a different life. A secret life that is not about showing or representing a critique but rather practicing it. Those artists, however, will not end up in the history books or show up in the centrefolds of magazines. Instead they will make others show up because of the changes they have made possible.

Our question nonetheless remains; how come we witness such an amount of performances that are so intensely contemporary on stage but place the audience in a framework that is everything else. Comfort is one, and important is certainly the fact that success in arts is relative to how an audience experiences being confirmed and able to engage without more than a teasing sense of risk.

Performing arts today tends to reproduce forms of attention that we know too well from corporate culture, social media, etc. Attention is economy, which means that contemporary economy constantly upgrades the optimisation of time and the way we attend to it. Perhaps we need to dissolve the bourgeois seating arrangements of the theatre, not by means of engaging in high speed attention but on the contrary by generating spaces where speed and time are drifting, not necessarily slower but differently paced. What is the attention that only dance or performing arts can generate? Perhaps the theatre and dance can function as a space where we aren't haunted by online presence, yoga classes and Netflix algorithms not because of regulations or good behaviour but because dance and performing arts offer different modes of desire or relations to time.

With the economisation of time and the intensification of information flows in our lives especially in relation to technologies, we are subject to a much higher ratio of decision-making. Just think about how fast you decide for or against on your dating app, or how Starbucks bombards you with instances of taking decisions. Neoliberal economies are extremely subtle in making us think that we take decisions, that we make choices but we should, of course, remember that Starbucks only offers us to make the decisions that are economically viable. Americano or cappuccino, sushi or sashimi—they have already made up your mind... by offering you the illusion of taking a decision.

In many ways, it couldn't be otherwise; capitalism after all is a matter of property and accumulation of value. But is it possible to imagine that an encounter with art and with dance could offer the audience, the public, a different mode of inhabiting space, life or the world? A space that is not asking the spectator to choose between this or that, to prefer one to the other, or to interpret or analyse the situation at hand. Can dance offer a space and time where attention is not directed or designed, where the individual is treated as a thinking being and given the opportunity to not make a decision, to not choose, but

rather, generate or not a decision from his, her or their vantage point or lack thereof? Such a decision is not about taking or making a decision in respect of a series of possible best choices, but instead about "ignoring" the possible and best in favour of a properly personal engagement, which instead of a choice becomes a contribution. A form of production. On a political level this implies a shift from siding with this or that established position to making politics or producing a position in the world instead.

Dance is not a matter of consuming space or time but to make oneself available to its unfolding. An unfolding that can only take place as long as space, time and activities inhabiting it (dance) simultaneously offer themselves without asking for a return and become available.

Perhaps this is a moment when the audience forgets to be audience and transforms into being public.

# Practice Based Dance

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"It's more complex than that, really much more complex." Isn't that a horrible sentence and you, or at least I, hear it not so rarely. Because what does it really mean? Initially it points out that what I proposed was naïve or simply stupid, which I can live with, but moreover it silences the person who made the proposal and in a pacifying, deflating kind of way. Perhaps one could say in the style of *Bartleby*—"I prefer not to"—as the person probably is right but doesn't need to answer to what, how, why more complex? As if that wasn't enough, in fact I believe the sentence is a smokescreen disguising a liberal opportunistic voice that simply chickens out from any real position. Or, translated into neoliberal jargon, the murmur of a resilient subject that practices rather than states.

Practice has emerged over the last few years as the new cool in dance and performing arts, but as much as this move might be interesting, one can perhaps also question if it's not a shift that, in more than a few respects, rehearses neoliberal strategies and approaches towards subjectivity, production, distribution of power, etc.?

An insurance company in Sweden no longer gives their fresh recruits any introduction or tasks but simply proposes: This is your desk. In six months we expect a self-evaluation. In other words: Make yourself useful, we won't tell you what useful but expect you to provide the company with a reason to keep you.

Performance as we know it, with a few exceptions, functions as a statement. It is an utterance and a manifestation of a position, and hence something that can be subject to critique, discussion, disagreement and so on. It also means that a performance is never more complex than that, but that exactly is also what gives it leverage, reason and justifies its existence.

Performance—theatre and dance certainly but also extending to performance performance—operates through what one could call transcendent capacities. We play Ibsen's *Enemy of The People* but the drama transcends the local situation. However lousy it is done, it's still a great play. The director's position of power transcends the individual, and we kind of know that it's part of his or her job description to be an asshole. Similarly, a performer's ability transcends the person, as it is some more or less discernible technique that is applied, or, as long as the dancer does what the choreographer proposes his or her personality, background, social skills, imagination, ability to collaborate, etc., might be used but is secondary to executing instructions.

This is a *modus operandi* that evidently establishes, lives and thrives through power, hierarchy, exclusion, punishment, homogenisation, etc. But as much as it is full of horrors, it is also pretty much transparent and obvious. It's a clear-cut disciplinary complex, which means it is fairly easy to navigate or simply avoid.

This is the template that is used by most conventional directors and choreographers although not rarely with blurred edges where the performers are being milked of ideas serving choreographers that have run dry or who use them as raw material inserting them in frames through which they are exposed as the offspring of a brilliant mind. Here discipline and control is mixed up into a rather nasty concoction that produces more than too often deeply toxic environments.

Practice, as in practice based dance, shifts things around, favouring more lateral forms of exchange, sharing, conversation, heterogeneity, etc., over centralised transcendent power that

gives itself the right to punish. Often this means inviting people more or less without preference to participate and share one or several practices, e.g., dancing in relation to a set of open instructions. Instructions that the individual participant interprets and gives form and expression. After the practices, it's common that one shares experiences and observations which might be inserted into the instructions or might form the base for a new set of instructions. In practice based dance as opposed to transcendent capacities, what is emphasised is what is immanent to the situation, the initiator, participants, etc. The practice can for sure be proposed in different context but what occurs in one situation cannot be compared one-to-one with another situation. The individual or group proposing the practice does not transcend the situation or itself but is as an individual or group immanent to the situation. Similarly, the participants are not utilised in respect of identifiable sets of skills but instead of who, what and how they are—through what is immanent to them.

This on the one hand can be understood as an opportunity to realise oneself, to explore abilities, inner spaces and spiritual connections, or to practice different relations to one's body, self-image, etc., but one can also consider that, in fact, the initiator is "using" the participants themselves. It is not the participants' skillset that is taken into account but what the person is, which is exactly what contemporary capitalism is largely about. Namely, the financialisation of life itself.

If centralised or top-down power is disagreeable and leans towards asymmetry and possibly abuse, it seems like an emphasis on practice where the initiator proposes rather than decides is less prone to create toxic environments. If conventional methods of production claim the performers' time, it appears that practice instead allows the participant to invest in him- or herself. This is certainly agreeable but again, to what extent is this a matter of disguising power or of creating environments where the initiator through a minimal amount of information (decision) relies on the investment and creativity of the partici-

pant in ways that perhaps aren't so far away from the insurance company?

Instead of understanding practice based dance as a form of resistance to contemporary phenomena in society, perhaps we have to consider that it might also coincide with neoliberal strategies and forms of governance. Strategies that we are all subject to concerning resilience, gig-economy, precariousness, affordance, identity and so on.

Evidently the art that a society generates correlates to general modes of distribution of power, resources, production, etc. Both artistic work benevolent to a system and an art that resists, protests or distances itself reverberate of its context. So perhaps practice based dance is just a child of its time, which certainly can be interpreted as a small disaster—Oh no what happened to our leftism—or perhaps as an indication and something we can learn from and hence transform or propose alternatives for.

What however complicates the story is when practice based dance steps out of the "studio" and onto the stage. Because indeed the stage is a context that operates prominently through and with transcendent capacities, not least concerning how we look and how representation consolidates. Is it so that the promise of practice and its reliance and allowance of immanence collapse when it enters the dispositive of the theatre, deflates as it has little or no compatibility with "theatrical" representation, ending up exposing the illusion of freedom, the creativity of the individual or something similar? Is it perhaps the destiny of practice based dance to remain in the studio or in the park and as long as it does it is something rather beautiful and caring? The fact of the matter remains, when practice goes on stage it simply isn't practice anymore and that moment it loses its intricacy and ends up in "It's more complex than that, really much more complex" - but for whose benefit or happiness?

We all know that there is no possible withdrawal from representation, for some thing to be something it's necessarily

entangled in complexes of representation. Practices are equally entangled but when on stage, in what ways does its representational dynamics change? Or, said differently, how does its performativity shift, when it's not just a practice but represents itself as practice? Practice turned demonstration?

Now, this is not an attempt to bash practice based dance but instead an attempt to shift perspectives.

What we have seen over the last bunch of years is a departure away from performance to practice, from transcendence towards immanence, from showing to sharing and situations where the relations between transmitter and receiver are blurred. Process has been emphasised and results secondary, which one can also understand as an interest in avoiding experiences that can be assessed in respect of measurability in favour of individual or even affective experiences.

Is it possible to consider that in certain cases practice is two-fold or operates on different levels at the same time, so that when we practice a set of instructions for how to move in or occupy space we are also practicing the possibility for alternative ethics, of cohabitating space, caring for each other or whatever it might be? One question is what dynamics those ethics, etc., operate in respect of (probabilistic, contingent or something in between) and even more importantly vis-à-vis what ideology or political positions? Because, evidently, that nothing says "it's practice based" doesn't mean its politics automatically is hunky-dory?

It's common to understand the encounter with art as a confrontation or engagement with potentiality. Potentiality outlined as an intensity that operates on the individual spectator expanding or compressing the individual's opportunities to act in the world. It is an intensity, a vibrant capacity without direction, contrary to a force or power that is without exception directional. A force cannot not know its destination, it's imbued with causality and can therefore only generate possible (and impossible) thoughts, experiences or sensations, whereas intensity, being void of causality, can generate a thought, ex-



perience or sensation that emerges from a realm beyond the possible (and impossible), namely potentiality. Using a different vocabulary, force links to effect and measurability while intensity associates with indetermination and affect (as defined by Deleuze).

With this in mind, it becomes interesting to consider "where" this capacity is located. Is it in the artwork itself, thus taking on a sense of anonymity, reaching a zone of impersonal indifference or perhaps better, acquiring a form of publicness. Or is it in the artist, emanating through the "performance" and the creative and conceptual activity of the artist, rendering the "work" a token of the artist's genius?

Evidently, aesthetic production and appreciation is never clear-cut but it is nevertheless compelling to consider which direction practice based dance leans towards, and what consequences this suggests in respect of responsibility and accountability on the one hand and spectatorship and aesthetic appreciation on the other.

It appears that practice based dance ends up in a somewhat awkward space, privatising the experiencing or even producing a proprietary environment that rejects the spectator, who finds him- or herself being degraded to the position of admirer.

But what happens if we turn it all around and, instead of departing from the stage and practice, make or generate dance in respect of a transcendental framework, creating performances but performances that, when on stage, practice with the audience or the entire "theatre" so to say, which is to say destabilise the dispositive theatre with its coagulated strategies concerning looking, representation, elaboration of time and space, social code, strong boundaries between transmitter and receiver, etc.

In other words, make performances that create the illusion of submitting to the dispositive of the theatre at the same time as they engage the audience in practicing the possibility for alternative ethics, of cohabitating space, caring for each other and so on. In other words, engage in the possibility of different social ecologies.

Although too simple a diagram, but for clarity's sake: instead of moving away from or discarding transcendental models of making and seeing performance, towards practicing "all together" in the studio—a situation that loses momentum when brought onto the stage—what if embracing transcendental models of awareness, although in favour of generating a moment of practice or practicing together in the theatre. Which would implicit to blur the dispositive of the theatre just enough for conventional models of appreciation, judging, etc., to dissolve, in order that we as audience, simultaneously, as individuals and a group, ought to build or construct modes of seeing, understanding, sharing and being in favour of the situation at hand. That is to generate a shift from transcendence towards immanence, where immanence is not already co-opted by process of financialisation but instead gains traction as potentiality (in the Deleuzian sense of the word), a move that would also satisfy Jacques Rancière's emancipated spectator.

To practice being an audience in an open-ended way does not mean to enter the stage and start dancing, singing or participating in other ways but exactly to practice being an audience otherwise or differently. To undo crystalised modes of seeing, interpreting, co-habiting space, experiencing, to lose control and allow for other behaviours and habits to emerge. For this to occur, however, it is necessary to locate potentiality in the work of art, and this can only be done through insisting on transcendent capacities and reaching for a zone of impersonal indifference. The price to pay is of course identity, belonging and confirmation but what is gained are forms of complexity that dissolve power and ownership, through which the individual spectators can gain experience of themselves and constitute themselves as forms of life.

A special thanks to the theatre scholar Georg Döcker on whose genuine knowledge and research on practice based dance and performance this text partly relies. Special thanks also to Adriano Wilfred Jensen who in practice has researched different thresholds between practice, dance and spectatorship.

# Art Is Not Information

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There is this story about a painting in some museum in St. Petersburg. The painting portrays the master-saloon of Lenin's summer house—whatever that's called, dacha—but there is also Lenin's wife together with a handful of big shots from the revolutionary government all engaged in group sex. Nothing graphic but still without doubt an orgy. An American tourist looks at the painting. Reads the wall text "Lenin in Moscow" and steps back again now inspecting and inspecting again. Taking on his Sherlock Holmes face—still confused. The tourist walks up to the guard—bored as usual, makes an attempt to communicate and asks: "Excuse me, but where is Lenin?" and the guard responds with a smile "Well, in Moscow."

Maybe now they have taken down the painting. Although this one is rather sad, it's always slightly comical with these kinds of semiotic glitches. But what both the American and the guard are missing out is how they both transform the painting into a set of information. Or that they together transform the painting from art to culture. In a way they close the painting, which now becomes subject to an entirely new regime of judgements. Did the painting communicate what it intended in a positive clear and efficient way? Moreover, is this information that we consider valuable and positive for the community that visits the museum, or should the painting be taken away because what it communicates is inappropriate?

Art is not information and it must not be. Think about it. An art that informs? Why on earth would I go to a museum to look at mostly square flat things hung on the walls if their purpose was to inform or enlighten me? Moreover, if that was the purpose what would the difference be between an actual Daniel Buren and a reproduction? Or wouldn't that make Isa Genzken total shit. Even Barbara Kruger too, mind you.

If art was a matter of information nine out of ten artists should probably just get a haircut and another job.

If art was a matter of information how would we consider contemporary chamber music or the work by, say, Steve Reich.

Information is always directional; it tells us something and should be doing it well. Information is not seldom a matter of prohibition from gendered toilets to no trespassing or worse. Information makes the world smaller. A toilet door without a sign is so to say richer than one with. An empty space on the ground floor is an opportunity until there's a sign informing the world that KFC is moving in. Damn.

Art has another job. Instead of diminishing what something can be, isn't its job to augment what is possible, what something can become? Information in this sense coagulates whereas art is more like turpentine—its job is to make something thinner and, even better, unclear vague dynamic and unpredictable. One thing is for sure: information was never meant to make you dream away and trip. I mean who reads the New York Times in Berghain when you can take MDMA and look at something nice like Wolfgang Tillmans.

Next chapter. Information is there to make sense and be useful. Art's job cannot be either. Sometimes art mesmerises me and I fall for it heads over heels. I tell you, information—nah, I never found myself contemplating a piece of information. Sorry. It goes without saying that art should stay away from

anything useful. Information is good for what it makes clear not in itself—there is no intrinsic value to speak of; with art the situation is reversed: art is good not due what use it conveys but due itself. At least me, I look at art because of what it is not what it does.

Now there is a complex differentiation to make, which in a way was in the painting example and an artwork's context and surrounding, actual and symbolic. Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author* proposed something prominent; the author's death meant that we should check out the art not the author's biography, identity and background—for art critique this was central—but one can also read Barthes from the other end to consider that when the "genius" dies there is only context, identity and background. And it's of course great, okay and wonderful to be informed about something through art but that's not the art.

Isn't the worst in the world, exhibitions that try to educate its audience about something urgent? If it's a matter of learning something about the art and the artist it's almost fine but art historical rigor is a very different thing from a group show that wishes to enlighten the viewer about the social situation so and so. I want to learn a lot about social situations and so much more but if it's about learning, is a museum, concert hall or theatre stage the place to learn? Wouldn't it be better if we sat down and talked about it and skipped the art part or the aesthetics all the way? Because this is the worst, right, art that wants to inform but packages information a little bit poetically. I can certainly support that information and knowledge often is strongly inscribed in Western traditions but we don't overcome that through packing Western knowledge with colourful poetics.

Art's job is not the same as the job of an institution.

Nor is art's job the same as that of the artist, and they shouldn't be mixed up. The artist, the person, is obviously responsible for the world like any other person. But her art can-

not be accountable for saving the world or not. Art's job is to be good art and not a service for somebody/thing else's struggle. How an artist is accountable for his or her work is a hard nut and ambiguous, but it is definitely of importance to step away from a causality between the artist and the work. If so, artist could possibly only make nice and good art with friendly people and sympathy. But none of this say that the artist is not also the person making decisions and deciding whether or not something should be shown for an audience.

It's heartbreaking to experience over and over again how art is made into culture, how art is made into information and service, and how art exhibitions and even the experience of art and an exhibition should be useful. Imagine you exit the Venice Biennale and some fonctionnaire pushes a questionnaire in your face: In what ways was the exhibition useful for you? In what ways has it increased your knowledge about... Exactly what is supposed to happen then about what?

Even more, if art is a matter of information who is to decide what is good or bad information? Maybe the artist will have to call the government or an oracle or so to find out? If art hooks up with information it becomes a service. In other words, it's the artist's goddamn obligation to refuse to inform and insist on art. Only then can art reclaim an autonomy—an autonomy that carries with it the potentiality to change the world completely.

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# Ecology, But How?

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A bunch of years ago the Slovenian thinker Slavoj Žižek proposed that a human being that separates his, her or their garbage and perhaps even has a compost under the sink is a person who desperately focuses on “how can I contribute to climate crises” in order not to be paralysed by the fact that the world is going under, that we are so intensely fucked and nothing’s gonna make it better. Perhaps Žižek’s psychoanalytical background shines through a little too much here. Sure, substitute the real trauma with something that is easy to handle. Engage in something superficial to a hundred percent and add condemning everybody who doesn’t to the eternal flames of hell as a smokescreen for the fact that the combination, democracy and capitalism, is unbeatable concerning an extractivist mindset. Textbook hysterical behaviour and not very complex.

In a current television series, one of the characters prides herself and pushes others to live a zero or no trash life. After a year, her entire contribution to the dark side of destroying the planet fits in a tiny glass jar. Congratulations and it’s great, but who other than an at least upper middle-class, educated, healthy, single-with-a-job person can afford the time it takes for this and that, no packaging, organic shop, or no wet wipes or diapers, you name it. There’s no doubt about it, ecological awareness is a form of privilege. Yet, the richest 10% of the people produce half of Earth’s climate-harming fossil fuel

emissions, while the poorest half contribute with a mere 10%. So maybe the zero trash community should think again? Perhaps with a Greta Thunberg portrait as your Facebook profile picture.

Around the same time, just after the 2008 recession, Zizek proposed that the problem is that we—whoever we are—don't take the crisis seriously enough. At that time the crisis was economic. Only economic. Look now, it's a little bit worse, everything is a freaking crisis and still very few of us do very little, including me. No excuses, we, none of us—individually or together—understand the scale of what is taking place right now and in front of our eyes. It's pretty easy to understand, we simply don't take the crises seriously enough, not even a little bit seriously enough.

Something quite horrible has happened to the publishing industry over the last couple of years. Previously it was quite simple, there were proper scholarly literature written without aspiration to be entertaining, an easy read or anything other than lengthy, rigorous and boring. Then there was popular science—nothing wrong about that even though scholarly had to go in favour of journalism—and everybody knew the difference. Popular science was simply said Nescafé—aristocratically packaged rubbish. Lately something new has surfaced, a sort of hybrid that poses as being of scholarly accuracy but isn't. And still it is not popular science, because most often those books are written by professors such and such but add to that the author without exception takes it very personally, the chapters are catchy and short, and they are always to one third a matter of identifying "the problem" (which the author of course always has) and the rest is an overview of how we in six or whatever steps can, or must, tackle it and save the world, our children, their children and further generations. I fucking hate this kind of books and the extended ecology shelves in our bookstores (actual or digital) are flooded with them. What these books further have in common is that they simplify everything; are sensational (no matter if the writer is a British



leftist, a Danish populist, an American liberal or what identity that he, she or they sign up for); operate as cognitive behavioural therapy, you know focusing on challenging and changing unhelpful distortions, improving behaviour and developing coping strategies that target solving current problems—gööö horror; and transform ecology into something that is external to the human but is our fault, that can be dealt with by the redistribution of resources and will have minor if any effect on how humans conduct life, but if we don't fix these forms of distribution really quickly we will all die.

Now, Žižek would turn it all around and argue that the first and most telling evidence that we are dealing with the current cluster of crises in a serious enough way is if life as we know it comes to an end, that the very notion of being human is transformed. And not just shifting from Republican to Democratic, right to left, Beyoncé to Katy Perry, but in ways that are indeterminate and irreversible. In other words, into something we couldn't even imagine imagining.

The other day a friend proposed that the fact that theatres are the last anything to open again after lockdowns and the first wave of Covid-19 is indeed evidence enough that theatre isn't important. Nobody, and certainly not politics, gives a shit about theatre. So why should we go on trying so hard to be political, radical or socially engaged? Really it doesn't make sense, or is theatre engaged in ecology more or less like sorting your garbage, both for those who make it and come watch it? It also doesn't matter how engaged—it can be really really engaged and super committed—theatre is still like the garbage sorting, something you keep under your sink and the illusion works only as long as the doors are closed. Or to put it differently, the garbage sorting, however meticulous you are, has extremely small if any repercussions into life, which I think one can also say about theatre. What happens in the theatre stays in the theatre, which is also why it feels so good to sit there in dark for a limited amount of time.

On the other hand, this irrelevance or hopelessness is perhaps exactly what makes the theatre and theatre (and dance) so exciting to engage in right now. Because to the same extent that theatre is irrelevant, it and we who work in and with it can do whatever we want. We have nothing or very little to defend, which simultaneously means risk is not an issue. We can risk it all all the time. So instead of trying hard to make more or less conventional theatre about ecology and climate crisis, instead of making more or less conventional theatre that prides itself for not flying, recycling costumes, using no set, not printing evening programs because paper is terrible for the planet, rehearsing using the internet or in a space without heating, or more or less conventional theatre that attempts to change the ecologies of work, decision making and authorship, what we really need to do, in order to take the cluster of crises seriously enough, is to make theatre that has no smaller aspirations than to change what theatre is and can be. And not just a shift from blue to red, conceptual to somatic, Meg Stuart to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, but in ways that are indeterminate and irreversible. In other words, into something we couldn't even imagine imagining.

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There are two kinds of problems. False or trivial problems are problems to which there are available solutions. Who's gonna pick up the kids? You or me, the nanny, grandma, let's call the police, pretend we forgot, or why not do it together, all of us including the police? Trivial problems are never a problem, it's just a matter of calculating and optimising.

Real or non-trivial problems are problems to which there are no available solutions. They simply cannot be solved. Not because the solution has not yet been found but because there is no solution to be found.

So why are real problems interesting in the first place? There is one option. Or maybe two. First, when we realise we've bumped into a real problem, let's forget about it and go back to normal, ordinary and trivial problems. Trivial problems make us feel safe and in control.

One could say that trivial problems are political problems?

"We need to increase the funding to education and offer teachers a better salary."

"No problem, let's increase the tax on... or decrease the funding for the arts..."

Or turn it around.

"We need to decrease the tax on..."

"No problem, let's decrease the funding for education."

Politics' job is not to change how things work; it's just about keeping up the flow and making sure things make at least some sense. Politics' job is to maintain the police, in the sense of maintaining the regulation and control of a community.

Politicians have two jobs, first to maintain the police, and second to take the blame if maintenance fucks up. No wonder they play it safe and come across as paranoid.

Second, referring to real problems and options; real problems are not supposed to be solved, their relevance resides exactly in the struggle and how they persevere. A real problem is indeed only a real problem as long as there can be no solution. The moment there is a solution, even only one, it's a trivial problem.

Another aspect is that a trivial problem has no impact external to itself. It doesn't create irreversible repercussions to our mental, social or actual environments. A real problem is something altogether different. Imagine there is no solution available within the context or reality we live. If we are still determined to find a solution, it means "we" have to change reality, to change the circumstances that determine life. Or perhaps the circumstances are flipsides, the consequence of finding a solution for a real problem is that reality inevitably will have changed. What makes this not just a little bit exciting or

frightening is that change set in motion is a form of change that cannot be determined, that is not probable in respect of what we know but instead contingent. In other words, we have no idea what the hell we are up to or against.

Real problems therefore are not political. They are not negotiable. They are not a little bit more or less, better or worse, but completely goddamn black and white and merciless. Still we cannot know what kind of merciless—after all, the result is contingent or indeterminate, which means it can also be completely ordinary and conventional.

Perhaps this is when we realise that we have arrived at a third or a new problem. The weird or obvious conclusion is that real problems cannot be posed, identified or determined. An entity that acquires representation needs to be “faithful” to representation and therefore cannot point towards or designate an entity that is not yet inscribed in the same representational order.

One option would be to reverse the layout. Instead of real problems to which there are no solutions, we could consider that there “are” new solutions to which we need to articulate appropriate problems. These solutions arrive from the future, perhaps like symptoms of what is to come. Thus, the formulation of an accurate problem implies rendering the symptoms actual. The formulation of a problem is easy because there is already a trivial problem available. The difficulty is to formulate an accurate problem, i.e., a problem that treats the solution with respect. With respect to the extent that the problem poses repercussions in relation to how we conduct life.

I’m a bit reserved here, the idea that something arrives from the future feels a bit too kitschy, doesn’t it? And symptom is too psychoanalytical even for me.

Resilience is a notion that shows up more and more frequently. In today’s societies we need resilience to cope with everyday hardships and general bullshit. A high degree of re-

silience makes it easy to sail through life and makes shit possible, but resilience can also be understood as being completely subsumed by the forces of society, which means economic interests. A single mother needs a hell of a lot of resilience to be able to cope with three jobs, kindergarten, childcare and running a household. Artists need excessive resilience to be able to navigate endless short-term contracts, applications, day jobs, parenthood, mobility, community, social engagement, glamour and you name it. Resilience is another word for precariat just without the negative connotation. Be resilient and neoliberalism loves you.

When it comes to problems, resilience is a specialist on false problems. It finds solutions for everything and is an expert in combination, dynamics and flexibility, and don't know the concept of resistance.

If you still haven't given up on real problems we can see that resilience is not an option. What is needed instead is an overdose, or almost, of perseverance. A sense of *n'importe quoi*\* which is not just to insist but worse. It's no way José, over my dead body and forever.

Trivial problems are attractive like candyfloss or body lotion and real or non-trivial problems are of a different calib, they require perseverance. It is through persevering or no-matter-what that something altogether else can emerge.

False problems are okay or agree, arguing that a little is good enough or however small my contribution is, it's something after all. Trivial problems are no problem. Real problems on the other hand are a no go, even a lot is not good enough. Real problems are all or nothing, take it or leave it and fucking unconditional.

Now, when it comes to ecology, who do you want to be? A trivial or real problem? Resilience or perseverance? Are you okay with a little less CO<sub>2</sub> knowing that it will postpone the end of the world for 20 minutes? Or are you ready to change the way you operate, the way you conduct life—even if you don't

know into what—in order to make this world flourish also for generations into the future? Even if the world you contribute to is a world without humans?

Now, when it comes to making art, who do you want to be? Is art about false or non-trivial problems? Flexibility or no matter what? Interdisciplinary or media specificity? Are you making art in order to contribute a little bit to the ecological well-being of your environments? Or do you consider that art's relation to perseverance implies the possibility to articulate a space through which real problems and real solutions can emerge?

\* *n'importe quoi* both and simultaneously in the sense of no matter what and whatever.

# Post-human Or Something

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"My Mama always said that a problem is just a solution that hasn't been found yet."

"Your Mama was an idiot then because if the solution hasn't been found yet, it's a fucking problem, isn't it?"

"That's the point, there is no problem, there's just a solution that hasn't been found yet."

"Which is a problem. In fact, it's the exact fucking definition of a problem."

"We're just gonna have to agree to disagree then, aren't we?"

But, question mark, what exactly is it that they will have to agree to disagree to? As long as we agree, no need for either problems or solutions. Jackpot! Then again, isn't the very notion of agreeing homogenising and repressive. Who can't afford to or doesn't have the agency to not agree? Behind an agreement there's always a financial settlement whereas understanding seems to be built on ongoing exchange.

In any case, isn't it terrible with people that puncture discussions with that kind of rhetoric? That's the people that deserve to be called a dick or asshole. Goddamned passive-aggressive. Is it only me that experience those few words in respect of a low form of ownership. Like two American men standing on each side of a fence barking at each other over something nobody really remembers what it was. See what I mean?

It is more exciting to contemplate the boundaries of imagination. If imagination is situated in language, doesn't that mean we can only imagine what language allows us to imagine? Imagination thus remains within the boundaries of representation, of what we already are able to perceive. That, I think, unfortunately makes imagination trivial and sad. One can only imagine what language agrees to, and the most radical end product appears to be an unresolved agree to disagree. Disaster.

On the other hand, if imagination doesn't have any form of boundary and is really wild, totally out of control, it becomes difficult to find it, define it or even talk about it.

Another thing Americans are great at, to insist on and set up boundaries. Practical maybe, but making things trivial, simplified, and one more time stinking of a sense of property. If there is a boundary there is also ownership and authorship.

One can wonder if imagination is a problem or a solution that hasn't been found yet. If imagination has boundaries and is language-based it simply isn't imagination, and yet if imagination is not bound it couldn't be differentiated from the rest of life, the world, universe or Gaia.

It feels good to say things like: we need to think outside the box—even though one knows that it's impossible to produce a moment when imagination exceeds its limits. Never mind what is outside the box, if not something unthinkable—because it is still thinkable, the outside is just the inside of another box.

Some different yet related questions are whether imagination is something—being—or if it is a form of practice—relations. The trouble, however, is that a practice needs to be located in respect of something and something needs to be practiced in order to gain representation in the world.

Imagination is a slippery slope, but what we can know is that if imagination is language-based it cannot exceed what is already possible to consider or think. This means that imagination always at least indirectly supports or consolidates the way



we humans are humans. Hence, we cannot use imagination to change the world or the ways life is conducted, exactly because however much we imagine it is still imagination based on or derived from this world and this (the current) way of conducting life. Thus, only by considering that imagination is not attached to language is it possible to utilise imagination in order to conceive rigorously different ways of life, lives that do not confirm the human as the human. The only problem, which might just be a big problem, is that as long as we remain human we can't imagine what that something is. It is impossible to imagine what we can't imagine and still this is what we have to imagine imagining. Shit!

Now, what is art's opportunities and responsibilities in this mayonnaise? If art's job was to "use" imagination in respect of what language agrees to, art making becomes strategic, calculated and in worst cases simply smart-ass. If this is the case, art making or art in any instance cannot bypass ethical implications. In light of this, art becomes through and through relational and has no value in itself. On the other hand, if art connects to some or other form of unbound or wild imagination, it must carefully avoid mysticism, spirituality, vitalism and universalism. As long as imagination is language-related, art has no problem with truth—language is after all performative. The moment imagination moves "beyond," it is pretty complicated to not end up in essence, truth and white male straight modernism.

Post-humanism has nothing to do with the post-human. Neither does it have anything to do with after humanism or after human, and certainly not with something or somebody being humane. Being humane just basically means being compassionate and nice. Although that's not exactly simple as it always implies ethical considerations. Does my compassion to the left undo my compassion to the right, etc.? Am I nice to this person because it's nice to that person or because it makes me feel humane? Being humane is not always that generous but, equally often, simply calculated and economic, symbolic or actual.

Post- in the sense of post-human, for example, rather than referring to 'after' as it might do with post-World War II or PTSD, implies some or other form of self-reflexivity, or the moment when, for example, humanism, modernism or the internet developed the ability to observe or inspect its own conditions, being in the world, engagements, ethical and relational complexities. Perhaps a stupid example. Post- is when something has gone through a serious amount of hours with the psychoanalyst. You know, not at all liberating itself from traumas but understanding them, and being able to reflect their impact and consider them as resources.

Post-humanism is not not-humanist or anti-humanist; it signifies the moment when humanism develops the ability to reflect itself, and obviously humanism or post-humanism has absolutely nothing to do with being humane or not. Generally speaking humanism must be considered one of the more inhumane worldviews ever invented, vouching without a blink of an eye for colonialism, slavery, extractivism, a human- and Western-centric world, patriarchy and so much more darkness. OMG capitalism.

Post-humanism is a humanism that at least figured out it might not be the best, smoothest and generous approach to the universe. Congrats. Nevertheless, post-humanism is also a system of thought anchored in human capacity, human in the way we are human.

Post-human is an altogether different story and much more difficult because, for one, here post- starts to point in all kinds of directions. The initial point nevertheless is that post-human has nothing or at least very little to do with robots or monsters (most of them definitely, ghosts, for example). One point of view proposes that post-human designates the moment when humans or humanity became able to reflect its own position vis-à-vis itself, its relations and its environments. For example, the moment when humanity became able to comprehend that this way of being human is only one of endless contingent pos-

sible ones; that there is no foundation to this way of being human but it's just the result of contingent outcomes to which there is no destiny, no path, no reason, etc. The post-human condition is the state where humans develop the ability to reflect their own being and doings in the world.

Another perspective onto the post-human seems to consider that everything that is not flesh and blood but appears like it is is post-human. Terminator, as in the films, would thus be post-human but is he, it or they really? Because in the end, isn't it the creature's way of showing conscience and compassion exactly when he becomes human and cute? The Terminator, Arnold, is exactly made to be human, to practice being human like "we" do. This is also why, on the first level, the robot-being poses a threat. When the artificial being becomes too similar to "us," our way of being human loses bearing as unique, special or whatever, and that is threatening.

You or whoever doesn't become post-human because you have "Artificial" tattooed on your biceps nor because you obsess about techno music created only using processors, not even if your dress code is strictly polymer-based or you shave some or other part of your head. It might feel great and can be valuable practices but at the end of the day the question is whether they in fact don't end up confirming and even consolidating being human in the way we are. Not so different from tribal tattoos in the 90s that functioned as evidence for being real. "When I look at my tribal tattoo I know I exist, it's permanent. When I recall the sensation of the pain it caused I can feel a heightened sense of presence. It makes me feel alive."

If anything, these kinds of practices—Continue, by all means—at best experiment with boundaries—produce tension and awareness about conventions—but the onset is always binary—not not similar to a protest. It's enabled exactly because there is something to "revolt" against, to resist.

Post-human is far more complicated because it means practicing being human detached—completely—from being hu-

man in the ways we are. As long as the practice is a result of what we know, based on forms of imagination that remain in language, it can, strictly speaking, not be considered post-human. As long as a practice or form of being is generated in relation or in tension with known practices, they can equally not be understood as post-human.

Post-human is not a matter of stopping to be human; to be non-human is another story and maybe easier. Post-human means to be human contingently different from practices that can be identified with respect to how we are human, both the being and the human part.

Post-human therefore is neither part of a problem nor a solution that hasn't yet been discovered. There is nothing to agree to disagree about the post-human and no matter how every form of post-human being is encompassed by boundaries, it is the boundaries contingent to the boundaries we are able to formulate as relations or into a grid. In this respect we have to conclude that any post-human capacity, any rigorous post-human practice, is void of ethics and moreover, politics. A post-human condition can in fact not coincide with the human condition as we know it, because the emergence of a post-human condition, in order to be properly post-human, eradicates what being human "once" implied.

Yet, isn't what art is all about exactly that: to—even if it is hopelessly impossible—generate the possibility for post-human conditions to emerge. Art's responsibility is not to make this world a better place, nor to question or critique it; it is to make it come to an end. The world as we know it.

# Sherlock Holmes' Violin

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Why does Sherlock Holmes have to play the violin? Was he a simple music lover that wishes for a position in the local symphony orchestra or was the violin a substitute of his absent mother, etc., childhood trauma? Nah, it's neither, but the violin is crucial for Holmes' activities and key to his ability to solve the craziest crimes. The violin is nothing more or less than a concept, a device that the detective inserts in order to stop thinking and for indetermination to possibly emerge. It's when he runs into a cul-de-sac that he needs the violin, to be able to see what cannot be seen through the lens of reason, deduction and conclusion. He has to have it to defuse his gaze, to stop being human. It's not that he wants to or could look at the world through the "eye" of the violin. Not at all, he just needs to vibrate with the violin, let the violin transfer its agency without knowing to what end. A concept is a machine that carries with it the capacity to dislocate causality. This can only happen through an agency that is non-human.

It has been considered too often that Gilles Deleuze is a relational philosopher among other post-modern and post-structuralist thinkers. It's evident that phenomenology and its continuation cannot have it otherwise; the world is its relations and there is no founding moment or origin. Value is relational or relative. With Deleuze nothing could be more wrong. It is true that transformation is central to his work but becoming is not a transformation from one known to another known, nor

from a known to an unknown—which is also knowable as absence. Instead, becoming is a change from something to some thing—contingent change—which is to say from something that is inscribed in a web of relations to some thing which has no relation, where the lack of relations instead renders it a being, but a being that is withdrawn. A different way of describing Deleuze's becoming is, from reality to immanence, and in a way back again.

This fact has been almost consistently ignored by continental philosophy, critical theory and anything Marxist because it would undermine, although to some extent different but yet their fundamental premise. Post-structuralism simply had to insist on Deleuze as relational in order not to poop in its own shoes. Deleuze's reasoning on the other hand was that only through insisting on immanence or potentiality could philosophy have anything to do with truth, although not as in consolidating truth but as in generating or producing truth instead, a truth that, when colliding with reality, language or representation, dissolves into without exception and/or is violated by any of those capacities, which in any case is the same. Curiously, however, it is not truth that is incorporated into reality but the other way around. It is reality that needs to transform in order to generate compatibility with truth, because: nothing can or must exist within reality that is not inscribed in a web of relations. For something to be true, on the other hand, it cannot have relations; if it does, each relation is different, and hence truth cannot be true. In order not to collapse reality will transform contingently in order to establish any or some kind of relations with truth, but the moment relation is established truth loses its being, swallowed by language. Deleuze knows truth cannot be established only generated. This makes him a productive rather than consolidating philosopher, but it also makes him a philosopher aware of the problems of relations, who places faith in being, or perhaps better, in realism.

It goes without saying that for Deleuze truth cannot be produced, because production is always directional and known—

it just doesn't work to produce "I have absolutely no idea." Deleuze however proposes that one under certain circumstances can produce the possibility of production, but there can obviously be no guarantee. This production of possibility cannot be linear or probabilistic but must be contingent, which is why Deleuze needs to introduce a capacity for the possibility to possibly happen. This capacity, which is not a tool since a tool always knows its destination, is known as a machinic assemblage, or a concept. A concept is an indetermination machine, which also must be indeterminate to itself.

Knowledge is performative whereas being is not. Knowledge is relative whereas being is true.

What does it mean to produce knowledge, or what are the implications of knowledge production? To learn, or participate in a course, has nothing to do with knowledge production, but means possessing established knowledge. Education is the opposite of knowledge production; there is no production going on at all, all a student does is to consume established packages of knowledge. Creative or artistic education is no exception.

For the notion knowledge production to have any bearing, it must signify to make or create knowledge, knowledge that was previously not existing or possible. Consequently, knowledge production at the end of the day means bringing something new into being, something that is and must not yet be knowledge.

It appears impossible to produce knowledge, as one cannot produce what one cannot know through determination. Therefore, in order to produce knowledge a device is needed. As we have understood, this device is known as a concept.

To engage in knowledge production is to attempt to engage in being. To engage in knowledge production implies to engage in the possibility of the production of truth. To engage in knowledge production further means calling out an agency foreign to humanity.

Now, how does this relate to art and aesthetic experience? Art is to a large extent connected to knowledge, but is not the same as aesthetic experience. The moment art is “only” knowledge it transforms into service and aesthetic experience is nullified. Knowledge is consistent, causal and continuous, it is reliable and ownable. Aesthetic experience or the encounter with art is something else; it is that which goes beyond reason, cognition and conclusion, it is to vibrate with that violin, or in other words, the aesthetic experience is to be engaged by an agency that is non-human. Since non-human agency cannot be knowledge, it must therefore be a being; aesthetic experience is a productive encounter with truth. For aesthetic experience to possibly take place, there is a need for device, indeed an indetermination machine—a concept—both in respect of artistic production and experiencing or viewing art. The aesthetic experience implies an engagement with foreign agency; it is to engage in something that is not yet human, which is something to which no relation can be established yet it is there. That which is yet there is being and being is always alien.



# I Have to Get Off Soon

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Imagination seems to be one of those words that only have one meaning. Like manipulation, it's always bad. Laughter is almost always good and it is good, laughter. But imagination, what is good about that, or perhaps more importantly, how can imagination be good when it can be so many different things? Furthermore, imagination almost always comes with expansion; imagination is bigger than the world or my room or a television.

In the past kids had imaginary friends, so cute, and yet parents worried about minors with too much imagination. Those friends were based on some sort of general deficit and imagination was a way of coping with boredom. And yes, something expanded, you know, wooden riffles (maybe not so expanded), but everything could become everything, a pine cone could easily be a horse in the wild west. When the internet showed up, cones probably ended up forgotten and commercial platforms and in-game purchases took over.

American imagination never really worked on me. Disney for example is so full of imagination I feel suffocated and just have to open a window. The tempo is so turned up, colours so bright, voices so hysterical or simply so too much is there that there is absolutely nothing left for me. Instead of supporting imagination and enriching it, it seems that American and soon the entire world's child entertainment has only one goal in common, to simply eradicate everything imagination. Well,

not so strange after all. Television, games or educational apps all earn money on making the user addicted and staying put, not when he, she or they throw the iPad away, going to the forest, having a battle with the garden hose that just transformed into a giant sea monster or making drawings of something that doesn't have names derived from some or other franchises. But then again, why would that be anything better and not just fulfilling for a parent who can identify with some sentimental image of raising a child into authenticity?

Nevertheless, a somewhat common understanding is that the dark side has no time for imagination. Consider Darth Vader, zero imagination, Voldemort zero imagination, Scrooge same thing and mind you Stormtroopers or Orcs are certainly not equipped with anything imagination. In popular culture, the only dark character with imagination is the genius serial killer but there again, his imagination is always only expanding on the basis of some or other unspeakable trauma. The Mother...

It's comical with Donald Trump and how he accuses everybody for having a too vivid imagination [fake news]—especially concerning his involvement in Russian or who-knows-what kind of dirty money or sex scandals—and at the same time is extremely imaginative concerning, for example, where the pandemic started, what a great idea to inject disinfectant, or in respect of his self-image as not being racist, chauvinist, sexist and a general asshole. That kind of imagination that enough people can imagine on the top of the iceberg but not so many would vouch for Robin Williams in the same position, the President—I mean hadn't he been dead and all. But why not, it would have been way more fun. Really, way more.

It's weird, obvious and sad that imagination and power have such a tense relation and how often power seems to both repress imagination and practice it in the most disturbing ways.

Perhaps the problem is that imagination always is conventional, surprising from time to time but conventional precisely because it is based on what we can already understand as sense perception, recollection, intuition, etc. Imagination is not

falling from the sky, it's not put into us by some mysterious force. It is ourselves which is why it might also be somewhat scary. It's me, inside my head that generated those images—exactly.

Children don't have extraordinary imagination. On the contrary, their imagination, although it might be cute or wicked, is based on the amount of perceptive input, how much the individual has experienced the world, inner and outer.

Conceptual art has problems with imagination. The conceptual artist either has no imagination and therefore hides behind rationalism and being clever, or is embarrassed by his, her or their imagination and therefore represses it into forms of harness often using irony to cover the dirty backside. In the first instance, most, and I mean most, conceptual art is exercises in the exorcism of imagination.

On the other hand, perhaps it is equally depressing with art that shows off how imaginative it is and overloads the viewer, like Disney, with information, colour, editing and boosting music or beauty for that matter. What both seem to have in common is a form of ownership of imagination, keeping it to themselves either due to some kind of trauma or as a megalomaniac superpower.

Sometimes I wonder if and how imagination has changed historically. Not in the sense of what people imagined or what fantasies they had but rather if different kinds of societies, forms of governance, class structures, penal systems, systems of owning land, relations to colonialism and slavery, repression of sexualities, etc., generate different kinds of imagination. Obviously, and perhaps imagination always is a matter of imagining the world otherwise and yet if imagination is formed by our environments, it's awkward to contemplate that our ways of dreaming about foreign lands and paradise are fruits of our environments as well. How does a person who has lived through colonial times imagine foreign lands in comparison with a person that knows nothing about the possibility of owning land?

How does a person who learned to say "mine" before standing up imagine differently, in comparison to somebody who never experienced and learned about property?

Especially in the 1960s, it was en vogue in academic circles to emphasise the importance of difference. More difference in any respect was good. Any kind. Difference was a way of giving voice to alternative forms of life, sexuality, property, race, bodies, improvisation, class relations and educational policies. Difference difference difference.

Strange in ways because difference conventionally would be understood in respect of relations and proximity, tensions and expansion. In the 60s the currency was of another kind and difference had value in itself, or that was the argument. Difference mattered, and yes it did in a society with fixed, or seemingly fixed boundaries concerning all the above and so much more. Power knew where it lived and had no intention of refurbishing. Then something drastic happened. Starting in 1970 everything fell apart, with post-modernism, neoliberalism, oil crisis, the aftermath of 1968, the first steps towards globalisation, the final shift from geo- to bio-politics and most of all the crumbling of value. Everything, every form of value crumbled and became relative, floating, fluid and liquid. Language is performative announced Jacques Derrida in 1970, money is liquid proclaimed Richard Nixon the same year. And what happened to difference? Exactly, from now on everything was only difference, because there was nothing fixed any longer, nothing.

However, one problem was that the understanding of difference didn't upgrade itself. We can still hear academics claim the importance of difference qua difference.

Under these circumstances what happens to imagination? When difference went out the window, when value started to float, did imagination then also start floating and need to be controlled differently, need to be something that could be differently used in respect of capital? How free is my imagination after all?

Finally. Is imagination a question or an answer? A statement or sensation? Is imagination a line or landscape? A story or a place?

Dance is perhaps not the first thing we think about when associating with imagination, but perhaps we should think again? Because dance has that specific quality of neither being a question nor answer, a statement nor sensation. Dance is not a medium that overwhelms with imagery, editing, colours, tempo, or at least it doesn't have to be. Dance doesn't need to tell a story, doesn't need to be critical, doesn't need to cast you off to another world. Dance is not a line, nor a story; it is a place and landscape, and you know the difference is that there's nothing to follow and a lot to experience. Nothing to be told and a lot to discover. Dance is not imaginative but perhaps just because of that a place where a lot of imagination can be born.

# But Use Your Imagination

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What can we do when imagination is the only means we have to invent a different future. When imagination at the same time has been abducted by forces that encourage more of the same and the destruction of the world as we know it? What can we do when imagination is the last place of hope—Let's imagine a better world—and contemporary capitalism has kidnapped it and made imagination into a business model, and turned it into the product so many of today's successful businesses sell?

If problems are just solutions that we haven't found yet? What does it mean when a company sells creative solutions? Or tells CEOs that their solutions will let them imagine the world differently?

Imagination is in fact the ultimate product for contemporary immaterial capitalism? What they sell is nothing which will become something if someone's lucky, and still these businesses guarantee the outcome will be amazing. Something is not right in this equation?

Imagination has grown to be the saviour and the enemy at the same time. Or, imagination is both the spark and the nemesis of the revolution. Both the enemy and the sponsor of the uprising.

Perhaps imagination has transformed from being an interestingly unpredictable weapon that classical capitalism, welfare state and general moralism feared to being a cuddle toy for world changers that have mixed up interior decoration with

revolution and an Instagram hashtag #highendhomes with political pamphlets.

What is in any respect obvious is that imagination is not about bringing us anywhere—at least not better—and the question is if the illusion still is operational. I mean, when imagination is nothing else than daydreaming and the neighbour of Amélie Poulain—not Hollywood but the French even tackier version.

Apropos imagination and resistance. It is undeniable that imagination historically had a kind of soft subversive quality, but for imagination to carry this force it also needs to have something to push against. Something needs to be actual, there needs to be fixed or indexical values, and as we know with the advent of neoliberal governance, fixed is not an option anymore. One could say that today, everything is only imagination and there's nothing more to it. There is nothing real or actual or properly stable, but all there is is imagination, fiction and floating narratives. Still, isn't it weird or obvious that in a world without anything to really hold on to, there seems to be endless struggles and wars fought over openness and polarisation appears to grow stronger by the day?

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At some point in the late 50s, artists started to make happenings and later performances as a way of fucking around with museum structures, the understanding of the art object and its relation to commodity, the notion of collection, the idea of disinterested contemplation and a lot more things. Performance equalled risk and signified resistance. Brave people made performances for brave audiences. Performance was obscure and at the end of the day it could be understood as a critique of general modes of production (Fordism) and by its simple existence a critique of capitalist economies.

In the late 90s and early 2000s, an endless row of books proposed that society, initially in the West but spreading through globalisation, since some time ago and accelerating, was transforming into a society that is “built” around, through and from performance. Jon McKenzie in his book *Perform or Else* (2001) even implied that human life has transformed from having value by itself to only having value as long as it is performing, meaning when productive and generating financial movement. In economies based on immaterial forms of exchange, the only thing that matters is to constantly generate movement. Humans today are like those sharks that can’t stop swimming because if they don’t move their breathing will fail and they will suffocate. Nice.

Alright, so what motivates anybody to make performance today? Just asking, because it certainly cannot be in order to question museum or commodity structures, it certainly cannot be in order to bring capitalism to a halt or consumer society to an abrupt stop. Somehow it can neither be about, especially not in the old West, displaying or making the audience aware of different kinds of bodies or forms of embodiment. First of all because they are available 24/7 on the internet and if you say no it’s because you haven’t looked careful enough. Internet is equally full of corporate, degrading, alternative, celebrating, amazing, disgusting, weird, wow, cynical, hippie, totally great, glitch, etc., images. Moreover, if imagination has gone overboard, why do we still need to push boundaries. They are already erased and in any case, whatever is displayed, whatever is made available is always only one step away whether we want it or not, if it’s not already consumed and repackaged by corporate money.

Everything, really all of it, makes performance the absolute match to our current times—pre-Covid evidently—and it’s tailored to the entire arena of neoliberal and late capitalist appetites. Performance enables the absolutely perfect subject for our times—individual, special, hypersocial, non-conforming



yet compatible, resilient, business minded, young, beautiful, urban, single with no kids, mobile. Indeed, the subject that performance currently sponsors is hyper-sellable and equally investable, especially since on top of it all it doesn't travel with bunches of objects or heavy sceneries but is mega-flexible in respect of space, dressing rooms, technical support, when and where, and cost efficiency.

So, a million positive things to say about identity- and subjectivity-sourced performances but in respect of political resistance, proposing a different kind of imagination and re-thinking subjectivity or the position of the body in society, I don't think so. I'd rather say that performance works like an external lab for the research and development department of contemporary capitalism. But most of all, performance is nothing, absolutely nothing different. It might just feel terrific exactly for those reasons and the sensation of being radical. Performance confirms the artist as being completely embedded in contemporary society including its business model.

Perhaps this could all be d'accord and fine but something is itching concerning imagination. The question is if this kind of performance isn't functioning more or less identically to Disney and corporate entertainment. It might offer a lot of, or at least a "special," imagination; it optimises attention and because of its focus on identity strengthens the intensity which the encounter is confirming—positive or negative—which means the experience, or what the experience does, is being framed, contracted, linear, economic and moral. In other words, the experience is not expanding imagination; on the contrary, it fastens and hinges value to what the individual is doing with the experience.

The problem with confirmation and hence identity truly lies in that once something is identified or located it is nothing else. The backside of identity is that it diminishes something's navigational opportunities, or said otherwise it loses its potentiality. Moreover, if identity is considered something organised

by language, which identity politics along with theories of performativity conclude, something can also only carry identities already made possible through and by language. This means identity invariably confirms the power structures that govern language and is counterproductive to imagination.

A most abbreviated definition of performance is that it is “a subject performing subjectivity.” Interestingly, both sides appear to strengthen each other and form a kind of circular flow and expel any glitches, weaknesses, holes or inconsistencies. A similar definition of dance on the other hand is that dance is “a subject performing form.” In dance a tension or possibly a release is introduced between the signifier and the signified. The dancer is not necessarily confirmed by the dance, nor is the dance dependent on subject. A dance can naturally be “used” to express a subject’s status, position, power or simply voice, but even when that is the case, due to the generic capacity implicit in form, the tension between subject and form is still present, although dormant. It is precisely this tension—or one could also consider it a distance—between subject, the signifier, and form, the signified, that makes dance on the one hand so “complicated” and so rich. When the distance gets too big, a recurring question, in its most vulgar form, is expressed as “what is it about?” and for many audience members this happens the very second the subject is not confirmed by the what is performed. But it is also in and through this distance—which perhaps is not a distance at all as distance is measurable and has two sides; here we have two but they are neither apart in the sense of measure nor two sides of one thing or even shared—that imagination can start to move, oscillate, reverberate or flicker and become generative. The entrance to the playground, backyard, battlefield, double bed, call it what you want, of imagination is precisely there, in the seemingly empty “space” between, between two incompatible entities. And imagination’s job is to generate coherence where incoherence rules.

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It is imperative to consider relations between performance and performativity. Every artwork is performative no matter what. A poem performs poem-ness and a painting carries the performativity of painting, which is not more or less performative than anything else immobile or not, silly or moving, with or without a subject. Everything is carried by forms of performativity but the performativity of a shoe and horse, a musical concert and a theatre play, a performance and a dance, a dance and a video of a dance and so on are different. There's no more or no less performativity, just different. The performativity of performance and dance is often equalled, put together as if one and the same, but in fact the different positions of subjectivity separate them quite strongly.

Now, both a performance and a dance can only happen once, but that's the same with any experience or event. Anybody who claims that theatre or performance is unique due to the singularity of the experience has simply not done their homework.

You can never step into the same river twice, never mind once. Correct, it can never be the same river since it is never the same river. The same river is just something we say, we know there is only change and flow, but it feels good and makes life easy. In this respect, there is no difference between performance and dance, but in regard of the position of subjectivity, performance issues responsibility on four different levels of subjectivity: the performer carrying or being a subject, the performance carrying subjectivity, the subjectivity of the spectator confirming in some or other positive or negative way the identity of the performer and the performance, and finally the subjectivity of the exchange between the three parties. Performance is, so to say, through and through performative and it deflates fairly rapidly if one of the entities missing.

Dance, on the other hand, through the introduction of

form—which doesn't mean it becomes formal—dislocates the continuity and confirmation of subjectivity, which means that the dancing subject is not confirmed by form. Which in turn releases the spectator from confirming the subject of the performer and obviously cannot confirm form as anything else than form. Furthermore, form withdraws from becoming subject. It withdraws from the desire to be given subject, value or symbolic charge, and remains something that has not value, except as itself as itself, and therefore simply cannot be performative. In this sense one could argue that dance, although the dancing subject is, is not performative. Form is some thing, which is not carried by performativity, and the dancing subject is something, carried by performativity. Dance is located, not all but some, in the interstitial space between some thing and something, and it is exactly in this oscillating instability or sliding perception that imagination can start to reverberate.

An understanding of dance as being top-till-toe performative, thus equivalent to performance, points in the direction that the space of imagination proposed always already is captured or, why not, entangled in language and representation. In other words, imagination as proposed above, forms of imagination that can be measured, exchanged and charged with economic value. Turned around, interrupting the "equilibrium" of subjectivity and introducing form—that is not carried by subjectivity and certainly not one that is generative in respect to human epistemologies—means that there is a space opened for imagination, not defined as a kind of ping-pong space where all sides confirm each other but instead a space that, if at all, produces responses or reverberations that cannot be interpreted because they aren't carried by human subjectivity. The spectator, also the dancers, cannot locate, place and confirm that exchange but must instead generate a location, must therefore invent a context where the exchange can be hosted. It is in this tension that a different form of imagination can flourish, a form of imagination that is not yet imaginable, an imagination that exists but still has not gained form.

This might sound terribly exhausting but is in fact exactly the contrary. For some it might be experienced as frightening because there is no service, nobody that offers you to choose this or that, but for others this is a space where the participant is not obliged, is not introduced to value or decision-making. And mind you, the dance needs you as little as you need it. It doesn't require your approval but knows how to mind its own business. It has no issues with whatever it is that happens in your imagination. It doesn't hold you responsible nor does it give you agency. Instead it offers that the spectator generates his, her or their own agency independent of the experience. A form of agency that is supplementary to the experience and is created by your imagination.

# Trust Me

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Trust me, it'll be alright. When that sentence comes out of the mouth of anybody, at least for me it's a clear sign that nothing's gonna be alright at all. And in any case since when is alright the desired outcome of anything? Isn't alright already presuming some sort of crisis or medium disaster?

It'll be alright, is something you say to yourself after reversing into a lamppost with your brand new Toyota Prius. Sure, it'll be alright, but first I'll have to be embarrassed for a week next to getting the damn car to the garage.

You'll be alright, is something you say to your choreographer friend after he fell on his face during the premiere applause. Sure, I'll be OK but that production will never be remembered for anything else other than the author's nosedive.

Trust me. What is that supposed to mean? Really, trust me? Trust you what, in respect of what? Either it means, you'll pay for the fixing of the Prius, or that the choreographer will most probably not embarrass himself again in the same way within an overseeable future. But there are certainly no guarantees. Perhaps we just have to accept that Trust me most of the time means nothing more or less than Hurry up and find somebody else to blame. At least come up with some terrific excuse and repeat it until you believe it yourself.

Trust me, it'll be alright, in short means to engage in processes to minimise collateral damage. In other words, it's something that comes out of politicians that have lost track of any kind of ideological grounding.

The starting point for trust is that something is stable, that some form of immobility is available to which trust can be attached. Trust is a form of anchoring and anchoring works fine as long as there is something untouchable down there at the end of the rope, in the beginning of time, in the first instance or at the bottom of it all. But there isn't.

Sorry, not sorry. Sorry, because it would feel so good if there was, the mother of all things. Not sorry, because if there was this something that would determine everything, nothing could be otherwise however much we tried. This is evidently why philosophy since forever had to render metaphysics, transcendence, immanence, the absolute, the virtual, *ding an sich*, the real, the void, Being, the philosopher's stone and so on inaccessible—a something that is situated beyond that which can possibly or impossibly be known.

In dance, maybe for art in general actually, presence is often understood as some sort of goal. Both in respect of making art, dancing or acting, and viewing, watching, experiencing. We have all read about it on the internet; those moments when somebody was entirely swept away and experience was fully in the now. Advocates for improvisation in dance often use the argument. Dance as a means for being fully in contact with oneself, reaching a state of authenticity. Perhaps this is also why jazz musicians have to close their eyes when going wild, to become one with the music.

Fair enough, but still. First of all, it can't really happen and if it does, there is absolutely no option to dwell in presence. Presence to be presence must be void of time. Sure, you can feel present with yourself on a good day or whilst dancing around but there is a hell of a difference between feeling present and being present. The feeling of presence is baptised rich and fulfilling, being on top of oneself, unstoppable, potent and superhero-like. Being present, however, is poor, impoverished or in fact utterly empty and has nothing to do with fulfilment. Presence is not a means for an augmented experience or comprehension of the self—as in taking mushrooms or something

chill—but the exact opposite. The actual experience of presence, being present, implies the annihilation of the self, the very erasure of identity. Presence is poor because it is nothing more than NOW. It is in fact our lucky day that we have no access to presence, because exactly this grants us permission to every then, both in the sense of past and future.

And yet, even the impossibility of presence is necessary in order for the possibility of any form of non-predictable, or contingent, change. If not, all change can only be strategic, probable and well-meaning.

Thirty years after Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble*, where she absolutely spot-on and flawlessly introduced identity politics, i.e., a comprehension of identity as being performative, a never-ending process to which there is no foundation or grounding. Identity, and with that obviously gender, is not a practice with a departure or destination, towards better or worse; it simply and complexly is a cluster of practices or negotiations between conventions and norms, tension, desire, suffering and joy.

Personally, I believe Butler's perspective to be as important as the combustion engine or the light bulb. Like seriously important but as much as those innovations changed the world they also changed the world, i.e., to the good and the bad. A lot of horses went into unemployment and quite some candles were forgotten in a lot of drawers. Needless to say, car crash was an unknown phenomenon before 1908. Last year, almost 1.4 million people died in road crashes.

The price to pay for performative identity is quite something. As long as identity was considered grounded or fixed, one could always say "I'm just human" and get away with it. You could also say "Trust me" and it would pass, right, after all your subject was something fixed. Bingo.

With identity politics, on the other hand, it's all up to you, you are always accountable and always responsible. As long as your identity was grounded, you could always refer to or reach for your true self, whereas after Butler there can't be an-



anything true about either you or self. It's just a process, remember. Post-Gender Trouble you can't even claim that you want to be yourself, because anything yours is in any case just bits and pieces picked up here and there, borrowed and sampled, pushed in different directions by conventions and norms. In short, since *Gender Trouble* hit the floor there has been no more "Trust me."

But most of all what Butler didn't anticipate is how identity, at the same time as it became politics, also turned into economy. As identity, no longer was anything stable, it became possible to produce markets for forms of identity enhancement, may that be yoga or the gym, what hotel bar and with whom you had your after-work drink, or some silent retreat ding dong. From 1990 and on, your identity was something you needed to afford and invest in. Not necessarily through lots of money but certainly with loads of consciousness.

At the same time, there is no option to consider identity as performative and the possibility of presence. Simply because there is no such thing as to itself the moment performativity is introduced. Indeed, the price for performativity is foundation. What further needs to be acknowledged is that with identity comes the body, which means performativity also annihilated the possibility to claim one's body or even to consider any form of direct, un-mediated contact with one's body. As if that was not enough, the notion of identity politics also eradicates any opportunity for spiritual connections or anything spiritual at all. To advocate for identity politics and claim spirit at the same time is equal to a politician saying, "God told me so" as an argument to lower some tax or not.

From the perspective of Judith Butler, identity, at least as ambassador for identity politics, including gender, body, sexuality, race, etc., is all about doing, and doing it again, or as Butler proposes: iteration. In other words, there is no such thing as being but only doing, or being is nothing else than doing.

It is of course no accident that performativity's connection

with identity occurs in and around 1990. After all, central to a performative subject if not deliberately is individuality. For a worldview in which identity is stable and grounded, we are all equal (at least on paper) and we are all connected to some sort of central unit or origin. Western society is piece by piece built on this form of identity, from philosophy and science to governance and ideology, inheritance and value, economy and love. Hence, if we want to embrace performativity in any wider sense, we also have to rethink quite a few, if not all, the grand institutions of society. Currently it seems apparent that we live a life performative in a world that we understand as foundational and that carries presence. An asymmetry has risen which makes it more or less impossible to generate change, especially since different cultures that share global institutions such as the UN practice radically different relations between performativity and presence. For societies that have strong religious presences, it is impossible to negotiate performativity, as much as fundamentalism and dogma comes across as counterproductive from the perspective of secular societies; after all, if there's no grounding to value fundamentalism becomes a bottomless pit of circumstances.

From an ecological perspective, it is necessary to renegotiate our relation to the world towards a notion that the three-fold world, the Earth and planet (which on a superficial level might appear as the same but certainly aren't) is performative, at least as long as we consider life to be. But as we have understood, if we did we'd have to tread it quite differently and too many too rich people have invested too much to allow for such processes to even be initiated.

Somewhat paradoxically, at least from my perspective, it seems like it is the most persistent advocates for performativity that also insist on some or other form of foundational presence. It is certainly no mystery that the popular rollout and application of performativity more or less coincided with the hype around tarot reading, fascination of witches and related

practices, appropriation and execution of rituals and spiritual practices from healing to silent retreats, ayahuasca obsession to everything Gaia—practices and stuff that all send clear signals in the direction of foundation, universality and a power beyond. Nothing against spirits or performativity but there simply is no good mix, it's either or, or not at all.

We can't consider a "little bit performative," it's on or off and it makes no difference. Something can't be performative from time to time or a bit now and then. The performative is a regime not a strategy, it's a plan not policy, yet evidently the regime cannot not be operated through strategies, for the plan to unfold policies will be issued in—and voluntarily. If humanity, its identity and subjectivity are performative, the price to pay is that, even if there could be something that has foundation and isn't performative, humans can only comprehend or experience the world and all its stuff through the apparatus we know as performativity.

Somebody once told me that next to the representation of power the reason why in old castles painted portraits of the landowners were hung in succession, generation after generation was in order to represent stability and show that over all these years, within a waste amount of time, nothing had changed. In a feudal or aristocratic society, change was considered as something negative, in line with the understanding that land was given and to be maintained, not expanded or made more profitable. Within a capitalist worldview on the other hand, change and expansion is absolutely crucial, which implies that the comprehension of time needs to be completely reconsidered. It would be impossible to consider an avant-garde movement in art happening in the 16th century; progress was simply something one rejected rather than embraced.

It is indeed equally possible to date the performative turn to 1990, as it is to state that its starting point coincided with the proliferation of capitalism, the raise of the nation state, the decline of feudalism, the introduction of the republic or the end of monarchy, the abolition of corporal punishment in favour of

custodial sentences, and the emergence of the so-called liberal subject. What these have in common is exactly a movement away from stability, givenness and foundation.

In respect of Western philosophy, the same historical moment can be identified as the shift from an ontological to an epistemological paradigm, in other words, the introduction of correlational philosophy through, Hume and Kant in particular, who both argued for the impossibility to answer any question without the appendix "for us," i.e., for "us" humans or even for human consciousness (human here obviously didn't mean all human beings but only white, European, straight, men).

It might, in parenthesis, be valuable to remember that Charles Darwin, although somewhat later, in 1859 in *On the Origin of Species* literally declared all other species geared solely by instinct, thus depriving them of performativity and therefore regarding them as beings that could be exploited without any concern, guilt or care.

Without contesting the importance of performativity under any circumstances, perhaps it is urgent to ask new questions? If performativity is eurythmic to capitalism and an extended understanding of capitalism authorises any form of exploitation of the planet, perhaps we need to ask whether performativity was the saviour we all waited for? If we want to explore opportunities for different political and economic systems, it appears evident that we also need to denounce performativity, which fool-proofs capitalism. If we want in any respect to save the planet, we equally have to give up performativity as it is derivative to extractive capitalism.

To assume performativity to have kicked in around 1990 equally poses a few question marks. Not only does performativity coalesce with individualism (which might be a little more complex than a simple "what's in it for me?"), but it also signed up for utterly aggressive neoliberal policies, hyper mobility, fast forward globalisation, gig-economy, the financialization of subjectivity, semio-capitalism, accelerated resilience and the

complete eradication of ideology from contemporary politics. Not a bad track record, but if we want to imagine a way out of capitalism it goes without saying that it's not gonna happen while supported by performativity. On the contrary, as we have seen, performativity is crucial, if not imperative, for capitalism's race to continue.

What art is, a definition of art, might be considered a ridiculous question to many, but for our context it's interesting to consider that art has been defined through criteria for a long time. For a painting to be a painting, it needed to fulfil a number of criteria, for example, being square, flat and hung on the wall. If not, sorry! But then again if your painting fulfilled enough criteria, it was a painting, whether good or bad—still a painting. The problem of course was: what about change, what about expanding the understanding of painting, how thick can a painting be to still be a painting, can a painting include object or only paint, and so on? Change was prohibited, but the upside was that art had foundation, was grounded, and could be trusted.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century alternative theories emerged which circumvented criteria and relied on candidature instead, i.e., an artwork had to be approved as an artwork, not in respect of criteria but if it was considered an artwork. Anybody could approve something, probably the first person being the artist; but what became central was that certain individuals, institutions, markets, economic interests, etc., had the position to approve on a grander scale and, so to say, for others. If a major museum showed a certain work or artist, it becomes difficult for smaller institutions or a person to disagree or contest the proposal or authorisation. This meant that art on the one hand could be whatever somebody wanted to be, but at the same time lost its foundation, its grounding, and ended up becoming performative—art was approved in respect of how well it performed being art—which meant that the criteria were exchanged for power. Who had power to approve something as art in respect of what consequences?

One of the principal problems with theories of the performative, I consider, is exactly the position of power, or in fact that everything, for good or bad becomes a matter of power and evidently agency. Even better, they are forms of power that have no grounding, that cannot be traced to a central agency, a bad person or anything foundational. Power in regimes based on performativity is floating, slippery or impossible to trace, and most of all a matter of who can afford to fund think-tanks, departments, museums, universities, lecture series, collections, magazines, you name it. Using ecological terminology, one could say performativity is the obverse of sustainability.

In fact, performative regimes, however it might seem at first glance, reject the body and inherently emphasise cognition, knowledge, reason and gossip. Performativity is not organic in any respect, under any circumstances natural. On the contrary, performativity discards everything that isn't constructed, convention-based and discursive, and it doesn't get more or less synthetic because we practice our bodies, go to yoga or the gym, watch performance art, get a tattoo or have wild sex. Any performative regime can only understand the body and its practices, enjoy them in regard of convention and language, or comprehend the body and its practices in respect of relations, comparison, exchange and measurement.

To pose questions to aspects of performativity doesn't automatically mean being against it or advocating for a "return" to an understanding of the world of presence and ontology. But perhaps it is urgent to envision and practice with other destinations in mind. Even so, our dilemma is that the regime of performativity is ubiquitous to the extent that any other mode of life, thought or imagination is impossible. Therefore, speculative practices are the only available models through which other views on the world can be experimented with or envisioned, which is where art can function as an autonomous space precisely because art can still, at least in certain contexts, be considered and are valued precisely for how it withdraws from being captured by relation, comparison, exchange and

measurement. Art might just be the only remaining domain where life can be practiced, at least hypothetically, outside the omnipresence of performativity. Of course, art, may that be paintings, objects, texts, poetry, dance or music, is always performative in respect of the world. After all, all art performs being art and a lot of other things too, but that doesn't automatically confirm that the experience generated by an encounter with art does. Might it even be possible for art to generate an experience that carries or has presence?

It is interesting, after having examined performativity to an extent, to consider what we mean when addressing embodiment—a term or idea that has gained presence, well, perhaps since 1990. From the perspective of performativity, since we have no access to the body indeed—it is after all non-discursive—the domain of the body to be the domain of the body cannot be discursive at the same time, which means what we only know of or about the body. We actually have no contact with the body itself. Said otherwise, we only encounter representations of the body or its parts, etc. Embodiment thus is the experience an individual has of his, her or their body or bodies, but there is in fact no body in that experience, as experience is something we comprehend and translate into forms of language. Yes, whether we like it or not, experience can only be accessed and communicated through language.

One thing is certain: there is nothing genuine, authentic, singular or whatever involved in embodiment. Embodiment is instead a measure for the success or not of relations between, for example an individual's ability to synchronise levels of discourse, where one of the discourses is concerned with the body, its appearances and movements. Certain individuals and communities might not be able, allowed or granted the right to carry a wished-for embodiment, which certainly is a tragedy and something we need to struggle against together. But since performative regimes cannot allow for presence or authenticity, embodiment can never be more than felt or experienced, which means it can always be negotiated but is never uncondi-

tional. Embodiment at the end of the day is a measure of the power or agency that somebody or a community has in respect of his, her or their appearance and movement in the world. One can be prohibited from practicing forms of embodiment, one can be traumatised or have an asymmetrical relation to one's embodiment, but something, an individual, community, object or anything else in the world cannot not have or carry embodiment. There are many ways to experience more or less embodiment, feeling more or less certainly, having a sense of being denied ones embodied self, but there is no way one can be, that one can have a grounded, foundational embodiment, never mind that there is anything true in respect to an embodied self. All things carry embodiment; otherwise those things cannot engage or find themselves engaged in some or other forms of relation, which include relations to oneself. So it is our lucky day that embodiment is not true but always fleeting. Nevertheless, individuals and communities that for longer or shorter time have been granted an "intact" embodiment, an empowered embodiment, etc., obviously can feel threatened when their embodied selves become less stable and cannot be taken for granted. At the end of the day, embodiment has very little to do with bodies but a lot to do with power, as everything does in regimes of performativity.

The departure from presence and foundation is not freedom, or even the freedom of an individual choice; it is the omnipresence of power. The departure from presence is definitely the crossing out of destiny, but it is certainly not independence. On the contrary, it is the becoming dependent on abstracted power, forms of power that have no foundation and therefore detached themselves from accountability. Trust me!



# Repeated Questions

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Some people answer questions by way of repeating the question first, perhaps not word by word but more or less. So utterly tedious.

Think about interviews with filmmakers, performance artists or something, obviously not in magazines; some of those people consistently repeat the question as a way of elaborating their answers. Why do they do that? Really? Isn't that kind of anal?

Are they too slow upstairs and need to repeat the question to be able to answer? Is it a strategy to gain some time and they figure out the right answer while repeating the question? Is it like a tick, some compulsive behaviour?

I wonder how their partner would react when asked, if that's something one asks: "Do you want to have sex?" Pause. "Do I want to have sex?" pause and then like, "Oh let me think about it for a moment and I'll see how my mind reflects that type of proposal."

Perhaps it's a technique reminiscent of *Bartleby's* "I prefer not to," a way of sneaking out, still staying on top, or something? What about if the repetition performs a means of making the question one's own? Is it a trick invented by paranoid minds to get around the compulsive behaviour because everyone and the world is out to get you? Or, is it a schizophrenic tendency, like one of my personalities (my "public" persona) was asked the question and now that persona needs to ask one of my other personalities, or consult Elvis?

Interesting, or perhaps not really, but what if art functions like that. Repeating the question as the first part of the answer, and the rest of the art is a matter of justifying the question. Unfortunately, I think too much of contemporary art operates exactly like that, or perhaps this is maybe not the only but still an efficient way of responding to commissions, applications, artistic research, juries and committees—simply to be a “successful” artist in the age of neoliberal policies.

At times the motivation for art is to raise questions. Great, but it might have a problem because implicit in the question is an answer, or for something to be a response, it must correlate to the mode of comprehension that the question suggests. The answer is either right or wrong, perhaps partly wrong, but it must not be incompatible with the question since then the illusion or causality is broken. In other words, an art that confirms the world as it is.

Sometimes the formulation takes a step to the side, replacing “raise questions” in favour of the somewhat more complex, “art should question.” Normally that ends up in two different traps, an art that tries to deliver answers, or comes across as a bit more clever than ordinary people, because it knows the answer but wants the viewer to figure it out him-, her- or themselves. So off-putting.

We can also turn it around, and propose that art’s job is to deliver answers to which there are not compatible questions. Assuming that the engaged audience will go home and figure out new questions or perhaps start an online discussion group and do the figuring out together with some other responsible citizens.

The idea of answer is exciting because it estimates a speculative undercurrent to artistic practice, in the sense of what it means to generate a work of art. A speculative art suggests that the artist cannot know what he, she or they are working on but can only have a vague *vorstellung*, hint or feeling for what it possibly can be. Indeed, if the artist is able to articulate the answer, it’s not new enough or, in fact, not new at all, maybe fresh at best.

Such an understanding of artistic occupation, or better such an occupation with art can be submitted to neither process nor production, as both imply some form of consistent narrative throughout. It is rather difficult to engage in the production of something you possibly have a vague idea of what it might just end up being, and it's an argument that art councils tend to dismiss.

Two important things to always remember.

Art is not information. The moment art is turned into information, it cannot not consider the efficiency with which it communicates, its out-reach, and simply economic legitimation.

Art is not culture. The moment art turns into culture, it cannot ignore the result of the utterance into an existing culture or set of relations. Art then becomes measurable and a matter of ethical evaluation rather than aesthetic.

Recalling Jacques Rancière's text *The Emancipated Spectator* from 2004, art's responsibility must not be to make the spectator think or reflect. No, Rancière rightly argues, that dismisses the spectator's independence and art becomes a guide. Instead the French philosopher insists that art's job is to make or force the spectator to generate or produce thinking, which must be mistaken under no circumstances for thinking or reflecting. Quite the opposite in fact. It goes without saying that one cannot reflect something that is not in some or other way familiar or recognisable, something that is inscribed in one's world or can be accessible. Meaning that something one can reflect automatically confirms one's views on the world, understanding of oneself, the prospects of others, the Earth and universe. Similarly, when I think about something, it is I who makes an advance on the object of thought, and in this advance, I cannot not attempt to embed the object of thought into my register or spectrum of knowledge, which implies that I will assimilate the object, privatise it, make it mine and give it a loca-

tion, a place among whatever else I know. Again, consolidation of the already available and known.

Instead, proposes Rancière, art must attempt to withdraw from being captured by knowledge, recede from being turned into information or even given a name. Only an art that, in whatever way that may be, is slippery, enigmatic, weird, cryptic, indecipherable, contingent, you name it, and not located, will make the spectator generate a thought, produce thinking—or you may call it emotion, feeling, sensation, tripping, experiencing fear or slight disgust. Same thing, as those impacts on the subject also need in some or other way be processed. When Rancière talks about emancipation, it's not like an adolescent moving out of the parental home; it's not to "think by oneself" or give the world the finger. It is the moment when the individual spectator generates a thought, a thought that does not belong to him, her or them yet still exists. The emancipated spectator is not independent or somebody with a lot of agency. It is rather an individual that leaves him-, her- or themselves behind, that loses its subject, that gives up agency and resigns from identity, in favour of the generated thought. However, this letting go also has an upside, which is that the spectator him-, her- and themselves at that moment potentially introduces new forms of agency into the world. To generate a thought thus implies not to approach something but instead being approached by something that still, at that moment, is unknown (even an unknown unknown), thus not assimilating something into one's range of thought but reversed, the other way around, to surrender one's wish to assimilate in favour of new associations with a different (in kind) formation of knowledge.

Switching into psychoanalytical terminology, one could say that a conventional spectator engages with desire whereas the emancipated spectator gives him-, her- or themselves up to *jouissance*.

The beautiful and possibly scary thing is that the moment emancipation takes off for a single individual, the moment

this assimilation into a new kind of knowledge kicks in, it also becomes available for all other individuals, people, creatures, etc. When conventional spectatorship is individual but shared (we the audience), surprising yet conventional, the moment of emancipation is a moment that is simultaneously singular and universal, that is ordinary yet overwhelming.

# When Are You Finished?

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"You've done it, Pollock. You've cracked it wide open." One of the best Hollywood scenes ever; when Marcia Gay Harden as Lee Krasner celebrates her husband Pollock's breakthrough drop painting. And it gets even better, the scene and the film, knowing that Ed Harris who plays Pollock also directed the film. That's an ego.

But Hollywood isn't particularly over the top, just a bit, because doesn't more or less all Western history writing apply the same strategies, celebrating male white subjectivity, genius, and the moment it happens—when Ed Harris slash Pollock stumbles on drop painting? Amazing.

Exactly, everything in Western history is individual men that stumble over stuff and kind of become genius through the stumbling. There was never any teamwork; maybe it was Lee who figured it out but didn't bother to let anybody know, or networks of circumstances, dialogue, conversation and study. Nope, it's always a stroke of genius.

It goes without saying that the cult of genius is not eternal but rather the consequence of circumstances, such as the understanding of individual property, or a society's relation to progress, etc. In short, capitalism needs geniuses, so let's make some and let's make some of the right kind so that power relations are maintained. In fact, the genius often seems to suffer more than anything else. Pretty much the expectations on a

genius, right. The ones to question are rather the institutions and powers that choose and maintain the status of all those geniuses.

When it comes to art, it's just great to read all these stories of lonely men in their studios, painting or composing symphonies in gloves, because the money is gone and the logs for the fire-place too. But we all know that these stories are fabrications, and even if there is some truth to them—that the winter of 1947 was really cold or whatever—the reasons why painting, and everything else, ended up where it did have much more to do with how capitalism understands progress, the saturation of markets, the distribution of power and wealth, and other fairly simply things to analyse and detect.

If we agree that capitalism's first dictum is expansion at any price, it cannot be otherwise concerning art. The lineage from the break with figurative painting up until today is different from the lineage in any other business. Before the introduction of republic and bourgeoisie culture, there could exist no secondary market for painting, hence no gallerists. Before the introduction of republic and the end of aristocratic society, the conditions for progress in painting or any other art was entirely otherwise. Hence no avant-garde.

As a matter of fact, change was not appreciated so the successful painter was obliged to paint in accord with his master, maintaining traditions and hence feudal values.

So, it wasn't Pollock that invented anything at all; it was capitalism that needed it to happen and Pollock was lucky enough to stand in the way. The history of painting, the history of art is not a history of male genius, it's the history of capitalism.

In lieu of this, the key is to alternatively break a new territory or push boundaries and consolidate one's position on a market. But mind you, if you push too bad you might just fall off established markets and become obsolete or excluded because your proposal will deflate the markets' diverse interests.

The successful 20th century artist was the one that could master the balance between expansion and consolidation. Cynical definitely, and perhaps that's why the story is told differently. Heroic is not much better but better than cynical. It's also a little bit sad to resign to, say, that the war on representation was not a matter of ideals, devotion or conviction, but more or less a strategic battle to be part of the show.

Of course, it's not this easy but pretty much. It's conventionally understood that abstraction was a "logical" step in the history of painting. It just had to happen; all the rest was exhausted and in order to capture painting's "being," it was necessary to get rid of figurations, depiction, etc. But what if there was another reason, one that couldn't be voiced? Isn't it equally possible that if painters or whatever artists, especially in the US after WWII, had decided to paint "their story" so to say, their destiny would have been exodus and poverty? From a certain perspective, abstraction was a heroic battle with conventions around representation, but from another it was rather a smoke-screen that was there to masquerade the artist's subject, political position, sexuality, class, you name it. Abstraction in the 50s was a solution of getting away with identifying as a communist, something that could be "in" the painting but must not be represented. Questions then open up both to what abstraction in painting today is and what it does, in other words, both to its actual and relational values.

Nevertheless, when examining modernism's battles around representation, it is remarkable to what extent these are specific battles largely concerned with making sure the battles stay in the museum or gallery world, perhaps with an open door but never far away enough to not hear the murmur from the crowd. It is largely a battle in respect of what is in the painting, from painting as a mimetic practice towards something that only references itself, i.e., has no value outside itself. Modernism painting in this respect was a non-relational art. It is from this vantage point we should understand "in the eye of the beholder" because what you experience in front of an artwork



that references itself is yourself experiencing experience, a self-referential experience.

Reflecting briefly about abstract tendencies in contemporary painting, it is tempting to interpret these attempts as a continuation—critical or benevolent/admiring, stupid or uber-clever, etc.—but what if it is all reversed? Abstraction today can be and is of course just a matter of economy but I believe it's neither—at least very rarely—a matter of questioning or modifying representation nor one of withdrawal in respect of some kind of smokescreen. No, the question is if abstraction is abstraction at all or if it just looks like it. To me it seems that painting today has to a large extent left abstraction behind and somehow degraded into a mimetic relation to the image. The crux is just that it is a mimetic relation not in respect of what is "in" the image, what you can see; it is a matter of miming phenomena.

A painting or in fact any or most kinds of artworks can appear or look abstract but in fact are mimetic, because what is mimed is not what you see but in relation to what you experience. Today, painting mimes experience, in particular experiences that are contemporary and satisfying for a contemporary liberal individualised subject. Painting mimes the experience of being on Facebook, browsing the internet, playing computer games, swiping or shopping on eBay. And it's congenial because at the same time as I contemplate an abstract painting, I get the rush from posting an image on Instagram, winning an auction on eBay or getting to a new level in some game.

Similarly, when we, if we do, talk about networked painting today, it's certainly nothing critical but just another method of making the viewer feel as connected in the gallery as when on the phone.

In that movie a journalist asks, "How do you know when you are finished with a painting?" and Ed Harris answers: "How do you know when you are finished making love?" I don't know how to paraphrase that one, but Western narratives around genius have certainly not ceased, and following a sort of equalisation and interchangeability of everything there is no battle

around representation to fight, nor between mimetic and abstraction. It might just be that abstraction is key nevertheless; not in respect to representation, but in order to generate experiences that aren't connected, instrumental, ethical, political or economic but just that instead, to generate just an experience.

# And Theatre Likes Me

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When people say ecology nowadays, it's automatically associated with global climate change, outdoors, non-existent rainforests and disaster. It's always the world that needs saving and the entire Earth that is going under. Fair enough it is, but since when did ecology become synonymous with climate change, macro-perspectives, and, is it only me that have this feeling, far away. It's always the ice in the Arctic that is melting or the forests in Brazil that's burning, hurricanes somewhere else or endless amount of beef exported to China. What we do locally, is almost only happening on a domestic level, we eat less meat, we sort our garbage and we use an app to rent an electric car, but what else? How do we engage, especially if we are older than sixteen and can't really take part in Friday manifestations?

How do we engage except by using our social media platforms to re-post something about how much plastic there is in the ocean or wildfires swallowing the mansions of celebrities? Or not even that? It is a bit tragic though how social media conscience has turned into a substitute for the real deal or simply admitting one's ignorance.

Every relationship carries and practices an ecology, also the individual's relation to him-, her- and themselves, as much as relations to plants, seasons, smoking, automotive industry, Swedish people and rave culture. In short, one could say that ecology is that which is between components forming a relation. And relations are dynamic, always sliding between forces

from micro-ecologies to macro-ecologies, from rather simple to vastly complex ecologies whether mainly mental, relational or environmental.

Another way of considering ecology could be as a form of mentality, a mindset or attitude, through which one's mind, relations and environments are perceived and approached. Mentalities that are specific to every relation but at the same time can be traced back and correspond to shared narratives and conventions, on local, national and global levels. Mentalities are never one's own or individual but always produced, oftentimes unconsciously through complex grids of relations, but equally often through pressure and lobbying initiated and funded by differently powerful institutions, markets, communities and individuals.

For some communities, it can be crucial to generate strong and watertight mentalities in order to keep the community intact or to withstand external pressure, as a means of acquiring visibility, to produce fear or avoid despair. Football fans, poets, Hells Angels members, middle-class mums, stock market brokers, you name it, all of them have felt a need to generate strong mentalities to claim their positions. Other communities are not given permission to practice mentalities, or ecologies, as they desire, but often do develop alternative models to share their modes of relating.

In order to save the world, Earth and/or the planet, it's not nature we need to preserve, it's not the oceans that we need to clean, it's not the taxation on CO<sub>2</sub> emission we need to introduce. We need to do all that too, and fast, but as long as our mentalities towards the world, micro- or macro-level, are maintained, all those efforts and endless amounts of money used will only save us for at best an extra 20 minutes or whatever tiny bit of time.

One doesn't need to study the Paris Agreement from 2015 for many minutes to understand that politics and politicians, companies and CEOs will never do anything else other than token actions for the environment. It's simple, too many too in-

fluent powers have too much to lose, and hence every page of the document reeks of concessions in order not to piss anybody off. Parliamentary democracy is great as a means to make sure that power is not coagulating but as long as it remains a matter of national governments there will never be a consensus big enough to save anything at all.

Perhaps a new religion could be a solution. A secular religion without a creator, etc., but still demanding some form of commitment. No, I don't think so. It takes time to develop a belief structure, and one for soon to be 10 billion people? Should the headquarters be in Geneva? Probably a bad idea to install it anywhere in Europe or the US, better to find a solution somewhere in the Global South. As far as I can see, there is no way of getting around global climate change and its extensions other than through a heap, a really big one, of money and regulations that you don't want to breach because of the severity of the punishments. But that would also give way for serious inequalities, cheating, black markets, resistance and war.

For humanity's more or less entire history, our problem has been that we are too weak, small and few to be able to stand up against nature. Because of this humanity has formulated relations between work and nature, that protect us from the brutality of its powers. Our work ethic at the end of the day is the result of how to temporarily and partially tame nature, to generate forms of collaboration or simply strategies for survival.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanity taught itself how to master nature, to step up and create some sense of equilibrium and thereafter create technologies that can inflict harm on nature to the extent that it will never repair, or at least not within our time on the planet. The problem is not technology or that people are evil or don't care; the problem is that the relation between work and nature has not been revised or thought through. In fact, we are still approaching nature as if it is something stronger than us, which can wipe us out on a whim. What is needed is to change the relation, or mentality established between work and nature, between two forces of power. With technology,

humanity has developed it so that it can be used as well to support nature, to generate resources or develop sustainable materials, but as long as our relation to work is not changing this can only happen by force.

For millions of years, humans and their societies lived in harmony with nature. Not always nice harmonies or harmoniously, but still in harmony. Depending a little bit on what perspective, something started to change between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earlier date puts colonialisation and its violations central to the development; others consider the starting point to be the invention of the steam engine in 1784 (more precisely, a particular patent that made the steam engine more reliable). Both colonialisation and the steam engine relate to the de-personalisation or autonomy of labour power, either by slave labour or by the steam engine as a substitute for manpower. The ability to produce on an industrial scale, may that be because of enslaved labour or machines, implies a radical change to our relationship to the world and Earth. What occurs is that humanity gains the ability to exploit the resources of the planet, in particular coal and oil, with a power so intense that the world will not recover. In order to support and justify these formations and the revenue created, new political, governmental, ethical, legal, social and economic practices needed to be articulated and established. The economic organisation consolidated into capitalism through numerous steps, and as much as capitalism needed to adapt to science and social organisation, the other way around soon grew exponentially concerning power, influence and manipulation. As we know capitalism has developed and consolidated highly precise protocols in respect of property, ownership, land, rent and debt, taxation, patents and so on and so forth, and those are installed to protect already powerful interests.

It goes without saying that power generates power, which of course is also correct when it comes to establishing legislation, conventions, punishment, law enforcement, the military, education, migration practices, gender, racial politics, inheritance,

sexualities, body ideals and so much more. In other words, the first thing to get rid of in order to save the planet is capitalism, and add to that the accumulation of wealth.

Unfortunately, there is a slight problem. Capitalism is not gonna let go, no way. Ne-ver. Especially since capitalism is a machine that has absolutely no conscience, whose ideology is survival no matter what, always proceeds with the wind in the back, with the coat turned, and is absolutely opportunistic. There is no way of getting out of capitalism, as in opening a door and stepping out on the other side, or returning it to the Amazon. Mainly for three reasons. The first we already know, capitalism is extremely malleable and sensitive to change. The second, is just an extension, too many too powerful people have too much to lose, and won't let go of either their power or wealth.

The third reason is somewhat more convoluted. The first rule of capitalism is expansion at any price. When a resource, market or dynamics becomes saturated, capitalism will find something else to expand into: garbage handling, death, war, depression, debt, storage of nuclear waste, memory, grief, resistance, attention, performativity, sharing, time, the future, even possibility, there is no end to it. A scary part is that capitalism over the last decades has also subsumed language, has assimilated language to the extent that language itself has become a financial asset. Even more scary is that capitalism has become ubiquitous to the extent that it has transformed imagination into a capitalist imagination. Whatever we imagine, plus the fact that language has been subsumed, it is imagined through a capitalist comprehension of life, the world, everything else. To imagine ourselves a way out of capitalism will be a capitalist way, and we will escape into more capitalism, perhaps with a more human face but still capitalism. As Fred Jameson once proposed, repeated by many, "Today, it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism"; indeed, it cannot be done when capitalism has assimilated imagination or when

the end of capitalism equals the end of the world. And it does, since we cannot imagine another one.

For art, and dance, this is kind of irritating. If imagination has been assimilated by capitalism, it seems impossible to create dance that at the end of the day doesn't run capitalism's errands. Even anti-capitalist dance must be anti, against, or resisting in ways compatible and favourable for capitalism? Every provocation created through dance or art can always, even in advance, be calculated in respect of market value. Not worth the trouble, or hmm yes, not bad it will upset the right kind of people, we're only in it for the money. Whatever art we do it's always capitalist art or at least a potential financial asset in the world of capital. No wonder, artists, art worlds and all the rest have become so deeply cynical. Or, if not cynical, have turned to post-hippie practices, where spiritual, mystical, magical, ritual, tarot cards, palm reading, silent retreat, witch craft, shamanism, healing, etc., all perform a kind of smokescreen or duplicity in order to create the illusion that there is something out there that hocus-pocus will set everything right again.

Come on, is anybody so naïve that they think anything will change with however many electric cars we rent with a smart-phone app, or that global climate change will turn its course because we sort our garbage into I don't know how many different plastic containers or if we stop flying, buy our laptop second-hand over the internet or have cold showers? Capitalism makes money on that as well, don't you worry. To drive an electric car might be great, but concerning climate or save-the-world issues, it's like celebrating busting an immigrant that pushes a few tiny bags of grass on the street corner as the first step to take down the drug cartels. Doesn't work like that.

Art and information are an infected combo. Art informs about many things; a dance piece informs the audience about the fact that it is a dance piece, it also informs us that is more or less an hour long because it ends after 60 or so minutes, and



so on. But that's something different from being a conveyor of information. A dance piece or any artwork, has no obligation to inform the audience about anything at all, which is just a little bit different from, for example, a newspaper or a red light. The moment art becomes a matter of information, it opens a door to a difficult dilemma. A newspaper is more or less optimised in order to convey its content as efficiently as possible. A red light is the most efficient way of making traffic safe. We value red lights for their efficiency not for their aesthetic quality, and we don't discuss what exact vibe the red light should be. It should be red plain and simple. But what happens to an artwork when it gets stuck between being appreciated for its aesthetic qualities and the efficiency with which it communicates and conveys information? It's the clash of two juxtaposing modes of evaluation and appreciation. Aesthetic evaluation and efficiency, on one side, affect, on the other, effect; two entirely different, incompatible capacities. To put affect and effect in one bag would be like, asking a car dealer how many horsepower the engine has, and he responds, Oh, kind of darkish green, or to move closer to an out of focus painting by Gerhard Richter whilst mumbling: I can't really see what it is?

By the way, a newspaper or a red light is there to pass on information. When their job is done, we forget about them or put them in the recycling bin. A newspaper is not something you keep in order to come back to and spend some more time together. After all the news is old; you come back to artworks, on the other hand, at least some of them, maybe compulsively or against your will, but you come back. For me, it's *Supper at Emmaus* painted by Caravaggio in 1606. It just doesn't leave me alone and I don't know why? A four hundred-year-old painting of five people around a table, ridiculous. It can certainly not be because of the information, but exactly about an affective response in me.

It is of course tempting to fill one's dance or art with information, to pass on injustices or asymmetries in the world, to help

people or to scream at the top of your lungs: the world is dying and it's our fault. But, if you want to save the world, is making art really the most effective means? But, if you want to save the world, why dress up the message in poetics, paint or have a few people dancing around? But, if you want to save the world, why do you want your work to be hung in a museum, even worse, sold by a gallerist or presented in the autumn program of some random dance festival, when we all know that those kinds of places are designed to neutralise anything harmful or upsetting? But, if you want to save the world, what happened to your passion for the encounter with art?

This was really cool in the early 90s and a few years before or after. The museum and theatre or dance venue as a place where forms of intervention could take place that set people back. The museum as a place of work, the staging of *Othello* turning the stage into a refugee information kiosk with free legal counselling, a performance where the choreographer exposes, next to bits and pieces of Wikipedia info spoken as if her own thoughts, all her garbage of an entire year, or a gallery installation that mimics the security check at an airport. But today, seriously? Time caught up with this kind of art, really. Today, every museum director loves and has to include stuff that enlightens the audience about this or that in the program, preferably with a bit of interaction, performativity and experience economy. Today, every art council, based on policy documents from higher up, distributes resources in accordance with how efficient a project (not an artwork) approaches an exposed community and how positive the result is. Today, which was not exactly the case in 1993, every government wants to know their art institutions of whatever kind deliver numbers, and forgets about showing art because it's touching, enigmatic or just lovely, or ugly, fun, party, disgusting, ambivalent or dark.

The crisis art experiences today is the desire from power and influential forces, to turn art into culture. Art is not culture even though it is created, shown and distributed in cultures. Art is carried by autonomous voices that insist even if they are not

heard; culture is an orchestra of mumbling and murmur trying to please. Culture is great and a necessity for life, evidently, but it's not art, which is not necessary but passes on the promise of change.

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For whom do you make art? It can't really be for myself because I really like to show it at least to some people. Yes, sure I do it for my own well-being but the rush happens when it goes live.

It can't really be for the audience, can it? If that was the case, why stick to dance and insist on experimentation and change? If it was for the audience, perhaps I should hire a dramaturg (LOL) or check in with a bunch of reliable spectators, what they are into? Perhaps, I make art to be loved? Probably, but then why make it so terribly difficult and not write a series of really thick historical mystery novels?

Personally, I haven't been able to articulate any other answer than, I make art, in my case dance mostly, for art, for dance.

Not for my art to be better or more successful, but for art, and dance, in general. I make art in order for art to stay alive, flourish, change, transform, kick ass, and most of all in order to make me sleepless, irritated, confused, hopeful, smile and to challenge my reasons to make art. My contribution to art is to make sure it stays complicated and never bends, insists on autonomy and never relaxes.

Presumptuous I guess, but fuck it, maybe I crash and end up a bit of a laughingstock but at least I kept it up also when the ship was going down.

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It seems impossible to make art or dance about ecology. Informing the audience about the dangers the coming generations will face if we don't shape up asap. Making dance doesn't reach a lot of people. So, if your mission is to save the world, change the expression. Go big.

If you insist on making dance about ecology anyway, for whose benefit is it? Is it perhaps for yourself most of all, since you know that the audience probably also read one or two thousand articles online about ecology exactly like you did? Is it possibly so that you make dance about ecology—a bit too obviously—in order for the audience and the art council to consider you a really responsible person? You do it for yourself? And when you make dance about something, whatever that might be, isn't that a little bit of a betrayal of dance, since it means dance becomes secondary to what it is about? Ouch!

Even more embarrassing would be to make ecological dance, in whatever kind. Only using candlelight? Not flying obviously. Sure, take the train but don't congratulate yourself for taking it, especially not when your entire audience just had a weekend in Barcelona, came back from a business trip or a golf vacation in Tenerife. Don't pride yourself with using only second-hand clothes for the costumes or skipping the evening program because printing a bunch of A4 papers will raise the global temperature. Really, come on, those highly inventive strategies are nothing more than showing off, and it's so obvious the world will get hotter because we are all blushing.

I believe we just have to admit that dance in this respect will not play a central character in the climate drama of the future. Maybe this in fact is a good insight, since it can open up for something else. Dance doesn't have the power, as in quantity, to change something in the world, but one might consider the possibility of approaching dance in ways that challenge, undermine, blur or even propose a different ecological mentality by using dance, and the ways of being with dance, being attentive to dance, working with dance, etc. Simply, be the playground

for those motivations.

Can we analyse and reflect dance, in a wide sense, and discover our ecologies relating to dance and shift them? Different ways of dancing already propose different ecologies vis-à-vis the body, the ground, relation, intimacy, individuality and so much more. The ways we work with dance, in respect of rehearsing, authorship, decision-making protocols, etc., are already ecological practices, and practices that perhaps repeat and consolidate how humanity treats the Earth.

Dance that practices ecologies differently, bypasses both “about” and “ecological,” maintains its artistic dignity, and at the same time opens up for the possibility of approaching life otherwise.

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We all know that art never was free. Of course it hasn't and perhaps that's a really good thing. Art generates, moves, cancels, renews all kinds of relations, and all of them in some or other way propose forms of dependency. Economy, space, authorisation, benefactors, kings, the church, the state, art councils, museums, theatres, archives, parents, partners, colleagues, competitors, enemies and friends, all of them are relations—nice, open, loving or whatever—but they are never not asking for some sort of return, if not just reliability and a little bit of respect, although more often for reports or proof and the product is aligned with the guidelines or the supporters profile.

Recalling calls for art's freedom, I think a small glitch occurred. *Ein, zwei, drei, die Kunst ist frei*, was not really saying it is free, but rather that it's art's responsibility to always strive towards its freedom, even though and especially since it's an impossibility.

Art can be more or less free, more or less fettered, and however much that can be a resource or imply forms of violence, the fact that art has something to struggle against or for is also

part of how it generates promise, takes new directions and forces us to perceive reality differently. An art that represents something inevitably gives up on the possibility of generating a sense of promise—not promise as in I will come in time but rather an abstract promise that perhaps can also be considered a form of hope, not promise in the sense of performative but as being—and instead becomes a kind of command.

It is further important to recall that it is art that should be free, *die Kunst*, not the artist. The artist as any other person is obviously responsible for his, her or their actions. The artist is subject to the same ethical, legal and economic circumstances as everybody else. An ecologically responsible artist, is an artist that sorts the garbage, transports artworks in an electric car or takes the train, and of course doesn't wrap his paintings in bubble wraps but uses recycled materials and environmentally friendly paint. Perhaps the dance company agrees to lower the temperature in the studio a degree or two or turn off the AC, or buy second-hand computers for the office. There are endless adjustments we can do to contribute to the climate. It's only up to us to be innovative, discuss and share our relation to the planet.

But it is perhaps a tiny bit dangerous to equal the artist and the art. An artist's work is not a causal extension of his, her or their psyche, politics or identity. It is of course never entirely independent, but to judge a person in respect of what his, her or their work portrays or looks like, the atmosphere they issue, whether there are plastic bottles on stage, or if the dancers have used airplanes to get to the show, is downright dangerous.

It's certainly difficult to know where to draw a line, but perhaps this is exactly the reason why we need to be extra careful, and every artwork evidently operates within complex networks of different and even contradicting forms of responsibility. Art should strive for its freedom, but that is not the same as the artist being free to be an asshole or forget to pay taxes, and a programmer or curator is not free at all representing on the

one hand, e.g., a state funded institution's relation to society and at the same time being a guardian for the artist and most of all of the autonomy (the freedom) that an artwork must be given the opportunity to struggle for.

Michel Houellebecq doesn't have to be a bad person or fascist because he writes about horrible things, Francis Bacon didn't nourish a desire to kill all Catholic people just because he painted deformed popes, nor is Clint Eastwood a crazy guy into guns because he shot people in some movie or directed seriously violent ones.

This is certainly a simplifying argumentation and each situation needs to be gently evaluated. Personally, I find it unnecessary to write books about certain topics, to make movies where violence is up in the face graphic, theatre pieces about domestic violence and dances where women are naked and men are not, but that's a somewhat different story compared to ethically judging the person or team that made the work, or even worse to propagate for black listing them.

Nevertheless, we should remind ourselves that freedom is not synonymous to irresponsibility, or some fuck-the-police-punk attitude; on the contrary, the more freedom somebody or a population is given, the more responsibility falls on the person her-, him- or themselves. And it's the opposite, an increase of regulations, norms and prohibition implicitly suggests a decrease of personal responsibility. Why does a population support fascism? One reason is indisputably the desire not to have to take decisions, to be held responsible.

Furthermore, freedom cannot be one-sided. An art that claims freedom cannot ask to be protected, listened to, supported or funded. In other words, an art that demands its freedom is at the same time making itself sovereign, and setting free the audience, viewer, spectator. Which in turn means that the promise that art carries is the promise, with all its bliss and fear, of nothing else than freedom.

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Every society has the art it deserves. Art reflects the society in which it is created. Art is not culture but the culture that made it possible is implicitly visible in the art. Similarly, every society needs an aesthetics that correlates with its general modes of production, distribution of wealth, property, power and so on.

It's not a coincidence that a new aesthetic regime was developed and established in the 18th century. The appreciation, value and temporality of art needed to be correlated to extensive changes in society. With the departure of feudal or aristocratic society in favour of modern capitalism, new models for how to conduct life were necessary, and this included art. The models proposed might not have been the most accurate or elegant but the ones that suited society best. The aesthetic regime that was authorised was the one that best benefitted the general modes of production of a certain moment in time.

The aesthetic regime that to a large degree we labour today with was established in the late 1700s, first and foremost in Emanuel Kant's book from 1790, *Critique of Judgement*. It is a delicate and highly complex outline which, although never touching upon the issue, suggests a terrain for art that makes it untouchable in respect of conventional forms of value. In particular as Kant successfully argues for the autonomy of the aesthetic experience, i.e., the potential intensity carried by an artwork. It is not the artwork itself that Kant declares to be autonomous, but the possibility of a form of experience to which there is no relation. One could say, an experience that is full of its own emptiness, and it is the encounter with this emptiness that carries—what we previously have touched upon, as an abstract notion of promise—autonomy or “unconditional” freedom. The experience of being a free individual.

Kant's elaboration of art has been contested for 230 years, for many reasons, or even endless reasons, which naturally



has changed over time as society has undergone transformations. Yet, it is still Kant's aesthetics that rules the world, kind of—indeed also colonial. A central complex in the challenges to Kant's aesthetics is the tension between autonomy and engagement. Kant argues that the artwork must be contemplated without interest, which means that it cannot at the same time convey a political proposition, content or in any way articulate a social or political engagement, especially not in respect of primary representation. At the same time, as long as art insists on disinterested contemplation it can claim certain forms of freedom; however, the moment it claims a political space it becomes responsible like any other information-carrying entity, participant or product. From a Kantian vantage point aesthetics and ethical judgement are incompatible, and must remain so.

From the perspective of art, artists, etc., it is easy to detect a pendulum movement from the desire of autonomy to political engagement, back and forth. Autonomy as a means to claim special treatment or freedom, but dismissing political engagement, political engagement but risking to lose privileges and becoming social or community work or perhaps simply propaganda.

Now, as mentioned, Kant developed his aesthetic theory alongside gross changes in Western society. Hence, in order for his philosophy to become "successful," it must have been in some way beneficial for power structures in society in general. These powers needed its time's philosophy, social theory, political models, you name it, to justify their interests and behaviours. Reciprocal relations certainly, cross fertilising each other but never void of interest. Kant's philosophy, including the aesthetics, needed to justify interests in respect of colonial power, non-regulated extraction of resources from the planet, burning of fossil fuel, exploitation of workers, accumulation of wealth, consolidation of gender roles and so on. Is it then far-fetched to suggest that as long as we adhere to a, generally speaking, Kantian aesthetics, we are also implicitly supporting

the continuation and strengthening of forms of societies, social and political orders that deliberately destroy the earth?

Our problem is also that similar to capitalism, Kantian aesthetics is really sticky and won't let go, because indeed, if nothing else, we can't after 230 years of indoctrination imagine an aesthetics that is not either Kantian or anti-Kantian, which in the end is one and the same. It appears impossible to manoeuvre one's way out of the deadlock that Kantian aesthetics proposes, not least because there are overwhelmingly strong forces and economic interests behind maintaining and strengthening the established aesthetic regime. After all, the amalgamated value that art possesses today is safeguarded by the aesthetic regime, and if the understanding of art shifts this value will possibly deflate, and that's not just economic value but more so the value in respect of all kinds of institutions—private, public, shady or not.

But if we can't conquer them, not even fight them, perhaps there is an option to labour for changes in the ecology of art, the mentality through which we generate, perceive and value art. We can't make art, we can also not make anti-art. We can of course stop making art, give up and do something reasonable, or we can take on the, at least at first instance, impossible task of changing the mentality of art, to something that both is and not at the same time, both art and not.

This is an art that must be speculative, that doesn't confirm the initiator nor the recipient, that won't have a double spread in any art magazine. It's certainly not avant-garde, and maybe not experimental (at least not in respect of its appearance). It's an art that cannot be made for yourself—for it to be properly speculative it can't confirm the maker as the maker—nor for the audience, because the audience, structurally or vis-à-vis knowledge, cannot identify with it; but it is an art that is created, a process initiated, for art, art in general. In order for art to stay alive, flourish, change, transform, make us sleepless, confused and hopeful. An art that insists on the promise of

freedom, the hope that life can be conducted in harmony with the planet, the Earth and the world.









