

## The Inoperative Theatres: On a Being Together of Singularities

### An essay on *Recollections* by Dalija Aćin Thelander and *The Second Time* by Simona Semenič

The article discusses the phenomenon of inoperative theatre and its transformative potential on the basis of two examples of theatre in the expanded field, *Recollections* by Dalija Aćin Thelander and *The Second Time* by Simona Semenič. With their subversive gesture that revolves around "doing less", these two participatory performances undo the theatrical apparatus by reversing its organisational procedures. In them, withdrawal and disengagement work as organisational strategies. Through "active undoing" they subvert the capitalist ideology in the form of the imperative of productivity and actualisation of all potential embedded in the majority of participatory and interactive relational performances. The performance undoes the problematic post-political myth potentially presupposed in participatory relational artworks, namely, the idea of a community as a democratic union, in which everyone bears responsibility for participation and engagement, yet entails no real antagonism. By enabling the possibility not-to write, the normative mode of the production of sociality is interrupted and the potentiality of being together as a form of the commons is reintroduced. The audience is abandoned to the absence of myth and its imperative of unity, identity and belonging. Left onto themselves, they individually write the performance and so inaugurate the inoperative community of singularities displaced into their shared exteriority as a place of communication and as a common ground of the community-to-come.

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**Keywords:** theatre in the expanded field, participation, togetherness, inoperativity, "doing less", being-with, potentiality, community-to-come, *Recollections*, *The Second Time*

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## Contemporary theatre and ethics

Contemporary performing arts often address social and political issues of the current time. Contemporary theatre is engaged – in its content as well as in its performative modes – providing a place for the unheard and invisible bodies and the critique of populism, nationalism and capitalism. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theatre cultivated an intense relation with politics and existed as a dispositif addressing numerous social and political issues, institutionalising itself as a critical and engaged theatre, which today can still be found in the bigger, national institutions as well as in the smaller, more experimental ones. In contrast, I attempt to consider contemporary forms of theatre from a different perspective and through a different approach, by conceiving the space of the theatre as a space of the community, a community that can only be perceived in its debris. Even though many theatre reformers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century also thought theatre as a place of community, this community was never thought of as an inoperative community, but rather as one organised around some original place or idea (nation, aesthetic revolution, work, etc.). The transformative nature of theatre was thus a part of the affirmation of community as a peculiar totality, where theatre is understood as a field of affirmation of the possible, of actualisation of revolutionary energies and desires, as well as of affirmation of the contemporary critical community. Conversely, I argue that we can think contemporary theatre as a space of a new ethos wherein its transformative and potential dimensions are exposed, only if we consider it as a place of an inoperative community, a community in ruins.

Through a close reading of two recent examples of what Alan Read would describe as “theatre in the expanded field”, *Recollections* by Dalija Aćin Thelander and *The Second Time* by Simona Semenič, I present an alternative concept of theatre, in which

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every performance is considered to be a singular ethical practice, which because of the moment of the common inherent to theatre, exists as a practice of potentiality and “reaffirms subjectivity not in what we are, but in what we are not but could be” (Kline 40). Here, theatre is a specific poetic practice that is on the one hand deeply engaged with the materiality of life, and on the other hand a dispositif of potentiality, in which we practise a new use of the common that allows for the constitution of new singular and collective subjectivities. Both pieces focus on the minimal condition of a performance, hence, although bound to a common space and time, there is something potential, something that could be otherwise. It is exactly on the account of this minimal condition, at once singular and extremely loose, that the contemporary theatre breaks down or becomes inoperative: theatre as an apparatus has to break down and become inoperative to truly concern itself with potentiality as a commons. In its “break-down”, in its undoing of its own apparatus, an old use of the commons is deactivated and a new profane use possible (Kline 177). Both performances are singular and yet paradigmatic examples of such a “breakdown”, making them examples of what I call the “inoperative theatre”. They no longer function on the level of the institutional critique of theatre, neither on the level of the conceptual inquiry of what theatre is. Instead of shifting the aesthetic boundaries of theatre, they, with their poetic power, implode the most fundamental conditions of a theatrical event itself: they are “doing less” and in “doing less” hope to produce “another time of the social” (Lehmann 301–305). In this way they again unfold the ethical space of theatre, which we cannot locate in the critical awareness of theatre, but rather in its practice, its modes of operativity and its communal process, in which also the audience collaborates on the basis of a minimal condition of collaboration. Theatre becomes a kind of singular common practice, a temporary poetic “breakdown”, an opening for a potential “now”, in which we (again) aspire for the experience of the encounter. This common practice is without any affirmation and universality, it is without address and does not establish a wider social community, rather exactly the opposite: it is a focused event of profanation and use of the common, with which it is possible to think the processes of individual and collective subjectivisation anew.

## ***Recollections***

*Recollections* (2014) is a piece by Dalija Aćin Thelander, a choreographer of Serbian origin based in Stockholm. It is set up as a “choreographed environment”, in which the audience is invited to autonomously create their own performative experience by way of interacting with the proposed material: texts and music recordings on MP3 players marked by different letters and seemingly randomly placed in the space, drawings of human bodies, documentation of the creative process and other spatial dispositifs that

organise the “stage”. The audience can listen to voice recordings of the text, variations of a monologue spoken by (a) modulated female voice(s) in different modes of speech and address, about the complexities and paradoxes of being as being-in-relation, as being-with. Some of the MP3s contain music tracks as well. The audience is free to interact and perform with the “environment” and its materials in any way and for as long as they desire. *Recollections* ends when the last person leaves.

By choreographing the audience’s attention and presence, *Recollections* deals with the physical and affective distribution of bodies within a heteronomous relational landscape in which they partake quite literally by measuring degrees of distance and proximity in the space between their bodies. The practice of choreographing the attention of the audience, which takes upon the responsibility to autonomously contribute with their “work” to the taking place of the event, is an attempt to use choreography as a toolbox and a set of strategies that engage through performing, embodiment, observation and contemplation and raise questions about how we are present and attentive in a collective environment, how we produce and perform ourselves in relation to others and how in a performative environment a collective is established and on what “common” ground. In this sense, we could view *Recollections* as an invitation to – in a communal choreographed environment and through the use of the practice of choreography of attention – re-experience, re-imagine or re-think our “being together” as always already relational and as that which is “common” to all, as the groundwork for a community-to-come.

## ***The Second Time***

The performance *The Second Time* (2014) by Slovenian playwright, dramaturg and director Simona Semenič, is an autobiographical monodrama, a sequel of her first solo theatre piece *I, Victim* (2007). The second solo, which Simona wrote and directed, self-ironically, in the form of a comical confession, in which she “looks back” and recounts the past seven years from her first solo to masterfully build a narration about the conditions of living a life as a self-employed artist and a single mother while suffering with the progression of her epilepsy and other ailments while striving to make ends meet in a state with a collapsed health system that offers her no real support.

*The Second Time* is set up as a collective reading session of the text titled *The Second Time* of which every member of the audience receives a copy. The audience can read alone or together, silently or aloud, from the beginning to the end or in fragments in a random order; all the while, Simona herself is onstage wearing a golden dress, sitting on a bar stool and observing the audience perform their reading. In this loose

performative proposal the work and the responsibility for the performance are delegated to the audience, which is to (collectively) decide how the event and their experience of it will take place, while the “author” is present only as an “exhibit”, her body a frame for inscription of the audience’s understanding of the text, a witness silently observing the taking place of the performance, the engagement of others in the face of her disengagement. The text takes the form of a stream of consciousness writing by the *dramatis personae* Simona Semenič who is addressing “us”, each audience member reading the text, as a singularised “you”, a *dramatis personae*, the other in relation, making us an unavoidable part of the piece. Meanwhile Simona exists onstage (at least) in a dual role – as a *dramatis personae* who speaks only through the written words and as a person in front of us, at once, a spectator and a silent witness, the author of the text and an “exhibit” that reminds us of the realness of the content of the text. The build up of the fictional narrative and the performative set-up open the space between *dramatis personae* Simona and *dramatis personae* “you”, the “still-life” onstage and the audience, real Simona and real audience, and all those spaces in-between these. This space of in-between is held open, amplified as a space of relation, a space of distance and proximity, an actual space of theatre, voided of habitual relation between stage and audience, and opened as a space of potential. The actual time of our “being together” is held open towards the potential new “now”, the “new time of the social”.

## Relationscapes

Both performances are organised around an autobiographic text that more or less explicitly talks about relation(s) and functions as an interface of the theatrical encounter. The singular voice of the author and its narrative is redistributed and multiplied into a multitude of voices and bodies. In *Recollections* I listen to the recorded avataristic female voices that could be my voice, the voice of other versions of me, that make me appear to myself as an echo of the voice, my body – my self – a resonating chamber in which physical, affective, mental events emerge as resonances of the voice. In *The Second Time* I read the text as thoughts of *dramatis personae* Simona in which I also find myself as the other, “you”, continuously addressed by Simona in the text, or I listen to others reading the text aloud, they being the multiple possible and actual embodiments of a “you”. In both pieces, I “listen” and find myself in a space opened up between the voice(s) as traces left by an absent or disengaged author. My presence is placed among the others, in a relational space between us that becomes the amplified space of the encounter.

In this relational space the act of listening is closely related to Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of listening in its self-forming function. In this space I come to myself through the

resonance with the other(s), a *self* as a process of referral that arises from its state of openness or exposure and its activity of listening. “A *self* is form or function of referral, a self is made of relation to self, or of presence to self.” (Nancy, *On Listening* 12) A self takes place in infinite tension and rebound, while resonating “from self to self, in itself, outside itself, at once the same and other than itself, one in the echo of the other, and this echo is like the very sound of its sense” (13). Listening functions as an approach to the self and a structure of the self as such and is always on the “lookout for a relation to self: [...] *relation in self* as it forms itself”. At once singular and plural, “to be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms a perceptible or sensitive condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, disconnection and contagion” (15).

Both pieces, through the act of listening, place me in the midst of this process of a self coming to itself and to the other by resonating in the spaces between “us”. In the time of encounter I attend to, experience, witness and observe being this self as infinite referral, as the tension and rebound of a voice, a multitude of voices in ceaseless relation. In *Recollections* the voice(s) situate me in different possible relational scenarios: a voice of consciousness contemplates in the first person about “relationality”; a voice calls out to me to perform various actions in relation to another; a voice in an intense fragmented narration of a fiction about two people that has taken place in the past or is still to come; a plea to another to return in a place of intimacy; a perplexed reflection about the process of formation of a collective “we”, etc. These relational scenarios address me differently and provoke different affective, imaginal, cognitive, perhaps even physical responses, which I can acknowledge or also perform in space. The negotiation with the voice(s) in the present makes me present to my *self* in the process of its coming into appearance to itself and to others only through relation, as an echo of the voice(s). In *The Second Time* I find myself between Simona as *dramatis personae* in the text and Simona as an exhibit and a witness onstage. I find myself as a reader and as a *dramatis personae* “you”, as the fictional addressee multiplied by other members of the audience. I am called into this intimate relation I need to negotiate, a relation that is real and fictional at once, between reality and theatre, never entirely real, as in relational landscapes there are always different degrees of fiction measured between “me” and “you”, voices between us that resonate and build us through their referral in this space of separateness, a relational space amplifying the separations between us.

## The in-between

On the textual level as well as onstage both pieces are organised through the logic of separations that opens the space(s) in-between. The two works are built, affect

the audience's perception and experiencing, and internally organise the distribution of bodies in space through the separation of voice(s) and the body. In *Recollections* the avataristic female voices on MP3 audio files move the bodies of the audience, affectively on the inside as well as physically in the space. In *The Second Time* the voice of Simona as *dramatis personae* in the text read by the audience opens an affective and relational space, prolonged by and into Simona's physical presence that functions as an empty frame for and a witness of possible inscriptions of relational and affective fictions "performed" by the reading audience. In both pieces, the displacement of the voice in relation to the body opens up the relational space anew. There are no actors, only traces of voices and a presence left behind to perhaps be voiced, performed and embodied by the audience. There are no clear rules for how all this is to be performed or embodied. The decision about how this is to be done is left to the audience. In both cases the space is marked by the lack of desire to choreograph or direct the audience in an accurate way. The pieces rather provide a loose proposal and thereby open up a space that allows the audience to figure out their form of participation. There are no clear rules of "togetherness" in this space. The logic of separations at work in both pieces rip the habitual and expected mechanics of theatre and create a possibility for the audience to re-experience their "simple" being-together in a shared time and space woven by heterogeneous singularities in an intersubjective relational landscape. "Togetherness" can become something else – not a community based on the affirmation of a certain idea of togetherness, but a community yet to come, as something that exists on its own exteriority, as an always potential affiliation, one that is still to be written.

In both pieces we are invited to attend to the space in-between by looking, observing and contemplating the space of relation. In *Recollections* I am surrounded by others: humans, objects, materials, stationary spaces. Their presence, their insistence or withdrawal, their shape, their gestures – everything is in a continuous reformulation of itself through its relation to the other(s). The relational space of infinite referrals appears to me as the place of a multitude that constitutes itself without end. My attention traces the spaces which open up between the entities surrounding me: the soft and soothing presence of a woman touches me; a young man and his shadow dancing; an abrupt change of light to red and the colouration of the bare concrete walls of the space; a group of people in the corner of the room sitting in proximity of one another yet each alone with their headset absorbed in listening or contemplation. Just as with the voice, I am in a continuous relation to them, appearing to myself as resonance, as an echo of the others I am with. I am at the limit of myself, exposed in this space between "us". In *The Second Time* *dramatis personae* Simona continuously looks at "you", at me, at us, which amplifies Simona's "still life" presence onstage, my, our exposure to her gaze, the awareness of my, our own looking at her, as well as my, our attention to the space between ourselves and Simona in the text, myself and

Simona onstage, myself and others as “me” or “you”, between the *dramatis personae* in the text – multiplied by the audience.

Both pieces deliver and allow the audience to experience what Nancy calls the “limit” or “exposition”, whose logic applies to any thing, any one, any I or we. For Nancy, “to exist means to-be-unto-the-limit or to-be-opened-to” (Morin, *Jean-Luc* 36), to be “with”, entangled with another singularity and at the same time distinguished from it. Only through the relation with the other; through one’s exposition to the other, one comes to identify oneself within this process of formation of the self through the act of listening. In other words, being “with” is the articulation of singularities, “the play of the juncture”, the “play *between* them” that “never forms into the substance or the higher power of a Whole” (Nancy, *The Inoperative* 76). Both pieces not only invite the audience to dwell at the limits of the self, to experience and negotiate, moment by moment, what the condition of being “unto-the-limit” or being “opened-to” the other(s) might be; but also make the audience attend to the “relation” as the “in-between”, “the emptiness, space or time [...] or sense – that reports or relates without gathering, or gathers without uniting, or unites without accomplishing, or accomplishes without bringing to an end” (Nancy, *L’‘il y a’ du rapport sexuel* 22–23). In *Recollections*, the diagrammatic spatial set-up announces the possibility to relate to everyone and everything in the space: to the bare walls in the illuminated space, the MP3s placed in different places in the space, to the outlines of the shapes of human bodies, a bench, a set of speakers that silently play Wagner’s *Parsifal*, a table with notes from the process, printed texts and, finally, the presence of the audience. I am *with* all these. I am, I contemplate my “edges” and my being *with*. I appear to myself in difference to them, touched, affected or moved by them, their shape, intensity or movement. In this space in-between me and the other(s) are unfolding while “being together” and “being separate” at once. In *The Second Time* the space between “us” intensifies as well – emerging between Simona in the text and Simona onstage, between each Simona and her audience, between “you” in the text and the audience. The awareness is directed to how we attend to and shape relations and to how we are shaped by them. We begin to understand that every moment is “the playground of the juncture”, that an encounter takes place when two or more singularities touch each other and thereby form or articulate each other through this touch, through their being together while being separate. The space becomes a stage where a number of micro-perceptions, micro-affectations, subjective temporary perspectives, emerging relations and recognitions of each other take place. I attend to this multitude of micro-topias arising at the juncture, each as a singular event of relating with another in a temporary encounter while “being with” and “being separate” at once. I am lost and found in the micro-encounters taking place in the intricate relational matrix of this strange being-the-one-with-the-other” to which I am exposed (Nancy, *The Inoperative* xxxix). In each encounter with the other, I measure the between, affected and changed by it, entangled and disentangled with it, through a mutual play in this relational playground of our common emergence.

## Relational delusions

In her book *The Artist at Work: The Proximity of Art and Capitalism* Bojana Kunst argues that out of negotiations with the changes of the post-Fordist modes of production, there has been an increase in the production of sociability in the arts in the last two decades. Mostly, this can be seen in the increase of participatory art as well as collaborative artistic processes. Art is articulating its relation to politics through the invention of models of sociability and community, active participation and interaction, modes of encounter that propose different modes of activity. Art becomes politicised, but Kunst states that “none of the two prevailing forms of politicization give rise to political antagonism nowadays” since the actions of the artist “do not establish a potential for different political communities and forms of co-existence” (*Artist* 11). All too often, political and ethical questions drown in what Chantal Mouffe calls “the moral register of the political” (72) instead of cutting through the modes of living with an antagonism that “concerns possible material and perceptive paths of live still to come” and “interferes with the disclosure of potential modes of a common realities” (Kunst, *Artist* 16–17). This is particularly relevant for art which concerns itself with the production of the social and human relations, such as “relational art”<sup>1</sup>, which “deals with the processes of transition, participation, collaboration and contracts, in which artistic works are not only considered as social events (since they always take place in the relation with the spectator), but also as independent formers of sociality by means of researching and establishing relationships (personal, political, economic, sensual, intimate etc.)” (Kunst, *Artist* 53). Relational art has been ostensibly criticised for its claim of being political solely because of the active engagement, participation and involvement of its audience and its production of relations. Although claiming to create a political alternative through the production of such relations, this production instead affirms relational art’s complacency with capitalist modes of production. Claire Bishop, in her critical approach to “relational art”, points out the problematic dimension of relational works, which are supposed to be open and interactive and to invite collaboration and the dynamic engagement of all participants.

The quality of the relationships in “relational aesthetics” are never examined or called into question. When Bourriaud argues that “encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them,” I sense that this question is unnecessary (for him) since all relations that permit a “dialogue” are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does “democracy” really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why? (65)

<sup>1</sup> The term indicates the appearance and theoretical articulation of a shift in the visual arts, which appeared in the mid 1990s and was conceptualised by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics*.

Relational art is supposed to offer pragmatic and concrete suggestions for social change and the formation of communities by “setting up functioning ‘micro-topias’ of the present”, where participants learn “how to inhabit the world in a better way” (Bourriaud 13). In this sense relational art is about changing the relations and protocols established among those who are engaged with the (art)work and finally with the institution through the creation of immediate social, communal cooperation and play (17). But not every communal form of collaboration is political as such and related to ethical questions of coexistence – referring, establishing common atmospheres, sharing, exchange, etc. – just because it has an immediate effect on the life of those engaged. And the question is whether this re-focusing of attention to social relations is already an ethico-political change and whether it actually intervenes into communal modes of co-existence and sociality of people. Numerous relational artworks produce a plurality of relations and a multiplicity of modes of communal existence and collective work (even if only temporary). There is dynamic interaction between subjectivities, but this interaction never concerns engagement in antagonistic social relations. It never questions the relationships that produce it. Quite the opposite, the projects replicate the existent social relations and pose them as the only possible form. They fuse with the shifts in late capitalism.

The sociality created in this manner is therefore already framed and presupposed as the sociality of transparent artistic space, which, in good neo-liberal manner always verifies and improves the ways in which we refer to each other as social subjects, constantly offering new games for our subjectivities and producing political procedures of negotiation, agreement or disagreement, but actually with no real effect upon the antagonistic space of the public. (Kunst, *Artist* 56)

*Recollections* and *The Second Time* are participatory performances that delegate the “work” of the performance to its audience. These are perhaps not “relational art” works per se but they both share a strong relational component that makes for a horizontal axis of both works. The participatory audience carries the responsibility to actualise, enact and embody the work through communal cooperation, play, relations and protocols, established among itself as the audience engaged with the work. A relational matrix is what unfolds here, impermanent, changeable and multifaceted, as a plurality of relations and a multiplicity of modes of communal existence and temporary collective work. The sociability produced is framed as and remains assumed to be a sociability of a transparent artistic space, yet I would like to argue that these two pieces do not simply verify and improve our modes of relation as social subjects but rather, as a possible choice, open another sphere, that of potentiality wherein a community can manifest itself on the basis of what Nancy frames as a common “being-together” or better: a “being-with” in heterogeneity. It is an open question whether the created “space” is already a political and ethical alternative, just as it is an open question to what extent it is the necessary “work” of an artwork itself “to have a real effect in the antagonistic space of the public”.

## Inoperative theatre

*Recollections* and *The Second Time* are examples of “theatre in the expanded field”; theatre which no longer distinguishes between dance, theatre and performance and instead moves between these with porous boundaries connecting diverse elements into new forms of theatrical encounter. Yet what further distinguishes these two works from many other examples of expanded theatre is that they both focus on a minimal condition of a performance, which is, although bound to a common space and time, also something potential, something that could be otherwise. The framework is open and the instructions loose, allowing for the emergent relational events to take place through the contingent self-organisation and distribution of bodies within the performative playground, as well as for an interruption and subversion of the habitual production of sociality. In these two works, theatre “breaks down” and as an apparatus becomes inoperative, reduced to the minimal condition of the theatrical event; in “doing less” they hope to produce “another time of the social” (Lehmann 301–305). “To do less” is a gesture that deactivates the old use of the common and makes possible a new profane use (Kline 177). It causes a temporary poetic “break down”, at the same time returning us to “now”, in which we aspire to the experience of the encounter. This common practice is without any affirmation and universality, it is without address and does not establish a wider social community. On the contrary, it is a focused event of profanation and the use of the sociality as a common, with which it is possible to think the processes of subjectivisation anew.

*Recollections*, as a choreography that is to be performed by the audience, imposes no demand. It rather entirely withdraws any imperative. Nothing is to be enacted, nothing is to be performed, nothing to be achieved. There is no imposed time limit for this performance to take place within. The withdrawal reverses the normal practice of performance as it appears in our lives, driven by the imperative for productivity, for heightened and goal-oriented performance, for efficiency, for the constant and instant actualisation of possibilities of engagement, the mobilisation of affective, imaginative, communicational and cognitive powers. Perhaps disorienting at first, this reversed vacated space slowly re-emerges as a space of “active undoing”. In this emergent space I do not need to perform or produce anything. I do not need to actualise anything: no form of identity, representation or belonging. I attend to my being here and now, with others in a shared space of time, exposed to those who are exposed to me while bearing this exposure. At the playground of juncture all dwells on its limit exposed into the space between, coming into co-appearance as a resonance of the other(s). A multitude of singular relational events arises and passes away in this common playground of the juncture where we are “touching”, where we are “being together” and “being separate” at once, present to this strange “being-the-one-with-the-other”.

In *Recollections* we practise “re-collecting”, a return to a common playground of the juncture, unveiling from the veils of oblivion “the self, the other, space, time and [...] everything else between” as written in the *Recollections* performance brochure in Weld (Stockholm, 2014).

*The Second Time* is more specifically constructing a narrative told by dramatis personae Simona Semenič about her own or rather the author’s rapid aggravation of her epilepsy and her struggle to pull herself through it. The deterioration of her health becomes unbearable, which leads to a radical change of lifestyle through healthy eating, sports, endless measuring of physical signs and testing, all kinds of alternative therapies that trigger a decision to no longer be a “victim”, to no longer subdue to the idea of illness and standard ways of its medication, until finally reversing its understanding into it being a blessing. In persistent struggle with her worsening condition Simona continues to invent tactics for her survival until in this reversal the illness awards the banality of the everyday with the status of sacredness. Through the unfolding of the narrative we come to understand the image of Simona Semenič in gold as the image of a profaned self that has transfigured illness and victimhood into a new “survival tactic”, a new practice of “life” or a new relation with the “bare life” that she is, and in this new profane-sacred relation she insists on the relation with a “you”, a “you” that is co-constituting “the audience”. *The Second Time* exhibits the icon of a transfigured (relation to) “life” that paradoxically stays disengaged and refuses to write. This new profaned self retains its potential character, its power and possibilities. This self, mirroring the audience, is already there when we arrive in the theatre. The time allows us to comprehend it through the reading, to arrive at a recognition of ourselves in the mirror. An old self now profaned becomes a new self. This new self “does less”, it “does not write”, it just sits there watching us, disengaged, in gold, as one more “prophet of not-writing” (Agamben, *The Coming Community* 37). The image tackles our habitual conformism with the imperatives of availability, productivity, creativity, efficiency, transparency, leanness, etc. Through our reading of the text, the narrated “we” inscribes itself into the image of the self in gold. It questions the self that strives to be “in the image of capital” and that serves the capitalist imperative of constant actualisation of the potential that the self is. The image of the “golden calf” in the void stares at us as a mirror reflection that confuses and disorients us and that causes discomfort with its “refusal to write”. This refusal suspends the imperative of doing – only in order to connect us, “a life”, with our possibilities and powers that are not yet actualised and will perhaps never be actualised.

Both pieces are participatory and interactive events that engage their audience in games of subjectivity, exchange, sharing, and collaborative making of this artwork, yet each in their own way resists complying with the post-Fordist imperatives. The audience is invited to take on the creative labour and the responsibility for making the artwork appears through their participation and engagement. In this sense, the artwork

could produce sociality based on the post-Fordist norm of a creative, productive and successful performance, seizing and actualising every possibility and potential, a norm inherent to many relational art pieces. Nevertheless, both *Recollections* and *The Second Time*, instead of complying with post-Fordist imperatives, rather subvert these (imperatives) via forms of disengagement and strategic “undoing” in order to open an alternative horizon of the common possibility of “being together” upon which the community-to-come may emerge from a “new now” as the time of potential and from a “new space of the social” that emerges through a new profaned use of relationality as a common.

With the withdrawal of the demand for any act but the act of attending, “being-with” one another, together yet separate, *Recollection* and *The Second Time* “enact” what Kunst calls “a new radical gesture” of “doing less” (*Artist* 192). Today, the modes of artistic production have been appropriated by capitalism as the central modes of post-Fordist production and “the intense use of the human powers destroys the tenacity, duration and persistence of the world, as well as the duration and persistence of subjectivity; for this reason, this use not only results in exhaustion and burn-out but also in the problematical subordination of our lives and activities to the ways of contemporary production” (*Artist* 191). This is why Kunst insists on the importance of reclaiming art as a gesture of “doing less”.

Art is not useful and purposeful. It can result from a total coincidence or failure. The length of its duration is unforeseeable. Art lasts and is the potentiality of human powers that are not yet realised. At the same time, art also does not belong to the intensification of the production of life. Quite the opposite, it is the anarchic force of waste, sleep and inactivity that opens up atmospheres and rhythms of life that are different from anything production-oriented. [...] What might lie at the core of artistic autonomy is an awareness of the unrealised potentiality of creative powers; it opens up human activity that is always less than it could be. (191– 192)

In both pieces, “doing less” leads towards the “undoing” of the theatrical machine that is now made inoperative. There is no goal, no finality, nothing is to be produced or achieved, no community is supposed to take place with a pre-established sense or idea of itself. In these examples of inoperative theatre, the neoliberal compulsion and supposition to produce, which most often founds the participatory and interactive “relational artworks” is undone. The theatrical apparatus is reduced to the minimal condition of a theatrical event, to our “being together” in the “now” of the theatrical encounter. The “ability to do less”, to not-write, and to endlessly insist on this less, is what opens us to the now, the time of potential, in which we can reconfigure and reclaim our “being together” as the common.

## Community to come

The gesture of “doing less”, of not-writing, transposes us into our original openness, extension, relation and communication as that which is the common ground of the community-to-come, which already exists here and now, but only if we “do less”, “take a little break from the world and let it ‘come’” (Murray and Whyte 46). Just like *Bartleby’s* “I’d prefer not to” restores the world to its potentiality, so also this gesture of “doing less” in *Recollections* and *The Second Time* restores our common “being together”, community as a common “possibility to *be together*” (De la Durantaye 160) as a community whose members share nothing but being, our “being-in-common” and our being exposed to it. In these examples of inoperative theatre, community is thought as inoperative community. It never becomes or affirms itself as a “single thing” that “loses the *in* of being-in-common” (Nancy, *The Inoperative*), but rather retreats from any hypostasis of the “common”. It returns us to the limit, to the edge of ourselves, onto our exteriority, where we, physically and affectively distributed in a space of time, write the event solely from our exposure to each other, through the relation between one another, by listening, watching and attending to each other as singularities being articulated as a resonance of each other, through touch as a playground of juncture. In the inoperative theatre, community is not presupposed. We are exposed in this strange “being-the-one-with-the-other” (xxxix).

In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy considers listening, not only as a mode of the self becoming a self through endless referral that takes place in the space between the two, the many, but also about listening as our possible “ethical and political condition” (68), as a choice to return to being exposed, to the limit of oneself, to the “singular eruption of a voice”. In this sense the act of listening has the potential to be “an interruption” and undoing of the myth that “organizes and distributes the humanity through speech” (48) and founds community as a necessary instalment of fiction, communion and belonging. *Recollections* and *The Second Time*, through their refusal to write, undo the theatrical apparatus and its organisational procedures as well as the idea of community. The undoing of the “myth” as can be observed in these art works, according to Nancy, “abandons us to the absence of myth” (58), delivers us to the limit of the singularity and makes us listen to its individual voice. “This limit is the place of community.” (59) Community then is a non-place, the extreme edge where singularities touch without merging. “Such community does not belong to itself, it does not congregate, it communicates itself from one singular place to another.” (61) Writing by not-writing “puts into play being in common, it puts into play communication itself, the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by another” (65), it exposes the limit upon which communication takes place and where singular voices may be uttered in a common place. By breaking down the theatrical

apparatus and its organisational procedures, *Recollections* and *The Second Time* uncover the “common”, this “being together” as being-in-common, which “already is”, which we share in banal and ordinary life, the sacred profane incoherently deployed in space and time.

This is a community without exchange, universality, economy, coherence or identity for there is nothing that could be shared; there is no common being. [...] A community has therefore little to do with a future common goal or with being unselfish, sharing things, taking responsibility for one’s actions and respecting another. It also has nothing to do with the consensus for collaboration and pluralist procedures of democratic dissemination. It is not about the outcome of dividing property we share and dividing it in a democratic and proportional manner. (Kunst, *Artist* 96)

Community is rather our multiple, dispersed, mortally fragmented existences that make sense only by existing in common. It takes place as communication through the exposition of singularities that share a common “being together” while “being separate”. It is not something we have to produce but rather an inoperative community. It exists, here and now, as potentiality, we “just need to take a little break and let it ‘come’”. These pieces of inoperative theatre allow us to take a “sabbatical vacation” from all the communities of the present and the future, from everything that demands production, by rendering the community as a project to be achieved inoperative, thereby allowing a community to come.

The political power of the theatre as disclosed in these examples of inoperative theatre is therefore neither in the affirmation, in the totality and universality of the common, in a mass transformative event and in the macro-political role of the critical theatrical dispositif, nor in the rhetoric unification of the revolt and the spectacular unification in the face of that against which we resist. Rather the opposite, it can now be found in micro-political acts, condensed time space dispositives, within which the form of engagement with life has changed and become singular. It is the singularity of the performative event, and its resistance to macro-political interpretations of its political relevance and the politic nature of the emerging sociality, and which exactly in its singularity retains its agonistic nature. These inoperative pieces as loose singular gestures disclose the ethical potentiality of theatre. Instead of institutionalised critique and spectacular revolt they prefer to practise and actualise the poetic nature of the common and to open the theatrical event to the time of potentiality. If we follow Agamben, for whom the goal of encounters, in life as well as in thinking, is to “enable (or disable) life” (“An Interview”), we can view these inoperative forms of encounter, which take place as relational constellations in time that enable life – as the life of a community. They restore us to the factuality of our common “being together” by setting us in time of the now as we, released now from finality and projection

into the future, settle into the relation with the neighbouring singularity in a micro-topical relational universe of a community-to-come. Inoperative theatre through its own undoing, which is the result of negotiation between numerous separations and organisational abilities, unfolds the potentiality of the relational space of our communal co-appearance in which we affirm life, that there is always more to the life in common. Here our participation is no longer equated with desire to be with others and share our abilities for what is common in the work." (Kunst, *Artist* 71). And the audience is no longer public, but instead "separate from public, something by means of which we temporarily leave the public outside and rehearse new adventures in how to be together through being separate" (71).

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