

Waiting for the Political. Towards Protagonism in Performance

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The article studies the topic of protagonism in contemporary performative practices. Its original assumption is: if the strategy of performing is not susceptible to the common, its reach is only representative, so we cannot speak of the true political that could spring from the performative. This is also reflected in the trend of striving for the participation of spectators, but participatoriness in itself does not mean politicality. The principle of neutralising criticism – political is immanent to critical – is written into the dominant production system, so we are not to expect that the (theatre) institution would generate a genuine politicality. This empty expectation reminds us of a key problem: the fundamental separation of performers from spectators, which is only a manifestation of the classification as a fundamental procedure of the spectacle economy of the culture industry. When we speak of the political in the performative and vice versa, we should consider relationships between all the co-participants in the space-time of the performance, as they embody the potential that can be politicised or sunk into apolitical representation.

With the idea that he develops via an affirmation of the situation as a performance, the author clearly deviates from the (dominant) paradigm of the theatre of the existing. The performative about which he speaks can be, but is not necessarily, artistic. It is the sign – a sign as an authorial gesture in the common – which takes the situation as a performance and calibrates it as artistic. But that artistic is not framed, it is not a closed field in the sense of an artwork as a product; the performance space-time is clearly defined, but it is also permeable and a different space-time can proliferate into it. This permeability perhaps indicates the difference between life and art, which is often the starting point for the theoretical argumentation of the avant-gardes and political art. To have this distinction, the existence of this demarcation line is essential, this alleged line between life and art. There is a widespread assumption that the avant-gardes and engaged and political art break down this barrier that blurs some fundamental and pre-emptive difference between art and life. Yet in the context proposed by the author, such barriers, and consequently the presumed difference, do not exist. An artwork is not something that is understood as a matter of production, an event, an

object or fetish that creates a symbolic difference, as something which needs to be invented to be framed, but as something which is inherent to the permeable realm of the sensual. Therefore, we do not have problems with the elusive or unrealisable desire for connecting art and life, but with the realisation of the common, in which, and from which, the ostensibly impossible originates – the life of desire that realises itself through pleasure. The realisation of the common requires the invention and realisation of certain strategies that share some characteristics with the performing strategies that are susceptible for the common. Again, this is not about removing the barriers, but rather about establishing circumstances in which common barriers cannot be created or are irrelevant. The fundamental aspect is that the basic division, for example, between the performers and the spectators, is not pre-supposed, that it is written neither into the authorial gesture nor into the production context. Alongside this utopia, theatre as a spectacle machine is not politically relevant. But inside this utopia, one does not need to wait for the political; the pleasure that originates from the protagonism of everyone involved into the situation as a performance is only one of the manifestations of enacting the political. The question of the quality and taste of such pleasure is the question of the method and the unpredictable outcome of the schizophrenisation of the unconscious, in other words, it is a question of the strategy of its aestheticisation. How do we thus set up certain lines of force that loosen the prior demarcation of the functions (performance, actor, spectator, director, playwright, dramaturg, stage designer ...); how can we lean on the power of protagonism of all (as J. Rancière puts it: whomever) during performance and how to achieve that this power functions as politically emancipatory? Such empowerment can be realised if – with the procedures that are a question of invention in the concept – effective nodes are provided to co-create *a situation* (rather than a presentation). In it, so to say, in the very core of the artwork, in the zone of pleasure, the space of political speaking is possible.