

## Editorial

### *Or How to Do Things with Performative Actions*

When analysing the methods used in direct political actions carried out in/at public places, we should draw attention to the risk of linking these phenomena with ritual, theatre or performance unless these terms are used critically and/or metaphorically. Many direct actions, however, are reminiscent of agitprop and guerrilla performance. Both methods are part of the history of 20th century theatre practices whose goal is to raise awareness of the public about a specific political or social situation as well as the struggle for liberation of discriminated social groups. Another theoretical framework frequently used in analysis of performative aspect of activist practices is Bakhtin's concept of "carnivalisation". Rather than looking for universal patterns and the, presumably common, roots of these events, analysis of specific social and political circumstances of a concrete historical moment might be reconsidered as a more productive point of departure.

The activists that take part in direct actions usually are not trained actors, because the basic motive behind those actions is not to create an aesthetic, but a political effect. An activist is an artist as much as is inevitable, no more and no less; the artisanship is a side effect of a political act. The absence of concerns about aesthetics and a disrespectful attitude towards grand narratives (political, legal, social, perhaps even philosophical), relegates an activist to the structural place of an amateur actor, that is to say, an actor who appears strange to the "silent majority," but precisely because of this he/she is in a position to pose simple, naïve and hence important questions. Actors, performers, activists, theorists and so on, are "amateurs" because they pose questions about issues that are not challenged otherwise, since they are somehow taken for granted.

Examples of this kind frequently involve transversal artistic practices. The transversality of these practices and their hybrid nature enable quick passages from the predominantly political into the predominantly artistic sphere and back. In combination with aestheticised protest events this creates a kind of post-Fluxus atmosphere of relative emancipation through experimental practice.

On the other hand, activist strategies that involve various artistic practices (creating a bricolage of activist actions) open a range of questions. Why political interventionism resorts to cultural-manifestation techniques in order to become constituted in the field of the political? Is it compelled to do so because of some special reasons specific to this interventionism (i.e. is the technique used a logical and causal transmission/performance for these inherent reasons), or is it encouraged to do so by some external, pragmatic reasons (i.e. is it part of a well-considered strategy of political action which is "culturalised" in this manner)?

Furthermore, one of the crucial problems encountered by many direct actions involves the fact that the neo-liberal system is so flexible that it is capable of absorbing, without any obvious difficulty, these types of intrusions of materialised political thinking and thus of pacifying existing "pockets of resistance." The self-defensive mechanism of neo-liberalism is cynicism, which operates smoothly on both the macro- and micro-levels.

Several examples following the protests in Genoa and the 9/11 attacks showed that at certain moments (or even during longer periods), when the system is overwhelmed by “security panic,” its absorption potential becomes dangerously reduced, creating conditions for repressive restrictions on artistic freedom and freedom of speech. The most recent example of such a hysterical reaction of the government has been the legal action against American artist and activist Steve Kurtz, a member of the artistic-activist collective Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), accused of bio-terrorism. Another outstanding example was the prosecution of the Austrian artistic-activist group with international membership, known as VolksTheater Karawane, the group’s participation in the “alter-globalist” protests in Genoa being the only reason for a brutal arrest of its members.

Given the general pressure of powerful political forces, who, in the wake of 9/11, have been endeavouring to reduce the existing standards protecting human rights and freedoms, the question that arises is whether art is destined to assume again the function of an asylum for critical political operations?

Slovene performing arts journal Maska will contribute a thematic issue to the growing body of literature on activist practices combining political action and performative strategies. The edition under a working title “On Artivism or How to Do Things with Performative Actions” will collect theoretical papers and manifest interventions on political and performative potential of contemporary activist practices. The initiatives such as Reclaim the Streets, Kein Mensch ist illegal, Communication Guerrilla, Las Agencias, ®™ark, Dost je!, Noborder Network, to name only a few, are possible references and points of departure for the essays to be published in the thematic issue of Maska. Texts on the strategies of resistance in historical perspective, such as student movement from the 60ties, Situationists, Fluxus, theatre of the oppressed, civil electronic disobedience, AIDS activism, ecopolitics, ACT UP’s protests etc., are also more than welcomed. Last but not least, we are interested in critical analysis of theoretical discourses on “carnivalisation” of political activism, contemporary theories of multitude and polyphonic composition of its subjects, the pleasures of protest actions, performing (or even “spectacularisation”) of human rights, “culturalisation” of identity politics and alike.

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