



A LIVE GATHERING: PERFORMANCE AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE



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EDITED BY ANA VUJANOVIĆ WITH LIVIA ANDREA PIAZZA

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This book project started with an invitation to reflect on the (art) audience and the (social) community. The invitation came from the European network of theatre venues, festivals and the organisations of Create to Connect. After several performance productions, festivals, publications and seminars, the partner organisations wanted to complete the project with a more extensive publication and in 2016 invited me, Ana Vujanović, to edit it. The invitation was generous and I gladly accepted it, as, apart from the fact that I have been concerned with its focus, the invitation gave me freedom to define and refine the topic and choose collaborators and writers. Since at that time I was engaged with a programme fostering critical thinking on contemporary dance and performance – with the somewhat humorous title *Critical practice (Made in Yugoslavia)* – where I mentored several younger writers, critics and choreographers, I invited Livia Andrea Piazza to join me in editing the book and Stina Nyberg to contribute artist's pages. My long-term collaborators Jelena Knežević from Walking Theory [TkH] and Marta Popivoda of TkH and Theory at Work [TnD] then joined us as producer and executive producer.

After sketching the concept, Jelena, Livia and I created this book together – but not alone. This book came into existence thanks to the enthusiasm, patience and productive dialogues with the contributors, and thanks to the support of Alma R. Selimović, development manager of Bunker and leader of the Create to Connect network. Her respect for the opaqueness and slow pace of the process of developing a theoretical discourse has been precious. A special thanks goes out to Stephan Geene and b_books, for a supportive and caring publishing process and for providing a publishing context that sharpens our book, politically and theoretically.

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To think of the audience and the community together in the performing arts, especially in the critical and socio-politically concerned segments thereof, usually presupposes a direct interaction between the artists and the audience. It happens in the in-between spaces of copresence and togetherness in public where the artists and the audience create both the sense of themselves and the performance that connects them and project or disrupt the sense of wider social community. This implies a great investment of hope when it comes to the political dimension of theatre, dance and performance as live and performing arts. That hope is additionally ignited by a recognised proximity between artistic performance and democratic politics, a similarity revolving around the live gathering of people in public. However, while attending numerous ‘political performances’¹ in the contemporary performing arts scenes across Europe and reading and writing on topics such as performance and politics, the artist-citizen, community theatre or participatory performance, we have realised that often there is a somewhat neglected difference between performance and politics today, which obscures our understanding of their relations. In order to comprehend how exactly the performance, with its liveness, being-with and togetherness, is located in its social context and how its imaginaries can radiate through society, we must attend to that point and scrutinise it analytically and meticulously.

1 | Performances characterised by clear social concerns and political aspirations and ambitions.

Apart from the long history of the metaphor of *theatrum mundi* – from Ancient Greece, via the Christian Middle Ages, the Baroque, Shakespeare and 18th-century European bourgeois society, up to the present – which embeds theatre in its social environment as a sort of metaphysical *mise en abyme*, a number of 20th-century directors, choreographers and theatre and performance theorists explored the proximity of performance and politics in a more concrete and analytical manner. We refer, for instance, to Blue Blouse, Bertolt Brecht, Workers Dance League, Augusto Boal, Milan Knížák, Valie Export, Sanja Iveković, Christof Schlingensief, or Richard Schechner, Peggy Phelan, Janelle Reinelt, Alan Read, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Randy Martin and many others. These voices however come not only from the field of performing arts but also from the field of social-political investigations; let us mention here at least Hannah Arendt, Richard Sennett, Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, Paolo Virno and newer voices such as Margot Morgan and Shirin Rai.² Hannah Arendt is especially important in this regard, owing to her explicit and famous insistence on the performative character of political practice and on the political dimension of artistic performance alike. In *Between Past and Future*, she explains this proximity in the following way:

In the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative art of making), the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence. ... The performing arts have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists – dancers, play-actors, musicians and the like – need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organised space for their work, and both depend upon others for the performance itself.³

However, although this oft-cited explanation has been largely used to emphasise the political relevance of the performing arts and we find some of its aspects still valid, the problem with this juxtaposition is that it is actually ahistorical. It is ahistorical in terms of ‘the grammar of politics and performance’, as Joe Kelleher assumed and Janelle Reinelt and Shirin Rai explicitly named it,⁴ referring to the notions of liveness and sociality, involvement of actors and spectators, ‘nowness’ and the gathering of strangers around certain issues. In these terms, Arendt’s explanation neglects, at the site of performance of her time and to an extent of our time as well,⁵ the grammatical and procedural differences between the political

2 | Margot Morgan, *Politics and Theatre in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013); Janelle Reinelt and Shirin Rai, *The Grammar of Politics and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge 2015).

3 | Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1961), 153–154.

4 | Joe Kelleher, *Theatre and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2013); Reinelt and Rai, *The Grammar*.

5 | Although the artistic performance in European society is still predominantly a public practice, which gathers people, depends on others and reaches its political momentum in the performance itself, its ephemerality and a lack of ‘an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence’ has been largely disputed. Among the main criticisms, we would single out Rebecca Schneider’s work on the performance ‘remains’, its

practice of Athenian democracy (the direct participation of citizens) and the official political practice of modern Western society (a representative system). That is to say, in her explanation the notion of politics tacitly refers to the Athenian model of direct democracy, while in a representative democracy, contemporary to the 20th-century's performing arts, public space is not the main site of politics nor do professional politicians gather 'others' to discuss and consult about their decisions, coalitions and votes. In a specific and paradoxical way, it is a *democracy* wherein people (*demos*) are commonly absent from ruling (*kratos*) their society, resulting in the situation where artistic performance and politics start to diverge from some previously or supposedly common grammatical elements, and above all from public space and the public sphere, liveness, people's gathering and involvement.

While politics started relinquishing these elements, performance did not. In this way, counting on grammatical and further procedural overlaps between performance and democratic politics in general – and thus on political openness to subjects, images, voices and social relations that derive from artistic performance – becomes a pitfall for a number of performance makers and theorists. That especially addresses an alternative and critical segment of the performing arts in the 20th and early 21st centuries, which opposes the theatrical paradigm of mimetic representation and frontal presentation and sees the political power of performance in the direct interaction and live copresence of people in public. Richard Schechner was among many who, in the 1960s and 1970s, claimed that representational theatre is a capitalist construction, which should be replaced with 'environmental theatre' that involves a live and flexible interaction between the audience and performers.⁶ In the 1990s, Peggy Phelan considered liveness, next to ephemerality and immateriality, as grounding performance's political potential within capitalism.⁷ There it operates at a symbolic level as 'a representation without reproduction' that by virtue of its immateriality and non-mediation remains 'unmarked', thus escaping absorption into the system.⁸ Speaking of today's art scenes, explicit examples of the idea that the political power of performance lies in its live social situation in public can be found in *artivism*. It is a hybrid practice which intertwines art and political activism thereby reopening Benjamin's conclusion on the aestheticisation of politics as typical of Fascism and the politicisation of art as a Communist response to it.⁹ Artist performances and actions are

archival potential, and the role of re-enactments (2011) and Italian post-Operaist thinkers, like Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno, who wrote about the role of performance and self-performance – including expressivity, communicability, virtuosity etc. – in immaterial labour and post-Fordist production.

6 | Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* (New York: Applause Books (1973) 1994).

7 | Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge (1993) 2005).

8 | *Ibid.*, 146.

9 | Aldo Milohnić, "Artivism", in *republicart: real public spaces*, 2005.

in principle based on a spontaneous and direct method of political acting: one steps out onto the public stage as a responsible citizen, spotlights a particular social problem by (usually minimal) aesthetic means and calls for public debate, around which people gather. However, as we already indicated, the problem here, in all of these otherwise diverse examples, is that this basic mode of political practice doesn't correspond to the social paradigm of (democratic) politics today, which is representative. At the same time it disturbingly corresponds to the economic paradigm of politics that revolves around immaterial value, cultural contents and 'production of subjectivity' by means of a virtuosic performance.¹⁰

Furthermore, speaking from the present day European perspective – marked with thirty years of protracted and troubled 'democratisation and capitalisation' of former socialist societies; the evolving of the European Union, characterised with the 'proceduralism' of formal democracy; and the protests of the precarious and outraged during the 2010s caused by a massive discontent with representation in political institutions – we would proffer that the representative democratic system in Europe of today is mediated, professionalised and bureaucratised to such a degree that it almost mutes singular citizens' voices in the process of making decisions. In that context, the political power of performing arts drawing on radical democratic experience decreases dramatically and the efficacy argument of artistic performance becomes undefendable. It is so especially if we accept Baz Kershaw's elaboration of Schechner's idea of performance efficacy as 'the potential that theatre may have to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities'.¹¹

The main question we raise with this book is how to understand and what to do – artistically as well as politically – with this kind of historical asynchrony between performing arts and democratic politics, which is focused on the live gathering of people in public. That question does not diminish the value of the political and artistic practices that appear in those exceptional social moments, 'social dramas' to use Victor Turner's term, which cause a standstill or disruption in the social order. Such practices are recently well described in the book *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*, whose point of departure is Chantal Mouffe's antagonistic view of democracy and recent protests, from Occupy to the Arab Spring, where theatre joined a wave of radical democracy

¹⁰ | Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour", 1996, <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> (last accessed February 22, 2019).

¹¹ | Baz Kershaw, *The politics of performance: Radical theatre as cultural intervention* (London and New York: Routledge 1992), 1.

practised on the street.¹² In our view, these moments are valuable but exceptional, and thus do not resolve our central issues: how to be political by means of performance in the context of representative democracy as the ruling political system in Europe today.

While unfolding a rich overview of the segments of current European performing arts scenes, which address these questions with numerous artistic examples, the contributions in this volume come to the point where Deleuze's thoughts about the missing people from *Cinema 2* further sharpen editors' initial reflections:

Art [...] must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people. The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims 'There have never been people here', the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute.¹³

These thoughts may provide a wider, metaphorical framing of this volume, especially since it seems that the missing people in our democratic society today are not only the colonised, marginalised or excluded ones; it is citizenry at large that is paralysed. As a response to these conditions, in the aftermaths of the protests of the precarious and outraged in the 2010s, new social and civil initiatives which explore different democratic processes have emerged, such as the Solidarity movement in Greece or Municipal Confluences, like *Ahora Madrid*, *Barcelona en Comú* and *Cádiz Sí Se Puede* in Spain. They pave the way to reinvent ordinary people as political agents of their society, which is alternative to both neo-liberal proceduralism and the professionalisation of politics, from which ordinary people are excluded, and right-wing populism, where individuals become fused into an abstract category of people. They also offer long-term, although still relatively small-scale, practical alternatives to the official European democracy, in the form of citizen-run infrastructures such as schools and hospitals, cooperative cryptocurrencies such as FairCoin, bottom-up municipalist discourse located outside Spanish political binary 'nationalism – separatism', or citizens' platforms for communal engagement in finding fast solutions for various urgent social issues.¹⁴ This book analyses precisely those artistic practices that have emerged alongside, simultaneously with or in relation to these social movements, investigating how theatre, dance and performance respond to the new

¹² | Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki (Eds.), *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2017).

¹³ | Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2; The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989), 217.

¹⁴ | Greece Solidarity Campaign; Vicente Rubio-Pueyo, *Municipalism in Spain From Barcelona to Madrid, and Beyond* (New York: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung 2017).

political insights, experiments and climate in Europe. As the contributions in this book manifest, it is a context wherein the previously well-known tactics and tools, such as participation, identity politics or spontaneous usage of public space don't suffice and wherein we must build and learn a new vocabulary of politicality of performance, which focuses on (re) inventing people and which includes such opaque and strange words as 'innervation', 'preenactment', 'prefiguration', 'recreation', etc.

The fact that today's mainstream democratic politics in Europe diminishes the relevance of the physical copresence of living people discussing their society in public is in this volume considered not only a failure on the part of the performing arts. Going back to Reinelt and Shirin's concept of the grammar of performance and politics, this fact is thought self-reflectively throughout the book in a wider social realm, and thereby becomes also an invitation to rethink politics itself. In other words, it seems that what performance as a type of cultural-artistic practice does politically today is to mark that empty place of democracy and publicly perform proposals of different socio-political praxis. This makes performance as a live, public event a real place on the public scene that confronts images of society as it presently is with those of a different, possible and virtual one. As most of the contributions in this book indicate, in the current European – and even wider – context, characterised by both neoliberal capitalism and representative democracy, performance may not owe its political relevance to being 'unmarked', as Phelan claimed in the 1990s, but rather its political potential might lie in the gesture of marking. In a political register, it marks a space of democracy that is empty, inviting the public to engage in inventing the people who populate it and create the social imaginary. In a theoretical register, it could also mark a space of cohabitation where differences are cultivated and produced.

What are the theoretical underpinnings and the concrete dynamics that emerge as performance and politics coinhabit society? How does performance have consequences on the world as we know it, not only in spite of but also by virtue of its differences from today's politics? These assumptions bring our book to the proximity of Kelleher's insistence on writing about theatre *and* politics rather than on political theatre and Reinelt and Shirin's ambition to 'bring practical political processes back into theatre and performance studies'.¹⁵ Where the contributions in this volume differ from these two positions is that they, through their versatile discourses and various tactics and rhetoric of analysis, consider artistic performance itself a repository of critical and resistant knowledge to the extent that the book eventually examines how to be politically active

through and by the means of performance today. By taking the difference separating performance and politics as a point of departure, the book thus analyses how performance can be a political part of its social context today and at same time asks: What is relevant for a democracy in which the live gathering of people in public is irrelevant?

* * *

The content of our book is edited dramaturgically. We have organised it as a speculative and imaginary journey through the concept of live gathering from the political public sphere to the artistic performance. There are two main movements along the journey. One is a linear progression which goes from one part of the book to the next. The other comprises lateral steps and movements that take place within each part: they are transversal and multilayered and hence render the book's parts into networks through which readers can wander and drift. Let us briefly present the three parts of the book before we move to each individual chapter.

In Part I, 'What is people's gathering to democracy?' the authors discuss the live gathering as a political practice by looking at today's democratic public sphere with its challenges and paradoxes. Isabell Lorey, Bojana Cvejić and Bojana Kunst offer thorough analyses of recent protest movements and other gatherings in public space from the perspective of revolutionary, performative and prefigurative political tendencies. The social context they discuss – European societies of today, including the specificities of former Eastern Europe – outline the geopolitical framework of the whole book and launch important questions into the sphere of the performative. In Part II, 'The New Politicality of Performance: The Time of Gathering, (Re) creative Labour and the Domestic', the performative responds with a new and unexpected approach to the political dimension of the performing arts by opting for certain political detours. The contributions of Stina Nyberg, Ana Vujanović, Giulia Palladini, Livia Andrea Piazza and Valeria Graziano explore creative labour and recreation, the private and domestic, the experience of gatherings, and liveness as a temporal category. They speak about the politics of performing arts as a politics that disperses and enters the sphere of production, private life and an overall sense of the world. This opening of the performance also implies a new understanding of people's gathering in the political public sphere, whereby Part II becomes a terrain where these two spaces – performing arts and politics – meet and intersect, on a new ground. From that in-between terrain, the book moves to the sphere of the performing arts in PART III, 'Radiation Patterns

of Performance'. Here Florian Malzacher, Goran Sergej Pristaš and Silvia Bottiroli discuss concrete artworks, unfolding the problematics of live gathering in theatre and performance as a political challenge. Their texts focus on contemporary European performances and then try to articulate some tactics by which the performance radiates in society: preenactment, refraction and undecidability, which operate in the the domain of the radical imaginary and real-life experience.

Part I opens with the essay 'The Power of the Presentist-Performative: On Current Democracy Movements' by Isabell Lorey, who starts from the refusal of representation and the engagement with democracy that has defined the most recent social movements, not disregarding them as apolitical but meeting them with the desire to articulate the 'presentist-performative' and breaking the dichotomy of presence and representation that characterises both aesthetics and politics. Lorey's critique of representation is paired with a critique of the metaphysics of presence in order to ground political action in the bodies that constitute live gatherings. The dichotomy between the public and the private is left behind to open up to assemblies of bodies that occupy space and time, suspending representation and yet not simply settling for their visibility and presence in public space. Looking at practices that measure themselves with the possibility of creating new democracies grounded in mutual affecting and connectedness, she proposes a shift from the 'in-between' to the 'being with', an alliance of precarious bodies that don't belong to self-contained individuals but rather to singularities who are always de-instituting and instituting, becoming common in the present time as a creative midpoint of current and future democracies.

The performative aspect present in these assemblies emerges as a tool of analysis and affirms itself as a voice in 'The Procedural, the Prescriptive and the Prefigurative Performance: Some Reflections on the Question of Time of Political Action'. In this article, Bojana Cvejić addresses the temporality of political action through these three models listed in her title. A critique of the procedural as an alignment with a present that is given, opens up the way for the two alternative models. Prescription operates by rupture and looks at the future as a rehearsal of revolution. As such it stands in contrast to prefiguration, which removes the gap between present struggles and future political goals to find political relevance in the performativity of a collective experimentation grounded in a present that is not given but under construction. Yet, at the end of the article, performance shifts from being a tool of analysis to being a fourth voice in the debate. Through the example of *Time Bombs* by BADco (2017), Cvejić explores the specific capacity of art to re-narrate the present. In contrast to the other models that keep us in a present closed off from other temporalities or set political

goals in an indefinite future, artistic practice emerges as a voice bestowed with the chance of engaging with temporal displacements able to open a different way for re-imagining the present and the future.

The live gathering that constitutes the background of these texts becomes the focus of inquiry in 'Performance, Institutions and Gatherings: Between Democratic and Technocratic European Cultural Space' by Bojana Kunst, who investigates it across both performance and politics. Here we enter the context of Eastern Europe through a reflection on right-wing populism and fascism in their different and yet equivalent ways of reducing the relevance of the public sphere as a multiplicity of cultural and political gatherings. Bojana Kunst reads attacks on the arts and its institutions as part of a broader context, where the political aim is to reduce space for the public to come together and where the rejection of different kinds of gatherings as embodiments of the audience and its political expression becomes explicit and politically sustained as such. These populist attacks are matched by the economic dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, which marks art institutions with professionalisation rather than democratisation. As a bitter consequence, live gatherings sustained by art institutions are becoming more and more of the same. However, the current situation is also a chance for institutions to act differently: in resonance with Lorey's being-with, art institutions might act as support structures for gatherings, embracing the deep ambivalence they entail.

While these essays punctuate the meaning of live gatherings within democratic practices in today's European geopolitical context, Part II takes an unexpected escape route through Stina Nyberg's 'A Live Gathering Dictionary' that brings the discussion elsewhere. The shift regards not only the content but also the perspective, because here it is an artist who takes the floor. Her contribution to this book springs from her inhabiting, and building together with others, Stockholm's dance and performance scene, where in recent years artists' self-organised gatherings have become a prominent force and have given voice to their political concerns. The dictionary unpacks the notion of live gatherings from the micropolitical scale of the kindergarten as a first ground on which to experiment with forms of collective action, to live gatherings on a bigger scale. At no level is there room for the apolitical, the word opening the dictionary. In this spirit, the dictionary explores the words and practices that recur and inform our ways of getting together: it embraces dysfunctionality and celebration; it challenges the assumption of mutual understanding as well as the traps we fall into while practicing critique; and it looks for unexpected alliances not by fetishising the idea of collaboration but rather by reappropriating it. Nyberg's dictionary accomplishes this by continuously jumping from the

individual to the collective level and, most importantly, by challenging this distinction.

The chance of performance as a live gathering that calls into question the dichotomy between the individual and the common emerges also in Ana Vujanović's essay 'Performances that Matter: From Public Sphere to Creative Labour', which tackles the current political dimension of performance by shifting attention from the public sphere to the realm of creative labour. In such a current context, performance emerges not so much as a model of political practice but rather as a model of production, along the lines of two social macro-processes: the economisation of politics and the politicisation of production. The first exposes the base for the second: today politics is latently present in production, and since the performing arts in neoliberal capitalism belong to the tertiary sector of production, their politics functions in the form of Jamenson's 'political unconscious'. As such, a performance's politicality is not only weakened, but also by definition complicit with the dominant mode of production. And yet this context allows the argumentation to be turned upside down: in a negation of negation, performance operates like a litmus test for democracy. Through the examples given by different stage performances as well as by European performance initiatives, the chances of the performing arts to address not only their politicality but also politics at large emerge in what Vujanović defines as propositions for 'walking through ourselves populated with others'. Such gestures understand the political as seizing democracy from the representative political system and rethinking it within the relationships of our being and working together.

The book offers another entry point into the debate on the politics of performance with a text by Giulia Palladini, who proposes dropping 'politics' in favour of 'domestics'. 'On Coexisting, Mending and Imagining: Notes on the Domesticity of Performance' looks at the domestic not as a pre-given domain, but rather as a field of struggle and imagination like the *polis*: the domestic is political. On this premise, the investigation of the domesticity of performance sets out from a non-domesticated notion of the domestic, to be freed from the set of naturalised dichotomies to which it is still attached. Using different examples from politics and performance, the text unfolds the notion of the domestic as a domain opening to an idea of home grounded in the proximity of bodies; and a feeling at home that emerges in the direct experimentation of a coexistence that cannot be only represented. In separating the idea of home from that of the private, the article suggests using performance as a field of invention and experimentation of coexistences where the proximity of bodies offers a home to the homelessness affecting subjectivities within neoliberal

capitalism. Through the investigation of Fourier's choice of domestics as a field of invention and Barthes' notion of the marvellous real, domestics discloses also a particular temporality that re-proposes the present as a privileged shelter for action in the form of a persistent doing.

The dimension of time is interspersed throughout the pages of this book only to take the floor in 'Performance and Liveness: A Politics of the Meantime' by Livia Andrea Piazza, which investigates performance as an instrument of time-building. The reflection starts from Virno's metaphor describing people's relation to time as spectators watching themselves live: today's present appears as if it were already lived, past and thus unchangeable. Focusing on performance as a specific field of work and as a live gathering, the article proposes to dismiss the question 'how to use time?' to ask instead how to build it; and proposes *the meantime* as a fruitful dimension to think about the politicality of performance today. The meantime is explored in its double meaning: a time simultaneous to the present and a time separating us from the future. It appears as a gap within the general rhythms, where performance can challenge the conditions of its own production and experiment with different ones. Dispensing with the notions of ephemerality and duration usually attached to the time of performance as a live gathering, the meantime emerges as an ordinary temporality able to question the notion of 'normal time' and the separation between the collective and the individual. In the meantime, performance unfolds as a collective instrument to build time and opens up the present as a time porous to the time of others.

The possibility of building time and the tools for different collectivities to intervene in the current political and economic situation appears in Valeria Graziano's 'Recreation at Stake'. The article stems from her previous work on prefigurative practices and belongs to a larger inquiry into the speculative notion of recreative industries. Recreation is unpacked in its multiple meanings following the potential that it discloses for challenging the dichotomy between the intimate and the public and for tackling the conditions of creative labour. It becomes the ground to envision organisational practices that can counter the dominant managerial culture and reappropriate creativity, calling for a creative reproduction. Through examples from the past and the present, such as the Danish 'junk playground' of the 1940s and the recent experience of the Italian cultural centre MACAO, the framework of recreative industries exposes an alternative, minoritarian history of organisational forms that looked at cultural production as intertwined with social reproduction. In this history, the live gathering appears as a key practice of cultural production and, while exemplifying its traditional intersection with politics, it is also

reframed through the recreative industries. In this shift, performance as a live gathering becomes part of a framework that can intervene politically in the present and enable a specific kind of social collaboration based on experiencing the presence of others, and of our differences, as a source of pleasure.

The desire to experiment directly with the politics of organisational forms is matched by the willingness to overcome the metaphors of audience as a community, and deal directly with the politics of spectatorship. Part III starts with 'Theatre as Assembly: Spheres of Radical Imagination and Pragmatic Utopias', in which Florian Malzacher pleads for a theatre that not only mirrors society but can directly challenge the way it functions. Through the work of artists such as Milo Rau, Jonas Staal, Public Movement, Philippe Quesne and others, who recently used the assembly as an artistic format, the article opens up a reflection on the nexus between consensus and participation, and especially on the possibilities emerging from breaking it: from a theatre in public space to a theatre as public space. Here preenactment is set in contrast to immersive theatre, which exemplifies a form of 'fake participation' – bound to remain on the level of representation – leaving no room for a true emancipation of the spectators. Preenactments, as artistic anticipations of a political event, relate differently to the representation. They are the rehearsal of the political as event, rather than the rehearsal of a determinate political event. As such, preenactments shift from showing possible alternatives to being possible alternatives. Yet, according to the author, the possibilities of breaking those limits correspond to the end of theatre and to the beginning of reality, since the fine line marking the borders of theatre and politics can be played with, but certainly not ignored.

The idea of theatre as a mirror of society is completely dismissed by Goran Sergej Pristaš, who in 'The View from Matter', claims that theatre has a character that is refractive rather than reflective. Through the works by Slaven Tolj and Oleg Kulik, this article enters the deep darkness of the black box, which sheds light on how the very manifestation of theatre always already contains multiple gazes rather than two poles reflecting each other. The duality of theatre is different and composed of the relationship between artist and the audience, and the theatre as a whole poetic gathering of animate and inanimate spectators and actors: here is where the refraction occurs, springing out from innervation. The process constituting the base of imagination for Benjamin becomes, in the encounter with theatre, a potential for a different kind of watching: the view from matter. An example of this encounter is the performance *Noordung Prayer Machine* by Dragan Živadinov. From matter, no spectator is confined in the activity of watching

one image and theatre's apparatus becomes a density of gazes. Refraction exposes its political potential: the world sees itself in and through theatre, and the latter becomes a ground of reflection on social objects, without losing its self-reflective character. In this possibility, of watching neither as a subject nor as an object but rather from the side, appears the chance to provoke a radical rearrangement of that which exists, in theatre and outside of it.

A similar density of gazes opens Silvia Bottioli's 'An Undecidable Object Heading Elsewhere'. The article starts from the work *Yes Sir I can Boogie* by the Zapruder filmmakers' group and explores undecidability as an artistic feature able to create political spaces by challenging the concept of representation in its figures of visibility and readability. Undecidability is in Calvino 'the paradox of an infinite whole containing other infinite wholes' linking the realms of imagination, reality and art. In this text an alliance with darkness also appears to be quickly overcome by the idea of opacity: undecidable performances challenge reality on the same level of visibility and complexity that characterises it. In performance situations, undecidability grows out of the coexistence of real and fictional worlds that, rather than cancelling each other out, establish a logic of addition and excess, making representation crumble under the layers. The tension of the artwork *Yes Sir I can Boogie* travels unvaried to the level of performance as a live gathering, where a radical collectivity becomes aware of the world among itself, the world it lives with in its being continuously done and undone by the bodies that constitute it. In the live gathering, a new 'whole of the wholes' is created where individual identities are challenged by being continuously redefined as entity in transformation across the individual and the collective: a condition of life is produced that appears inherently and utterly political exactly as it is, with no territory or perimeter in which to settle.

In between the lines of these texts appears the second movement we envisaged for this book, as they interweave a network that can be navigated in different directions. The ongoing dialogue between performance and politics does not only present the insistent detours these two spheres make into each other; it also reveals the persistent challenges the texts in this book pose to the dichotomies that often mark the way we think and act in these spheres. The book is opened by a breaking of the dichotomy between representation and presence, and the same breakage recurs throughout it, investigating the difference between performance and politics and opening up different ways of representing, watching and being in the live presence of others. The politicality of performance emerges in this break as well as in the break of the dichotomy between production and reproduction. A parallel

challenge is made to approaches that separate the private and the public, and the individual and the common. In addition to deconstructive analyses, there is also a constructive force emerging in the lines of this book that regards the practice of instituting. It appears in unexpected, optimistic turns in thorough analyses of the bleak situation that characterises both performance and politics today. That optimistic force concerns institutions, those of the arts as much as those of politics, but it exceeds them in a chance to institute time and space. It travels through this entire book as a fight for reclaiming and reappropriating imagination and production in lieu of cynicism and deconstruction, which have previously countered attempts at the direct politicality of performance; it is an instituting at large that might start small, in sharing the gaze in performance, in the ways we work together and in the micropolitics that act as if things could always be imagined and done differently; and finally, that optimistic force overflows into the potentiality of instituting more egalitarian and more just conditions of our being alive together.

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The main question we raise with this book is how performance can be political in present day European representative democracy, a system which no longer draws on the live gathering of people. Several leading European (mostly female) thinkers analyse artistic practices that have emerged alongside new social movements – such as Solidarity in Greece or Municipalism in Spain – investigating how theatre, dance and performance respond to the new political insights and experiments. It is a context wherein the previously well-known tactics and tools, such as participation, identity politics or spontaneous usage of public space don't suffice. Thus we must build and learn a new vocabulary of politicality of performance that includes opaque words such as 'innervation', 'preenactment', 'prefiguration' or 'recreation'.

