

Anita Wach

Performer, the Fool

30 Movements self-reflection

Personal chaos and social chronos

30 Movements is a series of performative responses to a number of public events that influence and shape conventional realities. The main impetus for the project was the need for artistic displacement and the management of self - appearance. Created over a two-year period, the 30 performance events are the result of the artists' collective effort to maintain the simplicity of the performative gesture, seek clear representations of ideas related to socio-political phenomena, and prioritize purity of thought over aesthetic form. Jonah Wasterman described works of performance as situated and historically understood as that between ephemeral and archived, collaborative and alienated, real and represented - and this project tries to embrace all the dimensions of that strange activity we call performance.

The series strives to map the connections between personal chaos and social chronos, liminal and literal, physical and ideal. But we could also call it - the performance - simply the movement. Or the sentence. Or the gesture. Or the image. Or the standpoint. Each individual performance from the series can be perceived as the standpoint set in motion, gesture that acts through disposition and sentence translated into iconography of the common body. But we could also just say that each single performance is a physical attempt to deal with certain issues in public places and in front of the public eyes. The act of the transformation of an idea into something brutally real. Simple as that.

Constant displacement

Themes, contexts, locations, spaces, institutions, collaborators, genres, durations - all of these were constantly changing, forming a trajectory of 30 different "moves" and a semantic web of 30 different sentences - almost profane quotations from thinkers, politicians, artists, etc., collected from all over the world and from all periods of history. It was a very specific experience. Performing in different locations around the city is similar to hiking, with everything that comes with it: the excitement of arriving, the inconvenience of 'camping', the freshness of a new environment and adapting to the customs of the 'locals'. Entire project was designed as the constant displacement of the performing body - a body of a citizen obliged to perform a particular role in an urban community - the role of performer. And a citizen who performs the social role of a performer and who performs own private self at the same time becomes the embodiment of a paradox. She becomes herself by repeatedly ceasing to be herself. A performer becomes someone who looks for intimacy in exhibitionism, coherence in difference, stability in constant mobility and authenticity in strict form.

The performing strategy was all about concealing by exposing, revealing by distorting, dancing by restraining, connecting by alienating, going in by going out. All these compulsive moves were kind of a grassroots work coming back to fundamental questions: why? what? when? how? To give here an answer at least to one of those questions, let's name this work a collection of 'drifting appearances on the currents of reality': appearances of a naked among the dressed, exposed among hidden, loud among quiet - appearances of a fool among the reasonable ones. A total and ultimate fool employed to entertain and disturb the audience - a huge court with several thousand kings and queens - city dwellers. A contemporary, independent artist is given a special status, privileged position of free creator: she can laugh at kings and queens, she can freely make comments of all the other members of the court. And the performer needs a court and an army of tiny monarchs - owners, voters, consumers and taxpayers - asking themselves if they need their jesters. Do they?

Side effect of cultural programming

I decided to take the position of a fool, with all the benefits and obligations that come with it. Being a performer is a constant mode of seeking for time, place and action of another appearance. It is an obligation to be present and visible. A jester invades social spaces, forcing the body into carefully curated artistic communities. As a voluntary, professional fool I was not invited anywhere, I politely asked for permission, installed myself and let the performance grow in each specific environment, be it small contemporary art gallery, war monument in the center of a city or a basement of an activist's squat.

Access to the roof of the Museum of Contemporary Art (We, the Perverts, 14-09-2022) and the basement of the activist squat Plac (Veto, 23-09-2022) allowed me to feel the almost 'mussolinian' power of a demagogue addressing the crowd, as well as the tenacity of a rebel against stupidity and injustice. I wanted to mark all corners of the courtyard - a city.

But after a year of cruising around I started to feel as an obstacle to some order, a disturbing element in the space, or in a curator's program, where everything has a clear, defined and replicated purpose. My presence did not have a specific goal, it was rather parasitic activity, slightly forced on the established spaces and institutions. It was kind of a gift nobody asked for. And nobody asks for a performer, especially the fool, it's a performer who is in need of attention, who asks for everything and eagerly accepts a little more than nothing. And the entire process was all about that: starting from nothing, making something, dissolving to nothing and starting again. In our society we are all forced to constantly redefine ourselves, and it is better for us if we do it voluntarily, anticipating the movement of authority. I wanted to make a step beyond the limitations of the familiar environment and the rules that nourish the paradigm of a particular milieu. The paradigm that says we should stay where we belong and we should reproduce what we have learned to do. Bullshit.

Art of work of work of art

After two years of drifting between people, places, contexts and institutions I came to the conclusion that 30 Movements were like side effects of the main cure: cultural programming. If the culture can be perceived as a cure for individuals poisoned and narcotized by consumptionism, then art and performative practice is like a side effect of it; it might be unpleasant, painful, annoying, controversial, strange but it is necessary to go through curing processes. Standing for three hours on a wobbly pile of books was something of a rehabilitative attempt to find the right balance between the vulnerability of the body and the rigor of the intellectual project that is humanity. It was also an attempt to bring a sliver of life, even one as imperfect as the human body, into the museum and display it in a space filled with highly valued but dead objects of art.

Writing the 2.5-metre-long slogan 'Kunst macht frei' (Final Solution, Cirkulacija gallery, 08-03-2023) was like an eight-hour open-brain operation, a lobotomy of an artist asking herself which doctrine is consuming her brain cells and which ideological god does she serve? It is also an expression of the dangerously fundamentalist belief that art is the only thing that can truly liberate us. I repeat - art is the final solution. Does this sound reasonable?

The attempt to synchronize left and right hand (Left Centre Right, Cirkulacija gallery, 13-05-2022) was like a neurological exercise aimed at finally eliminating the gross binaries in our bodies and in our socio-political sphere. Well, this exercise seemed to work against my nature, and its side effect was unreadable text and a chaotic and twisted dance of 'two autonomous hands' - the pathological choreography of reaching for the impossible.

It is true that this healing process has a slightly homeopathic nature, yes, the performer is a manifestation of the pathology, but it is precisely the pathology that has developed inside the neoliberal body that has a transformative potential. A performer tries to use chronic illnesses - hectic life and thinking, lack of long-term concentration, temporality, uncertainty, glorification of fluid over fixed - for the sheer joy of creation. Creation understood as the best way to deal with reality and as an alternative to the idiocy of the paradigm of constant growth and permanent crisis.

But how do we view the work of the performer in the context of contemporary understandings of 'work'? Is the activity of an artist real work? It seems that a contemporary performer is mainly concerned with preparing and maintaining a work of art - her own performance: raising funds, the process of creation, promotion, distribution. But above all she is concerned with conservation and revitalisation: keeping herself alive and accessible to the public. Just like the jesters of the Middle Ages, who were given a house, food and their own bed in order to stay alive, always ready to provoke, entertain and interfere. In this sense, the performer is not doing normal, regular work, but is simply representing a work of art in action, being a kind of 'attraction'. The performer is therefore a conservator, obliged to maintain and renovate her own life as a condition for the existence of the performance. Medieval kings looked after their jesters because they knew how necessary the presence of a professional, 'useless fool' was to maintain the illusion of equality. Today, the authorities do the same for their jesters - feeding them and negotiating the boundaries they are allowed to cross.

Creation through negation

Speaking of fools, dictionaries describe a fool, an 'entertainer', as one who constantly occupies the attention, thoughts and time of others, one who maintains a certain state of mind, one who "holds together". Does the artist hold society together? My answer is: no, she doesn't hold anything or anyone together, but she can bring a few meters of a certain space to life and give a meaningful title to a certain period of time. She can cause a semantic curvature of space/time and reveal the non-obvious relationships of people, things and meanings: whether it's a cactus thrown between bodies (Three Lives, Modern gallery Ljubljana, 08-04-2022), an iron defending a pussy (Veto, Plac, 23-09-2022), two bottles of

'tears' pushed back into the eyes (Two Bottles, video, 31-12-2022), or the constipation caused by the indigestion of values represented by a pile of stones (Rectum, Alcatraz gallery, 25-03-2022).

What is the value of such an activity? What is the value of the court fool, the one who tries to point out the defects of society and the mental habitat of individuals, the one who is supposed to disturb the perceptual equilibrium of the spectators? Should it be appreciated at all? Does it not contradict the role of the court jester, who is here precisely to bring values down from the heights on which authorities, politicians and activists have placed them? She is employed by the egalitarian court to perform trivial dances, twist meanings, point out vices, juggle with words and carry out intellectual acrobatics.

And so it was meant to be. Jesters were called 'licensed fools' and it was their duty and ambition to devalue social codes and point out the idiocies of everyday life. The king no longer provides her with her own bed, horse and servant, but she can pay her telephone bills and feed two people on one diet. The role of the performer is to question and doubt, to sacrifice all that has been learned in order to make room for what has been overlooked or forbidden. It is also part of the *via negativa* method - creation through negation and the search for blank spots (or black holes) of culturally conditioned perception. In this sense, creation is also a negative gesture, rejecting what is already established and opening up space for alternatives.

Obstacle in public space

A performer is a carrier of content and interpreter of mental states by means of physical gesture or aesthetic arrangement. The court jester embodies a re-maker, the one who relocates her own body while recomposing meanings and perspectives. Jester is an anomaly, a curve in reality, a manifestation of uselessness in times of instability on the market of ideologies. The performer is an obstacle on the street, an intruder in public space, an unpredictable object in an art gallery, a mistake in the theater, a pervert in the park. She lowers the standard of capitalist society - not visible enough, not indebted enough, not shocking enough. Performer the fool doesn't do start-ups, but concentrates on cover-ups, drop-outs and standouts.

A performer is not here to fit in, she's an ultimate stooge caught in limbo between matter and algorithm, physical and digital, sensual and visual, personal and objective. A cuckoo who doesn't know when or how to stop, who doesn't follow the instructions in the manual because it ended up in a bin with theater magazines and bill envelopes. A suicider without suicidal thoughts, a hero without a heroic act. A very

optimistic nihilist. A pacifist carrying a weapon of the week - a piece of own creation (and usually this weapon is nude).

A performer, the fool answers when no one asks and makes corrections in perfectly assembled puzzles...
A performer, the fool is a kind of police officer without the right to kill, a swimmer without a shore, a representative without an electorate. A performer, the fool is like the waiter without orders, but still dancing between the tables, without a clear direction, carrying an empty tray, with no change in the pockets, but with the clear aim of maintaining circulation.

Performers: reductionists, agonists, naive nihilists fighting against their own egotrip. They secretly replace paradigms: instead of accumulation, dispersion, instead of production, pro action. Each performer is always confronted with reality, confronted and destroyed in order to prevent becoming a servant of the cultural market - 'realkultur'. They must act like barbarians of thought and caretakers of the battered. Performer's body is a cripple among economically engineered bodies and should have no other practical function than to resist the hegemony of 'normality' and utility.

Why did I write this text?

Why did I write this text? I guess I was driven by the need to explain myself to myself, the need to understand why I do what I do, why the hell I keep leaving my comfortably furnished bedroom to do something for the public? Here is very straightforward answer: because I am challenged by the creative ethos of Via Negativa, by an artistic director and co-authors who keep raising ultimate questions about reality and art, by all the collaborators and VN Lab people who feed my brain with tantalizing thoughts... and because someone has to do it, someone has to play the role of a deliberate fool, otherwise we are lost.

I am also driven by gratitude to the venues that have hosted me. I'm aware that I've been lucky compared to many other artists. The fact is that many places are still inaccessible. Thank you to everyone who has opened their doors and allowed me to make a 'fool' of myself. After two years of cruising around different venues and places, it seems that the interest in performative actions is very low, but the need to experience something real and unique is very high. It was hard, fulfilling and necessary to break the illusion of the artistic realm by building a real fantasy of art making.

One of the sources of the project was the middle-aged performer's desire to challenge old habits in search of new contexts, new people around, new eyes, different perspectives and experiences. Different

and new, especially for a practitioner who has always treated practice as a discipline aimed at maintaining physical strength and cultivating mental wilderness...with more or less success. Facing other human beings is part of the practice and it's a great but also pretty scary encounter. One of the challenges is not to let yourself be corrupted by the ideological dictates of decision-makers, but to follow your personal imperatives. It's damn hard to work with people and at the same time be able to distance yourself from the current of dominant tendencies.

Speaking about so-called 'people'. The work of the performer seems almost like archaeological work in the age of post-humanism. But the definition of the human is as unformed as the human itself, and the example of the 'performer' can shed light on some unresolved aspects, such as the need to do useless things and the pursuit of danger. Constructing performance is about digging, cleaning, collecting and examining small fragments of human behavior so that we can slowly build a coherent story around them.

Why am I sharing this text with an audience? It seems to me that in order to understand a personal perception of the world, a few extra pairs of eyes and a set of brains are crucial for any creator. I find the art world a rather scattered and alienated 'territory', so the gesture of sharing the unripe fruits of the imagination with the viewer's overloaded nervous system seemed a good way of overcoming my own cynicism, fear, insecurity and disbelief.

30 Movements

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Venues: Galerija Alkatraz, Ljubljana • Moderna Galerija Ljubljana • Galerija Škuc, Ljubljana • +MSUM Ljubljana • Spomenik žrtvam vseh vojn, Ljubljana • Cirkulacija 2, Ljubljana • Sokolski dom Tabor, Ljubljana • Cukrarna, Ljubljana • Stara mestna elektrarna, Ljubljana • Trg republike, Ljubljana • Muzejska ploščad, Ljubljana • Plac – Participativna Ljubljanska Avtonomna Cona • Likovni salon Celje • Hupa Brajdič, Ljubljana • Prešernov spomenik, Ljubljana • Center kulture Španski borci, Ljubljana