

Suspended Work of Certainty – A Spectator's Preference Regarding the Performance *Work Every Day*

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In Tom McCarthy's novel *The Remainder*, an unnamed character is involved in a fateful event – the fall of an unidentified object that fell on his head from the sky and left him without a memory of the accident, yet with a considerable financial compensation. This enables him to harness people, objects, and events in a megalomaniac effort of creating the circumstances in which he could relive the specific, yet indefinable disposition caused by the incident and by memories of his previous life. The accident concealed by amnesia forces him to compulsively enact the scenes from a reality until the organizing principles of reliving the event acquire autonomy and begin generating a series of events that lose all contact with the initial trauma. From the reconstruction of a *deja-vu* that began with a crack in the wall, vague memories of an apartment and the smell of fried liver from the neighbour's, the enterprise will escalate to a bank robbery and an airplane flight into the unknown.

Traumatic compulsion, which is according to psychoanalytical orthodoxy compelled to repeat the pattern of the painful incident, thus confirming it as certain, void of contingency, and constitutive in terms of identity, here reaches a fictionalized solution in the economic power of a traumatized individual to mobilize the reality with the aim of producing a final event that is no longer harnessed in the inescapable necessity of repeating the pattern from the past, but is instead liberated for the absolute contingency of the newly

emerging future. Many things could be said about the fantasmatic meaning of this basic fiction in McCarthy's novel – for example, that it is economic power that enables the staged mobilization of the reality in order to break with the conditioning of the past (be it by interpreting the cure of a trauma as forgetting to forget with the help of consumerism as the true power of capital to produce the social reality, or as an ideological matrix that reproduces the structure of economic domination). However, for our purposes we will use the narrative procedure of gradual peeling of the rationality of action, suspension of the sufficient rationale (which is the manoeuvre of belief in the aleatority of economic power: richness can befall anyone, like an object out of the blue) which brings both the protagonist and the reader to the final contingency of happening – the series of reconstructions and repeating results in an event that no longer emerges from the original one.

Gradual suspension of the sufficient cause of staged actions and interpretability is the specific procedure used in the performance *Work Every Day* by choreographer and conceptual author Marjana Krajač. From the beginning and throughout the performance we follow the disparateness of various aspects of expression: between various dance expressions of the four performers, between dance movement and choreographic organization of the dance material, between shaping the stage, costumes, light or music, and the structure of stage action, between the proto-text

and performance, etc. Even though we recognize the relatively clear structure in the course of the show, that structure does not condition the processes and elements within the performance, remaining a merely formally given itinerary. All material processes and elements insist on (or rather desist from, but I will come back to that) their specific, mutually irreducible expressivity. The performance continuously undermines the subjection of one element to the logic of another, seeking neither to base them on one another nor to produce their structural consistency. The incoherence and inconsequentiality is established as the dominant principle of organization.

Theatre is a process of abstraction, of thinking away those material vehicles of the communication process that constitute the theatrical apparatus. Abstracting from the presence of material elements in the theatrical apparatus – the performers, the stage set, stage technology, performance space, sounds, etc. – is a precondition for presenting the absent scenes. The historical avant-garde and post-avant-garde can be viewed as a history of attempts at giving the stage primacy to and enable the play of that otherwise thought-away, yet present materiality of theatrical action.

Conventionally, however, the theatrical action of performance dictates the structure of meaning and gives the consistency of expression to processes, agents, infrastructures, and relations that carry it. The material events on stage – such as dislocating the stage set, turning on the spotlights, action on the proscenium, or addressing someone through the fourth wall – are to be read together from the theatrical action itself. We might say that the theatrical event of performance is nothing else than precisely the production of that inner coherence of material action on stage. The process of producing that inner coherence of meaning and the consistency of expression determines each and every one of these elements separately. Moreover, with the unifying effect of performance, certain elements within the material structure determine other expressive elements as to their meaning. The classical hierarchy of theatre presupposed the unity of action on stage and the primacy of the dramatic text over other elements. However, Brechtian epic theatre abolishes this hierarchy of expressive elements in the theatrical apparatus. It is precisely that logic of de-hie-

rarchization that is radicalized in *Work Every Day*, which extracts the material processes, agents, infrastructures, and relations from the relationship of subjection to the structure of meaning in the performance. The procedure evolves from the abovementioned irreducible diversity of dance expression to the absence of coherence with the choreographic organization of movement and further, to the penultimate act of comic choreography, which autonomizes the structure of attention of the spectator and the final act of lowering the ropes, in which the invisible material infrastructure of theatre eventually gains its autonomy.

Performance dominated by unfinished gestures, which seems only half-done and suspended in the process, programmatically thematizes work in its very title. Developing the possibilities of the related notions of work and productivity through performance, *Work Every Day* nevertheless insists on the contingency of their relatedness – throughout the show, there is a continuous possibility of work without creating a product or a product that does not result from work. The contingency of that relationship – between the work and the product of performance – is a procedure through which *Work Every Day* occupies the opposite pole from the theatre of assertion and explanation that what goes on in the society should be assertible in theatre. The theatre of assertion and explanation, which has been experiencing its second youth on the Croatian scene, especially in the form of propaganda theatre, supposes that it can positively present what the spectator knows and what the mass media perpetuate. However, the contingency of the material vehicles of theatrical action corrupts the certainties of knowledge that it enacts. The only certainty left is the certainty of uncertainty. Therefore, what we have here is the theatre of subtraction: what we have brought with us *may* not be so, and what we take home with us *may* not be so. It is a theatre that we leave deprived of what we have brought with us, a theatre that impoverishes us instead of striving to enrich us.

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