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A STUDY IN SOCIAL
DRAMATURGY

Toward a Trans individual Self

Ana Vujanović
Bojana Cvejić

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Part I

Introduction

If this book opens by repeating that we live in the age of the self and that in 2021 we are not yet past the (twentieth) "century of the self" (to borrow the title of Adam Curtis' well-known 2002 documentary), it is actually to state something else, the ulterior motive of our inquiry: the crisis of the social since 2000, followed by the massive protests and subsequent self-organized social movements since 2010.

This inquiry is contextually determined, although in many aspects it has a global reach. It is situated in the neoliberal capitalist and democratic Europe of the early 21st century, in a context in which the old borders between the communist East and the capitalist West have been blurred while new borders have emerged between the European Union member states and non-EU European countries as well as between Southern and Northern Europe, drawing new divisions, hierarchies, and biases. This is the social context we both live in and which is our concern. Our critical approach, which we have developed in a dialogical manner, is informed by both our life experiences and our critical theoretical stances, which draw on a combination of leftist, Marxist and feminist theory and activism.

Both of us were born in Belgrade in 1975, when it was the capital of Yugoslavia, a socialist but not an Eastern bloc country. Before moving to Berlin in 2011, Ana Vujanović had actively worked in various leftist collectives in Belgrade and in post-Yugoslav independent cultural-artistic scenes, collectives which, in the midst of the social transition toward neoliberal capitalism, tried to position art and culture as public goods, i.e., neither in the domain

of the state nor in that of the market. Her ties to the sociopolitical context of Belgrade and the post-Yugoslav cultural sphere are still constitutive of her research, cultural work and democratic-socialist political standpoints. These include her concern for and sensitivity toward the specificities of local contexts, marginal positions, and minoritarian voices within the globalized world. Bojana Cvejić took part as a student in the political protests and antiwar activity in Belgrade in the 1990s, experiences that proved formative for the political horizon of her writings. Having relocated to Brussels in the early 2000s, she continued to collaborate with art collectives, theorists, and politically independent performance-makers in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, based on the common heritage of non-aligned socialism. Thus, investigating collectivity has also driven her to set up experimental collaborative situations and discursive platforms in Western Europe, which have questioned the capacity and limits of freelance artists in the West to act structurally and to alter their modes of production.

The crisis of the social in the neoliberal and democratic Europe of the early 21st century started several decades ago. "There is no such thing as society" – the notorious phrase of the Conservative British prime minister Margaret Thatcher captured the onset of neoliberal economics in governance in 1987 already. Her statement echoed the earlier words of the Chicago school economist Friedrich Hayek, for whom "society" was a term deployed when people did not "quite know what they were talking about." In this view, society in the former Western bloc and then in today's globalized world is no longer mainly imagined as a whole, but as a living tapestry of individuals whose duty is to look after themselves. This means to look to themselves first before projecting their problems onto the abstraction or illusion that is society.[1]

Is this to say that society has been eclipsed in a manner comparable to the claims about the phantom public sphere from a century ago? In *Public Sphere by Performance* (2012), we were concerned with the crisis of the public sphere. Accounting for it through the analytical instrument of performance was a way of describing how the public sphere arises through the words, deeds, actions, movements, and bodies of a space of appearance (Hannah Arendt). In other words, we observed how the public sphere is formed in communication and meaningful interaction among

people living in a democratic society who are concerned with how to organize it. We observed the dynamics of the rise and decline of the public in European and, to a certain extent, North American democratic societies through the methods of the social drama and social choreography of public political life. Within the relationship between the self and the public, we also identified intensified expressions of individualist performances in art.

As a sequel to the prior investigation of the performance of the public, including the performance of the self in public, we are now taking the current fusion of the public and the private spheres as our starting point. Our intention is to research the extent to which the crisis of the social is correlated with the expansion of individualism and how a transindividual formation of the self can bring about different courses of action and a more socially driven imagination. First, we are going to look at the modes and techniques in which people perform themselves, thus constituting an individual rather than a collective notion and experience of the self. These modes will flesh out the strains of individualism characteristic of neoliberal society today. We will then unfold transindividual performing of the self as a process of collective and individual co-individuation in which we see a path for combating the intense individualism at the core of the social crisis. The struggle rests on concepts and arguments, analyzed cases, and imagined prefigurations, which make up our arsenal of discursive weapons in the pages of this book. To begin, we will elaborate the distinctive meanings of the initial claim, i.e., the crisis of the social.

Crisis of the social

They say the working class is dead, we're all consumers now
They say that we have moved ahead, we're all just people now
There's people doing 'frightfully well', there's others on the shelf
But never mind the second kind, this is the age of self

Robert Wyatt, "The Age of Self" (1985)

The crisis of the social in Western Europe commences with the collapse of class consciousness that Wyatt's song highlighted in the 1980s and the decline of the concomitant labor movements.

From a post-1989 perspective, in the words of Roberto Esposito, the "failure of all communisms" is entangled with the "misery of new individualisms" which now reign on a global scale.[2] What prevails in the European societies of today and beyond, globally, is an individualist rather than a collectivist understanding of the self. Why is it difficult or unpopularly utopian to imagine a society that would differ from the one reproducing neoliberal capitalism? The crisis of social imagination is due partly to the fall of European communist and socialist regimes after 1989 and partly to the global expansion of the free-market economy. Consequently, the ideal of social totality, which characterized political discourses of former Eastern bloc countries as well as the leftist political forces in the West, has been abandoned. It is seen as a residue of these 20th-century political agendas, which preferred a centralistic, sometimes totalitarian approach to social macro-organization above individual freedoms and rights.

Another variation on this theme – the demise of the social whole – has been expressed as a loss of the world. Long ago, Hannah Arendt premised the political life of the public in democracy on holding a world in common. Paraphrasing Heraclitus, she wrote that "the world is one and common to those who are awake, but … everybody who is asleep turns away to his own."[3] Alienation from the world, for Arendt, implied the withering of "common sense," the sense that gauges the reality of having the world in common. Common sense has been superseded by an inner sense of sharing the same structure of mind and faculty of reasoning (for Arendt[4]) rather than partaking in the world as the third thing that we produce in common and that envelops our togetherness.

Half a century later, Alain Badiou argued in a French daily that "we live in one world."[5] This maxim was voiced in a covert polemic against the liberal pragmatist pluralism of partial concerns and identitarian communities, or a perspectival logic that constantly redivides, repartitions, and miscounts the population according to new fault lines. This endless atomization has penetrated the very language in which individuals express themselves in the first person singular, carefully guarded by emphatic appositions ('for my part,' 'in my view,' 'as far as I'm concerned').

There is a difference between a socially and politically committed speech in the first person and the expression of the self that withdraws into the private sphere with political indifference. In the former, saying 'I' indicates a specifically different, often minoritarian position of critique and emancipation in which a person establishes themself as a social subject by showing how their personal life is politically and socially structured – as in the feminist stance of 'the personal is political,' or the other comparable stances of identitarian difference with regard to race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, ability, etc. By contrast, in the latter, 'I' flags complacent individualism in which the self is defended as private property. Thus, this intimate complacent self reduces its expression to an opinion of a liberal 'I'. 'We' becomes a sum of all purportedly equal selves in a relativist sense, so 'we' do not envisage a common world. In the last instance, this relativist posture of singularity amounts to the withdrawal from partaking in imagining the whole. 'As far as I'm concerned, … don't count on me.' The tolerance of difference – undoubtedly, a prerequisite for coexistence – becomes repressive when the function of saying 'we' in the context of a social vision has been debilitated.

Ruminating on society's decline as a crisis of social imagination, the loss of any long-term perspective impedes a vision of a common world. Here we have a temporal problem: the imagination is invested in a future. But the bitter message of all neoliberal reforms today is: 'There is no future.' The social mood of 'no future' grows against the background of neoliberalism and its hegemonic conception and experience of time in which only the present is 'real.'[6] Presentism prevails in current capitalism, which operates with volatility and flexibility in 'the instant,' against the ticking clock of finance. It seems that if the present is to pass favorably, it must hijack the near future, i.e., predict it and control it moment by moment. Bereft of living in the present, our time is accelerated to a near future without the distance that is necessary to imagine it otherwise. This hinders the fantasies of a society drastically different from the capitalist democracy regarded as the best possible world.[7]

One way to explain how the illusion that there are no alternatives to neoliberal capitalism is sustained is to look into individualism as it appears in the fusion of the private and public spheres.

Preoccupation with oneself is thereby foregrounded as a currency of freedom. The personal has come to stand for private-as-public, indicating that private interests should be understood as inherently political. The concern with the self is cloaked on a singular level in an etho-poetics of existence which obfuscates the political and social reasons to think and act collectively. Moreover, its currency is fueled by positing the human as a potential to become, have, and appear as a unique individual. If we drop it here, in the opening pages of this book and without any further elaboration, potential is a risky term. It points to a far more widespread usage that refers to the individual self, to human potential as a positive inner resource that individuals 'tap into' in order to actualize themselves, rather than to the preindividual nature of collective being. Aside from indicating a positive overflow of possibilities, potential signifies the uncertain and unknown realm in which something hasn't (yet) been individuated. Why is the claim of potential for individual's self-actualization as a unique and original person so much more familiar than regarding potential as a preindividual and transindividual common?

Searching for new prospects of the social

Although the above diagnosis suggests that the crisis of the social ended in a stalemate, the last decade has seen mass revolts against austerity measures marking the decay of social welfare and state-provided social services. The massive public protests in Europe and beyond, since 2010, have spawned wider social movements that seek to restore social justice either by self-organizing social welfare in lieu of the withering welfare state (e.g. the Solidarity movement in Greece) and a bottom-up political life outside mainstream representative political institutions (e.g. the Municipalist movement in Spain), or by seizing the means of political power (e.g. 15-M, Podemos, etc.).

Meanwhile, social activism persists in 'prefigurative practices' in a minor key. In the aftermath of the protests in 2011 and 2012 that perform the political will of the people in public in a well-known major key, new collectivities and forms of self-organization continue their work in the often less visible zones between

the public and the private: for instance, social organizations and counter-institutional building that imagine, practice, and symbolize the social relations that they seek to instill in society at large. The main objective of the politics of prefiguration is to prefigure the future of social change right now, not in a distant future.

Prefiguration is said to be exemplary.[8] In the symbolic sense, it imagines and enacts alternative social structures in small-scale experiments within a community. These can be enclosed in their own practice and isolated from the society in which they seek to effectuate 'deep change' while simultaneously being dependent on that society in ways they may be theoretically blind to. Prefiguration is said to be actual when it expands beyond locality through the insistence on the distribution of the new collective practices born out of collective experimentation. This brings prefiguration closer to the goal of building alternative or counter-institutions, where social change wouldn't only be anticipated or indicated, but partly actualized. In these practices, we recognize the opportunity of a transindividual collective transformation of the society in crisis, which we extensively discuss in this book (Part III).

Crisis here could indicate, in the etymological sense of *krisis*, a phase of passage between life and death. In the present moment, half the neoliberal capitalist world is embroiled in riots against social inequality and the unsustainaibility of life, on the one hand, *and* in the flux of immigrants to Europe, on the other hand, as if the two were sadly lumped together by a similar populist rancor. In addition, we are writing these lines in the time of the COVID-19 crisis, which has suspended the global temporality. That social dramaturgy of the virus has given us time to observe existing geopolitical inequalities, disparities, and hierarchies at work, while making a call for global justice pressing. Therefore, the COVID-19 global outbreak is not only an indicator of the limits and delusions of globalization, but also an opportunity for transindividual social transformations on a number of micro- and macroscales.

The moment of social unrest is propitious for reconfiguring the social – and the aim of this book is to seize the semantic means of its reconfiguration. In other words, we seek to devise concepts and analytical tools for reimagining the social *beyond* the horizon of reigning individualisms that we will carefully decoct here. Within the conceptual framework that we intend to introduce,

transindividuation is key. The choice for the concepts of individuation, with their preindividual and transindividual dimensions – which originally stem from the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, but are revamped through an encounter with Marx's writings on alienation (cross-read by Bernard Stiegler, Paolo Virno, Jason Read, etc.) – begs the following question: What is so novel, distinctive and relevant about basing both individuality and collectivity upon transindividuation, a term that has been resuscitated 50 years after it was coined? Didn't the discourse on community in the 1980s and 1990s already address similar problems? For starters, let's point out some differences from our conceptual precursors.

From community to transindividuation

In 1983 an issue of the left-wing literary magazine *Aléa* revived the notion of community, registering its exhaustion in the 15-year period after May 68.[9] With the term "inoperative community" (*communauté désoeuvrée*), also translated as "unworking community," Jean-Luc Nancy attempted to break from the clinch of declining communism and rising individualism in which community was doubly lost. He furthered his theses in the book *La Communauté désœuvrée* (*The Inoperative Community*, 1986).[10] His political concerns are, on the one hand, a totalitarian nostalgia for a closed, pure, and harmonious community, which is a seed of every fascism and Nazism, and, on the other hand, an individualist society, formed as a sum of separate individuals. Nancy's "unworking" community is thus an anti-fascist project, a political and philosophical quest for an open community of individuals that is nothing more than an ongoing encounter.

In a close dialogue between Nancy and Maurice Blanchot, and later in the theories of Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, the work of the community was to supplant the anonymous yet homogenizing notion of society, and to propose instead a being-together as a being-in-common while irreducibly different, even singular. The common is here understood as either a common thing (commons) or a *munus* (duty, service, and gift), a lack around which the members of a community engage. In either

case, instead of a communal substance, a relational ontology is at work here, predicated on the incompleteness of the self, of singular beings who incline toward the other due to their own insufficiency. Hence, being-with-one-another emptied the common of unity, substance, and essence, conditions upon which totalitarian, religious, and identitarian communities are founded. Echoing May 68, a "feast of explosive communication" in which people mixed regardless of "class, age, sex or culture," community was asserted as an ungraspable event, an effervescence that happens and that remains intangible in communication and contact. The 'taking-place' of contagion – the touching of separate, yet not atomized individuals, at once singular and plural – became the spatial and somewhat vague figure of community.[11]

We are aware of the advantages that communities based on identities have brought since the 1960s to the lives of many marginalized, minoritarian or excluded members of our society as safe places for gathering, as alternative families and support groups. Hence, we do not contest their raison d'être and value on a microsocial scale. However, from the perspective of the crisis of the social, there are several reasons why the concept of community as an alternative to society will not be an alternative we advocate in this book. Several decades of communitarianism have partitioned society into communities based on alterity, or into communities that are often warred against or threatened with isolation and marginalization. Structurally speaking, the community practiced upon the identity of its members is confined by the particular interests this group of people must defend in the face of other communities, the interests also blurring the public and the private spheres, and substituting the ethical for the political rationale.

Although communitarianism presents a critical alternative to liberalism and individualism, society as a means for living in and sharing a common world among the different and the unequal often disappears from the horizon of a community. This common world is defined by, among other things, the conditions of work and the political activity that makes up the public life of society's subjects.[12] Now that work dominates our lives without, however, a guaranteed common good, it is a condition which few are spared, although the majority (99 percent) is not equally hurt by it. Identitarian differences across communities matter here as they play a role "intersec-

tionally" in differentiating the position of, for example, a black working-class woman from a white member of the same class, as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins explained.[13] Precarity and access to resources of care that make lives sustainable are produced differentially and distributed unequally according to identities, which is an intrinsic failure of the European welfare capitalist democracies of the 20th and 21st centuries.

That said, our goal here is to pursue political solidarity that inspires alliance across the lines of color, gender, and other identitarian parameters. Thus, we will explore instances of political solidarity that aspires beyond the social solidarity based on kinships and identitarian resemblances (Sally Scholz), as political solidarity seizes power to unite dissimilar subjects in transindividual processes of emancipation. Searching for the socially and politically transformative potential of the common in the spheres of work, production and political activity runs the risk of universalizing the transindividual. Our challenge will be to probe how capacious, albeit distinctive transindividuality can be, as it operates with singularities without sublating them.

Work entails cooperation on the basis of what the human species has in common: the capacity to work, imagine, and produce, or what after Marx has been referred to as general intellect. Work also includes sharing conditions of technology, language, and modes of production. When rendered active and acknowledged, it is collaboration that puts the common into practice, which in turn regenerates what we have in common. In the wake of rampant privatization, in which being and having are short-circuited through acquisition, it is critical to claim that the common is given *and* at the same time produced in being-together. This conundrum between work, cooperation, and privatization of preindividual common conditions will be the focus of our inquiry.

The common we refer to in Part III of this book is neither positive and substantial (as in the concept of shared resources, the commons, or, in a different way, in totalitarian conceptions of community), nor negative and split (as in the adjectives in the discourse of the 1980s and 1990s: 'inoperative,' 'unavowable,' 'confronted,' 'disavowed,' or a community kept together by *munus*). Rather, it is at once potential and, to use Simondon's notion, preindividual, which in Virno's reading bears the social and historical content of

the heritage of humans: language, habits, and social relations of production. The preindividual reservoir of historico-natural capacities is actualized in singular instances and renewed when these singularities bring the share of their indeterminate nature together in a collective process of individuation. Hence, individuation is a process in which the individual, the milieu, and the collective are involved alike. This gives us one more reason to invest our political imagination in transindividuation: its process is open-ended and unfinished, and thanks to a sense of the future as a surge of unactualized potential harbored in individuals, collective structuration is possible without ideological unity or identified common.

Individuation as a metaphysical concept runs across a broad spectrum of the living and inanimate matter; however, we will focus here on individuation in the register of political and social ontology, i.e., the cases in which collectivity is a facet of social transindividuation and extends from social affects and imagination to political self-organization. Instead of pondering how the passage from one to many occurs, individuation permits us to immediately trace a bidimensional process in which both individual persons and the collectivities they form are altered. Another meaning of the crisis of the social has brought about a perfect slogan of such a process of transindividuation: 'No one will be left alone in the crisis.' In response to the dissolution of the common good, we have witnessed municipal and solidarity movements rise in Southern Europe and beyond. Whether these mobilizations strive after spatial justice or civil-public partnerships or other forms of public good now considered as common good, they all attempt to resolve the problem: What can I do insofar as I am not alone? How much potential do *we* have to go beyond our individual *selves*?

Structuring the terms of *performing* the self

The 1970s quest for the self through psychotherapy and bodily practices has been characterized as *narcissistic* self-observation.[14] Narcissism is typically understood in psychology as self-absorption and an idealized sense of self, caused by parental failure to provide a mirroring that encourages a more realistic image of the

self. As a pathology it therefore leads to a need for admiration and furthermore to the dependence of the subjects on others to validate their self-esteem. Our epoch, with its neoliberal demand to 'perform, or else,' could be seen as an ideal terrain for such behavior. Already in the legacy of performance studies, performing in the everyday supposes the presence of others and self-consciousness in 'showing doing.' However, a peculiar characteristic of performing the self in the early 21st century, one which we will explore in this book, is the lack of that social dimension. Instead, neoliberalism endlessly proliferates means of atomizing what that self could be and has congealed numerous techniques of the self without the individual seeking approval from a public.

If, in the 1970s, isolation of the self was tied up with a retreat from politics into communities of a particular interest, today the private-public game in which the self is performed doesn't need the others, not even in the form of community. The individualizing subjects have internalized the control of their *Leistung*, their performance as achievers. So, before we lay out transindividuation as an alternative to individualism, our inquiry explores the following questions (Part II): What is so distinctive about performing the self in the 21st century? How does performance provide a method suited to a description and an analysis of how individuals relate to themselves *today*? What is performance in performing the self if it is not an act, an activity, a doing? If to perform the self describes how individuals nowadays relate to themselves in everyday life, the truth games and techniques by which they practice and understand the self of their person, then this implies more verbs that might have to be distinguished from it.

Reading Richard Schechner's famous thesis about performing as showing doing together with Arendt's notion of the public as a space of appearance provided a basis for our earlier claim – in *Public Sphere by Performance* – that the public is constituted in performance. However, the individualist performing of the self entails appearance in a mixed public-private realm, in the solitude of sitting in front of a computer screen and attending education via Zoom, in contact with an imaginary community of other Internet interlocutors that distances the individual from the gaze of the public and from confrontation with the public that approves or disapproves their being or action.

When a freelance dancer or a Wall Street banker performs themself at work, they appear first and foremost to themself, managing their potential and its proofs for themself and *monitoring* their achievement. Is work then the domain of life in which performance of the self follows the duty of fulfillment of the self via a project, in what seems to reverse the Protestant fulfillment of duty yet doesn't relinquish its ethos? What is produced here exceeds the designated product, since it is supposed to restore to the individual its capacities regenerated and repotentialized. In that sense, individualist performance involves a self-creative, autopoietic formation of the self. This relation will be studied under *the model of autopoiesis* (Part II, chapter 1).

If one is self-produced, then in individualist neoliberal capitalism this is a matter of acquiring and *having* individuality more than just being in a process of individuation like everyone else and everything else. It is a quest of self-ownership, possessing one's individual capacities, creativity as well as material and immaterial assets independently of the others. How one becomes oneself exactly by supposedly having oneself will be accounted for by *possessive individualism* (Part II, Chapter 2).

As we will recount in the brief genealogy of individualism from antiquity to modern philosophy after Descartes, the philosophical strand puts forward the pursuit of truth, where one's subjectivity is formed through the imperative to *know thyself*, the first time as a humble assumption of one's restricted place in this world (in the Hellenistic period), the second time as a Cartesian non-ascetic subject of self-knowledge. Our task will be to explore the truth-games that form the grounds for performing the self today. Why this kind of performing the self now merits the name of *aesthetic individualism* (Part II, Chapter 3) lies in the shift of bias from self-consciousness to self-affection as the sensorial and affective nature of embodiment takes prevalence. In vulgar parlance, one is supposed to *feel* and *experience* the truth about oneself in one's body, as embodiment is supposed to reveal what words cannot say. Hence a proliferation of somatic techniques and bodywork in a commercial mainstream that represent contemporary practice of the self in its most experimental facets, with dance and performance as the source of the techniques and bodywork.

The continuous temporality of performing draws here directly on the performing arts, on rehearsal and repetition to instill and improve the self. Summarized in a diagram, performing the self entails actions and activities captured in the following verbs:

Performing the self

§ Appearing, showing doing, monitoring
Leistung (*achievement*)
§ Being, becoming / acquiring, having
possessive individualism
§ Producing, creating, practicing
autopoiesis
§ Knowing/pursuit of truth
philosophical individualism
§ Sensing and feeling, embodiment and rehearsal
aesthetic individualism

Appear, show, prove, monitor, and achieve. Produce, acquire, and have in order to become. Know, sense, perceive, embody, and feel. Repeat and rehearse, instill and improve.

The only verb we have omitted from this exhaustive list concerns the political and more strictly public function of performance – perform as in to act, intervene, and put one's own deeds and words into the common. As a historical and historic example of such a function of performance, we wish to mention Rosa Parks' act of resisting the bus segregation of people of color in the US. It took place in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. At first, it was just an individual act by a person of color, who refused to cede her seat to a white passenger. Soon after, the discourse of black activism transformed it into an intelligible performative, a clear act of public defiance which led to the massive Montgomery bus boycott. Parks' act not only transindividuated the social group she belonged to, but also transformed the society in a performatively disruptive way. At that point, performing of the self transcends the individualistic horizon and becomes transindividual, and with this we will conclude the third part of our inquiry.

Social dramaturgy as a method

This book continues the research project we started in 2009, "Performance and the Public," which resulted in the above *Public Sphere by Performance* (2012) and the documentary essay film *Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body* (2013), directed by Marta Popivoda, with whom we shared the previous and, to an extent, current research project. As in the earlier study of public life, we here further investigate the analytical and imaginative powers of *social dramaturgy*. The term itself is not new, and in the field of performance studies it was used by Victor Turner in his analysis of social drama. While Turner focused on exceptional social moments as cases of social drama, when he wrote about a social process as a temporal category he accounted for social dramaturgy rather than social drama.

Similarly, yet without an interest in performance, Bernard Stiegler, the philosopher whose analysis of transindividuation we will present in this book, uses the term social dramaturgy to elucidate the development of the transmission of collective memory over time, whereby complex economic and political factors are entangled in shaping certain mnemotechnics. These cases are exemplary, and apart from stressing the constellation of various elements in and over time, social dramaturgy is approached in both of them as a phenomenon. However, our usage of 'social dramaturgy' refers to a method of critically observing social phenomena with the means of performance beyond the art discipline. This could be seen as a development of Richard Schechner's proposition to think performance not only as a "broad spectrum" of cultural-artistic phenomena, but also "as a means of understanding historical, social and cultural processes."[15] The methodological approach in this endeavor entails rerouting knowledge of the performing arts – their poietic principles, genres and forms, as well as ideology – toward the social life of individuals and today's practice of the self.

In our study of the public sphere, we developed a hybrid framework of two complementary models arising from an intersection between performance studies and social sciences. While social choreography shows how social order is aesthetically produced, instilled, and rehearsed through a material practice of aes-

thetic ideology, social drama addresses the situation in which social order collapses in conflict and goes through dramatic stages to constitute a new order or restore the old one. These stages constitute what we adopt from Turner's method as social dramaturgy. Our analyses sought to test and revamp the concepts adopted from Andrew Hewitt (social choreography) and Victor Turner (social drama and social dramaturgy) in an encounter with the material of performances of the state, masses, or special groups from the context of the former Yugoslavia and contemporary European neoliberal society. Thus, we inscribed our research in the long tradition of social and anthropological critical analysis in the 20th century (represented by Clifford Geertz's "deep play," Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus," Erving Goffman's "social role," Richard Sennett's "man as actor," Foucault's "technologies of the self," and Butler's "performing identity").

The intention here to revive social dramaturgy is to understand the society we live in through discourses of performing arts without swapping the artistic field for sociopolitical activism. Hence, social dramaturgy is to a large extent motivated politically. It comes from a challenge we set for ourselves: What can we do as living people, as subjects of our society? Rather than seek action *aside from* our artistic and theoretical work, we ask: What can we do with what we hold in our hands, which is knowledge and practice in the field of performance and of dramaturgy in particular?

There are several problems, doubts, and obstacles to such an undertaking.[16] One is easy metaphors, such as *theatrum mundi*, which advocates a direct and smooth transition of the knowledge, techniques, and experiences between the performance and other spheres of society. Although philosophically interesting, this approach is of little methodological use since the process it refers to is by definition socially conditioned and must always be contextualized. The second problem is epistemological: the reader might suspect that social dramaturgy treats art by way of symptomatology, namely, that art can only reflect social processes. A different claim is at stake here. Instead of only mirroring, art too is involved in showing, producing, and rehearsing a social order on an aesthetic basis. For example, art takes part in fostering an individualist concern with, and practice of, oneself, like other technologies of the self and truth games that do not originate in

art. Therefore, it is important to pinpoint the difference between art merely reflecting and art instilling, rehearsing, and producing a social order through an aesthetic ideology.

Another, somewhat different misunderstanding about the method of social dramaturgy is the instrumentalization of art in other fields, such as politics and the cultural and creative industries. Social dramaturgy is conceived as a means of political campaigning and business training (the latter is discussed as "artification" in the chapter on aesthetic individualism). The main fault of such a view is that only those segments of performance and dramaturgy that meet the efficiency criterion are foregrounded, while knowledge and skills are decontextualized and relegated to 'know-how.'

The instrumentalization of art is related to one more problem: art's applicability in resolving social problems and mending social wounds. An example of art's 'social application' is 'community art.' Although we acknowledge that artistic practice may offer provisional solutions to social issues on a micro-scale and short-term basis, we do not see it as a part of our social dramaturgy method. Speaking empirically yet in general terms, art can hardly compete with several other social practices and services that are supposed to provide social benefits in terms of inclusion, reconciliation, cohesion, and so forth, as well as in terms of cognitively and symbolically boosting the economy. Thus, to avoid any misunderstanding about art's social usefulness in neoliberal cultural policies today, we put forward three distinctive theses upon which social dramaturgy as method is grounded.

First, an aesthetic continuum is presupposed in performance, ranging from the everyday conscious and unconscious experience to 'the aesthetic' in the narrower sense as an artistic and socially endorsed framing of the sensorial. For example, although it fulfills many functions that differ from one context to another, artistic practice is coextensive with many other cases of *autopoiesis* in everyday life. These include performing as producing oneself in work, social media, and extreme sports, to mention a few distinct spheres of human activity. A common rhythm of investment in oneself pervades these seemingly disparate activities. Through a continuous spectrum, a process of self-production, self-preservation, and survival under the rhetorical appeal to creativity is observed.

The second thesis concerns art as a privileged site of intensification in the two-sided articulation of the same problematic. At first, this assumption could be confused with a broader trend of aestheticizing one's life after the aesthetic ideal of art, or, simply, making an artwork out of one's life. Instead, our task will be to unveil those artistic forms that provide *techné* for aestheticizing an individualist experience of oneself. Hence, the genre of dancing solo and somatic techniques highlight some ethopoetic principles of the self, such as auto-affection, territorialization, and self-enhancement. Found in art or comparable with the experience of a work of art, aesthetic experience offers material support for intensity expressed in an intensified sense of personality ('to be intensely what one is') or in physical proof of one's personal value in vitality or exhaustion.

Therefore, our third thesis: we consider art as a perfect place for new social imaginations to emerge. The temporality of this condition is not tied to a present or a past, but to a sense of futurity. At bottom, in art, every single work or project has the potential to project one possible world. If every work of art must nowadays implicitly answer the question 'What is art?' (i.e., what it proposes as the concept of art), then an image of society can be derived indirectly from that same work of art. This is not just a matter of acknowledging the political aspect of every artwork. It also means that we must make an effort of the imagination as viewers of art. We must think or imagine what kind of society this artwork recommends (as if it were invited to do that), how it conceives of its social and aesthetic ideals, how it organizes itself structurally, what its modes of perception and action are, its actors and beneficiaries, and most importantly, where applicable, how its actors perform themselves, alone and together. This could be a test for every work of art, especially if it is a performance, a mental exercise: What would society be like *after* this choreography, film, exhibition, and so forth?[17]

Hence, we turn to a few select performances on the stage in which we can glimpse transindividuation in lieu of individualism. Or we observe the social dramaturgy of a film in which the preindividual and transindividual aspects are dramatically staked out. In our analysis, these works of art can be said to *prefigure*, imagine, and symbolize another set of social relations, ones which might be

at odds with the hyperindividualist order of the day. Theorists of prefiguration have recourse to performativity to account for "collective experimentation."[18] In their understanding, performance is synonymous with a collective action *here-and-now*. It is also preoccupied with the 'how' and 'what' that the mobilization is for.[19] The *prefiguration* thesis will draw our attention to contemporary social movements that exemplify the imaginal power to extend the process beyond the present through demonstration, a kind of showing by doing of another social imagination.

Speaking about prefiguration, we wish to mention here that throughout book we use the third person pronoun 'they' and related gender-neutral pronouns (like 'them' and 'themself') to designate nouns such as 'subject', 'person', 'individual', etc. Although with the term 'transindividual' we don't refer exclusively or predominantly to transgender or gender queer people, we think that if a book about transindividuation doesn't do anything for trans people, it doesn't do anything at all. Therefore, we use this book as a prefigurative language practice for us and our readers to contribute to a more inclusive and less hurtful discourse of academic writing.

Lastly, we wish to unravel what is at the core of our method in relation to the intellectual context from which we ourselves are speaking. 'We' pursues the joint authorship of *Public Sphere by Performance* into *Toward a Transindividual Self: A Study in Social Dramaturgy*. We, the authors of this book, are both practicing dramaturges and theorists. Sometimes we sit inside a creation process, accepting the delightful or disagreeable complicity of such an endeavor; at other times, like now, we step outside performance-making in order to see more clearly what performance can contribute to this world in turmoil beyond (minding) its own business. Perhaps this maneuver betrays art and artists, who, to survive, must maintain art's exclusivity with respect to the social and must resist instrumentalization.

At the same time, the research from which this writing follows has not found a home in academia. If it doesn't belong to performance studies or cultural studies *stricto sensu*, because it combines tools and insights from practical dramaturgy, social science, critical theory, and philosophy, this book vies for theoretical activism, falling in the gap between scholarship, art practice, and political action. Such a position is supported by the material conditions

for this writing we would like to disclose here: intermittency, slyly observing the art world from the side, rejoicing in work during brief periods of artistic-like residencies, and workshops in which we share our theses and invite challenges from artists. Thus, we wish to take the opportunity to thank a few partners who have supported this project: Tom Engels of SARMA, Brussels (the only organization that provided some funding for our initial research and writing); Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Akademie der Künste der Welt in Cologne, and Johan Forsman for Skogen in Gothenburg, where we spent brief periods of residency; Marijana Cvetković of Station: Service for Contemporary Dance in Belgrade, Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulakovski of Lokomotiva and Iva Sveshtarova of the Brain Store Project for contributing funds for copyediting; Florian Schneider of the Trondheim Academy of Art which provided funding for our film research; and Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KhiO) for contributing to the production of this book in its last phase. A special thanks to Snelle Hall for her persistance in bringing this book to publication.

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Part I

Political Genealogy of the Self