

**Tomislav Medak, BADco.**

## **Spacelessness, Tropes and Topologies – Spatial Problems in BADco.'s Work**

Over the course of seven years and over a dozen performances that BADco. has created since its beginnings, the issues of space and spacelessness have been recurrent concerns – either as concerns that have conditioned our work or concerns that were the subject-matter of that work. However, insistence on developing internal complexities of movement and performance, which was always at the heart of BADco.'s methodology, didn't provide much opportunity to treat the space as a separate problem, but rather a plane where different levels of conditioning and creation had to compete for the same room for expression. So, let us begin from what constitutes those different levels of conditioning.

### **Conditions of Spacelessness**

Starting from the immediate fact that BADco. lacks its own work spaces, except for intermittent collaborations with the Zagreb-based theatre house &TD on productions of “Man.Chair” (2000), “Diderot's Nephew, Or Blood Is Thicker Than Water” (2001) or “Memories Are Made of This...” (2006), the group mostly shared the precarious destiny of local non-institutional theatre and dance scene. Between attempts to squeeze into overfilled schedules of theatre houses, transitory occupations of abandoned industrial sites, performances at clubbing or exhibition venues, opportunities to hold performances at home come along rarely. What's more, the opportunity to perform at home oftentimes comes at a price of having to rent the theatre venue and invest own effort to get the space ready for performance – from finding the technical equipment to cleaning the floors. The grim situation of having to invest into home performances what needs to be earned some place else is reflected in the disbalance how many opportunities more demanding performances get to be presented in Croatia and how many opportunities abroad – for instance, our performance “Deleted Messages” was performed a mere five times in Croatia and over twenty times abroad.

And yet, while opportunities to perform, depending though on individual agility, available resources and selection preferences of rare festivals, do come along every once in a while, for non-institutional actors spatial limitations prove to be far more aggravating once we turn our view from availability of performing venues to availability of production space. Without an entitlement to rehearsal slots in theatre houses, without a dance centre, without a centre for independent culture, it is left to struggle working in inadequate spaces, to create without spatial and technical conditions it will employ in performances, to rely on its spaceless imagination. For example, BADco. has enjoyed the benefit of hospitality of Center for Culture Novi Zagreb, where it has access to no more than a small, technically ill-equipped rehearsal space without a marley dance floor, although it never performs in spaces anywhere similar to that one.

With the non-institutional context of our work, lacking a production space and a performance venue of our own, our performances come to rely on a kind of performative free fall into the actual space, which produces conditionings of conceptual kind: experimentation tends to be spatially agnostic, reduced to spatial extensions needed for expression, relations between actors and spatial relations, and rarely having an opportunity to experiment with the performativity of particular spaces. To simplify, performers who are not institutionally tied down to the performativity of a particular space, creators whose independence from the infrastructure sets them free for mobility, authors whose spatial concepts are not defined by the identity of a particular venue, either have the option to create performances for

the geometry of generic space or the option to create performances for the site-specific locality. The performances of BADco. are mostly set within the generic space, while some are even intent on exacerbating the generic aspect of space, for example by erasing the functional separation of respective positions of audience and performers in space as is the case of “Deleted Messages” (2004) or by recombining spaces with different theatrical functions as is the case of “Memories Are Made of This...”.

## **Spaces and Tropes**

The central feature of generic performative spaces is their overcoding by the symbolic space of subject-matter. The materiality of performing space, although always remaining present, retreats into the invisible functional background of symbolization – into the metaphoric space of stage. Accordingly, a canonical post-conventional strategy in performing arts would be to intervene with materiality into the symbolization in order to prevent it from forming a complete illusion.

The space in BADco.'s work is frequently marked by the dialectics of materiality and symbolization. In “Ribcage” (2003), for instance, the walk of performers along the circumference of the performative space stands in for the frequently depicted prison walk providing the inmates with an opportunity to talk to each other, but at the same time this walk functions as an actual form for performers to step out of the plot and discuss the performance as it unfolds. In “FleshDance” (2004) the dance is pushed into the seam between the floor and the wall and performed as if the gravity was pulling down to both planes, allowing it thus to revisit the specific dimensionality of space in the paintings of Francis Bacon, but also allowing it to produce a very specific form of dance movement. “Deleted Messages” emulates the space of a quarantine, while at the same time uses the model of contagion as organizational principle for the unfolding of performance.

## **Spaces and Topologies**

However, there's another level to the relationality between metaphors and space where the organizational principle of performance coincides with the organizational principles observable in the world outside of the performance – where a topos in the performance is a structure of the world beyond the confines of performance.

In “Deleted Messages” again the space is organized so as to function as a space of soft control, indicated by white cloth covering the rough concrete floor and thin, almost invisible aluminum poles suspended in space. The rules how to move around and behave inside the micro-world of performance are not made clear, but only so slightly indicated. The lack of clear rules, in turn, forces the audience subjectivate in accordance with their own projection of other subject's expectations, and whatever the rule they chose it is this very projection of other subject's expectation that locks them in into the performance's program.

It is through this soft subjectivation by the power of own choice driven by the projection of controlling other – the choice that leaves no choice other than what is programmed in advance – that subjects are formed and informed in today's age of commodified desire.

This completes the overview of three levels of conditioning and productivity that are juxtaposed in the work of BADco.: spacelessness and spatial mobility, topical overcoding of performative space and

material incursions, topological homology between organizational principles of performative space and organizational principles of the world beyond the performative space.

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