

Milena Bogavac

Diary of Self-organization

Work of the Belgrade fraction of the group Terms (informally known as the 'crossword puzzle group') began when Bojan Djordjev, after the summer school in Ohrid, e-mailed us a list containing more than seven hundred different terms, associated with contemporary art and contemporary society in general. Bojan, with his collaborators, had already compiled this list at some other workshop... The list was altogether unsystematic, but for all of us in the group it provided an initial inspiration. Confronted with hundreds of randomly listed terms, we opened ourselves to reflection on the concepts they termed...

We set the first meeting, with a plan to show up with individual lists of dozen terms each of us would be interested in. We did not perceive our task in the same way: some members of the group made a selection of terms from Bojan's list, while the others compiled their own, new lists of words and corresponding terms. At this meeting we agreed to compile more systematic lists for the next one. We still did not try to classify the terms according to thematic sections, but according to their usage.

This is how the initial 'terminology categories' were conceived:

- 1) Familiar Terms; 2) Terms repeating – and I don't know what they mean; 3) Suspicious Terms; 4) Commonplace stuff; 5) Terms I use most frequently; 6) Terms without an adequate translation; 7) Neologisms; 8) "Personal Terms".

Our next encounter was an opportunity to discuss the terms included in our lists. This meeting was useful, because we tried together to clarify the terms unfamiliar or suspicious to some of the group's members... Likewise, we expanded our lists, discussing some new

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terms relating to the previously listed words...We managed to find out adequate translations for several terms, or at least agree on the reasons of impossibility of finding respective translations. During one of the first meetings we got an idea to mount a large piece of nylon on the wall, and draw a 'map' of all the terms we wanted to explore... Thus, the third meeting ended with distribution of identical pieces of paper and an agreement to write each term on one of them. The next meeting was marked by the 'official' mounting of the nylon on the wall.

The group's members stuck upon it pieces of paper containing the terms, regardless of their sequence and systematization. The nylon sheet with various words stuck upon it became a display panel for a collective game of self-education, of classifying terms into different thematic blocks. Those were not determined in advance.

We tried to discover them, disclosing the relations among the terms on the nylon sheet. Systematization occurred gradually. To begin with, we decided to stick the pieces of paper with same terms on top of each other. Thus we could see which terms occurred most frequently. Around the most frequent terms, we began to stick the corresponding ones...The first section that stood out referred to the professional jargon of practical work in theatre, and concerning the fact that this jargon was learnt with Belgrade's Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU), this group was termed FDU... This side of the nylon gradually began to accumulate terms with common references to traditional and traditionalist forms pertaining to performing arts. Genres, movements, historical periods, and titles of various acting exercises all ended up there. This group occupied the extreme right side of the nylon. In the middle, we began to arrange the terms directly derived from the language of new technologies. Computer commands, labels, derived terms and 'serbisms' came to the fore, forming an independent thematic section: NEW TECHNOLOGIES... Not far from the NEW TECHNOLOGIES terms related to pop culture began to regroup on the nylon, featuring as a sub-category assorted jargon expressions for particular phenomena in the contemporary society...

This category included names of pop stars, as well as familiar advertising slogans ("Maybe she's born with it")...This group was labeled as POP...



Having defined the initial thematic frameworks, we 'cleaned' the mess on the nylon: now the terms that remained outside those thematic sections became more visible. We noticed that many of the terms related to the human body and corporeality, being of medical provenience. Thus death, therapy, cyborg, idiot, madness and orgasm entered the same group with the notions of post-human, bare life, objectification, or monster... This group was termed BODY AND MEDICINE... Philosophical terms, or terms conceived in various strands of theory were grouped in the category RELATION TO REALITY: WRITING AND READING. This, fairly serious category, became the 'common denominator' of Foucault's and Baudrillard's terminology, additionally comprising the words like: process, procedure, method, contemporary, or relation.

In the vicinity of this category, another one crystallized, comprising terms related to the question of authorship. Auto-poetics, auto-fiction, original, and authentic were some of the key concepts in this thematic section.

We grouped the techniques and procedures applied by the artists into a separate category. The rest of the terms were classified in two groups, POLITICS and MARKET, and we promptly noted that many of those terms may fall into both of them. As a quite distinct thematic section, often used PREFIXES listed by Katarina Popović emerged, as well as FATIGUES from occurrences, phenomena, and norms of the contemporary world, defined by Siniša Ilić.

Staring into the nylon sheet with the attached papers we realized that it infinitely resembled the map of the world! Of course, we immediately wanted to see it in the 3D version, as the globe of terms and concepts related to contemporary art.

If our map of terms is compared to a world map, there are some striking and almost incredible coincidences. Prefixes and Fatigues occupy the place of the archipelago of the Land of the Rising Sun. FDU jargon commands a territory corresponding to Asia on the world map.

Europe is filled with Politics, i.e. the terms falling into this category. The place of Africa, on our map, is (ironically?) occupied by the Market. South America is inhabited by Pop terms and New technologies. Central America is a home to Techniques and Procedures, and North America

cultivates Authorship and Relation to Reality. Canada is claimed by the (chilly) terms relating to Body and Medicine.

In the next phase, we typed the terms from the wall into a Word file. Each member of the group got one category to deal with and present it to the other members. We did not try very hard to define what exactly 'dealing with' meant, and we left some space to each others for a creative approach.

Presentations we were about to prepare, would mainly demand completion of the lists of terms and their systematization within a thematic section.

After we had classified the terms into different categories, we came up with the idea to invite to the group meetings an artist or expert in the respective fields. These collaborators would not be treated as lecturers, but as added members and consultants in different fields. ... The workshop we would subsequently have, would probably address a search for terms 'spanning' the space between the categories.

This paper, initially conceived as a Chronology of our previous work was written in October 2009, when our self-education group first came up with an idea to produce a "diary of self-organization". This was a month and a half after the launching of our group, and this paper did not come about just because we could see at this early stage how many interesting phases in our work were to follow, or because we thought that some kind of a record of the process we went through (or, more precisely: we created) could be presented in the final publication.

This paper was written for much more practical reasons. Our purpose was to communicate with the Skopje fraction of our group, because it appeared that, since the last meeting at the summer school, our working concepts were diverging completely. Because of the frequent cancellations due to technical reasons, our meetings via video link were never efficient enough, and our e-mail exchange only confirmed our feeling that we understood our work with the terms in completely different manners.



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Namely, while we in Belgrade cut and pasted little pieces of paper on a nylon sheet, reckoning how to connect and define them, the Skopje fraction was, as it seemed, concerned with personal responses to specific terms. Moreover, the Skopje people opened a Wiki page where, in only few days, they attached video presentations of their terms.

We were encouraged to begin publishing our content on this page which, for some reason, to us in Belgrade seemed quite impossible. However, with a strong wish to cooperate, we decided to attach to the Skopje Wiki page a report on our previous efforts. Thus, we hoped, we would demonstrate both our cooperativeness and our alignment with the working principle we found more appropriate. From this point of view, the fact that our chronology of work was the last piece of information we ever delivered online (from Belgrade, but from Skopje as well), is quite interesting.

The Wiki project was thus “successfully” completed and soon utterly forgotten.

However, the same thing happened with our idea that each member of the group should ‘deal with’ one category, and subsequently, in the ‘sharing knowledge’ spirit, present it to the rest of the team. Although we, initially, agreed on the question of this ‘homework’, we equally unanimously kept on ignoring this agreement. There was no one among us to get this initiative going, so we – in a tacit consensus – decided to drop it. Our subsequent meetings were regular, but 100% inefficient. At the time, we were all busy doing other things: both in Serbia and abroad. Our meetings were held in a creative, friendly and not at all productive atmosphere. In other words, it seemed that we met in Magacin in order to report to each other what new was going on in our artistic lives: how far one went with the new show; who went to a new festival; who saw or read something nice. The two hours would elapse quickly and we would conclude our meetings with occasional ideas on how to proceed with our pursuits in collective self-education... Those are probably forgotten by all of us. Although it may seem that in this phase of our joint work we merely wasted our time, it is highly possible that this period was decisive and determined all our subsequent actions. At this point I would like to refer to Bojana Kunst’s lecture at the Open Day, delivered many months later. In this



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lecture she put forward the claim that learning demands time, but also generates friendship. If the purpose of the project Deschooling Classroom is investment into the independent scene, then it might rightly be claimed that in this phase our stakes were highest.

We gave ourselves some time and enjoyed our friendship, which significantly contributed to the rapid flow and quality of information shared among us. One should not overlook the fact that in this brief period each of us completed several other projects; each group’s member was acquainted with all the phases the students of our ‘deschooling class’ went through. In other words, we did become a class.

And when, in the early winter, the situation cleared a bit, we were ready for new pursuits in self-education. Bojana Cvejić came to town, and her workshop was a big turning point in our work. Although in the beginning we couldn’t agree on what to expect from her and how we should conceive her workshop, in a conversation with Ana Vujanović, Bojana came up with the idea to engage our group as contributors to the glossary published by the East Dance Academy. On the first day of the workshop she presented to us the concept of this book, including the working principles of EDA. In the next two days, under Bojana’s guidance, we collectively brainstormed on the notion of contextual approach and roles of art festivals in the context of artistic scenes in the countries of the former Eastern block.

Bojana Cvejić took off and left us with deadlines that we, certainly, missed...

However, what happened during and after her workshop was decisive for the direction our work would assume. First of all, at this workshop we finally met the Skopje fraction of the group (again). Also, we were finally confronted with concrete tasks. We were supposed to jointly write two texts within a certain amount of time. Or, as Bojana Cvejić put it, it was about time to finally shift from theoretical to practical work. More precisely: a phase of production of something resembling our final output. In this case, faced with an utterly concrete task, we demonstrated that writing can be a collective action. All the members of our group equally invested themselves in conception of these texts. So, it may be claimed that, while working on them, we developed our own technique of collective writing which shows in many aspects that



publication



in process



collective self-education is a possible, practical and plausible concept. Assembled around the same task or the same problem, in the course of writing of the text on contextual approach to art, members of the Belgrade fraction appeared as a company of individuals who were, vanity-relieved, willing to share their knowledge, insights and ideas with everyone else. Even if the text we produced is not perfect, it is quite important to stress that we wrote it for several months, in more than ten versions, and that we had long discussions on each subsequent change, demonstrating to the others how the same definitions or phrases might be read in more than one way, depending on the reader's educational, political/personal or ideological background.

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As our professor Miško Šuvaković happens to be the author of a Video Glossary in the field of art theory, Katarina Popović suggested that we should watch this program together, and then discuss it. At that point someone remembered the forgotten idea to include in our work experts and consultants from various fields. As the first guest in this capacity, professor Miško Šuvaković was invited, contributing with new content and new dynamics. He kindly accepted our invitation, and the first session with him was planned as follows: episodes of the program are screened in Belgrade and Skopje, and then we connect via video link and debate together. As many times before, video link did not work. However, the conversation we had in Belgrade with Miško Šuvaković was recorded and sent to Macedonia in the mp3 audio format. This session was inspiring, so we decided to promptly arrange the next one. For that one, we prepared some questions for professor Šuvaković. They concerned the basic concepts and terms, used on daily basis in the jargon of contemporary art. Conversation wherein Miško Šuvaković clarified the meanings and references of the terms: method, format, practice, strategy, procedure, technique, platform, protocol and many others, was decisive for the continuation of our group's work. We kept on getting together once a week in order to see all the episodes of the Video Glossary. As professor Šuvaković had other commitments, we discussed what we saw between ourselves. Sometimes, instead of the Video Glossary, we watched other programs on art, but we kept our habit of discussing them afterwards. During those sessions we shared knowledge, information, talents and skills. A similar thing happened during the timeshare period, when in Belgrade and Skopje we all worked together on this publication: on its concept, contents, visual identity and layout. This publication is not a textbook.



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It may rather be compared to an exercise book, working sheet or compendium of problems we were not able to solve. Our 'Publication in Process' does not provide answers, but it does provide some space for raising new questions, which – after 10 months of group work – might remain forgotten.

