

Anguish Language Writing and Crisis

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Preliminary conversations

I've been thinking about some common interests, like the construction of the self through language and the means of communication. And we have this special task to do something performative. Maybe we have to circle more around some issues in order to come closer to a set of questions that we can then transform into a performative moment. But would this be something we would do all together? Or as a presentation and then a conversation around it? There will be a kind of preparation in the sense that we are now talking about these issues, but we won't give the results of our thoughts, although we might already know what we want. We look at some questions and we want people to enact them. And we have a card up our sleeves, we might have a trick. We will inevitably have more awareness of where we want to go than the others. Or maybe, slowly, by what we are doing, we can make sense together about what's going on. We can use ourselves as a kind of material that they could look at. Yes, we should look precisely at who is involved in the situation, who has which role; the division of labour, somehow, because it is not a simple performer/audience situation, but it is also not equal. And there is also the expectation to involve the other participants. The question I'd really like to follow is how the self is constructed or determined. Especially if there is already this kind of tension of who we are, the roles, the expectations. Yes, and what one can do within certain patterns, or how to subvert them, or to overfulfill something. Maybe we find ways of using estrangement techniques – which may not be a contemporary term, but perhaps relates to forms of determination that contemporary capitalism has implemented, and how to denaturalise them in that context, fuck them up, look at them from a different perspective. I find it appealing to have to confront these issues where the situation deals with them, but not in a cosy way, rather to embody some of the issues, there is a tension, you feel the crisis in

itself, the realisation of some of these issues becomes an experience, that might be a frustration, a feeling of impotence, because it is not just coming from a discursively resolved position. And where is the crisis in our conversations? The moment we talk to each other, in the language we use, in the way we speak *about* crisis? I read the text you sent, Brassier's text on improvisation. It was quite dense and difficult to understand, but interesting in relation to rules and behaviour. What inspires me in Ray's thinking is that he is very objective on the one hand – I mean as objective as one can be – and on the other hand there is lack of resignation that I find extremely appealing. It is like: ok, let's do something with the resources we have. It's interesting that somehow it is the opposite of the whole thesis of communisation, because it is about bringing in a programme, what would be needed in order to change conditions, what type of programme? He's getting back to questions that have been totally dismissed for many years, probably for good reasons, but perhaps, with the resources that we have today – what would it require to change today's conditions? What some people might find problematic is, when it comes into an analogy to today's reality in practice. But for him thinking is itself a practice that can lead to a form of idealism. He could be described as an idealist in some ways, because he still gives reason a chance or he believes in the power of reason. It was difficult for me to understand what he says about becoming an agent but not having control about it: on the one hand to get rid of oneself, but on the other hand thinking of a set of mechanisms that would enable this process of de-subjectivation. Like having a task that one can't fulfill actively. I guess it would be the mechanism itself fulfilling what is driving us and that is what becomes the subject, because it gains autonomy through self-determination. It's the act becoming the subject and having an agency that is cutting the relationship between self and agency. What I think is very realistic is to not imply agency in relationship to the self but rather that it is this act that has been generated. Let me see, if I find it in the text: 'the involution that grounds recognition is a purely mechanical reflexivity'. I can understand something about it, but he also says himself it is paradoxical. To create a situation where agency is possible, but you can't deliberately create it,

because this would then be something you would *do*, or what the self would do. Do you understand what my problem is? 'Involution', the way I understand it, is a kind of undoing of certain assumptions that you have had before, so let's say a behavior that is culturally and socially produced and nevertheless you are falling into certain ideological trajectories or positions. What this would mean is to gain consciousness about the way you've been interpellated ideologically or socially and culturally determined, and what it would require to gain your own determinancy or autonomy? Of course there is a problem with talking, because that would imply that I, individually, could do that. But it would rather be this act starting from a recognition of how you are culturally, socially and also biologically determined and then to gain access – to gain awareness – about those processes and then to understand what it would require to counter them, or to do what you need to do in order to be really self-determined. It would be an involution of those parameters that usually determine you. How does that thinking inform your performance practice? I am trying to incorporate it very slowly, sometimes and some ways are more rudimentary than others. I guess I am playing around with the notion of the subject, and this can even be very literal. Who is the subject in the moment of speaking, where is the tension? I am trying to find different forms of displacement that can be temporal or through instructions to other people. I am also trying to objectify myself through expressing insecurities that I have about myself or the way I portray myself or trying to look at these moments of mediation that are often taken for granted or as neutral. I also started doing this thing, when someone asks me for a bio, I take the lyrics of songs that try to embrace self-expression or empowerment of the self. These are just little gestures that I am trying to do in order to play around with some of these notions. So it's trying to understand both how I am objectified by the conditions or the expectations that some people might have when I am going to do something. And, in doing this, I am playing around with what is almost the opposite to what a singer-songwriter is doing, that is trying to express their emotions as much as possible. It is rather about trying to find a kind of twist or distance or progression. I can relate to this. Also because this expression of emptiness

It is also a tool for measuring something and making it unmeasurable at the same time. What would be our ideal idea of the diagram? Do we use it as a positive or as a negative tool? You mentioned the positive aspects that are driving towards some clarity, so that we can all be on the same page, literally. The negative consequence is maybe this process of simplification or objectivation, which is obviously also used for capitalist strategies. This tension of today's condition, living under the commodity form, inevitably it is part of the knowledge economy. This tension will inevitably be there, but we are trying to understand how we are implicit, complicit within that. If we question the diagram as a technique, we are also questioning what we are doing. It may become too self-referential. I agree, we don't have to discuss these kind of things there. I just needed to think it through, because it is connected to the questions. So the idea is, as you said: How the diagram falls back into ourselves. I wonder, whether someone will stand up during the first part and totally disagree. I would be surprised.

Note

Preliminary conversations ahead of a performance presented at the Anguish Language/Literature and Crisis seminar at Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik, Berlin, 1-4 October, 2013.

Sources

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