Emotional topographies of performative artistic practices

Mojca Puncer^{*}

University of Maribor

After the decline of studies with regard to feeling and emotions within the historical context of aesthetics, we can see a revival of interest in this topic from the so-called "affective turn" aspect in art, culture and the broader social reality. In this context, affect becomes the key which unlocks the door towards harmonizing body and emotions. The cultural turn in aesthetics itself brings us an open mind platform, where the historical methods of studying the senses, emotions and feelings embodied in art objects are increasingly substituted by studies of aesthetical processes and performativity. Psychoanalysis, deconstruction of poststructuralism and the establishment of a tighter alliance between theory and the artistic practice itself were the factors which significantly contributed to the evaluation of the latter. Another important contribution in this evaluation sprang from feminist thought concentrating on the body. Aesthetics is in this context returning to its original field of interest, after which it got its name, namely that of sensual cognition, to a specific discourse of the body as an amalgam of feelings and emotion. Instead of historical forms of representation, this recent affective turn emphasizes temporariness, affect, individual experiences and everyday life.

An artist with his/her performance of "body thoughts" (emotions, affects) emphasize that facet of a performed body, which eludes the capturing of discourse, but is nevertheless of key importance for his/her social and gender positioning. Individual feelings, emotions and affects become an important tool for social and gender politics, performance and pleasure. These processes are very dynamic, transitive and elusive and very difficult to be captured within the theoretical field. Theory of performatives can be of help in understanding such processes. Affective performativity underlines body performances of specific, non-normative artistic subjectivities. A performative body adds value to the art, a value which isn't brought in, neither by static description or representation: the performance of a body with specific social and gender marks is exactly the tool used by an artist to cut into the mythology of a coherent subject. Thus the relational, affective, collaborative and "non-material" aspects – the driving force

^{*} mpuncer@yahoo.com

behind multiple artistic subjectivity in the post-industrial capitalist society – come into focus.

This discussion uncovers some of the key concepts which connect emotions and affects with contemporary art and culture, mainly from the aspect of defying instrumentalization under neo-liberal conditions. What we are dealing with here is a special spatial modus of thinking, which emphasizes the multifacetness of social relations and draws alternative ways of spatialization, of embodiment and emotional topography. It is about new forms with respect to the active co-creation of public spaces, conditioned by the specific nature of art and about the circulation of meanings within it. Conceptions of affective performativity offer the possibility of qualitative explanations of social relationships, where we are predominantly interested in the methods of artistic articulation of emotional and affective forms and meanings, and their evaluation in a specific cultural-historical or social-political context.

Introduction

Before I enter the realm of the so-called 'emotional topographies' in contemporary art announced in the abstract with the so-called 'affective turn' (Ticineto Clough, Halley, 2007) and begin to interpret it, allow me to briefly sketch the main trends propelling the contemporary perception of feelings and emotions within philosophy and the cognitive sciences. These trends are also my point of orientation in this article. A philosophical discussion with reference to the concept of emotion is more or less based on the current discoveries in psychology (mainly from the expansion of psychoanalysis during the early 20th century) can be roughly divided into emotions, based on feelings or physical sensations (with sources in the traditional empirical method) on the one hand and emotions as intentional (cognitive) states (with its roots in ancient Greek philosophy) on the other. Studies in the sub-spheres of the philosophy of art or aesthetics are connected mainly with sensual and emotional evaluation (arising from the discussions on aesthetical judgements of taste), while due to the transformation of art, the present calls for ever-increasing and necessary integration along with other scientific fields. Only then can we challenge some conventional ideas, such as the idea that capitalism controls emotions with the means of bureaucratic rationality. The sociologist from the Frankfurt School, Eva Illuoz (2010) with her concept of 'emotional capitalism' points to the rise of homo sentimentalis and to the fact that economic relations have become very emotional. The public sphere is permeated by a spectacle of private feelings and psychotherapeutical discourse of self-help due to a mass expression of mental suffering. We can see the contradiction of processes of emotionally turning oneself into a form of commodity, which permeates social ties, but not all the effects are negative. This social aspects are increasingly connected with 'relations' and 'realism' in contemporary art (the so-called 'relational art', introduced by the

French curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002)¹, as opposed to completely fictional artistic narratives, which are the subject of interest especially in cognitive theories of emotions. Contemporary art often uses the element of fiction as a proof of its own contradictory autonomy. Contemporary art establishes a complex and contradictory relationship regarding the autonomy of art and also transcending the boundaries between art and life.

Allow me to summarise the main characteristics of contemporary art: the opening of a finished artefact in an open work/process (explosion of installations and performative works, expansion in social and virtual space), which results in new relations between a work of art and audiences (participation), integration in the expansion of new media and technologies in connection with globalised economic processes. This means an extreme internationalisation of this form of art, the consolidation of the art market and a re-evaluation of specific traditions. Other specifics are the extreme heterogeneity and mobility of contemporary art practices and their multi and intermediality or trans-disciplinarity (Tratnik 2010). On the other hand, contemporary art turns away from great narratives and focuses on more partial topics, micro-situations and local issues. Contemporary art is often some how a social experiment and also a form of research. Nicolas Bourriaud, the founding father of the so-called 'relational aesthetics', establishes within his text upon the so-called 'altermodernity' that 'critical dimension' of art in the contemporary aesthetic thought 'represents the most common criterion of judgement' (Bourriaud 2010, p. 25). Critical dimension, performativity and documentary or reality references are the most obvious and common dimensions of contemporary art.

From the aspect of emotions within the context of art, the paradox of fiction is of particular importance for analytical or cognitive aesthetics. The answer to this paradox depends upon the concept of emotions, which can be roughly placed between the two afore mentioned theoretical directions (theory of emotions as feelings and cognitive theory of emotions as some form of evaluation judgements) (Levinson 1997, p. 21).² Today we have a sort of consensus (not only in the analytical Anglo-Saxon context) that an emotion means a certain physical response with a typical psychological, phenomenological and expressive profile, which serves in channelling attention in a certain direction and that this profile includes a certain level of cognition. We have to mention that we also have different classifications of emotions, based on their complexity, etc. I'll return to this later. More recent philosophical discussions with regard to the nature of emotions and

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¹ According to Bourriaud, the relational aesthetics is an aesthetical theory, which evaluates a work of art on the basis of interpersonal relationships, are presented, produced or established by that work.

 $^{^2}$ Jerrold Levinson introduces a concept of emotion, which functions as a mediator between the sensational and cognitive model.

to the emotional response to art or more specifically; to the 'paradox of fiction' in representational art, to negative emotions and affects in art or to the so-called 'paradox of tragedy', etc. Suggest the focusing on certain emotions. This enables us toward a better understanding of the relations between emotions, beliefs, desires and acting (Hjort Laver 1997, p. 19)

Underline affective performativity

I'd like to make a step towards performativity in contemporary art, which especially interests me within this discussion. Firstly, I'd like to mention the performative aspect of emotions and its expression as a social act. The performative theory of language use has its roots in the work of J. L. Austin (1962), who pointed out that we perform many things in everyday life verbally (offence, apology, conviction, etc.) This aspect of the use of language is considered in analyses of a certain emotion by an analogy employing speech acts. Upon entering the field of performative art analysis, we have to consider the divide, stressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick when she discusses performativity from the aspect of Austin's theory of speech acts (in contrast with their positivistic treatment in analytical philosophy, which focuses on the division between performatives and constatives, etc. and from the aspect of anti-essentialistic deconstruction (Derrida, Butler) (Sedgwick 2003, pp. 6-7) If Austin's performativity is more about the ways in which language constructs or affects reality, deconstruction and critical theory of genders and aspire for a much broader sense of performativity as a characteristic of discourse. The distance between the theatrical and the deconstructionist meaning of the performative, strives to overcome the polarity of verbal and non-verbal acts. The theory of performative speech act is seminal within the method, which Sedgwick uses for her approach to the queer theory, where the subject of the so-called 'periperformativity' ("around" the performative), which is aesthetical, physical and affective, eludes to be included in a discourse. With regard to the question of overcoming the polarity of non-verbal and verbal acts, forms of post-object works of art, based on the realisation of a space-time event as a work of art, are of special interest for our further discussion. Works of performance, body art, happenings and actions are performative, because the acts of speech and nonverbal physical gestures are expected to have an existential, aesthetical and expressive impact on the viewer. The artistic creation is directed toward action in a social context and not on the product of an object. A work of art is an act of the artist's action and its meaning derives from the very act of rendition (which corresponds with the performative functions of a language). In the visual arts, performative works were created by the relativisation and dematerialisation of an art object.

Alternative Spatial Models of Reflection and the Emotional Topography of Art

Performative theory directs us further to alternative spatial concepts and models of thought, developed by Deleuze (together with Guattari) in accordance with his enthusiasm about mapping, planimetry and representations, which do something, direct us outwards, to non-discursive or beyond-discursive states (Deleuze, Guattari 2009). Deleuze doesn't strive for a marking model, but defines his work as a map making, drawing lines and areas on a flat surface – even with regard to a person's corporeality (Deleuze 2004; Grosz, 1994, pp.160-183).³ Deleuze's interest in planar relations has inspired Sedgwick, who proposes and interesting concept of 'beside', which deconstructs the established spatially designed hierarchies. "Beside is an interesting preposition also because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. /.../ Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." (Sedgwick 2003, p.8) With this concept, she wants to contribute toward an emphasis upon non-hierarchical, co-existence (of various social groups, creative contribution of several artists to create a joint artistic project, etc.). We are dealing with a special spatial modus of thinking, which emphasises the multilayering of social relations and interactions.

In my theoretical approach for discussing emotions in performative arts, I try to articulate an idea about emotive topographies, with the help of Guiliana Bruno's ideas in her Atlas of Emotion (Bruno 2007). Nevertheless, I'm more interested in the emotional topography with the intervention of performative practices and performing artistic subjectivity, which in given spatial co-ordinates, which draws and opens new emotional and mind territories and so contributes to sensibilisation of audiences for discussed topics (humorous questioning of conditions for artistic creativity, tragic experience of losing a loved one, etc.) than in geographical shifts and cinematography, which are the focus of Bruno's research. Guiliana Bruno gives a suggestive outline of the history of spatial and visual arts with a focus on the representation of spaces and impacts, of movements and emotions. According to her, the meaning of emotions is historically connected with transfers and migrations, with adaptations and survival strategies. From this and because of the general mobility of forms and subjects in contemporariness, we can conclude that a contemporary emotion needs migrations in new physical and mind spaces. All in all, intercultural negotiations and real and virtual mobility are one of the main features of contemporary art

³ In his analysis of Bacon's painting, Deleuze focuses on the artist's aspiration for direct reaching of a person in his/her sensuality and talks about the logic of sensation, where the body (i.e. the body without organs) is understood mainly as a surface of inscription, a place of emotions and sensations.

(Bourriaud 2010, pp. 106-31).⁴ Orientations to networks, surfaces, connections and intensity are coming to the foreground. I'm interested in alternative topological models, such as the model of the Möbius strip as a fold, which opens new perspectives for reflection on spaces and bodies.⁵ The model encourages attempts of confiscating new social spaces, through connecting with neighbourhoods, the local and regional, beyond dominant ideological, representational or organisational systems.

In the post-Fordian production paradigm, even the affective becomes a tool or technology of the production process. In the 1990s, the so-called 'affective turn' draws the attention away from the historical forms of representations to stressing temporality, affect, individual experience and everyday life. The main two predecessors of redirecting the attention to emotions and affects in contemporary human and social sciences are psychoanalysis and feminist theory, with their focus on the body. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers a relevant theoretical reflection on the power of affects such as shame, and their political potentials in social practices.

The affect shame

Sedgwick designs a specific theory of emotions and affects (the latter are intense and short-lived emotions, such as fear, anger, enthusiasm, shame), where she thoroughly studies the affect shame, as defined by the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins, who greatly inspires her work (Sedgwick 2003. pp. 93-121).⁶ In order to understand affect in the work of Tomkins and Sedgwick, it is pivotal to make delimitation from a psychoanalytical (Freudian) notion of drives. Tomkins dedicated his life's work to researching affects, which he arranged into two groups, in positive and negative affects. He gave special attention to the affect shame. According to Tomkins, shame is the affect of offence, humiliation, ridicule, defeat, etc. which penetrates the depths of a person's ego. Regardless of the form of humiliation, the disgraced person feels naked, defeated, alienated, robbed of dignity and value. His/her responses are epitomised in the body language, i.e. with the lowering of his/her head or eyes, with covering the face and in the feeling of being ashamed of his/her own body and hiding it from the gaze of others. Beside this, shame is strongly connected with pleasure, because it functions as an inhibitor. Shame has power to attach itself to a part of a body, to sensor system, to another affect. With regard to shame, Sedgwick thinks that the perception of

⁴ Bourriaud discusses the so-called 'journey-forms'.

⁵ Elizabeth Grosz for her critical review of representation and affirmation of difference similarly as Deleuze uses topological model of Möbius strip: "The Möbius strip model has the advantage of showing that there can be a relation between two 'things' – mind and body – which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate 'things' being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other." (Grosz 1994, pp. 209-210)

⁶ Together with Adam Frank, Sedgwick wrote a chapter 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins' (Sedgwick 2003, pp. 93-121). When analysing Tomkins' essay of affect in perspective of the systemic cybernetic theory, they understand the so-called 'cybernetic fold' as "a fold between postmodernist and modernist ways of hypothesizing about the brain and mind" (Sedgwick 2003, p. 105)

performativity with expressions of everyday fact of shame and its derivatives opens numerous new ways for a deliberation about identity politics, which are interesting for art as well. "[T]he shame-delineated place of identity doesn't determine the consistency or meaning of that identity, and race, gender, class, sexuality, appearance, and abledness are only a few of the defining social constructions that will crystallize there, developing from this originary affect their particular structures of expression, creativity, pleasure, and struggle." (Sedgwick 2003, p. 63)

Emotions / Affects in Contemporary Art (a few examples)

In order to highlight the mutual applicability of chosen theoretical concepts and contemporary artistic practices, I will discuss some examples of performative expression of emotions in contemporary art. The process of the creation of a work, a performance or spatial installation itself is a medium to express an artists' emotions and feelings, while it is in its finished form a cognitive/performative act, which evokes emotional states in a spectator/interpreter and thus gains his/her attention. Affective power of the performed/represented can for example originate in an emotionally charged focus on powerlessness, which we sense when confronting our own existential vulnerability. This tragic aspect can in art be effectively subverted with its antithesis: humour.

Emotive laboratory of contemporary dance

The Slovene dancer and choreographer Maja Delak (1969) was encouraged by the need to deliberate upon her own history of choreography and to invite a group of female artists in order to establish a laboratory situation for a thorough study of performance material (Delak 2008). Through a specific reading of Slovene dance history, the artists ask questions with reference to the reasons and conditions of their own beginnings and dealings with the medium of contemporary dance. This questioning, through and open and multi-layered discursive positioning, which involves an analysis of theoretical texts, results in the dance performance Drage Drage/Expensive Darlings.⁷ The process was inspired by the reading of referential texts, which played different functions, from terminological and explanatory to content and structure. Content-wise, the artists thoroughly studied affect, as defined by the American psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins (who inspired the writings of Sedgwick, who is also one of the sources of research). The study of affects deals mainly with the experiential aspects of desire and pleasure, which are strongly connected with the shame affect and the experience of the 'engendered' body.

⁷ Expensive Darlings: idea and choreography: Maja Delak, EMANAT. Premiere: October 6th, 2007, PTL, Ljubljana.

The performance Expensive Darlings through deconstruction of an apparent solidity of gender-identity positions makes an analogy with the position of contemporary dance, which with the presentation of body thoughts (emotions, affects) stresses out that facet of a dancer's body which eludes a discourse and rationalisation, but is nevertheless seminal for the artists' self-positioning. Thus we can see the body of a contemporary dancer in the light of the 'physiological' function of art in relation towards the female body. Artists question their positions in contemporary dance through adopting clichéd images of femininity, shown in a constitutive division between the particularity if desire and pleasure and also social norms. The performance builds on cabaret technique of selecting and reinterpreting excerpts from pop music (Celentano) and film (Barbarella), which consolidate the stereotypical images of femininity. With playing and reinterpretation of clichéd characters, whom are driven to tragicomic levels (vampirella, femme fatale, drag king, bride, a fairy, a cabaret dancer, a female toreador), they overturn the established symbol codes. Especially subversive are the possible analogy with queer identities (drag) and humorous dimension of playing typified images. Humour, irony and cynicism often function as the subject's (heroic) answer to a traumatic loss, which is in this way kept at a certain distance and diminished in more 'human' proportions (Zupančič 2002). We laugh at our own pain and impairment and take a reflexive position towards it and to that what caused it. We are able to analyse our own involvement in the situation, and make fun of our own fallacies and delusions. The performance attracts the audience with humorous methodologies and introduces feminist and queer perspectives toward a certain social, cultural and political and also historical context in order to display dominant myths in contemporary social reality. Let us remember that those works, which especially include a female artist's body, shook the traditional systems of framing within art history with their strategies (Jones 1998). With the use of their bodies, artists cut into this system and questioned the dominant politics of representation in Western cultural history, which work in mass media.

Rituals of remembering and parting; of developing compassion

Allow me to mention two other suggestive and emotionally charged works from the context of contemporary visual ('reality) art, while addressing aspects of our existence, which exceed our usual recognition and which also includes the confrontation of the loss of our dear ones and our own mortality.

Works by the French artist Sophie Calle (1953) are full of elements from her own life (DARE, 2003). Through photographs and performances in public spaces, she creates narratives, where she contributed as an author in first person and a fictional character. In her conceptual processual works, Calle adopts roles of an investigator, detective, voyeur, etc. These roles reflect both a thorough form of research and also a common curiosity. In 1980 she did *Suite Venitienne*, where she followed a man from a party in Venice for two weeks. A year later she found herself at work as a hotel maid in Venice and created *The Hotel*, where she imagined the hotel guests with the help of their own personal items. Calle's works

opens up zones between fact and fiction. She crosses the boundaries of privacy to study meaning, which are supposed to stay hidden in public places. By this, she brings a certain air of intimacy into them. When her boyfriend broke up with her by E-mail, Calle asked 107 women to read and analyse it according to their professional interests. The E-mail was set to music, textually rearranged, staged and received a psychiatric evaluation amongst other things. Thus, the work *Take Care Of Yourself* was created (named after the final phrase in the letter) for French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2007 (Vernissage TV, 2007). We can understand it as a rational woman's control of the situation instead of a fit of capricious emotions or dumbness due to emotional turmoil. Calle explicitly says that she doesn't want to give any directions for viewing her work and thus influencing the spectator's experience. The second example of the artist's ability to create a work of art based on intimate and painful details from her life, is a film, edited from the recorded moments of her mother dying (during Calle's preparation for the Biennale).

The Slovene visual artist and performer Andreja Džakušič (1971) with one of her works, *Developing Compassion* (2006–2008) (SCCA – Ljubljana, Studio 6, 2010) also deals with the personal experience of the illness and death of her father and the connected long-term process, which was the fundamental impetuous toward addressing the emotions of sadness, fear and pain, which are connected with death. The moments before death, the death itself and the time after it are three time axes, which became the focus of the artist's dealing with such a specific traumatic situation. Typical for the entire project are the multi-phased processes of the intertwining of repeating elements (disinfectant, pillows, red colour, etc.), segments of performances, which bring a spectator, through the means of both audio and video recordings and also objects (personal items, etc.) to a visual, atmospheric and poetical landscape, brimming with emotions, typical for the rituals of parting and mourning (minimalistic visual artistic interventions into space, performative articulations, accompanied by an undertone singing of laments). Installations, left after the performance, are traces of a live event.

After the theoretical discussion, I now address the mechanisms of emotions and affects in connection with an actual art practice, which in contrast with the mass media isn't a routine of techniques and a tried and tested formula. I'm interested in both the aspect of the emotional response to performative art, which uses real referential points as the process of creating a performance as a specific emotive laboratory, which is at the same time a laboratory for constructing identities and is inspired by topical theoretical texts regarding feelings, emotions, affects and performativity. Female artists and performers have developed their own techniques to express specific emotions through emotional occurrences, which are contingent and numerous, which doesn't mean that they don't participate in the more general phenomenological forms of human perception.

Conclusion

Recent affective turns from historical forms of representation stresses temporariness, affect, personal experience and everyday life. This turn marks a peculiar break in perceiving relations and with them the related ethical and political responsibilities of a creating subject, who is also at the centre of interest of feminist and queer based interpretations and performative artistic articulations. Hardt uses the syntagma 'affective work' with a goal to encompass corporeal, emotional and intellectual aspects of new production forms (Hardt 2007, p. xi) Eva Illouz lucidly talks about the so-called 'process of emotional self-commodification as a central part of the current stage of capitalism (Illouz 2010). She insists that the fundamental ambiguity of the process, which subordinates a person on the one hand and liberates it on the other. Capitalism penetrates subjectivity, drives it to action and thus problematise theses about autonomy and non-instrumentalised art production. In the spirit of broader experimental traditions of the past century, art explores the methods of renewed establishment of forms, which affirm the subjectivity of an artistic process, which goes beyond the institutional frame.

In search of answers to how should we look at the transfer of accent from a finished work of art to open social relations from an aesthetical point of view on the one hand, and the political potential on the other, we can use ideas of affective performativity, seen through Sedgwick's work, as they offer the possibility of qualitative interpretations of social relations. With performative and affective awareness of antagonism (the affect shame in the queer scene in relation to the mainstream, etc.) and also searching for alternative forms of participation and solidarity amongst members of specific social groups, where we can transcend the hegemonic duality of positioning. The political aspect of Sedgwick's theoretical-performative-affective work opens up through the demand for transcending the dualism and plurality of positions. Affective work, which evokes specific emotions and actions and thus encourages the establishment of a political subject and his work in the public sphere of a certain community, is here constitutive.

The example of coded queer representations and their identity positions, with origins in the field of pop-culture (drag, etc.) can become a material in those artistic practices, which self-position themselves through the establishment of analogies with other marginal positions (in a dance performance, for example, a contemporary dance creativity, meaningfully relates with the marginality of feminism and queer movement).⁸ Artist and performer with performing 'body thoughts' (feelings, affects) stresses that facet of the performing body, which eludes a discourse and rationalisation, but is nevertheless pivotal for her social and gender positioning.

Muving (in) arts (G. Bruno) can evoke an intensive emotional reaction; detect the birth of new ways of empathy and feeling in society. A renewed articulation of

⁸ This comparison is convincingly addressed by Maja Delak's dance performance *Expensive Darlings* (2007). The performance was partially inspired by Eve K. Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*. (Delak 2008)

space according to the measure of body in art is both a restoration of the sensual (non-verbal) and affective experience and an impulse for reflection – not in the sense of isolation, but in sense of negating borders, transformative orientation outwards, toward active, emancipated audiences in the Rancière line of thought (Rancière 2009).

At the end, allow me to address the question, posed by Rancière with respect to the concept of art in light of the bonds between aesthetics and politics, through the so-called division of the sensible, which marked inequality in society. Art can be socially relevant ('political' or 'meta-political) with regard to the specific disclosure of the division in the field of perception and the sensible, i.e. in the field of the aesthetical. If the addressing of the sensual and emotions in art are qualitative explanation from the re-articulation of social bonds perspective, we can determine that the effects of art cannot be predicted. As explains Rancière, art can only coincidentally match politics, when it manages to rock the existing division of the sensible. Therefore the evaluation of the sensible, affective and emotive potential in art (in contrast with instrumentalised reactions), which presumes an emancipated spectator, is put to the test again and again.

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