

**RADIO ŠTUDENT**

## **Shizophrenia of a performance**

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Cuneiform script, porcelain, bronze, a plough, floodgates, prostitution, Las Vegas, a sewing machine, a loom, a motocultivator, an aspirin, a sewerage system, art, money and so forth. Absurd and with a lot of sense at the same time, the above notions are nothing but a drop in the sea when compared to the entire multitude of man-made inventions and creations with sole purpose to make life easier for mankind in one way or another. The performer Katarina Stegnar enumerates them at the beginning of her own piece *Dvojna igra/Double play*, where she simultaneously plays herself and with herself. Even though technical, entertaining and civilized inventions have transformed the present-day society into something far from perfection, the latter still to a large measure clings to the idea of continuous progress, which manifests itself in the sphere of economy – that of the neoliberal type - as the imperative of economic growth.

What if she could fix that world all by herself? Based on the idea of having some kind of a world-saving plan, Stegnar constructs her performance on two parallel levels. The first level assumes the form of a presentation through speech and visual image in order to unfold a multitude of facts or quasi-facts pertaining to the state of our current society, and also in order to unveil some of her own suggestions as to how various disputable relations could be done away with. In doing so, Stegnar mainly tackles environmental issues on the basis of statistical data and research obtained, as quantifiable evidence of the consequences, brought about by actions of mankind and also as potential solutions for issues, such as environmental pollution, renewable energy sources, sustainable development etc. The other level of the performance is inhabited by Katarina's double, at first appearing almost as a mechanical disturbance within planned course of the performance – starting with voice or sound, then progressing to video and, finally, appearing in flesh and blood. What we see emerge between the two incarnations of Katarina are basically two diametrical positions: one inhabiting an active advocate of making the world a better place, whereas the other inhabiting the skin of a content consumer who couldn't care less about the problems of the present-day world. However, in the end both personas turn out to be nothing but average bourgeois

individualists. They meet at the classical point of the dramatic turn, when the fatal letter containing a bribe comes along.

Katarina the lecturer draws her material from expertise reports and economic analyses, performed by the New Economics Foundation. The lecture contains several general claims with a fair number of highly dubious assertions, which openly flirt with social awareness as a point of view. The lecture is structured according to separate thematic sections, namely the Great transition, the Great rearrangement, the Great stabilization, the Great localization, the Great retraining and the Great exhaustion. The above thematic division melts with the frequently used key word "imagine", borrowed from the wider project title *Imagine 2020* and implemented by none other than Bunker, the producer of the performance and the arena of its developing existence at the same time. The performance therefore starts and ends with the song *Imagine* performed by the Beatles. Lucid connection between content of the performance and its production background conveys a touch of playful ambiguity.

A distinct echo of Katarina's long-term involvement in the performance group *Via Negativa* can be noted in *Dvojna igra/Double Play*, since the aesthetics of her performance bears substantial reference to methods and situations played out in *Via Negativa's* work. A long-lasting performing practice has above all armed Stegnar with a distinct approach to a stage situation, which conveys its most autonomous nature in its humorous aspect. Performed rather than acted by Stegnar, funny situations seem worthy of an even greater emphasis in their emancipatory potentiality, while the elements of classical play as they emerge in the form of gestures or movements here and there fail to contribute substantially to the situation of a political performance, which Stegnar seeks to invoke and subsequently also succeeds, even though it manifests itself on the level of the performer-audience dualism. It is almost impossible to evade this polarity in such conditions of production. Occasional excursions into live experiments with audiences as a characteristic feature of *Via Negativa* have come to life in this particular performance through cooperation with four audience members, who turned into candidates for making a new, better society in accordance with the lecturer's efforts.

The emphasized schizophrenia of a double play in the performance thus on the one hand functioned as a brilliant metaphor for the split, lying at the heart of everyday reality, somewhere between the solemnity of any given personal mission and the easiness of bourgeois hedonism, whereas it offered on the other hand a personal reflective stance with regard to the duplicating personality split of the stage protagonist, between her media-constructed image and her stage presence, between an actress and a performer. The aesthetics of this schizophrenic relationship was particularly conveying,

since it provided the framework for contemplating the media representative teams of everyday life, in the field of art as well as beyond. Obscurity of meanings and messages frequently takes place on the slippery field of media-induced manipulations – and by this I am referring not only to a stage, but also to a street, to places of physical movement, as well as to video as a medium. The time delay that occurs through slips into a media-governed reality results in making a big step away from our true needs, desires and pleasures. The parallel media reality depoliticises life exactly in the direction called »imagine«, in the direction of the seeming and illusory, which can never be reached in its constant movement further away into the indefinable future. Just as the lecturer in the performance at one point asks the audience whether they're happy and then replies to this question herself by saying no. The sobering of the audience in the face of this truth might have had a bitter taste indeed, but it nevertheless seemed much less painful as the humorous music intervention *Od Vardara pa do Triglava* broke in.

In some other course of thought, namely on the level of reflecting upon the performance as a form of representation in a certain context, I tried grasping its initial schizophrenic situation in the light of my own understanding of a performance as a possibility of the impossible in conditions surpassing the relation artist-audience. This was considered also in reference to the problem of a play, where appearances in the performance often trigger a move away from the direct, live intervention into space-time here-now. What we're talking about here isn't a blind impulse to promote some sort of an ideal clean-cut performance, which wouldn't belong on stage, in theatre, but a problem of placing the performative with its potential emancipatory nature within the framework of a theatre, or within a reduction modus of any sort for that matter. The performative in its political emancipatory dimension breaks through this formal, and at the same time also ideological and institutional framework, or doesn't need it in the first place. Katarina Stegnar's *Dvojna igra/Double Play* and her previous work most definitely contain the potential of »positive schizophrenia«, to borrow Jacques Rancière's term, for a future play with an even more decisive performative action to take place beyond the prescribed framework.

Schizophrenia of a double play was polemicized by Nenad and Nenad.