

Artikel

The Workshop



Life Forms (2019).
Photo: Joachim Dette/HKW



The Workshop

A Format and Promise Between Collectivity and Individualism

By Stefan Hölscher

Introduction

I would like to investigate how far the contemporary phenomenon of the workshop in the dance field, which differs from the format of rehearsal, training or shows, can be contrasted to the historical emergence of the Neo-Avantgardes' workshop format during the 1960s. My suggestion is that contemporary ways of hanging out together should be situated in the area of conflict between the group and the self. I am arguing for this contrast by relating my own current research project *Collective Realization – The Workshop as an Artistic-Political Format*¹ to Michel Foucault's late investigation of ascesis and different kinds of subjectivity, to Richard Schechner's approach to the workshop format in the context of the Neo-Avantgardes, and to the research Ana Vujanović, Bojana Cvejić, and Marta Popivoda have been conducting under the title *Performing the Self* in the last years.² At the end of this essay I will briefly say a few sentences about the durational event *Life Forms* in which I participated as an audience member at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin from 25 to 27 April 2019, since this contemporary workshop-like setting very much reflected what I would like to call the paradox of the workshop. The assumption underlying the following exposition can be put as follows: workshops always take place within a tension between the form of collectivity they promise and the individual positions they put their participants into.

The problem of subjectivity in late Foucault

As a first step I want to portray ascesis as a government of the self in contrast to a government of others in Foucault's later thought. In this context I shall demonstrate how far what is at stake in ascesis is not so much an aesthetics of existence, the self as a work of art, a late 20th century dandyism, or even the idea of 'freedom' replacing Foucault's previous concern with historical a priori forms as conditions of possibility for experience, as Philipp Sarasin has suggested (see Sarasin 2010), but subjects radically changing their relation to themselves and amongst each other, a 'spiritual' relation which empowers them not to be governed in a certain way and which might as well have an impact on the wider webs of knowledge and power surrounding them. At the beginning of the 1980s Foucault dedicates himself to ascesis, the history of various kinds of subjectivity and practices of subjectivation, having conducted research on biopolitics and the history of governmentality up to the end of the 1970s. In a text entitled *The Subject and Power* – which was originally published as an afterword to the edited volume *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in 1982 – he defines power relations with regard to biopolitics precisely as "a way in which certain actions modify others" and makes

1) Currently I am working together with Kai van Eikels within the framework of a research project funded by Fritz Thyssen Foundation at the Institute for Theatre Studies at Ruhr University Bochum. I also thank Rok Vevar from *The Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive* for providing our project with different film and video materials.

2) For a summary see <http://www.anavujanovic.net/2016/09/performing-the-self/>. Access: 05-11-2019.

clear that “something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures” (Foucault 1982, p. 219). For the late Foucault, powers are reversible relations depending on actions acting upon other actions which need to be carried out actually in order to be effective. In the context of biopolitics in the era of governmentality they involve pastoral technologies of all sorts and fields of knowledge which establish and uphold a structure encompassing those governing and those being governed, or, to put it in more Nietzschean terms, which establish and uphold relations between shepherds and their sheep.

In the same essay from 1982 Foucault surprisingly emphasises that the goal of his work “during the last twenty years” has never been “to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis” but instead “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (ibid., p. 208.). Following this remark and referring to the modern episteme in his earlier book *The Order of Things* (1966), he distinguishes between different ‘modes of objectification’ which since the late 18th century produce subjects, namely (1) linguistics for the speaking subject (2) economics for the labouring subject and (3) biology as “the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive” (ibid.). According to Foucault, at that time the modern state arises out of the three domains of labour, life, and language, which transform human beings into biopolitical objects of knowledge and power. The modern state relies on the individuality of its citizens. On the one hand it brings forth the idea of individuality, on the other hand individuals can only be considered as such in their relation to the state, the complex network of its institutions, and the divisions and segmentations amongst its members the state as a global structure puts into action and sustains. The conclusion Foucault draws from this scenario at the beginning of the 1980s is quite remarkable:

The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social and philosophical problem of our times is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (ibid., p. 216)

Following Foucault’s diagnosis, my point in regard to the workshop as both a format and a promise will be to juxtapose such a government of others in opposition to a government of the self, as he particularly describes it in his analysis of asceticism in Greek and Roman antiquity. Not unlike his homage to Immanuel Kant, the essay *What is Enlightenment?*, first published shortly before his death from HIV/AIDS in 1984, what is at stake in asceticism is a radically changed relation to oneself that the subject has to go through in order to find a way out of the ‘immaturity’ imposed on it by the pastoral regime of shepherds and sheep. On Kant and the Enlightenment Foucault remarks: “[W]e are in a state of ‘immaturity’ when a book takes the place of our understanding, when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience, when a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be.” (Foucault 1997, p. 305) I cannot and do not want to answer the question here if the relation to the self in terms of asceticism is also a power relation – actions acting upon other actions within a single subject – but as a self-relation which also implies a relation to others it certainly cannot be reduced to or even be identified with the pastoral networks of knowledge and power, whereby these first and foremost constitute the modern subject even before one is able to change anything at all.



Life Forms (2019).
Photo: Joachim Dette/HKW

The workshop format between collectivity and individuality

“For some of the actors their garden of Eden, for the duration of making the performance, was their workshop where they came together in a loft for four hours every day for many months”, Carol Martin writes about Open Theatre’s *The Serpent* (1967). (Martin 2006, p. 83) Whilst in the context of the Neo-Avantgardes, workshops fostered groups in preference to individuals, in the present means and ends seem to have changed. Against this background my second step takes place in terms of a proposition: whilst in the 1960s many workshops were aiming at the production of other subjectivities, today, following what Foucault describes as the logic of the state, they are, rather, about the reproduction of one and the same subjectivity – that of the individual. Seen from this angle, workshops can establish both relations of individuals to themselves and relations in between exceeding them as individuals. They include not only a collective situation but also the formatting and formation of subjectivity in relation to that situation in terms of a promise.

In the Greenwich Village Art Scene in New York during the 1960s various makers in the field of Performing and Visual Arts questioned the traditional hierarchy between training, rehearsal and shows, between their practice as a process and the products of their practice respectively. For many of those who participated in certain artistic milieux during that time it was more important to develop collective forms and modes of hanging out together spatially and temporarily than to commit themselves to rehearsals and training in preparation of something other than their togetherness which they put into play in the course of workshops. In the frame of Andy Warhol’s Factory, Judson Church Theatre, or Grand Union³ as much as in the case of Open Theatre, Living Theatre, or The Performance Group: in various artistic contexts around 1968 a mode of subjectivity which does not stem from individuals but from the relations between them, their actual togetherness, emerged and as a group technology also had an impact on what Foucault describes as technologies of the self.⁴ Afterwards, I would claim, this mode of subjectivity migrated from groups to the individual and as such has been expanding into other fields of society from the late 1970s onwards – from Business Workshops and Life Coaching to many more frameworks we are confronted with nowadays. Just search via Google or in Youtube and you will find dozens of videos announcing courses in which people are offered to gather in groups in order to advance their individuality, be it within the framework of their jobs as company managers or due to desperate (psychological) situations in their private lives. The choreographer Dragana Bulut, together with the business and life coach Rainer Wetz, has recently dedicated her theatre production *Happyology – Tears of Joy* (2018) to this contemporary dilemma.⁵

Resulting from this situation my claim is that whilst in different artistic environments of the 1960s the workshop was strongly linked to the desire for a collective ‘truth’ in terms of the very relations between people, today’s workshop culture, somehow corresponding to the age of ‘post-

3) Grand Union was the name of the later collective of former Judson people who from then on presented workshops instead of pieces also for an audience. See Hupp Ramsey, M., 1991. *The Grand Union (1970–1977)*. *An Improvisational Performance Group*. New York: Peter Lang.

4) I am borrowing the term ‘group technology’ from Bojana Cvejić and the project *Performing the Self* she is involved in together with Ana Vujanović and Marta Popivoda. I first encountered it when she conducted a workshop in the frame of the MA Choreography and Performance in Giessen back in January 2012.

5) Regarding Dragana Bulut’s piece *Happyology – Tears of Joy* (2018) see <https://vimeo.com/293681208>. The homepage of the company from Rainer Wetz can be found here: <https://www.iak-koeln.de/?main=impressum>. Both accessed: 07-10-2019. During the summer term 2019 Kai van Eikels and me invited Dragana Bulut and Rainer Wetz to co-conduct a Coaching Workshop with our students at Ruhr Univerasity in Bochum. All participants of this experimental setting learned a lot about what it means to be an individual carrying self-responsibility in the neoliberal era.

truth' and individuals like Donald Trump, is much more about the 'truth' of subjectivities being isolated from each other. What is the experience I am creating here? What do I gain from it? Where does it take me? How will I benefit from it? Resulting from this individualist approach it can be said that what was at stake in many artistic workshops in terms of altered relations to others around 1968 has today, all too often, been transformed into a common concern with the preservation and enhancement of the individual in and for late capitalist society. Today the individual is centre stage, whilst half a century ago, at least in some artistic sub-cultures, collective constellations as something more than the sum of the constituent individuals were staged.

Inside the artistic milieu of the 1960s – I am only looking at North America here – besides Open Theatre with its *The Serpent* from 1967, Living Theatre with its *Paradise Now* from 1968, or The Performance Group with its *Dionysos in 69* from 1969, there were also Ann Halprin's workshops, for instance, on her Dance Deck in California as early as the 1950s, the composition workshops conducted by Robert Dunn in Merce Cunningham's Studio in the early 1960s, or the many films being shot in the ambit of Andy Warhol's Factory. Amongst them is the 16mm film *Jill and Freddie Dancing* (1963), in which two members of Judson Church Theatre, the dancer Fred Herko and the dance critique Jill Johnston (who wrote for *The Village Voice*), are shown casually on the rooftop of a building in New York, smoking, talking, drinking beer and dancing. Giulia Palladini's recent recoinage of the term 'foreplay' can help to understand what it meant to hang out together at that time in regard to the questioning of the usual separation between preparatory and presentational phases in the doing and making of art (see Palladini 2017). By way of contrast, the expansion of the workshop format from the art field into other fields of society and the turn towards the individual at the cost of the group from the late 1970s correspond to the historical shift in political economy from material products to immaterial processes. This marks the transition from industrial to service economy, that is, the new spirit of capitalism in postindustrial societies which have outsourced their industries to the global south in the last decades (see Chiapello and Boltanski 2007). Precisely at this time Foucault shifts his focus to subjectivity and the ways it is interwoven with power and knowledge.

Foucault's ascesis in the age of biopolitical governmentality

Although the government of the self and the government of others are different, they are also interwoven. In the course of his lectures on *The History of Governmentality* from 1977–78 Foucault analyses biopolitics as a power formation superimposing both sovereign and disciplinary power at the end of the 18th century. Five years later, in his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* from 1982, he reconsiders his previous project and connects it to his recent research on technologies of the self. Central to the empowering reading of ascetic relations to the self and others I am undertaking here, in a third step, is Foucault's extraordinary understanding of 'truth'. In his later lectures 'truth' is not something already given which has to be achieved by just gaining knowledge and ascending from the realm of sheer appearances to the high skies of true ideas, as in the Platonic model from which he distances himself. Also in contrast to contemporary 'post-truth', what he understands by 'truth' is a commitment, a passion, and specific exercises which involve a radical change of the relation between subjectivity and its practical means and ends.⁶ Ascetic practice or exercises in ascesis are carried out by subjectivities moving away from their objectification in structures of knowledge and power, aiming towards new group formations in order to reach a different self and

6) My following brief reflections on practice here are deeply informed by a dialogue with Anne Schuh from FU Berlin in the frame of our current research project.

another relation to others. What Foucault finds in Greek and Roman antiquity differs from an understanding of ascesis as confession which is still dominant nowadays, especially in Business Workshops and in Life Coaching.⁷ He locates his concept of ascesis in a period after Plato raised the idea of a perfect state in which an eternal order of things had to be remembered (what Foucault calls *recollection*) and succeeding the Christian understanding of ascesis as self-renunciation (what Foucault calls *exegesis*). Different from this form of ascesis are some performance cultures of the Neo-Avantgardes during the 1960s which interweave group with self technologies, creating what I call the paradox of the workshop. For the Hippy generation ascesis “involves coming together with oneself, the essential moment of which is not the objectification of the self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself” (Foucault 2005, p. 333). In the same year as *The Subject and Power* is published in Chicago, Foucault sketches out new forms of subjectivity and processes of subjectivation (as governments of the self), opposing them to modes of subjection (as governments of others) in Paris. He does so by returning to old Greek and Roman texts, pointing at a lost ‘spirituality’ hidden in there. “We will call ‘spirituality’ (...) the set of (...) researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth” (ibid., p. 15.), he remarks on 6 January 1982 in his first lecture on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* at the Collège de France. This is how he puts the fundamental difference between an objectification of the subject and a subjectivation of a true discourse, which according to him is called into play in the period taking place between Plato and the rise and spread of Christianity:

Let’s say, schematically, that where we moderns hear the question ‘is the objectification of the subject in a field of knowledge (connaissances) possible or impossible?’, the Ancients of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman period heard, ‘constitution of a knowledge (savoir) of the world as spiritual experience of the subject.’ And where we moderns hear ‘subjection of the subject to the order of the law,’ the Greeks and Romans heard ‘constitution of the subject as final end for him[her]self through and by the exercise of the truth.’ (ibid., p. 319)

The precondition for what is described here as truth is a “pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct” (ibid., p. 406), meaning that “the presence of the person speaking must be really perceptible in what he[*she*] actually says” (ibid., p. 405), which “must be sealed by the way he[*she*] conducts him[*her*]self and the way in which he[*she*] actually lives” (ibid., p. 405 f.). Thereby ascesis “is not a way of subjecting the subject to the law; it is a way of binding him[*her*] to the truth” (ibid., p. 317.) and it “involve[s] arriving at the formation of a full, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself, capable of producing the self-transfiguration that is the happiness one takes in oneself” (ibid., p. 319 f.). The problematic at the core of ascesis can then be summarized in the following question: “How can the subject act as he[*she*] ought, how can he[*she*] be as he[*she*] ought to be, not only inasmuch as he[*she*] knows the truth, but inasmuch as he[*she*] says it, practices it, and exercises it?” (ibid.). On 17 February 1982 Foucault tells his audience:

7) See for example <https://edi-performance.com/performance-workshops/> and (unfortunately only in German): https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=24&v=n44OuTaF900. Accessed: 07-10-2019.

The form of this schema is neither recollection nor exegesis. Unlike the Platonic model, it neither identifies care of the self and knowledge of the self, nor absorbs care of the self within knowledge of the self. Rather, it tends to accentuate and privilege care of the self, to maintain its autonomy at least with regard to knowledge of the self whose place is, as I think you will see, limited and restricted even so. Second, the Hellenistic model unlike the Christian model, far from moving in the direction of self-exegesis or self-renunciation, tends, rather, to make the self the objective to be attained. (ibid., p. 257)

The self as an objective to be attained and subjective truth as something according to which one has to conduct one's life together with others in a collective constellation are far away from the individual being objectified in structures of knowledge and power which Foucault describes in terms of modern individualism. In his 1984 essay *What is Enlightenment?* he ends with a consideration of Kant's short text with the same title that originally appeared in *Berlinische Monatszeitschrift* in 1784; in it he finds similar constellations to the ones he deals with in the course of his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Following Kant, Foucault here defines Enlightenment as "a modification of the preexisting relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason" (Foucault 1997, p. 305). For Kant and for Foucault alike one can only exit from one's state of immaturity both as a task and an obligation "by a change that [one] him[/her]self will bring about in him[/her]self" (ibid., p. 306.). According to Foucault the Enlightenment is less a historical moment towards the end of the 18th century or a specific relation to the present – which at the end of the 18th century was the presence of the French revolution towards which, as Jean-François Lyotard has shown in a brilliant essay, Kant felt "enthusiastic" (see Lyotard 2009) – but a relation to oneself that implies "to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (Foucault 1997, p. 311) that ties oneself "to an indispensable asceticism" (ibid.). Bridging Kant's elaborations on the Enlightenment to the observations Baudelaire made during the 19th century, Foucault, in the year of his sudden death, carves out another understanding of modernity: "Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover him[/her]self, his[/her] secrets and his[/her] hidden truth; he[/she] is the man who tries to invent him[/her]self. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his[/her] own being'; it compels him[/her] to face the task of producing him[/her]self" (ibid., p. 312.). The production of precisely this other subjectivity Foucault is looking for at the beginning of the 1980s was at stake for many artists turning to workshops as both a format and a promise in the 1960s whilst they tried to leave trainings, rehearsals and shows behind.

The workshop past and present

From this perspective, the supposed 'truth' of a collective realization which was at stake in many artistic practices aiming at the formatting and formation of other kinds of subjectivity during the 1960s already forecasts the present moment, not only the time of Trump; it is here that the authenticity the workshop promised to the Hippie generation turns out to be an illusion, i.e. the assumption that there could be a collective space and a time independent from individualism and the market, untouched by capital, and emancipatory in terms of the construction of alternative ways of hanging out together. Nowadays, on the contrary, it is togetherness itself and the subjective relations people establish between themselves as individuals which are considered processes and products simultaneously. This problematic can be seen very well in the above mentioned piece *Happyology – Tears of Joy* (2018) by Dragana Bulut: welcome to the artificial hells in which one is forced to participate actively and not only passively (see Bishop 2012)!

What has all this to do with Foucault's ascesis? What was privileged as a subjectivity being

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Life Forms (2019).

Photo: Joachim Dette/HKW

embedded in collective constellations instead of in single individuals by some pioneers of the Neo-Avantgarde half a century ago nowadays is turned into a tool enhancing individuals for a global (dance) market which demands flexibility and the ability to continuously adjust to situations in terms of projects: all too often I have participated in workshops in order to advance my skills or to do networking rather than to create an experience that truly changes me as an individual or to really relate differently to myself and to others. Not only in Business Workshops or Life Coaching but also in a multitude of dance workshops people primarily relate as individuals to other individuals. In contrast to this, when Richard Schechner, the founding figure of a field of research closely linked to the cultural revolution of 1968 called Performance Studies, deals with the notion

of the workshop at the end of his 1973 essay *Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance*, he puts a lot of hope in this kind of association amongst people: “The workshop is a way of playing around with reality, a means of examining behaviour by recording, exaggerating, fragmenting, recombining, and adumbrating it.” (Schechner 1988, p. 110)

I cannot argue as anthropologically as Schechner, nor can I be as optimistic, situated as I am about a half a century later, at a time when the workshop setting he sketched out has become much more ambiguous than it seemed to be during its emergence around 1968. Its difference relates to, on the one hand, training, rehearsal and shows in the artistic field, and on the other hand, in the context of political economy, to the assembly line in the factory. Whilst Schechner makes a clear distinction between facilitating workshops and repressive ones – which he only locates in “asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools” (ibid.) – in the last few decades the border between these has become rather blurred. The idea of collectivity Schechner culturally appropriates from the rituals of tribal culture and conceives as a group technology empowering and facilitating “small, autonomous cultural groups” (ibid.), in the best case shall replace the individuality of traditional theatre, which he rejects as entertainment and drama. Today this vision has been turned into various technologies of the self, promoting individuals in favour of groups whenever people gather together.

At the beginning of the 1970s, however, inspired by the rituals of tribal societies, Schechner put the workshop format in juxtaposition to work as wage labour, for example, or instrumentally driven activity in general. In another text, entitled *From ritual to theater and back: The efficacy-entertainment braid* from 1974, he states:

Industrial cultures separate and standardize functions and expressions; communal societies combine many functions and expressions in extended, complicated events. Industrial cultures specialize in sequencing univocal actions while communal cultures generalize by means of events that are multivocal. (Schechner 1988, p. 155)

Schechner hopes to overcome individualism by contrasting industrial to communal societies; he also contrasts theatre – as an individualist means of entertainment and representation – to ritual, as a way to actualize collective relations between their participants by means of their efficacy, which for him led to the transformation of subjectivity away from the individual towards the group. He does so being driven by a deep trust in performance as a process that could be opposed to those shows which are separate from their audience as the products of preceding trainings and rehearsals. What he rejects in this context is the usual causal and chronological chain leading from trainings (the transmission of technique from one individual to others in the frame of exercises) via rehearsals (the structuring of a scripted process by repetition) to shows (the entertainment of individuals in contrast to what Schechner calls efficacy). In the same 1974 text he states:

[S]ince around 1965 what has been shown to the spectators is the very process of developing and staging the performance – the workshops that led up to the performance, the various means of theatrical production, the ways the audience is brought into and led from the space, and many other previously conventional and/or hidden procedures. (ibid., p. 131)

However, what Schechner could not take into consideration when he proclaimed the protection of a “time/space where intra-group relationships may thrive” (Schechner 1988, p. 110) in the context of the workshop is that this frame as the formatting and formation of subjectivity from the

beginning on was not only linked to groups but also to individual positions it put their participants into – the paradox of the workshop. Already around 1968 the workshop as a production of subjectivity was not only about collective experience and relations one bears to others but was also linked to experience as it appears to individuals alone. Therefore, from the beginning, the workshop has been in serious danger of reproducing the bourgeois figure of the individual rather than, as Foucault wishes when he talks about ascesis, to produce collective forms of subjectivity. Nowadays, people in the dance field and in other social fields who organize or attend workshops, claiming to privilege processes over products, might only witness the rendering of processes into products. They might do so because they forget that the promise of collectivity always goes hand in hand with a formatting and formation of subjectivity as Foucault analyses in his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

Against this background Jon McKenzie describes our current state of affairs as a society of performance (see McKenzie 2001) and as Bojana Cvejić recently made clear, since we do not observe a spectacle from a distance anymore but are embedded in processes unfolding alongside the very relations between us, we have been turned from public citizens into private users.⁸ My point here is to suggest that the paradox of the workshop as the promise of a collective practice should be understood neither as training, rehearsal nor a show but as the very process being its own product, producing both a collectivity and individual positions therein.

For Schechner the workshop is closely linked to what he calls actuals. In his 1970 essay *Actuals* he already develops an understanding of “actualizing” which is closely linked to the workshop format and which he emphasizes in terms of a “special way of handling experience and jumping the gaps between past and present, individual and group, inner and outer (...)” (Schechner 1988, p. 32). For Schechner an actual has to do with (1) process (2) situations (3) contest (4) initiation or “*change in status* for the participants” (ibid., p. 46) and (5) a concrete usage of space (ibid.). According to him, actuals are as much in contrast to dramatic theatre as an individualist and a purely entertaining entity as the workshop is to the idea of shows in front of a supposedly passive audience. On the contrary, workshops aim to activate collectives, not produce passive individuals. As actualizations of a togetherness they are the empowering of people and the transformation of situations. They initiate change. They ought to be collective realizations of a supposed communal experience which would be different from individualist experience and the reality of daily life in industrial societies at an earlier point in the unfolding of globalization.

What is then the difference between our present and the alternative modes of association the Hippie generation was searching for? Why the paradox of the workshop? Around 1968 artists were not only looking for alternative ways of working together and collaborating on common goals and agendas within a given market – this is the situation of today’s freelance artists who attend workshops in order to gain skills and do networking within that framework – but instead, like Foucault at the beginning of the 1980s, tried to change subjectivity as such and the order of experience it was based upon (see e.g. Janevski and Lax 2018 and Martin 2006). Whilst at Schechner’s time workshops perhaps could still be considered “caves that give evidence of singing and dancing, people celebrating fertility in risky, sexy, violent, collective, playful ways” (Schechner 1988, p. 110), today it is much more difficult to separate the cave from its outside, from postindustrial societies and the real subsumption of life itself as a process and the rendering of its events into products.

8) See Cvejić, B., *Notes for a Society of Performance: On Dance, Sports, Museums, and Their Users*, https://www.academia.edu/14880800/Notes_for_a_Society_of_Performance. Access: 05-10-2019.



Life Forms (2019).

Photo: Joachim Dette/HKW

Life Forms at Haus der Kulturen der Welt

The durational and workshop-like format *Life Forms*, presented for three days in a row at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin at the end of April 2019, seemed to take into account all the contradictions this problematic consists of and what I call the paradox of the workshop, at least from my partial perspective as someone observing it as an audience member.⁹ Therefore I would like to take my fourth step here by relating this simultaneously individualistic and collective workshop-like setting to the field I have sketched out so far. Although it did not try to achieve a complete collectivization of practice, it blurred the boundaries separating individuals, their positions, and *different* practices. It also blurred different spheres in the doing and making of art, since in its frame the practices of curation, choreography and performing overlapped and interfered with each other as much as the format of the workshops and shows did. As both a curatorial setting and a choreographed situation it did not want to activate a collective but allowed its participants to stay passive. It was both theatre and ritual, a collective actualization in terms of efficacy and representation.

The public event did not pretend it would be purely about the invention of a group technology

9) See https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2019/lebensformen/lebensformen_start.php. Accessed: 05-11-2019.

actualizing or melting the participants together into events they then would all share. On the contrary, it left enough space for all the different subjectivities it consisted of to relate differently both to themselves and to others. Since it did not promise anything but a situation it combined self with group technologies – subjectivities and the relations between them – in a way that facilitated another subjectivity both on the level of individuals and on a collective level.

Life Forms also opened different practices towards each other. Over the course of three days we were welcome to come and go as we pleased. Scholars and artists from different backgrounds appeared in the middle of the crowd, starting conversations in varying tones, modalities and numbers. Though what happened in this setting was scripted theatrically beforehand to a certain degree, the actual encounters left space for everyone, including the audience members, to situate both in relation to oneself and to others as one pleased. The presenters reappeared a couple of times, but always in different constellations. We could see them inbetween, being part of the crowd at HKW, rewriting their papers based on previous encounters for upcoming appearances in other constellations. The durational event was framed by fragments of Xavier le Roy's animal motives which he has been developing since *Low Pieces* (2009–2011). What we experience as time passes is how we become different in relation to ourselves depending on how we relate to others. Ascesis in *Life Forms* involved a level of reflection which was different both from the Hippie workshops in the 1960s and, for example, from today's Business and Life Coaching workshops.

We saw this in the way that scholars changed their way of talking and even how they stood or sat in relation to the ensemble they entered and left. As an audience member one neither merged with the event nor became part of a uniform collective. One related both to oneself and to the group, continuously balancing between oneself and the others. Therefore *Life Forms* manifested what I, relating to the research project *Performing the Self* by Bojana Cvejić, Ana Vujanović and Marta Popivoda, would like to describe as the tension between group and self technologies, relations to others and self-relations, respectively. As a workshop-like setting this series of events neither tried to establish a collective nor did it leave us aside as just individuals. Instead, it explored the very space and time inbetween us, thereby referring back to a still urgent problematic at the very heart of the ways we can hang out together that has existed since 1968.

What does all this imply for today's workshops? Can there be ascesis without a commitment and passion for truth in the above mentioned sense? My proposition here is to think of workshops as ascetic sets of exercises, practices, and technologies both of the self and in the sense of group technologies which enable subjects and groups of subjects to exit their subjected positions in structures of objectivation in order to subjectivize themselves and by doing so bring forth new forms of subjectivity. Within the framework of this proposition, workshops as ascetic practices would also mean an emancipation from the individuality subjects are ascribed to by the pastoral logic of shepherds and sheep in the age of biopolitics and governmentality. At play in ascetic workshops would be modes of subjectivation which help to find ways out from our 'self-incurred immaturity' and lead away from the individualism we are all suffering under. Ascesis would involve the task and obligation to invent exercises empowering the construction of new relations between subjects and their means and ends. Only under the condition that one binds oneself to a subjective truth and that one follows a commitment and a passion for that truth, new forms of subjectivity can emerge, which in the age of post-truth is perhaps even more urgent than at the end of the 1990s, the last time dance moved on to pastures new, at a time when the general political situation promised to be a bit more calm and easy than in 2020.

Abstract

This essay investigates how far the contemporary phenomenon of the workshop in the dance field can be contrasted to the historical emergence of the workshop format in the context of the Neo-Avantgardes during the 1960s. It suggests that contemporary ways of hanging out together should be situated in the area of conflict between the group and the self.

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