

A quadrilogue on quadrilogue¹

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Abstract

The notion of collective creativity has always been primarily attached to artistic collectives and their practices. Even though collective creativity (in the sense of the actual production of a concrete artwork) has been subjected to intense questioning or even dismissal in favour of persistent focus on individual genius, it managed to preserve its legitimate place, especially in relation to the research of collective artistic practices. Scientific research has, of course, also often been collective, although it is sometimes reduced to collaborations in which each scientist is in charge of a specific research segment which she or he undertakes individually. We are, however, interested here in the type of collective creativity or inter-cerebral collaboration (G. Tarde) in the arts and science, which *jointly* produces new knowledge. This new knowledge cannot be attributed specifically to any particular individual, even though it brings each of them individually new knowledge in return. Specifically, through a quadrilogue focused on the theme of collective creativity in academic research, we will describe and think through our research and writing experiences using this method – in relation to both the production and reception of our work.

Keywords: *creativity, collective, collaboration, knowledge, quadrilogue*

Ključne riječi: *kreativnost, kolektiv, suradnja, znanje, kvadrilog*

1 The paper is an extended, written version of the presentation held at the symposium *Innovative methodologies: International Art and Science Conference*, Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, April 9th–11th, 2019.

Jasna Jasna

It all started as a joke. It was 2017 and we received a conference call for the *Theatre Between Politics and Policies: New Challenges* conference to be held in Belgrade the following year. Two years later, we received another call, for another conference, called *Innovative Methodologies: International Art & Science Conference...* much like everyone inside academia regularly receives for any given conference, any given day. The first conference was about politics and spectatorship. We'll do a panel, we decided, panels are easier to organize than individual papers, we just need a common theme, the rest will somehow fall into place. We'll do a panel, yes! We'll still need four individual papers, but it's easier when you are not alone.

We decided we would do it, but the deadlines were tight, and so were our schedules, as is the case with the schedules of everyone in academia. Then someone had an idea. Let's do it as a dialogue; actually, let's do it as a quadrilogue, since there are four of us. To be more precise, let's email about whatever topic we agree upon, and then just read these emails out loud, and – ta-dam! – our panel is done. It all started as a joke, really. It all started from a pragmatic need, the need to fit another demand for producing knowledge into our already congested academic schedules.

But then someone else said, it's not such a bad idea after all, not bad at all. If we're doing a panel, why pretend there's just four separate individuals behind the lectern, without any real contact, without any reference to one another? Why pretend our themes and interests have nothing to do with each other, why pretend they are detached from our common social, pedagogical, cultural context? Why not try something else instead? Why not show the inherent interconnectedness of our professional and private lives, why not incorporate the fact that we are all colleagues and friends, the fact that we regularly **think** together, through emails and messages, through drinks and meetings, through jokes and experiences, through gossip and insights. Why not show that, indeed, it is not only easier when you are not alone, but also more rich, more meaningful, more interesting, more comprehensive, more ample.

Indeed, why not, the others replied, and so we decided to follow through. The first email was written and then sent, and then the second and third, and all the others followed. The quadrilogue was slowly taking shape, one thought after another, one quote, two disagreements, one question, two disputes. In a couple of days our epistolary panel was done.

And the rest is history. And then another one followed and then a third one, which is this one, the *meta* one.

When Charles Green² writes that collaboration in the arts became a crucial element in the transition from modernist to postmodernist art, and that it continues to be a key component of creative processes in Western arts contexts, he doesn't mean to say there was no collaboration before postmodernism, what he means rather is that it went unnoticed. In other words, as Kathryn Syssoyeva writes,³ scholarly interest in collective creation has only recently gathered pace. But despite this late blooming, the proliferation of literature on collaboration is quite abundant. Historical analysis, practical procedures, impact and reception, all of it has been covered. Narrowing down the focus to the field of performing arts, *devised theater* was the *it term* of the nineties.⁴ Of course, as Simon Murray⁵ suggests, it is almost impossible to imagine theatre practices which are not collaborative:

Even in productions that adhere slavishly to the authorial play text and which are directed in a manner that brooks little creative input from actors, the work is still collaborative in the sense that its realization in front of an audience requires countless 'micro' acts of collaboration both within the creative process (between text, director, actors, designers, sound and lighting technicians, carpenters, choreographers, dramaturgs etc.) and beyond it.

But although everyone was doing it long before the nineties, only then did they get a name for it, only then was there a precise way to call it, to shape it. And a name always means legitimization, a name always means history.

So far so good; the story flows nicely; it all looks rather wonderful. But if this was a theater play, if this was a performance text, we would need an antagonist at this point,

- 2 Charles GREEN: *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, x.
- 3 Kathryn SYSSOYEVA: *A History of Collective Creation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 2.
- 4 Alison ODDEY: *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, London: Routledge, 1996; David WILLIAMS: *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 1999; Deidre HEDDON and Jane MILLING: *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Simon MURRAY and John KEEFE: *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2007.
- 5 Simon MURRAY: Contemporary Collaborations and Cautionary Tales, in: Noyale Colin and Stefanie Sachsenmaier (eds.): *Collaboration in Performance Practice: Premises, Workings and Failures*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 37.

we would need someone to measure our forces against. And we do not need to look much further for it, one figure spontaneously offers itself.

Enter: the Artist Genius.

Yes, the “only” problem with this collaborative narrative about collaboration is that, despite its strengthening in the last couple of years, there is still another narrative much stronger than it, another narrative that has been ruling our thought systems approximately as long as the Cartesian dualist paradigm. It’s one of those narratives that has been lying dormant beneath our syllabi, our texts, our lectures, our conference papers and panels, our everything. It is the narrative that overshadows collaborative practices, ideas of devised work, it overshadows the fact that people usually work **together**, through emails and messages, through drinks and meetings, through jokes and experiences, through gossip and insights.

It takes one simple stroke of genius (pun intended) to wipe out all this collaboration and put the tyranny of the individual Artist Genius in its place instead.

So, this is how the story of collaboration vs. individualism looks like in the practical part of the performing arts world, at least according to me. But what about theater science, what about performance studies scholars? What’s the story in that part of the world?

Una

Before I try answering this particular question, I would like to emphasize a struggle that many of us in academia are frustrated with. I am referring to a certain unattainable positioning between the demand to credit one’s (re)sources, to properly reference and attribute every single idea, word, sentence that you are using to the person you heard it from, read it from, understood it from, and the inability to do so with absolute rigour. Because it assumes a certain kind of linearity of our understanding of the world. First you grasp what was said by this person, then you grasp what was said by that person, and in the end you have a building made out of bricks as ideas, properly attributed to person A, B, C. But knowledge and understanding do not operate that way. They operate both in circles and in cycles, and also through accumulation and release. To trace that logic of influence, to trace the actual origins of ideas, is almost impossible, yet we insist on it, and in some ways we are forced to insist on it, because that gives grounding and legitimacy to our work.

Yet to unravel how thinking operates is a fairly difficult, if not impossible task.

For instance, let’s just look into the story that Jasna Jasna just told; let me quote her:

Then someone had an idea. Let’s do it as a dialogue, actually, let’s do it as a quadrilogue, since there are four of us. To be more precise, let’s email about whatever topic we agree upon, and then just read these emails out loud, and – ta-dam! – our panel is done. It all started as a joke, really. It all started from a pragmatic need, the need to fit another demand for producing knowledge into our already congested academic schedules.

“...someone had an idea” – the truth is, we have no idea who had that idea. It happened less than a year and a half ago, three of us were present, and we have no idea who had the idea of us doing a quadrilogue together. Because the way ideas occur is always relational—you think in relation to another’s thought, and then a third idea occurs, that wouldn’t have occurred had you not been exposed to several ideas before that, to a conversation. And whose ideas is it then? The reason why we don’t remember, or can’t agree on whose idea it was, is because it wasn’t anyone’s idea, as it wasn’t an individual idea, but a relational idea (and one could argue that all ideas are actually relational). To tell you the truth: it’s really not much of an idea. It’s about as innovative as a traffic sign. Let’s get a proposal in which we would argue against each other, or agree with each other, or anything in between, rather than just writing a piece by ourselves. How utterly wild and out there. And yet, how often do you actually witness that at humanities conferences? Not all that often, although it is slowly changing.⁶ How many people do you know in the academia, in the field of the performing arts, scholars who work collectively over an extended period of time, who write books together, research the same topics together, and collaborate continuously? And yet, collaborative writing, I would argue, fits much better with the very logic of thinking than individual writing. What do I mean by that? In order to think rigorously, you have to think against yourself, you have to think *against your argument, you have to be your own devil’s advocate*. And it works much better when you don’t have to imitate that voice of disagreement, when you don’t have to imagine that position of otherness, as there are limits to how Other to Oneself one can be.

6 TAYLOR and FRANCIS: Co-Authorship in the Humanities and Social Sciences: A Global View: A White Paper from Taylor & Francis, *Taylor and Francis*, 2017 (access 25 February 2022).

To go back to Jasna Jasna's question: "what about theatre science, what about performance studies scholars?" I will first look into reading practices and their relation to solitude and collectivity. In his brilliant article, Ed Simon describes the reading practices of the 18th century, quoting from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and Abigail Williams' *The Social Life of Books: Reading together in the Eighteenth Century Home*, emphasizing reading as a "social activity which happens between companions, not simply a static, locked-away silence happening between covers".⁷ Simon adds:

We may think of reading novels as exercises in isolation, where either the site of study must be quiet and singular, or where the psychological space of imagination is within our mind's interior, but in the 18th century the novel was often as social as ancient Greek drama or a modern Hollywood movie.⁸

So, what happened? How did reading become an exercise in isolation from a fiercely social activity? How did we arrive at this:

Despite some attempts to revive the lost art of reading novels aloud, such as the New Bedford Whaling Museum's annual marathon for Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* or Harvard's Houghton Library with its marathon of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* this past Halloween in honor of that book's 200th anniversary, novels in the 21st century are either experienced in the static confines of the audio-book, or in that isolating room from which the form has most thrived – that of the individual head.⁹

If we put aside material causes, such as rarity and the expense of books, the proliferation of printed books, the development of more portable ones, and high rates of illiteracy, Simon argues that the transition from oral and collective to literal and individual culture was related to a "new interiority," to a fascination with inner life, subjectivity, consciousness, isolation, and privacy. And indeed, the novel has always been taken as an ideal form to create and articulate interiority in detail, and in all its elaboration, all the complexity of individual subjectivity. In comparison, theatre, performance as a form, demands social situations, demands and forces social encounters, hiding much more than they show, suggesting much more than they elaborate, and treating speech as action. However fascinated by

interiority, in whatever conservative psychological realist tradition of fascination with the simulation of interiority, forms of performance cannot deny relationality, the cause and effect of social interactions. Or can they?

Agata

Before someone among us – or, maybe, no one – develops the discussion in direction to answer Jasna's and Una's questions, and before I ask myself – as well as yourself – another question, I would like to share my own and private perspective on our collective scholar-working. The biggest advantage of writing together is the *organic nature* of that process. I feel much more motivated and, if you want, obliged to jump into the work if I were triggered or invited by something said by someone with whom I regularly share information, opinions, frustrations, impressions, emotions... Certainly, much more than by an abstract deadline, or even by a more abstract evaluation form that I have to fill in every couple of years to prove my scholarly activity. Besides that, reflecting together upon a certain topic offers me a freedom to choose the problem (and to approach to it) that I prefer – without worrying about the consistency of the research, because the others will most likely cover other problems and approaches that have to be examined and considered as well. Although, rigorously speaking – as Hannah Arendt argued, following Socrates – when I am thinking I am by definition disagreeing with myself¹⁰, when I am presenting a collective paper – as Una put it – I don't have necessarily to "think against my argument," I don't have to be "my own devil's advocate," "I don't have to imagine that position of otherness"¹¹ – because, many of them are implicit to a collective work. But there is one more phenomenon that attracts me to collective writing: reading my comrades (what they argue, affirm, deny, propose) – apart from triggering me to respond to them (If I feel so), sometimes literally opens my own approach or my own theme to myself. What emerges in our correspondence will sometimes remind me of something I would have maybe never thought of without reading them – if I was writing a text all by myself. It's like a word association game: you have to have at least one other with whom you will play. The more, the merrier. Couldn't this also be the logic of producing knowledge?

7 SIMON, Ed: Interiority Combustion Engine, *Berfrois: Literature, Ideas, Tea*, 2019 (access 25 February 2022).

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Hannah ARENDT: *The Life of the Mind*, New York, London, San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1971, 185.

11 *Ibid.*

Goran

A few years ago, renown German Marxist scholar Michael Heinrich attended a conference in Zagreb dedicated to his work. When asked about the ingenuity of his widely acclaimed book, a commentary on Marx's *Capital*, he humbly answered that it wasn't his book, but the result of many interlocutors who co-authored the theoretical framework, refined many arguments, and substantially improved the structure of the presentation. However, due to copyright procedures, the publisher insisted that one author had to be singled out, so his name stands on the book cover. The collaborators are, as is usually the case, mentioned in the preface. I suppose we are all familiar with similar examples, and they usually don't bother us much.

What I find particularly interesting is the genealogy of such an arrangement. Under what conditions is a collaborative collective the legitimate origin of a scientific or artistic work? The answer may seem banal and straightforward: when collaborators agree on the conditions of the production, and the same goes for the laboratory as well as a performance scene or venue. But when it comes to attribution, we find ourselves in muddy waters: the freer the field, the more hierarchical and unequal the distribution of benefits. We are pretty accustomed to situations in the natural, medical, or technical sciences, where scientific papers bear the names of a few dozen authors. Yet, in the humanities, including art theory, we rarely see more than two co-authors. One of the principal reasons for this is the unbelievable perseverance of the concept of genius, the sole creator of an artwork or any text whatsoever, as devised at the end of the 18th century. To quote Jasna Jasna: "It takes one simple stroke of genius to wipe all of this collaboration out and put the tyranny of the individual Artist Genius in its place instead."

An artistic field, often indulging in self-congratulatory paeans, presents itself as a field of principally limitless combinatorics, where only the imagination of its participants may set limits. However, quite often all the credit goes to one and only instance: his majesty the Original Creator, and her collaborators deserve at best the status of a sidekick. The covert logic of such reasoning is pretty simple: while many can participate in the production of the work, only one actually brings about the main idea, and its aura overshadows all the other contributions.

Irish-Ethiopian cognitive scientist Abeba Birhane¹² traces such a position back to Descartes and his stringent

postulate of the absolute certainty of one's mental capacities. While the nature of the outer world may be ambiguous, the very fact that I'm capable of contemplating it proves my mental existence. So, the sole bearer of creativity, the sole producer of ideas, is always an individual mind. The vast swaths of psychology, and consequently epistemology, are still heavily imbued with such prejudices. Unlike Cartesians, Birhane, drawing on Bakhtin's insights, advocates the dialogic model of the self as an epistemic actor. In such a conception, ideas are not found or discovered by an individual, but produced by the relational dynamics of versatile co-creators. It may sound fairly mundane, but such an approach bears significant consequences for the (self) understanding of the artistic field.

Jasna Jasna

I love how this text keeps beginning all over again, how it has multiple starts. Undoubtedly, I would say, it will also have multiple ends. And this might be one of them.

By accident, recently I have started reading *Sex, or the Unbearable*, co-authored by Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman¹³, described on the back cover as a dialogue between them. The way they explain their common endeavor in the preface of their book, I think, perfectly applies to our endeavor that started almost exactly a year ago from now (although Una previously stated that a year and a half have already passed... see, disagreements at work). Berlant and Edelman write:

Resistance, misconstruction, frustration, anxiety, becoming defensive, feeling misunderstood: we see these as central to our engagement with each other and to our ways of confronting the challenge of negativity and encounter. Far from construing such responses as failures in the coherence or economy of our dialogues, we consider them indispensable to our efforts to think relationality.¹⁴

Relationality: here is a word I learned from Una, who is here (or rather, there). I have learned it outside of context of this text, inside the context of one of those messaging exchanges that make up so much of our daily "non-academic" communication. She used it to explain why

12 Abeba BIRHANE: Descartes Was Wrong: "A Person is a Person Through Other Persons," *Aeon*, <https://aeon.co/ideas/cartes-was-wrong-a-person-is-a-person-through-other-persons>, 2017, (access 12 March 2022).

13 Lauren BERLANT and Lee EDELMAN: *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013.

14 *Ibid.*, ix.

I see Goran, who is also here, one way, and she, on the other hand, sees him another, completely different way. *Everything we do is relational*, she said, *there is no way of perceiving things outside of our relation to it*. It sounds like common knowledge, I know, but the novelty was in having a word for it. And that word is *relationality*.

I will probably be using this word in many texts to follow, but will never link it to Una, will never “properly” attribute Una for her role in my acquaintance with the word. (Except that I just did.)

Berlant and Edelman continue:

Structurally determined by interruption, shifts in perspective, metonymic displacements, and the giving up of control, conversation complicates the prestige of autonomy and the fiction of authorial overignty by introducing the unpredictability of moving in relation to another. One never can know in advance to what one’s interlocutor will respond or what turns the conversation may take through the associations of a single word.¹⁵

Again, this sounds like common sense, but when placed within the context of the intellectual production of knowledge, of academia, it undoubtedly evokes Una’s previous question again: “How many people do you know in academia, who work collectively over an extended period of time, who write books together, research the same topics together, and collaborate continuously?”

Una previously proposed the obsession with interiority as a key element behind the obsession with individual authorship, at least when novels are in question. She left the question open when it comes to performance, and I would now like to open it up in relation to intellectual, academic work, the type of work we are doing here, right now. Through Birhane, Goran already gave a glimpse of possible answers, but let me explore things in another direction.

On the one hand, the reasons might be of a purely practical nature—after all, where would we end up if we would list all the names from our list of references as co-authors on the front cover or the spine? Or at least, from our list of acknowledgements? (Personal confession, I sometimes feel the acknowledgements section is my favourite part of the books I read, and I find myself rereading them, trying to decipher the real relations behind the careful wording in each sentence.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

Back to the argument. If not (just) interiority, then why is the academic field so obsessed with individualism. Might it have something to do with what Christopher Lasch writes about in his *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*, namely the fact that, “Every society reproduces its culture, its norms, its underlying assumptions, its modes of organizing experience—in the individual, in the form of personality”¹⁶? I will leave that question to my colleagues, make it another piece of the word associations game that Agata suggested we play.

I love how this text keeps quoting itself all over again, how it keeps referring to itself over and over again. To reaffirm this position, let me once more repeat how I love the fact that it will have multiple ends.

Una

Let me answer Jasna’s last question immediately and hasty. Part of the reason for the obsession with individuality must surely be the fact that we die alone, even if we die surrounded by people. The experience of dying is profoundly individual, incommunicable, and non-relational. Now, even if I would argue in favour of that, and many cultural materialists would disagree¹⁷, that type of answer is not very productive, and it is hopelessly meaningless in its generality. Also, there is an obvious problem with such a poor attempt at providing an answer: would that mean that non-humanities scholars, who are collaborating to a much higher degree than humanities scholars, are not experiencing death individually? And only us, humanities scholars, die alone? Something tells me that it is not the case. I will not go further down this blind alley, but I will say this: centuries of catholic dogma built into Western societies, according to which you meet your Saviour individually in order to be confronted with an individual sin spreadsheet, a personal account of your sinful life, and not a collaborative or collective, or relational assessment, haven’t helped, or rather have provided a rather solid basis on which to build on our separation from others, down our individual life paths, our individual responsibility and moral biases. But let me try to go back to a safer thread from this exchange, the commonplace and cliché of the theatre and performing arts field as being inherently more collaborative in relation to other arts. And I will immediately bring that into question with a quote from Goran:

¹⁶ Christopher LASCH: *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1991 [1979], 34.

¹⁷ See, for instance: Raymond WILLIAMS: *Modern Tragedy*, Toronto: Broadview Encore Editions, 2006, 80–81.

However, quite often all the credits go to the one and only instance: his majesty the Original Creator, and her collaborators deserve at best the status of a sidekick. The covert logic of such reasoning is pretty simple: while many can participate in the production of the work, only one actually brings about the main idea, and its aura overshadows all the other contributions.

This is a great description of precisely our field – the director is the one credited with the main idea, and even if we are talking about devised theatre practices of a collective such as Forced Entertainment; we all know the name of Tim Etchells, but we would struggle to name, from the top of our heads, other Forced Entertainment members, even though they have been Forced Entertainment members for around 30 years. Of course, actors and their individual creations often get the credit too, precisely for their brilliant individual talent, but it is rare that students of the academy enter the field with a burning desire for a phenomenal group dynamic exchange with their actor colleagues. You don't often hear someone say: "I really, really want to be an amazing acting partner, and I want to be an actor because I want to excel in a collaborative exchange with other actors."

The situation is, however, far worse, with regards to theatre criticism, and I think this has something to do with the importance of the establishment of the persona of the critic. A theatre critic is a position which is often understood as the position of the arbiter of good taste, someone who is building their position as the one who knows what works and what doesn't. And in fact, I think with this we have turned full circle on the question of collectivity and collaboration in humanities. In some ways, the less objective the field is perceived to be (the humanities being the most subjective of them all), the higher the emphasis is on individual brilliance and a personal, original, unique contribution. Apart from this being actually a circular conclusion – the more subjective the field is, the more subjective it will be – it again, isn't a very insightful thing to say, as it is, again, very general. And it also unproblematically positions a distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. Yet the main problem for me is this: because the field of art making and art evaluation is treated as highly subjective, it suggests that in some ways we should give up on the collaborative processes of negotiation of what it is that we actually saw, as anyone will anyway see what they want to see. Now that is a hugely problematic conclusion, and one of the most dangerous of them all. It is precisely these collaborative processes of negotiation (on value, ideologies, performance, dramaturgical logic, etc.) which can add to

the complexity of analysis without denying the individuality and subjectivity of perception. One of the things I love the most is our endless discussions about theatre pieces we saw, our endless disagreement on what works, what doesn't, which pieces are political, which aren't, what is it that the *métier* of the theatre director implies. What I consider particularly important is that this collaborative process of thinking through something does not require us to come with a collective judgement, it allows for our disagreement to show – what we are doing is somehow revealing the logic of thought processes themselves, making them visible. And I think that this is the key to the importance of dialogical or quadrilological exchange. It is somewhat less focused on the representation of ideas, and more on the logic of their development. Which is I think something that, for instance, the genre of theatre criticism especially lacks in its fascination with evaluation.

Agata

The other day I visited Trbuljak's exhibition *Who Would Buy the Back Wash Sink from Goran Trbuljak?* (Museum of Arts and Crafts / Muzej za umjetnost i obrt–MUO Zagreb, 20 November 2018–1 April 2019), which happened to fit perfectly into our discussion here. For those of you who don't know: Goran Trbuljak is a photographer and conceptual artist whose life-time self-imposed artistic mission is deconstructing, reconstructing, and deconstructing back the myth of an individual artistic genius, and the presupposed originality/authenticity of his work – provided by God or some other higher instance. In a very sharp, witty and playful, way, he researches the mechanisms of building an artistic (star) persona, producing, reproducing and/or manipulating artistic values, setting the laws and rules of art market... demystifying and mocking the whole "machine" – including himself – to absurdity. He launched himself into "the world of art" in 1971, with the aphorism *I do not want to show anything new and original*, written on a piece of paper, which he exhibited in in the SC Gallery in Zagreb, which marked the beginning of a series of *Untitled* works that he produced until 1982. As the curator of this recent exhibition, Jasmina Fučkan, describes:

The series consist of twenty textual works – one-line sentences by which the author expresses opinions about unnamed works of art and relations in the art world, sums up the orders that visitors are supposed to carry out, scatters the statistical information on the artist's existence and rises above the conditions of institutional co-operation. The first such texts intended for people on the street or gallery

and museum visitors have been exhibited at the Paris Youth Biennale in 1971, and later on many other manifestations. He often made photocopies of these works, leaving the visitors the opportunity to bring them home if they wanted. However, today's free distribution of these Trbuljak's works is no longer possible because they make contact with the audience under the copyright conditions of the of the collection meaningfully named *Kontakt*, which aims to put the under-examined art of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe into the context of global history of art.¹⁸

The *Kontakt* collection is owned by the Erste Group and Erste Foundation, thus by a bank. A paradox, inscribed in Trbuljak's work since always, keeps on perpetuating. Besides the practical side of this purchase—that Trbuljak got, I hope, a respectable amount of money—it could be also read as a part of his concept. Namely, art collections are part of Trbuljak's research... But, he himself is a collector too. In many interviews he is also referring to himself as a collector, more or less in almost the identical way as he put it in a caption accompanying one part of his MUO exhibition:

Collectors collect art for different reasons. Some collect it in order to display it immediately, I collect it to keep it permanently hidden. I was buying from artists whose works resembled some of my own. I thought that by doing so I could hide them from the public, and thus reduce my own competition.

Not only that. The collector Trbuljak—noticing that his artistic value is significantly rising—now begins to buy artworks of the artist Trbuljak: the only art work that he exhibited recently within the Permanent collection of Museum of Arts and Crafts—in a middle of a room full of 19th century (or so) armchairs, writing desks, porcelain plates, etc.—was THE *Back Wash Sink* that he bought while it was still A back wash sink—through the on-line commerce platform Njuškalo.hr. (*njušiti* means to sniff). During the exhibition, with a little help from an art convention, the ontologically transformed object was displayed again on Njuškalo.hr—this time by the author and, of course, as Trbuljak's THE *Back Wash Sink*. And who sniffed out the good purchase opportunity? Who else, but Trbuljak the collector. One could ask now: OK, what's new in this? We've seen it all, more or less... in Duchamp, Warhol, Haacke, and a bunch of others. Exactly, nothing's new, but still—because of that

more or less—it's not the same. Pondering the question of uniqueness, the relation of an author with her own name, the possibility of double/multiple/shared authorship, in one word, upon ontology of an artwork, Trbuljak is showing how we can, by “imitating” someone, produce a new work.

French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde claimed that, in fact, that's the ONLY way to produce something new; that the inventiveness/imitation dichotomy is a false one, namely, they cannot but go together. According to Stephen Wright, Tarde saw them as the mutually reinforcing dynamics of any process of innovation. Imitation “is the veritable engine of the spread to invention, and the reason that innovation—in art, in knowledge production, etc.—is always collective and never ‘private’”.¹⁹ The logic is as follows: by imitating something, we actually repeat it and—spread it. As we spread, we share—thus imitation ceases to be unilateral and becomes reciprocal:

[...] the effect of its spreading is that, even as it generates imitative series, it multiplies the likelihood of their intersecting with one another, inventing other new objects, which themselves will generate new clusters of series. This differentiating process, paradoxically inherent to imitation, is precisely what Tarde refers to as invention. “An invention is, after all, merely the effect of a singular intersection of heterogeneous imitations.”²⁰

Tarde is arguing that, basically, an invention which is not imitated simply does not socially exist.

In order to “defend” in this quadrilogue, the very idea of quadrilogue, I found most inspiring Tarde's concept of *inter-cerebral co-operation*: “It is the co-operation between minds and its product, knowledge, which is the very core of the productive process, and at the origin of the production value”²¹, as Wright understands it, sharing immediately with us Maurizio Lazzarato's views, based on Tarde's constitutive power of assembled minds:

Language, art, science, public opinion and affects all presuppose a common agency which cannot be described by the logic of material production as well as a form of co-ordination which cannot be reduced to the market. [...] Their measure can only be determined within the immanence of a

18 Jasmina FUČKAN: Instead of a Biography/Permanent Display for Goran Trbuljak, *Museum of Arts and Crafts*, 2018, <https://www.muo.hr/blog/2019/02/15/suvremeni-umjetnici-u-sp-zasto-bi-netko-kupio-glavo-per-od-gorana-trbuljaka/> (access 11 March 2022).

19 Stephen WRIGHT: Digging in the Epistemic Commons, in *Kollektive Kreativität/Collective Creativity*, Kassel; München; Frankfurt: Kunsthalle Fridericianum; Siemens Arts Program; Revolver, 2005, 308.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

collective agency, which, as we know, breaks down the alternative between the individual and the collective.²²

As you can hear, in this kind of a *mise-en-abyme* technique, right at this moment I'm copying, imitating, thus spreading, the idea of Stephen Wright who—in order to defend the concept of copyleft—in his article imitates, thus spreads, the ideas of Maurizio Lazzarato imitating, thus spreading, the ideas of Gabriel Tarde. Yet, none of these texts is a mere copy of each other. One could compare, to some extent, the process of producing knowledge to the process of structuring literary narration. As Barthes would say, a text continuously breathes and holds its breath, and then again... To repeat and conclude with Wright spreading Tarde's ideas: knowledge production is a collective endeavor and any consumption of knowledge is, at one and the same time, the production of new knowledge. In Tarde's words:

It can, rigorously speaking, be neither lent nor exchanged, since whoever possesses it does not give it up by communicating it to someone else. There is an act of emanation, and not alienation. It cannot be given, nor can it be stolen, for the same reason.²³

A considerable bunch of artists—especially those in the area of visual arts—have learned and practiced that lesson over the last hundred years. Paradoxically, or not, academics have been a bit slow. It is maybe the last minute for scholars of the world to learn to—unite.

Goran

So far, this quadrilogue has addressed some pretty serious problems considering the issue of authorship, stressing its conceptual inconsistencies, as well as some disciplinary specificities in the respective fields of the humanities, and/or the “stricter” or “more objective” natural sciences. However, what bothers me the most is, in Berlan and Edelman's phrasing, the presupposed ‘authorial sovereignty’ of the individual author, particularly in the arts, which warrants the integrity and truth or aesthetic value of a particular statement or discourse. According to such positions, a single author is in principle more reliable, while epistemic responsibility somehow diminishes or disperses with a greater number of co-authors. I've already stressed that such an understanding stems from the philosophical disputes during the period of Romanticism, which resulted in the firm concept of copyright.

²² *Ibid.*

However, in this context, another instance from the history of philosophy may prove more fruitful. At the end of the *Phaedrus*, Plato introduces the topic of writing. Socrates asks Phaedrus:

“But there remains the question of propriety and impropriety in writing, that is to say the conditions which make it proper or improper”.²⁴

After Phaedrus, in the usual manner, agrees on the topic, they go on, questioning the benefits of humans' capacity, starting from the story Socrates had heard from the elders. This passage, often treated as self-derogatory, elaborates on the ambiguities of writing. Socrates tells the story of Theuth, an Egyptian deity who invented many useful things, among others, writing. After proudly boasting in front of King Thamous of the greatness of this invention, which would cure the imperfect human capacity of remembering, the King finally states:

If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls: they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks (...) And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance; for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing.²⁵

For Socrates, written words are like paintings: fixed and mute. When asked for explanations, they do not answer, but only repeat what's already been said. To corroborate his denunciation of writing, Socrates tell the allegory of a wise farmer who carefully plants and cultivates valuable seeds, while negligently dealing with worthless ones. Analogously, a wise man, i.e., a philosopher will proceed along the same lines:

But far more excellent, I think is the serious treatment of them, which employs the art of dialectic. The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new seeds grow up in new characters; whereby the seed is vouchsafed

²³ Otd. in *ibid.*, 309.

²⁴ PLATO: Phaedrus, in: R. Hackforth (ed. and trans.): *Plato's Phaedrus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 274b.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 275a.

immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto.²⁶

This quadrilogue, as well as our former ones, obviously fulfils the condition of being spoken, and not written. Thus, it technically satisfies Socrates' requirements for fruitful planting. But structurally more important, our endeavor procedurally departs from the closed and finite (or in Socrates' parlance: mute) nature of any discursive practice, be it an artwork or theoretical presentation traditionally conceived.

So, what I find much more interesting is the following diagnosis of words' nature: "words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new seeds grow up in new characters".²⁷

While authorial statement purports to present an encircled, closed, and coherent account of the state of the affairs, our quadrilogue in the very process of its generation undermines any such pretense. Its properly speaking dialectical nature warrants closer examination, and a more nuanced scrutiny of the problem at hand. In this way, the original seed, or starting premise, functions as a generator of thought, and not as an instance of discovery brought about by the Genius Artist and/or thinker.

If we, following the earlier mentioned Birhane's insistence on a dialogical model of self, renounce the concept of the individual author as the sole, or at least principal, creator of meaning or aesthetic value, we may well fit Socrates' understanding of *expert dialectician*. This may sure feel comforting for our vanities. However, and way more important, our non-expected and non-negotiated sequence of critiques and autocritiques effectively and performatively deconstructs the myth of authorial sovereignty. No discursive authority or competence located in an individual functions as a decisive truth producer. As such, our practice really resembles Socrates' favourite dialectics by the virtue of giving everlasting life to the original seed.

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²⁶ *Ibid.*, 277a.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Sažetak

Kvadrilog o kvadrilogu

Pojam kolektivne kreativnosti vežemo uglavnom za prakse umjetničkih kolektiva i koliko god ga se, u smislu poimanja konkretne proizvodnje konkretnog umjetničkog djela, osporavalo ili relativiziralo – dajući primat jednom individualnom geniju ili tumačeći ga kao rezultat složenog procesa uvezanog kolektivnim dinamikama unutar kojeg, ipak, svatko ima svoje mjesto – on ostaje legitimno opće mjesto u proučavanju kolektivnih umjetničkih praksi. Ni u znanstvenoj produkciji, dakako, kolektivni rad nije nepoznanica, ali on se najčešće svodi na suradnje unutar kojih je svaki znanstvenik zadužen za specifični segment istraživanja, koji obavlja samostalno. Nas će, međutim, ovdje zanimati onaj tip kolektivne kreativnosti, ili „inter-cerebralne suradnje“ (G. Tarde) u znanosti, koji zajednički proizvodi novo znanje – koje ne možemo vezati specifično ni uz jedan od umova koji surađuju, a koje povratno svakome od njih donosi neko novo znanje. Konkretno, dopisujući se na temu kolektivne kreativnosti u znanosti o umjetnosti, nas četvero sugovornika opisat ćemo i reflektirati svoja dosadašnja iskustva rada ovom metodom – kako na razini produkcije, tako i na razini recepcije našeg zajedničkog rada.

