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Editorial

Solidarity and/in Performance: Rethinking Definitions & Exploring Potentialities

Katerina Paramana

Solidarity and/in Performance: Rethinking Definitions & Exploring Potentialities addresses understandings of solidarity and performance, and the relationship between the two. The current socioeconomic crisis has elicited calls for solidarity from philosophers, sociologists and activists. Yet these calls reveal the long and complicated history of the term solidarity itself.¹ Furthermore, different languages, elicit different understandings of the ethics, responsibilities and actions of those 'in solidarity'.² This issue therefore seeks to rethink the definition, use and potential of the term solidarity through, in and in relation to performance. It aims to question and re-examine the process and role of art making, what it might mean to be 'in solidarity' with an 'other' (where 'other' might be defined as the artwork, the spectator, the fellow citizen, a country, a/the collective) and how such understandings produce strategies and actions that can play a significant role in the current crisis and in the reorganisation of global society.

Near the time of the theme's conception (summer of 2013) and the distribution of the call for proposals (September 2013), Franco Bifo Berardi, Jürgen Habermas and Slavoj Žižek, among others, called for solidarity in the face of the socioeconomic crisis in Europe and the US and the massive demonstrations that accompanied it. In a talk delivered on 9 March 2013 for TedxCalarts: *Performance, Body & Presence*, Berardi argued that 'solidarity is not a political or moral word. It is about empathy'

¹ First used in the Roman law of debts, it acquired political meaning during the French Revolution of 1789 ('solidarité') being used synonymously with 'fraternité'. It was separated from 'fraternité' during the mid-19th century class struggles and the workers' movement. With a capital S- (Solidarność) it was the name of an independent trade union movement in Poland, formed in 1980.

² For example, in most English dictionary definitions, 'solidarity' implies unity, unanimity, a singular vision and/or agreement. In contrast, in Greek, 'solidarity' – 'αλληλεγγύη' [alilengíi] from 'αλλήλων' [allilon] (others) + 'εγγύτητα' [egyti] (distance / proximity) – is understood as 'the ethical imperative/ obligation of members of a group to reciprocally support one another'. This latter definition emphasises the support of others as a right and responsibility and foregrounds the protection of common rights and responsibilities. Most importantly it does so without the erasure of individuality or the assumption of unity, harmony or cohesion. In addition, its etymology leads to the definition of 'αλληλεγγύη' [alilengíi] as 'the distance / relationship / proximity between people'.

and 'pleasure of others' bodies which today are victims of competition'. He argued that 'real change cannot be political, because it has to do with the body of the other, with solidarity', new forms of which are needed as crisis and panic have become 'commonplace in daily life'. Berardi describes panic as

the sudden perception that the relation of your body to your environment is broken and accelerated...that the outside rhythm is not the rhythm of your body, of your needs and desires, but of fear, competition and precariousness (Berardi 2013).

He expressed the belief that today's social movement needs to 'become a healer: a common breath/body/activity of healing'. A month later (April 2013), in a lecture delivered in Leuven, Habermas argued otherwise, that solidarity is a political act – not one of moral selflessness – that depends on 'the expectations of reciprocal favors — and on the confidence in this reciprocity over time'. In response to the current crisis, Habermas stated that

If one wants to preserve the Monetary Union, it is no longer enough, given the structural imbalances between the national economies, to provide loans to over-indebted states so that each should improve its competitiveness by its own efforts. What is required is solidarity instead, a cooperative effort from a shared political perspective to promote growth and competitiveness in the euro zone as a whole (Habermas 2013).

Žižek has spoken numerous times about the current crisis in Europe and the US, as well as the uprisings in Syria, Tunisia and Egypt, and has publicly supported the political struggles of different countries (for example, he spoke at Occupy New York and openly supported the Greek left-wing party Syriza). Discussing with scholar Tariq Ramadan on Al Jazeera's 'What do you think? Egypt's political future', Žižek advocated that we are 'solidary' the moment we fight tyranny. Universal solidarity, Žižek holds, is built through the struggle for freedom (2011).

The differences in each of these philosophers' responses, each of which based on different, sometimes conflicting ideas of what 'solidarity' is, highlights the complexities inherent in the term. Yet we should push on. Since these calls for solidarity, the recent Euroelections have seen a number of right and far-right parties, playing on the economic instability of the Eurozone, garnering a significant

proportion of the vote, while the countries most affected by the crisis (e.g. Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) as well as a couple others (Slovakia and Romania) have pushed back, giving the highest proportion of their vote to left-wing parties.³ In light of this economic and political divide, it becomes even more necessary to rethink what solidarity might mean amongst Europeans and for what kind of Europe we hope and need to work for.

How, then, do we define solidarity and how can discussing the term through performance practices or theories help us not only rethink it, but perhaps redefine it in such a way that it creates different possibilities for how we can be with and support one another? And what might this support entail? What gestures, strategies and actions might it produce that can affect positively the relationship between the individual and a/the collective? Ana Vujanović (2014) argues that, in recent years, artists have 'embraced immateriality and its nomadism', flexibility, mobility and self-management, which has contributed to the 'normativisation of precarity'. In response, this issue asks: how might artists in today's neoliberal capitalist economy that promotes competitive individualism, self-management and self-care begin to address these issues and how can a rethinking of solidarity contribute to a change in today's economy? We have invited artists and scholars to respond to this issue's theme with articles ('new critical work' category), text-based creative work ('new creative work' category), audiovisual material ('performing solidarity' category) and performance or book reviews.

Wendy Hubbard's article opens the conversation. In it, she draws on her experience of watching Nic Green's *Trilogy*, in which female volunteers are invited to participate in the work by appearing onstage together naked, performing a solidaritous act both with one another as well as with the work's ideas. Hubbard proposes solidarity as a moment of instability 'in which a commonality is recognized, essayed, asserted or practiced', as opposed to 'a permanent, categorical commitment' that the term might otherwise suggest. She describes the work as 'an event of feminist solidarity', a 'powerful reservoir of feeling', and what Jeremy Gilbert names a 'site of collective joy' (2014, p.xii). Hubbard is concerned with how an act of

³ Although it should be noted that, for example in Greece, the fascist party Golden Dawn has maintained its power.

solidarity can enable a sense of togetherness or ‘magnify long-reasoned convictions to tip them towards action’ and emphasises the potential of solidarity to ‘produce future events’.

Olive Mckeon’s work discusses a political action as a performance of solidarity. The vehicle of her discussion is the West Coast Port Blockade of 12 December 2011, organised by community picketers who ‘shut down ports along the west coast of North America [...] in solidarity with the struggle of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)’. Addressing dance scholars Randy Martin and Susan Foster’s theorising of political organisation and social movements using choreographic analysis, Mckeon points to both the limits and fruitfulness of such an analysis. She suggests that it is expanded beyond the politics of representation of embodied movement and that it takes into account ‘the political economic dimensions of corporeality’; that it is ‘applied to analyse not only political struggles, but also the functioning of capitalism in general’. Mckeon argues that an understanding of the term solidarity is not possible when we consider the term abstractly, but only when we analyse specific instances of acts of solidarity within the specific historical context and social movements or political struggles from which they arise.

Br. Runo Johnson’s work, consisting of a video and an accompanying text, performs solidarity by speaking out and speaking up. His ‘solodarities’ are ‘slides in the life of The People’s Mic, and its driver Br. Runo Johnson, who heard the noise in 2011 and set out to stand up, on his own for us all, or as many as he could find’. Aligning with Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s statement that ‘The main stake of street actions is the reactivation of the body of the general intellect’ (2012, p.143), The People’s mic, using an old church pulpit and amplification devices, is an ‘ongoing series of performative street appearances all with the aim of stimulating and encouraging civic discourse’.

Nandita Dinesh’s contribution complicates what we regard as being ‘in solidarity’ by questioning who we are in solidarity with. In her creative work, she reflects on her experience of making theatre in military contexts, where the ‘others’ with whom she performs acts of solidarity are military cadets, those who are considered ‘future perpetrators’ of ‘future victims’ of war. Dinesh asks ‘If theatre is to respond to war,

must it not also engage with those who are considered the “perpetrators”?’ Drawing on texts from Foster, Haupt & De Beer’s *Theatre of Violence* (2005) and James Thompson’s *Performance affects: Applied theatre and the end of effect* (2009) she suggests that, perhaps, working with ‘perpetrators’ of violence is not about explaining, understanding nor forgiving or excusing their acts of violence; that solidarity, in this case, is about ‘a gesture toward those who fall outside conventional boundaries of aesthetic events, the exploration of the liminal space between understanding and ignorance, between explanation and obfuscation’. After Thompson (2009, p.134), Dinesh suggests that solidarity might be about ‘an examination of “systems of possibilities” rather than assertions of certainties’.

In their creative work, **Sandra Lang and Ana Bigotte Vieira** propose that the term solidarity is context-specific – that its definition should be understood ‘in relation to specific practices’ and ‘tied to a specific space and situation’. This assertion is enacted as they (re)define the term solidarity through a dialogue between a sound piece they created with excerpts of ‘speeches by politicians and intellectuals, songs and news reports’ (‘from Charles de Gaulle’s words about Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to Judith Butler’s speech at Zuccotti Park in 2011’) and which is offered along with their interjections at the beginning of their text and a discussion of their collective practices of Jeux Sans Frontières (JSF) – ‘a transdisciplinary project, a magazine and a website, working at the intersection of art, theory and politics’.

Megan Garrett-Jones’ contribution draws the issue to a close. She takes up the task of reviewing *TIME (Documents of Contemporary Art)* through the lens of solidarity, connecting the term’s relational dimension to a temporal one. Through her review of the book’s texts, Garrett-Jones redefines solidarity as the condition of ‘being present with’, for example ‘an artwork, another person, a text’, and as an ‘action not only in time, but across times’.

As the plurality of perspectives of this issue shows, solidarity is not realised in consensus, but in dissensus – in discussion and in the search for mutual recognition and understanding. In offering different perspectives on the understanding of solidarity in or in relation to performance, *Solidarity and/in Performance* seeks to take a step in this direction and to stimulate further reflection and debate by its readers.

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