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Irena Lagator

The Society of Unlimited Responsibility

In my work *The Society of Unlimited Responsibility*, we deal with the notion of the public titles of today's private corporate entities i.e. with distinct meanings that such titles are able to produce. We deal with presence.

In the Serbo-Croatian language, this title is called Društvo s Ograničenom Odgovornošću (DOO). In France and in Italy it has literally the same meaning as Société à Responsabilité Limitée (SARL) and Società a Responsabilità Limitata (SRL). Translating this literally into English, the result is: Limited Responsibility Society – a company whose liability is limited to the financial contributions of its members. But in Great Britain the meaning changes slightly to Limited Liability Partnership (LLP); in the United States it becomes Limited Liability Company (LLC); in Germany Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (GmbH), and in Russia Общество с ограниченной ответственностью (ООО).

Since the meanings of these titles slightly but significantly shift in different languages, territories and identities, I was interested in treating as material for an art-work *construction* this very production of the processes of meaning in language in relation to space, context, geography and societies, for its culturally, socially and politically relevance. If it is true that we all constitute society at large, wherein lies the justification of such a constitution if, in fact, we accept any public declaration of limited responsibility?

Seen from a wider contextual level, if we understand space and society as relational processes always under construction; if departing from one of the principles of conceptual art – that a piece need not be built – by inverting the term of limitation and transforming it into a more gradual and generous notion of unlimitation, aren't we then as a plurality able to at least visualize or verbalize, if not produce, the idea of a possible, differently established *Society of Unlimited Responsibility*? And if we are able to do so, what consequences might we be able to co-produce on a micro and context-sensitive level, one on which time, space and society as processes are founded? Wouldn't we then understand differently the meaning and constitutive complexity of the notions of responsibility, subject and society for which in fact, we would be unlimitedly responsible? Might this be one of the components for arguing, understanding and creating endlessly *open space* instead of continuing the production of space as a mere

container of things as such?¹

While one parallel to such micronization for the realm of universalization might be the necessity of a human being to make sense of the world around him, the other might lie at the core of the research of modern physics, namely in the concept of the superstring theory understanding of space, for it is quite poetically universal. Since Einstein's space-time continuum theory warns us that we cannot speak about space separately from time, string theory *unifies the laws of the large and the small, laws that govern physics out to the farthest reach of the cosmos and down to the smallest speck of matter.*² This theory invites us to think about the possibility that the world and the universe are one unique harmonic symphony responding to strings that vibrate in syntony at the ultra-microscopic level of the world landscape. Physicists are certain that today they can re-launch Einstein's research on the concept of unification, namely the unified field theory, the Theory of Everything. By unification, they understand a formulation of one theory that may describe every existing object in reality, i.e. a single theory that is capable of describing all physical phenomena. They suppose that this uniqueness exists, since over the past two centuries all the different theories of the universe have led to one single idea that, up to the present, has yet to be defined.

In the work, *The Society of Unlimited Responsibility*, the human body is introduced in an industrially squared notebook. Following the attempt of making visible what otherwise lies out of the visible field, the relational co-constitutive spatiality between society and individual and vice versa is made visible, in their co-productive temporal evolution. In each row the human figure rotates, spins in its own explicit habitable space of presence. Emerging from and reducing itself to a dot, the strategic time of its existence is brought into a visible plane through processes of coexisting heterogeneity, of sameness, of differences, of repetition.

In passing through the pages of the book, the *reader* modifies the space and thus the content of the book, makes explicit the space in between figures and the spaces they occupy, movements they perform, the time they ephemerally inhabit. The viewer mobilizes the drawn individuals visually by interacting with the book. In the very perception of their contemporaneous plurality in moving each other, of causalities of their peaceful, individual but common hospitable coexistence, the reader cognitively activates the two-dimensional surface of the *page content* opening it up toward the question of *interrogation of reality* – the one in which he as subject belongs in a society that similarly to the drawing unlimited and unlimitedly responsible has yet to be discovered.

If an individual (Latin *individuus*, from *in-* “not” + *dividuus* “divisible” from *dividere* “to divide”), as an indivisible particle of society, is society's subject when his

¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space*. Sage Publications Ltd. 2005.

² Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe*. Norton. 2003.

subjectivity is shared,³ then a unified theory of society⁴ in which society's *needs* (that which until now operates as *The Society of Limited Responsibility* (GmbH) could be gathered under full responsibilities, might prove that we need exactly the contrary, the unconditional –*The Society of Unlimited Responsibility*.

What would happen if, according to the theory of justice by John Rawls⁵ in which the concern of distributive justice is the basic structure of society, if we think for the moment less of being supplied with goods and more of being supplied with responsibility in all possible sectors of society? What if we try to distribute responsibility instead of its opposite? The addresses wouldn't be stores and businesses, and we wouldn't need to buy and sell to consumers. Would then the distributive responsibility alter the distribution of *goods*? What if, simply, responsibility equals or becomes, or replaces a surplus value? In place of valorization we might have responsibilization and the *era*⁶ of responsibilism. Would we then become a society hungry for responsibility? If in mathematics distributivity is a property of binary operations, and a binary operation is a calculation involving two operands, then in responsibility the two components might be the individual and society. And this is exactly what Rawls tries to make explicit, i.e. that *the basic structure of society* should contemporarily be *the compact of society*, a cluster of justice, fairness, of *justice as fairness*, of shares and, I would add, a cluster of responsibilities. Being a compact society, compatible, means being able to exist or occur together without conflict, means being synchronized. Thus, by proving *the reason of being together*, we in turn prove the need for responsibility, for a kind of responsitorium inter-space in which interests⁷ and responses⁸ meet. If we look more closely at the origin of the Latin word *compact*- "*tightly put together, joined*" (from the verb *compingere*, from *com-* "*together*" + *pangere* "*fasten*"), and if we remember that we are indeed closely put together on this planet, then, as Rawls asked what a perfectly just society would be like, today we can, unfortunately, still ask what a fully responsible society would be like. How differently would it function? How would it develop the sense of belonging to itself? What would be the outcome? Is this far beyond our reach?

Contrary to utilitarianism, Rawls does not conceive of the person as a pure, rational individual exclusively searching for his own well-being, but as a moral person susceptible not only to 'rational' action (understood as instrumental action in one's own interest) but also to what he calls 'reasonable' action, implying moral considerations and a sense of justice in

³ Peter Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphere I*. Pauvet. 2002.

⁴ *Theoretical assumptions must, of course, do more than simplify; they must identify essential elements that explain the facts we want to understand.* In John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2005.

⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2005.

⁶ also: ERA abbreviation: Equal Rights Amendment.

⁷ from Latin *interesse* "differ, be important", from *inter-* "between" + *esse* "be".

⁸ from Latin: *responsum* "something offered in return".

the organization of social cooperation.⁹

Arguing about the creation of social unity with egalitarian implications but moving away from a universalistic vehicle, Rawlsian free and equal citizens equipped with the same primary goods, i.e. equal liberties and opportunities and means such as income and wealth and the same social basis of self-respect, can understand the principle of responsibility as a principle of liberty, of autonomy. If in Rawls's scheme, justice is responsible, and if the individual is responsible, then it is the responsibility of society, of all of us regarded collectively, to alter and implement the notion of responsibility at a micro-particle level.

Perhaps one of the fields in which we can try to discover how different might be a society under unconditional and unlimited responsibilities could be the practice of art. I mean from the very moment of conception of the work of art where and when, if the *togetherness* of creator and recipient is one of thought necessities, then the responsibility felt allows to future recipients a significant presence at many, cognitional, political, psychological levels.

A work of art can embrace different people having different experiences at the same time. Where in society does this happen? ...It seems to me that being responsible is more about introducing criticality by virtue of coming together, rather than polarizing every argument into opposites. There is a kind of a critical potential in suggesting that responsibility lies in the way that things comes together.¹⁰

Working under the title Limited Responsibility Society (GmbH) seems to be a rather paradoxical process since today the *multitude* does not work within its limitations but with unlimitedly potential creativity. Can anything that by its form is limited be regarded as constitutive or productive? What connects those three notions of society, limitation and responsibility? What are the relations between these three notions? They are connected by the particular tone of their collective meaning, but what constellation of relations is producing this tone? And, does in the context of functioning of society, this tone produce any kind of feelings? A feeling of responsibility? Or a feeling of non-responsibility, perhaps? Doesn't it seems that work under limited responsibility, and therefore work under affirmation of responsibility about limited work, actually means precisely to know how and to know what? Do we (after twenty centuries and the 20th century) know how and do we know on what to work, produce and labor within the discourse of limited responsibilities and under the sense of non-neutrality of such

⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*. Verso. London. 2005.

¹⁰ Olafur Eliasson, *Space is Process*. Produced for JJ Film by Jacob Jørgensen and Mads Jørgensen. Directed by Henrik Lundø and Jacob Jørgensen. Edited by Henrik Lundø. Copenhagen: JJ Film. 2010.

discursive tonality? If society is not sure, art is.