*"A rebel does not claim to be able to solve everything, but he can stand up to everything."*

— (Albert Camus in *The Rebel*, taken from an STA interview with Beton Ltd.)

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**Beton Ltd. for STA: The time has come for our responsibility to become less and less limited**

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Ljubljana, May 28 – Beton Ltd. collective, whose core consists of Katarina Stegnar, Primož Bezjak and Branko Jordan, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. In a correspondence interview for STA, they spoke about the development of the collective over the years, about how they are challenging the phenomenon of the common in their work, as well as about the current developments with regard to the pandemic, culture, and state of mind.

**During the ten years of its existence, Beton Ltd. has grown into a strong and connected art collective. How would you describe the growth of your limited liability company during this period and how do you see yourself today?**

The Beton Ltd. collective, a limited liability company, was formed completely spontaneously based on the initiative by the Bunker Institute and Nevenka Koprivšek. It is this spontaneity without higher goals, ideologisation and self‑aggrandizement that has proved essential in our work. It was a privilege and a conscious decision to speak due to our internal need and urgency, rather than under the order of contracts, market, hyperproduction. In short, so we don’t speak when and only what we are told to say, if we paraphrase one of the titles of our performances.

In the beginning, we were operating as a relatively closed cell, nurturing internal relationships and the spirit of collective work, building trust and a common stage experience, but we gradually expanded the field of the collective with permanent collaborators, questioning the concept of the common from different viewpoints. In the ten years, we have lived and experienced the economic, migrant, ecological and pandemic crisis, the #metoo movement, the rise of populism, the phenomenon of fake news, the critical trivialization of political and public discourse, the growing forms of conservatisms, the vampirism of neoliberalism and corporate governance with our lives, narcissism.

Time and time again, we tried to respond directly to the social reality, and yet to think through ourselves all the time, to question our own experience, our inner world, so as to not lose everything while we lived. At the moment, the field of or activities is becoming more and more open, we are looking for even greater openness, inclusion, hybridity, and above all, it seem to us that the time has come for our responsibility to expand and become less and less limited.

**The era of the new coronavirus epidemic has turned the whole world upside down. Since you address current topics and problems in your performances, and at the same time thematize your role in the world, I would like to know how the current epidemiological crisis addresses you as creators.**

The pandemic of the new coronavirus, the declaration of the epidemic in Slovenia, the switch‑off of all public life and most of the vital system in the country, the isolation … None of this can compare to anything we have known or experienced so far. In this sense, the experience is historical, unique, incomparable to anything. At the same time, the situation is the same for everyone and completely general, universal.

Our experiences are virtually identical, there is very little truly unique in them that would merit a creative, artistic engagement. What will be really crucial will be our return to the post‑corona world. Obstacles, fears internalized attitudes, political measures, changes in public life.

The moment the table are turned there is a short period of uniformity, equal starting points, a hope for a better world, etc. But the very next moment, when the game starts again, our starting points are no longer the same as before, differences appear, which generate tensions, and these tensions demand response, reflection, action, and also creation in the field of art.

**How do you view the political developments in Slovenia and globally in the context of the epidemic?**

It is a simple symptom of losing and even rejecting public space, whether this is fueled by a political agenda or by corona fears that force us to lock ourselves in our nuclear family, cooped up behind four walls. Provided we can take care of our needs, we shelter there, waiting for a better tomorrow, and shift the responsibility for change elsewhere. In this way, the basis of our social life slowly falls apart. In fact, society falls apart. What remains is an individual and the state apparatus that protect its property. These are the circumstances against which we will have to fight.

**And what about cultural policy? With regard to the current events in Slovenia. According to the warnings of professional associations, the culture has been left out of the third corona package, despite the fact that this is precisely the time when the culture should receive additional funding. There is a well-founded concern that many cultural workers, especially the self‑employed, will find themselves below the poverty line in the future ...**

Culture has always been an easy target, because it doesn’t seem to produce anything, that artists are just lazing around, feeding from the state budget. These are cheap populist attacks. The political agenda is extremely perfidious; decision-makers shut themselves up between paper and real walls, wrap themselves in silence, and pretend to work. On the other side, there is a discriminated group of people, literally the creative proletariat, which is often forced to work for a pittance and under impossible conditions, just so that they can devote themselves to what they love to do.

Cultural workers have always been a true prototype of a capitalist peasant … Everything for nothing, and under poor conditions. Despite the fact that, on average, every euro invested in culture usually yields four euros. If we have to accept this mercantilist mindset. The value of culture, however, is a whole different story. People are not tired of working, they are tired of relations. And if the key employer of Slovenian culture Ministry of Culture) shows nothing but ignorance towards its own sector, there is a problem.

**A protest rally took place in front of the Ministry of Culture on Tuesday. According to the initiators, it was held in order to actively oppose the silent treatment of the Ministry. There are also anti‑government protests taking place every Friday. Protests are a legitimate form of expressing disagreement. How do you feel about what is happening?**

To answer with a quote from Albert Camus’ The Rebel, translated by Janez Gradišnik (published by Cankarjeva založba), which was used in the performance *Upor ni človek* (“Rebellion Is Not a Man”; Anton Podbevšek Theatre, 2014): “What is a rebel? A man who says no. What does he mean by saying “no”? He means, for example, that “this has been going on too long”, “up to this point yes, beyond it no”, “you are going too far”, or, again, “there is a limit beyond which you shall not go.” In other words, his no affirms the existence of a borderline. […] For a rebel […] there is no rest. He knows what is good and, despite himself, does evil. A rebel does not claim to be able to solve everything, but he can stand up to everything. […] A man is not a god. A man is a man.”

**Are you working on a performance on these topics – that is, the world, the state of mind, culture and politics in the time of coronavirus? Given the current state of culture, can we expect it by the end of the year?**

The decision not to do a performance about coronavirus was made pretty quickly. Coronavirus’ performance has been going on for months, and has been free of charge for everyone. But the situation itself exposed the topics that we have been dealing with for a long time; especially on social segregation, social impenetrability, the subject of euthanasia has also been on the table even before corona. However, we are not yet sure how to contextualize this in terms of aesthetics and implementation.

We will start the creative process soon, but it will definitely take longer, in a deliberate manner. It will also focus on documenting work procedures, both those dictated by the “new reality” and those that are essential to the operation of the theater but are suddenly no longer self-evident.

The fact is, however, that with the current boiling point created by the decision‑makers, the creative process itself faces difficult challenges, burdened with unrest, by fierce debates, by the urgency that the protection of the field of art and freedom of expression is almost more important at this point than an escapist escape into the depths of artistic creation.

**On Monday, some theatres began operating again, but with very unreasonable restrictions. After all, theatre is based on the connection between the performers and the audience, in your case, sometimes even in intimate settings, closely together or in interaction with the audience. How will you get back on stage?**

The important thing is that performances take place. Our advantage is that there are mostly only three of us on stage. If one of us changes their place of temporary residence, we will even be from the same household. This may seem like a joke, looking for loopholes, but we can’t allow the castration of theatre by masks and visors, it must remain a place of freedom, provided, of course, that we that we do not jeopardize the freedom and / or health of others.

**Although publishing videos of performances was more or less the way to keep the audience in times of crisis, and can in no way replace a live theatre experience, it nevertheless showed which performances attract interest. I was told by the Bunker Institute that your online performances attracted many people. How do you feel about this, are you afraid that fewer people will attend your performances in the future?**

No. A collective live experience is inherent to the theatre. Online theatre is merely an information, deprived of precisely this experience. In any case, one form of the theatre format has been present for at least a hundred years, it is called film. The fact is that, almost prophetically, our resent performances deal with the positions of the individual and the community in the circumstances to which we are physically subjected in these times, so we find it imperative to perform “live” again as soon as possible.

**Are there any reruns of your performances planned in the near future?**

Two reruns are planned by the end of June: *Ich kann nicht anders* (June 21 at ŠD Tabor) and *Great Expectations/ Grosse Erwartungen* (June 24 at the Old Power Station) as a commentary on Statehood Day. And we are discussing a live concert of our project *Mahlzeit* with Radio Študent.